



## Unit 1-3 16th and 17th Century English Drama

CBCS B.A.(HONS)ENGLISH (University of Delhi)



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**Department of Distance and Continuing Education**

**University of Delhi**

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**दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय**



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**16th and 17th Century English Drama**

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## CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

### Doctor Faustus

Dr. V. P. Sharma

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564, the same year as Shakespeare. He studied at King's School Canterbury and Cambridge and received his M.A. degree in 1587. His first play *Tamburlaine the Great Part I* was performed in London the same year, followed by *Tamburlaine Part II*. *Tamburlaine* portrayed a new kind of hero, a superman aspiring to conquer everything before him. The man with an overreaching ambition was to be the model for the other plays to follow. More significantly it established blank verse as the standard literary vehicle for the English drama. This was the age of Renaissance, and the play was an immediate success with an audience flushed with the exciting stories of the adventures and exploits of its seafarers and explorers.

*The Jew of Malta* came on the stage in 1589 followed by *Edward II* in 1592. *Doctor Faustus* was performed in 1592-93 (1588 and 1589 have also been suggested by some critics), about the same time as Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part I* was being staged. It was to be his most mature play.

By all accounts, Marlowe was of a rather violent and unruly nature and, to cap it all, very unconventional in his views on religion. In an age when religion was held in awe and respect Marlowe could say shocking things about scriptures.

In 1593 a warrant for his arrest was issued for being the author of anti-religious documents upon the testimony of a fellow dramatist Thomas Kyd in whose possession these documents had been discovered. But less than a fortnight later, and before he could be questioned on these writings, Marlowe was killed in a tavern brawl. He was only 29 then.

Although being a contemporary of a literary genius like Shakespeare had to have its disadvantages for any writer, Marlowe's plays, especially *Doctor Faustus*, (and a good deal of poetry, too) have earned him a lasting place in the annals of English literature.

This brief introduction does not cover all aspects of Marlowe's life and works but mainly those that might be of interest to you in appreciating *Doctor Faustus*. A full



chronological chart of Marlowe's life and works is to be found in any annotated edition of *Doctor Faustus*.

We recommend two editions of *Doctor Faustus*. You could buy either of them:

1. *Doctor Faustus* edited by John D. Jump, Published by B.I. Publications, New Delhi. Contains a useful introduction.
2. *Doctor Faustus* edited by Suroopa Mukherjee, Published by Worldview, Delhi. With a comprehensive introduction and some critical essays.

## **2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the elements of Christopher Marlowe's life and experiences that shaped his worldview and his writings.
- Analyze the historical and cultural framing for the play.
- Write a critical note on the role of the chorus.
- Discuss the development of the various themes within the play.
- Write a short note on morality plays.
- Write short notes on various characters in the play.
- Discuss the use of various dramatic elements used in the play.
- Discuss the interplay of Renaissance humanism, Roman Catholicism and various Medieval world views within the play.

## **3. FAUSTUS: THE LEGEND**

Like most dramatists of Elizabethan times, Marlowe also borrows the story for *Doctor Faustus* pronounced (F--aa-u-st-a-s) from an earlier source. This was the legend about the life and death of a German scholar George or Johan Faustus whose public life extended from around 1510 to 1540. A fortune teller and a magician, he was reputed to be a proud, arrogant man who had acquired supernatural powers and, according to legend, had died at the hands of the devil. During his lifetime he had been accused of the grossest immorality and had to take flight from punishment. The historical Faustus had indeed died a horrible death by strychnine poisoning, but legends soon grew around his evil life and his horrible death as a punishment

## 16th and 17th Century English Drama



for it. In fact, stories of men selling their souls to Satan in exchange for earthly pleasures that had been current for centuries, now came to be associated with Faustus. And thus, the legend grew. In 1567 there appeared a book called *Historia von D. Johan Fausten* (often referred to as the *German Faust-Book*) in Germany which gave an account of the abominable life and death of Faustus. It was a plain moral tale. More fiction than fact, it sought to show the consequences of the commitment to evil. The Faustus of this narrative is committed to evil, but he has intellectual curiosity as well, the hallmark of the Renaissance. And there is a strong anti-Pope bias in it. All this made the book immensely popular. You must remember that this was the age in which men really believed in magic, witchcraft and the power of the Devil. It was the age of Reformation as well and anti-papal sentiment was strong in Protestant countries like Germany and England.

The German *Faust-Book* was soon translated into English by an author who identified himself only as P.F. But as was the usual practice in those days “P.F.” not only translated the German book, he also embellished the tale using his own imagination. It was this English translation bearing the title *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* which became the real source for Marlowe’s play.

The German *Faust-Book* was a moral tale. So was the English translation *The Damnable Life*. How did Marlowe use his source material? How much of the Christian spirit did Marlowe preserve in his play? You will have to discover it yourself by going through the text. But it is well to remember right in the beginning that *Doctor Faustus* is a work of literature first or perhaps above all and moral or religious values must subserve its literary value.

### 4. DOCTOR FAUSTUS: THE TEXT

After this brief look at the legend, it is time now for a direct meeting with the text of *Doctor Faustus*. The best way to understand and appreciate a text is to study it unaided except sometimes by the annotations accompanying it. But a writer does not write in isolation. The times he lives in, the literary, cultural, social, and political environment of his times are bound to influence him in his writings. A familiarity with all this will enable you to identify the influences at work on the author in a particular work. It will give you the author’s meaning in that work. When *your* meaning (that comes through a simple reading of the text) and the *author’s* meaning come together, you have a fuller understanding of a literary work.

The background above has already hinted at the two most significant influences at work in this play. To be precise, they are *the Renaissance* and *the Morality drama*. It was the



age of Renaissance when Marlowe lived. And anyone dramatising a spiritual conflict was sure to be influenced by the Morality plays which had dealt with the themes of Good and Evil and the virtues of Christian belief.

But then there is another way of looking at the whole thing. A writer, more specially a dramatist, writes for a special audience; he writes up to their expectations; one could say that Marlowe exploited the elements of Renaissance and Christianity because he knew the audiences would like it.

You have already read about Renaissance in one of your earlier Study Materials. The introduction to *Doctor Faustus* edited by Jump will give you an idea of the basic characteristics of Morality drama. Familiarise yourself with these two things before you come to the Analysis. There are several texts of *Doctor Faustus*. Do ensure you have the one we have recommended so that references do not pose a problem. Jump's edition has 20 scenes. Mukherjee's edition divides the play into five acts. The table below gives the correspondence between the two editions.

|                 |                                     |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Scenes i-iv     | correspond to Act I, scenes i-iv    |
| Scenes v-vii    | correspond to Act II, scenes i-iii  |
| Scenes viii-x   | correspond to Act III, scenes i-iii |
| Scenes xi-xvii  | correspond to Act IV, scenes i-vii  |
| Scenes xviii-xx | correspond to Act V, scenes i-ii    |

From the viewpoint of the plot-structure, you can study and analyze *Doctor Faustus* in three sections: section one deals with *Faustus' Commitment to Evil*, section two with *Faustus' Exploitation of his Power* and section three with *The Damnation of Faustus*. We will take each section separately for analysis. But be sure that you have read the text first on your own. The analysis presupposes your first hand acquaintance with *Doctor Faustus* and is not exactly a summary of the play. And try to compare your own reactions (when you read the play) with the analysis below.

## **5. ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 Commitment to Evil**

**5.1.1 Prologue:** The play begins with a Prologue by the Chorus. The Prologue serves to define the scope and direction of the play and the nature of the tragedy involved. We learn



that it is going to be a play different from other plays. It would not deal with heroic wars or romantic love in “high places” but with the career of a German scholar Faustus. His parents were poor ordinary folk but Faustus managed to go up to the University of Wittenberg and acquire great learning. He became a great scholar of theology and was awarded the Doctor’s degree. But then he became “swollen with cunning of self-deceit” and tried to overreach himself, to cross the limits set by God on man’s pursuit of knowledge and power. Like the mythical Icarus who tried to fly close to the sun and fell into the sea when his waxen wings melted, Faustus also dared to challenge and transgress the kingdom of Heaven by aligning himself with Devil and went down to Hell.

The Chorus in a sense sums up and comments upon the life of Faustus. It pronounces judgement upon his actions: Faustus fell because of his pride and presumption. He adopted an evil course and when he fell he deserved it. But let us not be swayed in our assessment of Faustus by Chorus’s pronouncements and pre-judge the issue. (Remember that not even the author’s own words are to be taken uncritically. We have to judge Faustus from his own words and deeds). Does he deserve the punishment that he is handed out? Is the play then a simple moral tale of evil deeds and their consequences?

The Icarus metaphor gives an inkling of Marlowe’s attitude to Faustus’ fate. As Brockbank points out it reminds us that ‘dissolution occurs at the highest point of human flight.....’, But Marlowe retains some sense of the splendour and poignancy of human flight and fall-The wings are vulnerable but they do ‘mount’ and their melting is ‘conspired’. But if this seems to place Faustus in the heroic tradition, he ceases to be heroic once he has fallen; filled with pride over his ‘golden gifts’-his intellectual achievements-he ‘surfeits upon necromancy’ i.e., in his search for knowledge and power he turns away from the path of salvation through faith in God, which is ‘his chiefest bliss’, to the forbidden world of black magic. Marlowe seems to be using pride of Faustus as a double-edged weapon, to give him heroic dimensions and to damn him. This ambivalence in his attitude is reflected in the last line of the Prologue which reveals both awe and contempt for the fallen hero: ‘And this the man that in his study sits’.

### 5.1.2 The Soliloquy

The first soliloquy (Act I Sc i) charts Faustus’ mental journey from the world of philosophy and logic to the world of black magic. Faustus argues to himself how all that he has learnt and done can no longer satisfy’ his impatient restless spirit. He thinks he has learnt everything that is there to learn in philosophy; if to argue well is the end of logic,



Then read no more, thou hast attain'd that end;

A greater subject fitteth Faustus's art (i. 10-11).

But he despises not only logic but law and medicine also; he has been a wonderful doctor himself and his prescriptions have saved a thousand lives, *yet art thou still Faustus and a man* (i. 23). And Faustus is impatient to transcend this ordinariness of human life. The study of divinity also affords him no escape from drudgery. He finds Jerome's Bible telling him that the reward of sin is death, and since we can't ever be quite sinless, we must in any case die. Faustus conveniently omits the significant section of the quotation from Jerome's Bible which shows that redemption is still possible. In one text it says, 'but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' and in the second text, 'If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins'. And so he says 'farewell' to Divinity and turns to the world of necromancy (magic) which shall give him

a world of profit and delight

of power, of honour, of omnipotence. (i.52-53)

His feverish imagination envisions a future in which the whole earth and the winds and the clouds above shall be at his command:

A sound magician is a demi-god (i.61).

And just as Faustus is ready to quit the world of human beings and enter the world of spirits(which in Marlowe means 'evil spirits' only), the Good Angel and the Bad Angel make a dramatic appearance (i.69-75) : the one to dissuade him from adopting an evil course ('O Faustus, lay that domned book aside') and inviting God's heavy wrath, the other to urge him on to be on earth what Jove is in the heaven and, therefore, 'go forward in that famous art' (i.e. necromancy). Faustus has discarded the path of divine grace and taken to black magic; now he ignores the Good Angel and, as if inspired by the Bad Angel, his imagination runs riot over the vision of a world controlled by him with the aid of infernal spirits that shall be at his command (i.76-96). They shall fetch him gold from India, pearls from oceans and exquisite delicacies from all over the world; they shall give him the knowledge of unknown realms of thought Faustus does not forget his native land Germany in his grand design: All Germany shall be walled with brass, the swift, Rhine instead of the river Elbe shall flow by Wittenberg, the students in the University shall be clad in Indian silk and the invader (the prince of Parma) shall be chased away from 'our land' and Faustus shall be the sole king of all the provinces.



The two infamous necromancers Cornelius and Valdes who had initially-but only initially ('yet not your words only but mine own fantasy/but ruminates on necromantic skill)-interested him in black magic, now come and further whet his appetite for the pleasures of a world that the practice of the 'concealed arts' shall open up to him. There seems to be no turning back for Faustus now. One of the scholars who come to meet him a little later echoes our apprehensions when he says, "I fear me, nothing will reclaim him now" (ii.34).

### 5.1.3 The First Scene in Retrospect

Let us look back at the first scene now and see what it reveals to us of Faustus's character, his hopes and his ambitions.

The soliloquy is a kind of second prologue but to Faustus' own design. He means to meditate his choice of profession and uses his power of argumentation to convince himself that his mastery over various branches of knowledge is inadequate to satisfy his curiosity and his ambitions of domination over the world around him. You can view Faustus' ambitions from two different angles depending upon how you look at his pride and presumption. If you look at it as a typical human attribute that makes one rise above one's situation, you see the makings of a heroic tragedy in *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus wishes to gain curious knowledge of things no one has ever known; he wants power and wealth. Later in the play we shall see Faustus looking for a taste of beauty and adventure. The play then seems to be glorifying the return from Christianity to paganism. And this seems to be very significant in the context of the age in which the play was written and staged viz. the age of Renaissance. We shall return to this point again when we study *Doctor Faustus* for its Renaissance spirit. But in the meanwhile, you could look for the elements of Renaissance in the first soliloquy and in his later pronouncements and actions. We can say even at this stage that the play and its hero had a strong appeal for the audiences of that age. That he aimed at this appeal is evident from the fact that Marlowe twisted historical facts to let the audiences identify themselves with the hero so that Faustus, a German, echoes the sentiments of the Englishmen of that age when he talks of Prince of Parma being chased from 'our land'. You must also remember that Faustus' purely personal desires ('A world of profit and delight, of power, of honour') 'are offset by his national aspirations (i.87-95). Nothing epitomises the Renaissance spirit of *Doctor Faustus* more than the protagonist's 'yet art thou still Faustus and a man' where we find him wanting to break out of his limitations—human limitations to be sure- a desire that lies dormant in every human heart.

But if you look at pride from the Christian and moral angle, you can see the tragedy of pride and presumption, beginning to take shape as Faustus perverts both divine and human



values in asking for art to serve his self-conceit. Indeed, he can argue well but he uses his power of argumentation to prove to himself that nothing that belongs to human domain is either worth believing in or practising— neither medicine, nor justice, nor service nor humility. If he asks for knowledge, it is knowledge of forbidden realms. If he seeks power, it is not born of the admirable human urge to assert oneself; with power he seeks ‘a world of profit and delight’ as well. And it seems a perversion of human intelligence to argue for a willful alliance with the Devil to achieve one’s national aspirations (i.87-95).

It is idle to speculate on the playwright’s real intentions. But the critics have indeed been sharply divided in their readings of the play; the one set, taking its cue from the Chorus, gives it a Christian reading, the other, relying on the Renaissance influence on the play, gives it a romantic reading and makes a tragic hero of the protagonist. While we need not take a clear-cut line till we have analyzed the entire play it would be necessary to keep the two diametrically opposed views before us all through.

Faustus’s deliberate choice of a dangerous course of action will have far-reaching implications for our final judgement on him. He has willfully denied himself the choice of salvation by deciding to seek the devil’s help to achieve his ambitions. At the same time, however, Faustus shows the potential of a truly tragic hero who is willing to risk his very soul to explore unknown territories. He begins to remind us of the Greek tragic hero and of at least one Shakespearean hero, Macbeth who, like Faustus, adopted an evil course to realize his ambitions. But you will have to study the whole play critically before deciding how apt the comparisons are.

What about the two angels who appear suddenly and together? They reinforce the significance of a deliberate choice. At one level the Good Angel (who speaks first) reiterates the moral view of the Prologue and the Bad Angel the heroic and hubristic view of the soliloquy. At another level they are an externalization of the two conflicting voices within his own conscience. You will notice how this conflict grows feebler and feebler as with each subsequent appearance one voice grows stronger than the other (you can guess which).

#### **5.1.4 The Conjunction**

Set on his course, Faustus now recites magical formulas to conjure the Devil. Mephostophilis (also spelt as ‘Mephistophiles’ in some editions) appears. Pleased with his success, Faustus tries to order him about, but Mephostophilis quite deflates Faustus when he tells him that he came not on his summons but because he sensed a potential victim in him. There ensues a dialogue between the two in which Faustus asks him about Lucifer, his fall and about hell.



Mephostophilis tells Faustus cryptically that the cause of Lucifer's fall was aspiring pride and insolence and he himself and his other companions were.

Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,  
Conspired against our God with Lucifer,  
And one for ever damn'd with Lucifer. (iii.73-75)

As for hell, Mephostophilis says that to be out of heaven and to be deprived of its eternal joys and everlasting bliss is to be in hell.

Call it sheer determination or sheer cussedness but Faustus is discouraged neither by the striking resemblance between Lucifer's fate and his own if he renounced God, nor by a candid confession of unhappiness by Mephostophilis over loss of everlasting bliss of Heaven. In fact, in a rather patronizing tone, he asks Mephostophilis to learn from him to bear one's losses with a manly fortitude, and with an incredible assurance he asks Mephostophilis to go and tell Lucifer that he was willing to renounce God and surrender his soul to him in exchange for twenty-four years of voluptuousness and services of Mephostophilis

To give me whatsoever I shall ask,  
To tell me whatsoever I demand,  
To slay mine enemies and aid my friends,  
And always be obedient to my will. (iii.96-99)

In a brief soliloquy after Mephostophilis's exit, Faustus's imagination goes wild as he contemplates becoming the emperor of the world, making a bridge through the moving air over the ocean and joining the African continent to Spain. But in the fifth scene doubts and despair over the choice of his course of action begin to assail him as he waits for Mephostophilis. And as in the first scene, the soliloquy is followed by the appearance of the Good Angel and the Bad Angel (Do you think this repetition of the pattern has any significance for plot or character?). This time the Bad Angel speaks first and says what he had said in the first appearance: 'Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art'. Faustus' doubts, suddenly, seem to evaporate at the mention of 'power and wealth'. Mephostophilis reappears with Lucifer's instructions. And as desired by Lucifer, Faustus prepares to write out a contract in his own blood wherein he agrees to 'be a spirit' (i.e., join the fraternity of Lucifer's evil spirits) and let him carry away his soul after twenty-four years if Mephostophilis shall remain at his command during this period and do whatever he asked him to do. When Faustus stabs his arm to draw out blood, it congeals—a divine warning signal which only irritates him rather than prevent him from the evil (is not they soul thine



own?); Another mysterious warning comes when Mephostophilis brings in a chafer with fire to melt the congealed blood. The words *Homo fuge* ('Fly man') appear on his arm but Faustus is prepared to ignore it all. And, finally, the deed is done Faustus signs the deed, agreeing to give his soul to Lucifer after twenty-four years of 'power, delight and honour'. In the discussion that follows, Mephostophilis leaves him under no illusion about the awesome nature of hell. His description of hell would do credit to a Christian saint.

When all the world dissolves  
And every creature shall be purify'd,  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven. (v.125-127)

But Faustus is so intoxicated with the power at his command now that he shrugs off the idea of hell with the remark, "I think hell's a fable". He is so fascinated by the immediate prospect of his power and pleasure that he refuses to believe he will ever be damned, even when Mephostophilis says 'For I tell thee I am damn'd and now in hell' (v. 138).

And how does he begin to exploit his newly acquired powers? He asks for a wife to begin with! After all the lofty aspirations and expectations of his soliloquy, doesn't it come as something of an anti-climax? He does not get a wife. Only a devil dressed as a woman. Mephostophilis promises Faustus 'the fairest courtesans' every morning but no wife, for, in the Satanic philosophy, 'Marriage is but a ceremonial toy' (v. 151). *Faustus has been granted shadow- power only.*

Faustus' career in evil life begins with disappointment. In the scene that follows this one he briefly gives expression to this feeling of disappointment and despondency. But first let us consider the implications of Faustus's act of signing away his soul.

The conjuration and the signing of the contract with Satan follow logically from Faustus' intense desire to break free of what he considers are limitations on his restless, aspiring soul. But his pride begins to be punctured right from the beginning of his association with Satan when Mephostophilis tells him he came to him not because of his conjuration but because he could read his sinful frame of mind. He offers Faustus no prospect of power and glory and yet Faustus signs the deed that means eternal damnation after twenty-four years in which he thinks he will live his own way, master of himself and the world. There is bitter irony in his use of 'Consummatum Est' with which he seals the deed for these were the last words of Christ on the cross. In sheer arrogance he ignores all the divine warnings that try to stop him from pursuing a reckless course. The present becomes so obsessively important that he closes his eyes to his future. Mephostophilis holds up a mirror to Faustus's aspiring pride



and insolence (when he talks about Lucifer's fall and its cause) but Faustus refuses to look at it and see the fall he is re-enacting. There is a terrible complacency about his attitude, he seems to have no apprehension of hell and seems incapable of moral experience. On the other hand, one could also read in Faustus' character the adventurous spirit of the renaissance man willing to risk everything to reach his avowed goal.

It seems difficult however, to believe that Faustus could be totally insensitive to the rebuffs he begins receiving almost from the beginning of his association with Satan. When he is refused a wife, the implications are clear: marriage is a sacred thing, a noble human relationship, which must be denied to Faustus once he becomes a spirit (that is, joins their band by renouncing his allegiance to God).

Faustus' presumptions have, after all, come to separate him from his fellow human beings. The deliberate choice of an evil course gets emphasized once again and later Faustus' damnation would not look unjustified in the background of this willfulness.

### 5.1.5 The Parade of the Seven Deadly Sins

Scene vi begins with Faustus full of despair over his actions. He blames Mephostophilis for his state. He says he will renounce magic and repent. The two Angels come in at this psychological moment and signal the inner conflict in Faustus' mind. But they only confound and confuse Faustus. His helplessness is brought out in the lines:

My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent  
Scarce can I name Salvation, faith or heaven,  
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,  
'Faustus, thou art damn'd!' (vi. 18-21)

'Cannot repent' is a poignant expression of despair but very soon Faustus, by a determined act of will, is able to overcome it and, putting away all thought of killing himself which he had entertained briefly to end his agony, can say, 'I am resolved Faustus shall not repent' (vi,32). That signals the end of conflict. But it is ironical that he could not use the same will to defy the evil, to overcome despair and to repent and thereby redeem himself.

Faustus asks Mephostophilis questions on astronomy but soon discovers that his student Wagner knew much more about it. He asks Mephostophilis who made the world and the latter refuses to answer it notwithstanding the contract that bound him to Faustus for twenty-four years. Obviously, as Satan's lieutenant, he could not speak the truth without acknowledging God's supremacy. This he won't do. Faustus realizes, to his utter dismay, that



he has made a very bad bargain. He thinks of God once again. And as might be expected, the two Angels enter the stage again at this moment. If the Bad Angel blandly tells him that it is too late to repent, the Good Angel tells Faustus it is never too late to repent and for once succeeds in making him call upon Christ to save him: -

O Christ my saviour, my saviour,  
Help to save distressed Faustus' soul. (vi.85-86)

The repetition of 'my saviour' serves to bring out the intensity of his agony and his yearning for help to be saved. Lucifer sees his victim really slipping out of his hands and himself appears on the scene along with Beelzebub and Mephostophilis. Lucifer tells him coldly that,

Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just;  
There's none but I have interest  
in the same. (vi.87-88)

Isn't it ironical that Lucifer calls his enemy Christ 'just', that is, 'fair'? But then it serves his purpose to distance Faustus from his possible redeemer. The terrified Faustus promises 'Never to name God or to pray to him'. In fact, his promises go far beyond Lucifer's own demands:

To burn his scriptures, slay his ministers,  
And make my spirits pull his churches down. (vi.100-101)

Pleased with his submission, Lucifer arranges to 'gratify' Faustus by a show of the seven Deadly Sins. It is a macabre show which, Faustus says, delights him. Is he already turning into an evil spirit or is he only making the best of a bad bargain?

Whatever be the case we will not hear of Faustus' doubts and despair for a long, long time. In fact, for the next twenty-four years, he will only be using, or rather misusing, his evil powers for 'profit, honour and delight'.

The Faustus of scene I, curious, restless, adventurous, a man willing to risk his very soul so that he could be more than man, is now a man who has not only separated himself from God but has also isolated himself from his fellow human beings and is already plunging headlong towards hell.



### Check Your Progress 1

1. Faustus's pride propels him towards greatness and yet, at the same time, it also leads him to his damnation. Do you agree?
2. Faustus's soliloquy is followed by the appearance of the Good Angel and the Bad Angel. Do you think this pattern has any significance for the plot or character?
3. Doubts and despair continue to hunt Faustus right through the first Act. But that is resolved when he says, 'I am resolved Faustus shall not repent' (vi,32). What promises by Mephostophilis helps him make up his mind?

### 5.2 The Limits of Power: Faustus and his exploits

From scene viii to scene xvii, we see Faustus exploring his powers, often very recklessly. These scenes are often farcical and show him clowning and enjoying himself to the discomfiture of others and revenging himself mercilessly upon those who mock at his magic. These scenes, by general opinion, were written by a collaborator who could not match the tragic genius of Marlowe. But perhaps he wrote to a design suggested by Marlowe who possibly did not consider himself competent enough to write comic scenes.

But does the low comedy of these scenes fit into the total design of the play? Could these scenes be dispensed with? We will have to suspend judgement till the analysis.

First let us glance at these scenes very quickly because they hardly involve any subtleties of meaning unlike the scenes earlier.

The Chorus comes in again to describe Faustus' journey across the cosmic space, thus overcoming the constraints on staging events across long spans of time and space. From a secular point of view, he still enjoys our sympathy and admiration, for, although he has taken the devil's help in his adventures, he has done nothing diabolical as such so far. As if to counterbalance this image of Faustus, the subsequent scenes portray the protagonist as a clown and a petty minded cruel practical joker.

Scenes viii and ix occur in the Pope's chamber at Rome. Faustus accompanied by Mephostophilis enters the Pope's chamber and watches the pageant of the Pope, Raymond, king of Hungary and the procession of monks pass by and Bruno, the rival Pope, led in chains. As desired by Faustus, Mephostophilis frees Bruno and puts him on a fast-paced



horse on way to Germany. In the next scene Faustus becomes invisible, thanks again to Mephostophilis, and plays tricks upon the Pope and his guests at dinner, snatching morsels of food, making wine goblets vanish and even striking the Pope in the face, and thus causing consternation in the assembly. He and Mephostophilis throw fireworks among them and beat the friars away.

All this must have been quite pleasing to the audiences in the Reformist England of Elizabethan times when anti- papal feelings were running high but to a modern audience it must make all those lofty aspirations of the first scene look so empty of any significance. *Faustus, who aspired to be a king has become a clown.*

But Chorus 2 at this stage again restores the balance. Faustus' fame spreads through the land. His friends admire his knowledge of astronomy and are awed by his adventures. He now enjoys a respectable place at the emperor Charles IV's court in Germany.

Soon enough we see Faustus pleasing the emperor with his mighty magic. The Emperor is grateful to him for rescuing Bruno and getting him back to Germany. Faustus pledges his services to the Emperor and Bruno and offers again to display his art to please the Emperor. The Emperor expresses a wish to see Alexander and his paramour Thais. Faustus commands Mephostophilis and a moment later there is the grand spectacle of Alexander coming in from one side and the Persian emperor Darius from the other, Alexander killing Darius and setting his crown on Thais's head, and Alexander and his paramour saluting the Emperor. The Emperor is so spellbound by this awesome spectacle that he advances to embrace him but Faustus checks him:

My gracious lord, you do forget yourself;

These are but shadows, not substantial.

(xii.54-55)

It is difficult to believe that Faustus does not realize the irony of his own statement. It is not so much the emperor who is forgetting himself (it is only a momentary lapse) as Faustus himself who has forgotten himself and his humanity for 'shadows not substantial' things and that he will pay dearly for it.

But this awe-inspiring spectacle is followed by a rather farcical scene in which a young gentleman at the court, Benvolio, has horns clapped on his head for mocking at Faustus's magic. The horns are removed on the Emperor's request but we cannot fail to read in it the petulant behaviour of the great doctor and philosopher Faustus. But the nadir is not yet reached.



The horns are again put on Benvolio and his two friends Frederick and Martino and they are pulled through mud and dirt after they try to kill Faustus for disgracing Benvolio.

But if there was some reason for Faustus's harsh treatment of Benvolio, there is none to explain his downright conning of the horse-courser in scene xv. He swindles the man of forty dollars by selling him a witch's horse which turns into a bundle of hay when the courser rides him into water. There are coarser tricks that Faustus plays upon other unsuspecting victims, tricks that are difficult to associate with the Faustus of the earlier scenes with all his pride and his magical powers.

The farcical section ends with Faustus's display of his magical powers in the court of the Duke of Vanholt (scene xvii) where among other things he conjures up grapes for the Duchess in the month of January. And with this the Doctor has nearly completed his twenty-four years of lease from Lucifer. The hour is approaching when the devils must come to seize his soul and consign it to hell for ever.

There can be no two opinions about the quality of these scenes. They are no match either in form or in content to what precedes and follows them. And yet we cannot dispense with them in any stage production. If Faustus has been given supernatural powers, he must use them. It is another thing that if Marlowe had had the comic genius of a master dramatist like Shakespeare, and had himself written these scenes, the section on exploitation of power would have been artistically more satisfying.

But the scenes still fit into the broad thematic framework of the play even though they lack the tragic and poetic intensity of the preceding and the following sections: Power corrupts and debases, especially, a proud and presumptuous man like Faustus. Faustus's degeneration is, in fact, anticipated in scene iii (II.92-99), scene v (II.139- 43) and scene vi (line 108 onward). And, above all, it is this gay, ungodly conduct that will justify his damnation.

The clowning and swindling are not simply an index of his degeneration but also a comment on the foolish bargain he made with the Devil. The world of profit, and delight and of power and honour which he had sought when he called up the Devil is nowhere in sight. Recall his ambitions— a few very pious, the others very awesome- 'to wall all Germany with brass... bravely clad' (i.87-90), and to 'be great emperor of the world—potentate of Germany' (iii.106-113). He never really gets the power he desired; he never really does anything that could make all Germany feel grateful to him. He had desired to get answers to questions that have bothered mankind since creation. But Mephostophilis can hardly satisfy his curiosity. Or he refuses to answer inconvenient questions. There is no doubt that all this develops in him a



consciousness of having been cheated and be fooled. The frequent fits of despair are symptomatic of his awareness of the growing emptiness of the way of life he has chosen. It is our awareness of this emptiness in his life and the inevitable doom that partly softens our revulsion to the utter coarseness to which he sinks as his hour draws near. We are reminded of St. Matthew: “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (St. Matthew 16:26)”. But the pity is that Faustus is going to lose his soul, is going to be damned forever without gaining the world he had set out to gain. He does not become a king; he only becomes a conjuror in a king’s court. He had grumbled that despite his learning and his achievements ‘yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man’ (i.23). But the question is: Having gained powers of magic, is he more than a man? The last section should answer this question conclusively.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

1. Do you think what Faustus does with his powers match the ambitions displayed in Act I? Does it make Faustus a lesser man?
2. When the Emperor advances to embrace him but Faustus checks him and says, “My gracious lord, you do forget yourself. These are but shadows, not substantial.” Discuss the irony of the statement.

## **1.3 The Damnation of Faustus**

### **1.3.1 Hope and Despair**

The last two scenes of the play bring us to the close of Faustus’ life. It is an altogether different Faustus that we meet now. Obviously, the genius of Marlowe is again at work here. The Faustus who took delight in clowning, swindling, getting sadistic pleasure out of others’ suffering, who took offence at petty offences, has given way to a Faustus in a state of spiritual despair at the approach of his last hour. We see a magnanimous Faustus who wills all his material possessions to Wagner, his student. But do you see the irony in this magnanimity?

Faustus is so human again as he talks to the scholars who come to visit him. They would like to see Helen, of Greece, the most beautiful lady in the world, and Faustus readily obliges them. Helen, or rather her apparition, passes over the stage.



But even as late as this Faustus has a chance to work for his salvation. An Old Man comes in and exhorts him to

leave this damned art  
This magic that will charm thy soul to hell  
And quite bereave thee of salvation (xviii.38-40)

And Faustus who has gone so deep into evil can still hear him. The intensity of his despair can be seen from his third person address to himself. For once Faustus can see himself as he is:

Where art thou, Faustus? what hast thou done?  
Damn'd art thou, Faustus, damn'd; despair and die ! (xviii.55-56)

Mephostophilis—in perhaps the most morbid piece of humour in the play—executes his ‘master’s’ command and hands him a dagger to kill himself. Hell is no longer a fable to him; it is a reality he must soon face:

Hell claims his right and with roaring voice  
says, ‘Faustus, come; thine hour is almost come’. (xviii.57-58)

But the Old Man still holds out hope of salvation if only he would repent:  
‘Then call for mercy and avoid despair’ (xviii.64)

Faustus tries but in vain:  
I do repent, and yet I do despair;  
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast. (xviii.71-72)

Despair is no less a sin than disbelief and Faustus knows that. But whatever little effort he has made is snuffed out by Mephostophilis’s terrorization of Faustus that follows immediately. As always, the terrorization succeeds and ironically, he can repent now—not to God- but to Lucifer for having strayed from his path—the devil’s path.

But isn’t it strange that Faustus is frightened by the threat of torture when eternal death and eternal torture are to be his fate anyway? Isn’t it ironical that the repentance, that has always eluded him, comes to him readily when Lucifer demands it on pain of torment? Is there a flaw in dramatization of Faustus or in his character as such?

It is, indeed, ironical that while the inevitable damnation does not terrify Faustus into seeking divine grace the immediate prospect of torture makes him reaffirm his allegiance to Lucifer. But there is consistency in this picture. Even at the best of times Faustus had little faith in divine grace. And so now when he has gone so far in his evil career by his own



choice, he can hardly be expected to develop faith that will make him bear the present torture to achieve redemption in future. Faustus, moreover, has always looked on the *present* as more real and more important than the future. Neither the hope of eternal life in future nor of eternal death could bind him to an upright course and to a staid life. It is in this aspect of his character that the elements of the heroic tragedy and the Morality play come together.

Faustus' condition is desperate. When despair had struck him earlier, he had blamed Mephostophilis for his plight, now when Mephostophilis terrorizes him he blames the Old Man for making him waver in his allegiance to Lucifer and asks the Devil to torment him

‘With greatest torment that our hell affords’ (xviii.86).

Notice his expression ‘our hell’. When Mephostophilis says  
His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul;  
But what I may afflict his body with  
I will attempt, which is but little worth

It does not register on the terrified Faustus' mind. It does not make him perceive the power of Faith and repent.

The Old Man exists, unlike the two Angels, outside Faustus' psyche. He symbolizes the essence of humanity. In his torture and ultimate death at the hands of the devil we see the pain that pride can inflict on humility. When Faustus causes the old man's death, he has taken an irrevocable step towards his damnation.

### **5.3.2 The Apostrophe to Helen**

Faustus now makes what turns out to be his last wish to Mephostophilis: he would desire to communicate with Helen. Helen appears on the stage. Faustus breaks forth into rapturous poetry. His personal crisis seems to dissolve into a passionate celebration of that immortal beauty:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? (xviii.99-100)

The metonymy in ‘face’ and the hyperbole in ‘topless towers’ underscores the indescribable beauty of Helen of Troy that caused the ten-year Trojan war and led to the destruction of Troy. The ethereal beauty of Helen is matched by the equally ethereal loftiness of topless towers of Ilium. Faustus weaves a fantasy around this unreal world and desires to escape into it; only here could he escape the clutches of Lucifer:



Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.  
Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!  
I will be Paris, and for love of thee  
Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked,  
And I will combat with weak Menelaus  
And then return to Helen for a kiss.

(xviii.101-111)

As Faustus kisses her, he combines the present with future satisfaction: “I will.....”. But, ironically, the kiss of Helen does not save him, it only damns him irrevocably for he indulges in sensual pleasure.

The apostrophe to Helen recreates the world of *Iliad*. It brings together the two strands in Faustus’ career. On the one hand it expresses the simple eager aspirations of a man to lose himself in a world of pure beauty and heroic exploits. It brings back the world of chivalry and tournaments in which the brave knights took part and which the Renaissance man dearly loved. The verbal music of the lines and the romantic imagination that inspires them remind you of Shakespeare’s *Cleopatra*: ‘Eternity was in our lips and eyes’. But if the apostrophe celebrates the values of heroic order, it simultaneously celebrates those of the moral order as well. When Faustus expresses a wish ‘to glut the longings of my heart’s desire’ and wants Mephostophilis ‘to extinguish clear. Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow’ (xviii.95) before Helen passes over the stage, he has committed a manifest sin against the Holy spirit. When he embraces Helen, he commits the sin of demonolatry, for, Helen that comes to Faustus is only a demon; he embraces evil completely and puts himself beyond redemption.

### 5.3.3 The Last Hours and Damnation

The last scene begins with the entry of Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephostophilis onto the stage to enjoy the spectacle of Faustus’s torment as ‘his labouring brain/Begets a world of idle fantasies/To overreach the devils’. As it is, we have seen Faustus sinking deeper and deeper as the higher he has tried to ascend. Yet it must be noted that Faustus denies them this pleasure immediately. Despite his sin of demonolatry, we do not see him turning into an evil spirit in his communion with fellow human beings. We see him indulging in no idle fantasies. He is tragic and pathetic, but he is not evil. The proud and arrogant Faustus has been transformed into a profoundly melancholic man who now knows the weight of the deadly sin that he carries upon himself. Three scholars come to meet him, and he opens his heart to them: how his learning has gained him only hell, how he had sold his soul to the devil, ‘For the vain pleasure of four-and-twenty years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity’ (xix:66).



He knows his hour has come and so he tells them, 'Talk not of me, but save yourselves and depart' (xix:76). His isolation is complete. But we are conscious of the fact that he has denied Lucifer sovereign power over him by his willful choice of an evil life.

The scholars leave Faustus in despair and anguish, but a Faustus who is human in conception.

The two Angels come to Faustus for the last time now but significantly they come not together but at different doors. The Good Angel speaks to him of what he has lost by not listening to him, the Bad Angel of what lies before him now. The Good Angel tells him he has:

lost celestial happiness,  
Pleasures unspeakable, bliss without end. (xix: 106-107)

And the Bad Angel discovers Hell for him and invites him to let his eyes  
with horror stare,  
Into that vast perpetual torture-house (xix 116-117)

Faustus who had enjoyed or pretended to enjoy the spectacle of the Seven Deadly Sins in scene vi only moans: 'O, I have seen enough to torture me' (xix. 128)

The scene with the two Angels is significant in many ways. They enter severally, each makes quite a long speech and neither talks to Faustus in an imperative mood.

The significance of their several entry from different doors should be easy to imagine. As manifestations of the two conflicting voices within his own conscience, the simultaneous appearance of the two Angels had represented the dilemma of his conscience: should he or should he not adopt an evil course? But the dilemma is no longer there, the Good Angel has grown feebler, he speaks only of the past, of what could have been; the Bad Angel speaks of the future, of what lies in store for him. There is nothing more to do now. Faustus must face the consequences of his choice.

Also notice the contrast between the attitude of the Old Man and that of the two Angels to the plight of Faustus. Against the Good Angel's *Divine* concern for Faustus' soul, the Bad Angel shows *Satanic* concern, whereas the Old Man's was pure and simple human concern.

It is also significant that both the Old Man and the Good Angel and to some extent, ironically, the Bad Angel too deny Lucifer the ultimate power over man. The Old Man exhorts Faustus to repent and seek divined grace and 'evil shall have no power over him.'



But what about the claim by Mephostophilis;  
'T was I that, when thou wert i' the way to heaven,  
Damm'd up thy passage; when thou took'st the book  
To view the scriptures, then turn'd the leaves  
And led thine eye. (xix.93-95)

If this is true then it is the most chilling moment for Faustus, and for the audience to realize that their whole experience of the play must undergo a metamorphosis now. Satan could turn any of us into Judas. Terrifying as it is it makes the nature of evil in our life that much complex-and more difficult to grasp. But, as one critic has remarked, from one point of view the play's devils are only symbols of 'aspiring pride and insolence', and it is only Faustus' willful pride that turned the leaves and led his eye. It is as if the devils were directing him. The externalization of pride and giving it the personality of Devil in Christian mythology comes to serve a double purpose here: in the tragic condition, Satan's power is like malignant fate (man is punished for the pride he was born with); in the Morality tradition, it has grown into an inexplicable challenge to the power and mercy of God (see Brockbank 1968 :55 - 56).

Yet, as said earlier, Lucifer is denied the ultimate power over man. Mercy is not blocked; it is not really sought. The Devil could not touch the Old Man's soul because his faith was strong. And Faustus' contract had no validity as the panicky reactions of the devils showed whenever Faustus tried to seek divine intervention. He is terrorized into submission. Almost till the last hour there was the possibility of Faustus repenting and saving his soul. The Good Angel blames Faustus' love of the world and his pride for his impending doom:

Hadst thou affected sweet divinity  
Hell or the devil had had no power on thee (xix. 108-09)

And the Bad Angel observes pitilessly that he has invited his own doom: 'He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall' (xix. 130).

### 5.3.4 The Soliloquy and Damnation

Whatever the merits of the apostrophe to Helen as a work of art or as the celebration of the Renaissance spirit, it seals the fate of Faustus. His monologue in his last hour is a frightening insight into the psychology of a condemned man waiting to be led to his death. But Faustus' situation is much more tragic for it is not the physical extinction that frightens him now, it is the approaching perpetual damnation that sends him into paroxysms of despair and terror.

The clock is ticking away and soon the dreaded hour should arrive. Faustus wishes time to stand still. But time moves on inexorably. Now he only wishes this last hour to



expand into 'a year, a month, a week, a natural day' so that he could repent and save his soul. Faustus realizes the enormity of his sin, but he still knows that if he could repent and seek God's forgiveness, he would be saved. But he cannot repent at this moment:

the devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.  
O, I'll leap up to my God! who pulls me down? (xix. 145)

It is the devils within and not those without who are pulling him down. He still has intimations of divine mercy as he sees Christ's blood streaming in the sky. But he cannot reach it. Christ shed his blood to give man eternal life and even a drop, or even half a drop could save Faustus' soul. This is the most vivid image of the spiritual agony of our protagonist.

Faustus cannot move out of the confines of the marching time; he cannot move out of the confines of the earth as well. It is only now that he sees the hopelessness of human condition wherein the natural law must always prevail without any concession to anyone.

The wrath of God stares him in the face as he begins with the name of Christ and in his terror ends with an appeal to Lucifer; he wishes to hide himself in the earth, but the burial must be denied to him for the same reason for which he was denied a marriage at the start of his evil life. In a frenzy now, he begs the stars above to suck him in and then exhale his soul out so that it will straight ascend to heaven.

But neither the earth below nor the stars above will accept him. The predicament of Faustus who had once aspired to be a demi-God reflects the futility of human pretensions to power. Reduced to a state of abject hopelessness Faustus now only prays for mitigation of his punishment. Let him be in hell for a thousand or even a hundred thousand years but let him not be damned there forever. Faustus can see beyond the present into the remote future for the first time. But it is too late. The man who had aspired to be more than a man ('yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man') now cries to God to change him into some brutish beast:

all beasts are happy,  
For when they die  
Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements (xix:178)

But no help will come, and in the space of two lines he curses first his parents for bringing him into this world to go through all this, then himself and then Lucifer for his damnation, now only seconds away. Then the clock strikes twelve and Faustus wishes his soul to change into little water drops 'And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found' (xix.186). But the Devils come and as Faustus cries to God in sheer terror and promises to burn his books (i.e.,

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knowledge) that had brought him to this state, the Devils carry him off. But his last words “Ah, Mephostophilis!” perpetuate his fellowship of sin. Faustus has realized, but only too late, the futility of knowledge and speculation.

The scholars who had been in the adjoining room (on the stage, behind a curtain) listening to the horrible shrieks and noises, now enter the stage and discover Faustus’ remains. In deference to his famed scholarship, they decide to give him a decent burial and accord him a proper mourning.

In the Epilogue with which the play concludes, the Chorus brings to a fitting end both the Heroic play and Morality. As Brockbank states “Faustus’s ordeal is specifically that of the aspiring mind-of that part of our nature which is dissatisfied with being merely human and tries vainly to come to rest in fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience. It is a romantic agony which oscillates across an abyss between extremities of hope and despair”. But if the Epilogue hints at it in the first three lines, it also fits squarely into the Morality tradition by warning against following forward wits ‘who practise more than heavenly power permits’, yet they leave the wise to wonder at unlawful things.

### Check Your Progress 3

1. Isn’t it ironical that the repentance, that has always eluded him, comes to him readily when Lucifer demands it on pain of torment? Discuss.
2. “Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.” Does the kiss save him or does it damn Faustus irrevocably?
3. Discuss the role of the chorus in the play.
4. What do Doctor Faustus and Lucifer have in common?
5. Does Doctor Faustus finally repent?

## 6. FAUSTUS AS A TRAGEDY: DIFFERENT VIEWS

The last monologue brings together the two aspects of the play- the Heroic and Morality. The last scene re-enacts the fall of Lucifer due to his roaring pride which had been hinted at in the exchanges between Faustus and Mephostophilis in scene iii. But Faustus like Lucifer has aroused our admiration in his challenge to that inexorable law that spares none. As time ticks away, we are finally brought face to face with the struggle between the heroic will and Destiny



ranged against it. Destiny wins. Ellis-Femrör observes that the tragedy of Faustus results from the predestination of man to destruction by some indeterminate forces (symbolized in the devils) and this implies a Satanic rather than a moral world order. Marlowe sees the world order as necessarily evil in which the spirit of man is set against the Universe. The monologue comes to reveal the littleness of man in this Universe. In the heroic (or romantic) view of the tragedy of Faustus's pride becomes an assertion of individualism, presumption, and that of resoluteness.

Marlowe's sympathy for the new spirit of Renaissance is quite apparent. Faustus has suffered for the pride of will and eagerness of curiosity (Hazlitt). Faustus' end shows Marlowe's recognition of the pitfalls that this can lead into.

As against this romantic view many critics, many of them from our own age, have seen *Doctor Faustus* as a straight and simple Morality play. A Morality is concerned with the sinful life of a protagonist going to his well-deserved doom and damnation. The accent here is on the interplay of good and evil.

W.W. Greg, for example, alights on Faustus' cardinal sin of sensuality which in his view is a greater sin than pride and presumption. The Helen episode is the turning point in his even otherwise sinful career. The sin of demonolatry finally damns him, and he goes to a deserved doom. Greg quite ignores the indisputably human side of Faustus' personality-his love of beauty and art, his nationalism and above all his thirst for knowledge.

Kirschbaum calls it a morality play because its form is like that of a Morality in conception with the Angels, the allegorical figure of Old Man, the Devils, and the seven Deadly Sins. For the sake of physical pleasures he gives up the last possibility of redemption (but see comments on Helen episode above). *Doctor Faustus* is in no sense a heroic tragedy of a Renaissance man, it is wholly conventional in its Christian values. Its protagonist is in no way a superman reaching out for infinite knowledge and ineffable beauty as one might expect a Renaissance hero to be.

For Maxwell the central sin of Faustus is not sensuality but pride-the same sin that led to the fall of Lucifer, Again he is like Adam in his curiosity and must suffer. Maxwell therefore sees the sin of the mind (of pride and curiosity) damning Faustus more than the sin of the flesh (sensuality) which comes much after Faustus has already joined the fraternity of evil spirits.

Helen Gardner focusses on Faustus' sin of presumption. He rebels against the immutable law of creation and must pay the penalty. Redemption is possible only through



sincere repentance and submission to God's will. But what Faustus is capable of is only despair. There are no elements of the Heroic protagonist in Faustus' character. If he wishes to rise above humanity, he only sinks below it. In his rebellion against the Divine law, he is a usurper against God.

Terminology, it seems, plays a major role in deciding which side of the fence you are. What is a great ovation to immortal beauty and an ardent desire to seek immortality by losing oneself in it in the Heroic tradition, becomes the sin of curiosity for forbidden knowledge. When, to escape damnation, Faustus offers to burn his books, it is a reference to not only knowledge of black magic but to knowledge in general, to man's innate curiosity about things. In keeping the reference vague Marlowe is obviously allowing construction of meaning in both traditions: call it the curiosity of the man looking for adventure and enterprise or the sin of curiosity. Presumption again allows two levels of meaning: the sin of rebellion against the law of creation and thus of becoming a usurper in one tradition or overreaching in another tradition. If Faustus chose to go the Devil's way, 'wasn't it because he didn't have the capacity to go God's way rather than because he was of a sinful frame of mind?

Your view of *Doctor Faustus* as a tragedy depends on your frame of reference. A straight textual study reveals the life of a man who through pride and presumption and defiance of the Divine will writes out his own doom. But take away its Christian trappings and it becomes a fascinating study of a man who tries, blunders, and fails because he cannot overreach Destiny. It is in the interplay between those two contrary readings of the play that the greatness of *Doctor Faustus* lies.

It is this balance which became the basis of the *third view* of Doctor Faustus as a *moral tragedy*. Unlike the romantic conception of the Heroic tragedy or the textual framework of a Morality, it is based on the thematic structure of the work. According to Nicholas Brooke, who rejects both the Heroic and the Morality perspectives, in *Doctor Faustus* the Morality form has been perversely and purposely inverted. It becomes a satire on the contract with Lucifer that, from the Morality point of view, makes him a spirit. Yet Faustus' character oscillates between levity and seriousness. The later Faustus, in fact, has no coarseness or vulgarity in him. Faustus, in a shocking defiant manner, rejects Heaven and seeks Hell. He boldly struggles to be anti-Christ. Doctor Faustus becomes a symbol of the collective consciousness of Man as a desiring, overreaching, and failing creature.

Brooke's conception of the tragedy in *Doctor Faustus* goes to another extreme. Faustus becomes or tries to be anti-Christian, but we never see him being anti-Christ. And the



despair of the later Faustus shows that the play has not completely moved out of the Morality tradition although it has not forsaken the Renaissance perspective.

It is Mizner who suggests the presence of a dualism in *Doctor Faustus*. The play becomes an expression of Renaissance dualism, the awareness that knowledge is power, but the flames of imagination (excited by it) were flames of Hell. The basic tension in the play is, therefore, generated by the simultaneous presence of the religious and the Renaissance elements in it.

**Check Your Progress 4**

1. Is Doctor Faustus a morality play, or a tragedy, or a little bit of both?

**7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

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## 2. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*

Barun Kumar Mishra

### STRUCTURE

#### Part 1 – Introduction and Summary

- 1.1 About the Author
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### PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

#### 1.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare, also known as “the Bard,” was a poet, a playwright and an actor and is thought to be the greatest dramatist of all times and the most significant one in the English canon. He was a prolific writer and in addition to poems and sonnets he wrote 37 plays. One more play was attributed to him after he died. He wrote comedies, histories, tragedies and romances or “tragicomedies”.

William Shakespeare was born into a family of traders, in Stratford-upon-Avon, 100 miles northwest of London in the year 1564. Not much is known about Shakespeare's



early education but it is said he attended Grammar School and studied Latin grammar and the Classics. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582 and they had three children, two daughters and a son. Unfortunately his son died at an early age of 11, but the daughters survived.

An ardent lover of theatre, Shakespeare lived in and around London to make theatre his source of livelihood. He joined The Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theatre group, and was one of the founding members. The group later came to be known as The King's Men under the regime of James I. Shakespeare wrote almost two plays each year for this group and emerged as a prominent name in the world of theatre.

In the early part of his career Shakespeare was involved in writing lyrical poetry. His famous poems of the time are *Venus and Adonis*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*, both dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. By 1598, Shakespeare could complete some of his most famous works, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, as well as his historical plays *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, and *King John*. In the final years of sixteenth century, Shakespeare wrote his romantic comedies *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as *Henry V*, the last of his history plays in the Prince Hal series. During the next ten years he wrote his great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the next phase of his writing Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII*. He also wrote the "tragicomedies," *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. In addition he has written many sonnets on the issues of love, chastity, beauty of man, and has challenged the Petrarchan ideals of women as objects of love.

Shakespeare died in 1616 and by that time there was no single collection of works published in his name. In 1623, the First Folio of his authentic works was published by John Hemings and Henry Condell. The universal appeal of Shakespeare's plays has endured over the years and they are still read and performed all over the world and have been translated into many languages. Adding to the literary genius of Shakespeare Ben Jonson has rightly said, "He was not of an age, but for all time!"

## **1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This study material is divided into two Units.

- In Unit 1 you will be introduced to the play *Macbeth*.
- Unit 1 will also provide a detailed summary of the play along with critical comments.



- Unit 2 will attempt a critical analysis of *Macbeth* as a Tragedy and of the various themes in the play. It will also take up a discussion of the major characters in the play.

### 1.3 INTRODUCTION

Among the Tragedies written by Shakespeare, *Macbeth* is considered to be a masterpiece which presents a compelling exploration of one man's relentless and criminal pursuit of evil for the sake of power and the guilt that tears him apart in the process. While it encapsulates Macbeth's tragic flaw (hamartia) of ambition, it also weaves in a fair amount of complexity through the involvement of the three witches and Lady Macbeth, both of whom seem to become agents of fate in Macbeth's destiny. It is a question much debated whether Macbeth is solely responsible for the decisions he makes in the play or whether forces beyond his control propel him towards a path that only moves towards catastrophe that is inescapable.

The story of *Macbeth* is half legend and half history drawn mostly from the "Chronicles of Holinshed", where one can find an account of the real Macbeth and King Duncan. Raphael Holinshed was one among the many writers who collaborated to put together the legendary histories of England, Ireland and Scotland in this work. For the most part Shakespeare follows the chronicler for the story of his play but changes it in places to suit his purpose. For example, in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Banquo actually helps Macbeth kill Duncan but Shakespeare changes the character of Banquo in his play because James I, the then ruling King of England was a direct descendant from Banquo's line.

The tragedy of *Macbeth* comes very close to the structure of an Aristotelian tragedy and the same will be discussed later in Unit 2. What is noteworthy however is that the play is one of the least complicated of Shakespeare's plays in the sense that the plot moves without deviations in a focused manner towards an inevitable end. One's attention never wavers towards any subplot or any humorous scenes that would cause a diversion. It is a superb study of the psychological degradation of one valiant and deserving man through heinous acts of his own and we can in no way miss the implied message of the play. The universal relevance of the play's theme accounts for its appreciation even in current times. It is still being produced in many theatres across the world and there have been numerous cinematic renditions as well.

It is suggested that you read the play before proceeding further with this study material.



## **1.4 MACBETH: SUMMARY WITH CRITICAL COMMENTS**

### **1.4.1 ACT I**

In Act I the scene is set for action to begin; characters are introduced, and the plot is set in motion. Shakespeare skilfully catches the attention of the audience by introducing the supernatural element with the appearance of the three witches in the very first scene.

The opening scene is set on a thundering night in a dark and foreboding landscape amidst which the three witches plan to meet Macbeth. The next scene is at the camp of Duncan, the King of Scotland, who is in the middle of a war with the King of Norway. The camp scene progresses with an unnamed captain praising Macbeth for his bravery and valour in the latter's fight against Macdonwald and his defeat of the Norwegian King, Sweno. Shortly after, the Thane of Ross appears with news informing King Duncan that the Thane of Cawdor has betrayed them and become a traitor by joining the Norwegian army. The treacherous Thane of Cawdor is then arrested. As the news of Macbeth's victory in the battle against Macdonwald reaches King Duncan, he decides to honour the bravery of Macbeth by giving him the title of Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is being presented here as a brave general who has valiantly fought for his King and come home victorious.

The next scene again shows the three witches in a dismal heath brewing potions and dancing around by joining hands. On meeting Macbeth and Banquo, the three witches prophesise that Macbeth will become the Thane of Cawdor and then the King of Scotland, and for Banquo, they predict that he will become the father of kings. Having said that, the witches vanish. Macbeth and Banquo are left baffled and puzzled over the strange encounter. Two noblemen Ross and Angus arrive bearing the news of Macbeth becoming the Thane of Cawdor. Both Macbeth and Banquo are surprised and shocked by the news and start wondering if the witches were speaking the truth. On Macbeth's enquiry Angus informs them about the treacherousness of the former Thane of Cawdor and his impending execution.

Macbeth ponders about his new title and starts pondering over the realisation of the witches' second prophecy. Ambition begins to raise its ugly head and he says to himself: "Glamis, and thane of Cawdor! The greatest is behind." It is evident that he has started contemplating the idea of becoming King:

I am thane of Cawdor.

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair



And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3, lines 135-40)

A little later he muses:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man  
That function is smothered in surmise,  
And nothing is but what is not. (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3, lines 142-45)

When Malcolm is declared heir to the throne, Macbeth immediately begins to consider him an obstacle in his way of becoming King:

The prince of Cumberland! That is a step  
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,  
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;  
Let not light see my black and deep desires. (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 4, lines 50-54).

These 'asides' have been placed quite strategically by Shakespeare to make it clear to his audience /readers that even at this early-stage Macbeth has begun considering the idea of becoming King. He is losing all restraint as far as his ambition is concerned. He is also keenly aware of the evil nature of his thoughts.

Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth receives a letter from her husband informing her about the two prophecies of the witches and the subsequent realisation of one of them whereby he has become the new Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth is equally ambitious and gets excited at the prospect of Macbeth becoming King of Scotland and herself the queen. She begins to contemplate the King's murder and invokes supernatural powers to strip her of all vestiges of feminine weakness in preparation for a deadly plan that would ensure the throne for Macbeth:

Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty. (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 5 lines 30-33).

When Macbeth arrives, she greets him as King with the phrase "all hail hereafter" and tells him about the plan to murder King Duncan. She warns him not to let any kind-hearted weakness show on his face and thereby hinder the plan to get the throne. It may seem that it is Lady Macbeth who is goading her husband to commit the crime, but Shakespeare has already given the readers/audience enough evidence that Macbeth himself harbours the dark desire to



be king and has even considered murder. He admits that it is his “vaulting ambition” that is egging him on towards such a horrendous task. He however, battles with his conscience and is anxious about the consequences of such an act.

Lady Macbeth attacks his masculinity by taunting him to become a man. She calls him a coward and belittles his reluctance to act for his own good. She then lays out the plan to kill the King and explains how the blame would be put on the King’s two guards who would be drunk. Macbeth pushes aside his fear and anxiety and agrees to the plan.

### **Check Your Progress**

- What is the prophecy of the three witches for Macbeth?
- What do the three witches prophesize about Banquo?
- Do you think Macbeth is ambitious from the start? Give evidence.
- What is Lady Macbeth’s role in the murder of the King?

### **1.4.2 ACT II**

The evil plan that was devised in the previous Act comes to its ugly fruition in Act II. King Duncan is murdered by Macbeth and this bloody act only leads to more bloodshed. However, the third prophecy of the witches is also seen to come true in Act II when Macbeth is chosen to become the King of Scotland.

The Act begins with a brief meeting between Banquo and Macbeth. Expressing his gratitude for his hospitality Banquo presents Macbeth with a diamond as a token of thanks from the King and while talking he abruptly brings up their encounter with the three witches and their prophecies. Macbeth dismisses the topic saying that he has not thought about it at all, but he ends the conversation by suggesting that they will discuss it later. Banquo then calls it a night and departs for his bed, leaving Macbeth alone who then hallucinates. He sees a vision of a dagger dripping in blood. He realises that it is a vision of the murderous act that he is about to commit.

Macbeth kills the King according to plan and comes out looking extremely distressed and visibly shaken. The burden of guilt begins to set in. Realizing the enormity of his crime Macbeth knows he will now never be able to experience the soothing and relaxing sleep that rejuvenates people’s lives:



Methought I heard a voice cry, “Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep”—the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labor’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast. (*Macbeth*, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 35-40)

This Act is important from the point of view of Lady Macbeth’s character too. The manner in which she plans and carries out Duncan’s murder reveals her ambitious and ruthless nature. While Macbeth is disoriented by the magnitude of his crime and is haunted by guilt, Lady Macbeth in a cool and calculating manner controls the situation. She chastises her husband for cowardly anxiety and on his refusal, she goes ahead and plants the dagger on the guards herself.

The dead King is discovered by Macduff who raises an alarm. A scene of chaos unfolds. Lady Macbeth appears and acts surprised and horrified by the murder. Macbeth makes a strong and eloquent expression of his grief and sorrow. At this point, Malcolm and Donalbain also enter and learn about their father’s murder. The bodyguards with the bloody dagger are blamed and Macbeth, claiming to take revenge, immediately kills them. To divert attention, Lady Macbeth pretends to faint. Banquo calls a meeting to bring some order amidst the chaos. Fearing for their lives Malcolm and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland, respectively. Later they are suspected of having a hand in the King’s murder.

In the absence of King Duncan’s sons, Macbeth is chosen to be King and his coronation ceremony is to take place at Scone

### Check Your Progress

- Who discovers the death of Duncan?
- Describe Macbeth’s state of mind after he has killed Duncan.
- Comment on the manipulative aspect of Lady Macbeth’s character.
- What reason does Macbeth give for killing the guards?

### 1.4.3 ACT III

Act III shows how Macbeth’s thirst for power drags him deeper into more bloodshed and cruelty. To keep and preserve the power that he has gained through violence he is drawn into



a vicious circle of more violence. In this Act we also witness how Macbeth's horrific crime begins to affect him psychologically.

The first scene of Act III is set in the royal palace at Forres. Banquo has begun to have suspicions about the foul play of Macbeth. As he waits for the King and the other men, he begins wondering about the three witches and their prophecies. His thoughts are interrupted as the newly crowned King Macbeth and his queen Lady Macbeth enter, followed by Lennox, Ross and other ladies, lords and attendants. King Macbeth greets Banquo and invites him to the banquet that is scheduled to be held that evening at the royal palace. He then talks to him for a while enquiring about his plans for the rest of day. Shortly when everyone leaves, we hear Macbeth soliloquizing. In this soliloquy he talks about the necessity and importance of safety for a King. He also contemplates about the prediction that the three witches have made for Banquo that he would be father of Kings. He fears that if the two prophecies made by the three witches for him are already fulfilled, then the one made for Banquo will also eventually come true. He fears that the witches have placed "a fruitless crown" upon his head "And put a barren sceptre in [his] grip." (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 64-65). He feels jealous of Banquo and his son Fleance. At the end of the soliloquy Macbeth decides that he has no choice but to kill both Banquo and his son Fleance. He calls for two common murderers and fabricates a story to persuade them to kill Banquo and Fleance. He instructs them to maintain caution and avoid discovery at all costs. The murder is planned for that very night somewhere away from the palace.

Meanwhile, a concerned Lady Macbeth is worried about her husband's constantly doubtful and anxiety-ridden behaviour. Macbeth however is gripped by the fear of retribution and says that he would rather be dead than go through the constant mental torture brought on by their criminal act. Lady Macbeth responds by acknowledging his fears, but she gently reminds him of the evening banquet and the need to keep a brave and happy face in front of the guests. Macbeth mentions a "deed of dreadful note" that is yet to be done and without involving Lady Macbeth he takes complete charge of the task. In the next scene, the two murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance manages to escape.

At the Banquet, King Macbeth confidently hides his real feelings but is visibly shaken to learn from one of the murderers that Fleance has escaped. Lady Macbeth admonishes him for neglecting his duty towards his guests. Macbeth tries to bring back his composure and raises his glass for a toast but again loses his control on seeing Banquo's ghost sitting at the table. His crime has begun to affect his mind and cause psychological disturbances. The sudden change in his behaviour confuses the guests and they become suspicious of him thinking that



he has gone mad. Lady Macbeth tries to control the situation, but the ghost's reappearance drives Macbeth insane and finally she has to ask the guests to leave.

The exchange between Macbeth and his wife reveals how heavy the burden of guilt has become for him. Yet his ambition is driving him on towards more crime. There seems to be no return possible:

I am in blood

Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,

Returning were as tedious as go o'er. (*Macbeth*, Act 3 Scene 4 lines 141-43)

The crimes he commits only make him suffer as he now feels that all threats to his throne and power should be eliminated. Macbeth plans to meet with the three witches again hoping that they will let him know about his fate. Lady Macbeth sympathises with her husband and asks him to go to bed for the night, weakly assuring him that sleep will cure him.

In the following scene, in the heath the three witches are confronted by their queen, Hecate, the Goddess of witchcraft. She expresses her dislike and disapproval for Macbeth and instructs the three witches to be prepared with spells to “draw him on to his confusion” as he will continue to “spurn fate” and “scorn death”.

The next scene focuses on the misgivings that people have started having about Macbeth. The strangeness of the recent events makes them question the same. The suspicion is that Malcolm, Donalbain and Fleance are being wrongly accused. There is talk about Macduff trying to restore peace to Scotland with help from the King of England.

### Check Your Progress

- What is the significance of the Banquet Scene?
- What happens in the Banquet Scene which shows Macbeth is suffering inside?

### 1.4.4 ACT IV

Two significant developments take place in Act IV. On the one hand Macbeth remorselessly goes ahead securing his Kingship by eliminating all his rivals. He reaches the nadir of his bestiality when he does not even spare Macduff's wife and children. On the other hand, we are shown that plans are afoot to overthrow Macbeth and put an end to his reign of terror.



The Act begins with the three witches chanting their spells around a boiling cauldron in a cavern. Macbeth enters and demands answers from them about his future and the witches agree to let him know. They conjure up spirits and apparitions to help Macbeth. One of the apparitions advises him to beware of Macduff. The next apparition reiterates the witches' original advice, that is:

“Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn  
The power of man, for none of woman born  
Shall harm Macbeth.” (*Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1, Lines 81-83).

Macbeth feels extremely relieved and delighted to know that no one (born of woman) can ever kill him. As the feeling of invincibility dawns upon him, his first thought is to spare Macduff's life, but he decides to kill him, nevertheless. The third apparition foretells Macbeth's replacement by another king who will restore calm and order into all the chaos that he has created. Macbeth feels visibly threatened, but he is soon reassured by the next and the final counsel. The next apparition is a riddle that tells Macbeth not to worry about conspirators:

“Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until  
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill  
Shall come against him.” (*Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1, lines 95-97).

In response to Macbeth's adamant demand to know if Banquo's issue would ever reign in this kingdom, the witches show him a procession of eight shadowy figures of kings. Macbeth realises that each king has a resemblance to Banquo. The witches disappear along with their trappings, leaving Macbeth in despair and in dread of his worst fears.

Lennox comes in and informs him that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth is filled with rage after hearing this news and vows to retaliate by attacking Macduff's castle. In his rage, he expresses his intention to kill Macduff's wife, children and all other relatives. His growing insecurity makes him resolve that he would take down each threat that he perceives.

The scene at Macduff's castle in Fife, underlines the innocence of Macbeth's next victims. Lady Macduff feels lonely and afraid due to her husband's sudden flight from the country. With her young son by her side, she talks to noblemen Ross. She expresses her sadness to Ross, saying that Macduff may have succumbed to madness. Ross disagrees with her and says that the times they are living in are fearful and treacherous. He suggests to her that Macduff's decision to flee the country might in fact have been an act of wisdom. But he



fails to persuade Lady Macduff who remains unconvinced by Ross's words. After a while Ross leaves the castle feeling emotionally exhausted. Lady Macduff then expresses her fear to her young son that Macduff might have been dead. Her son however refuses to believe that as true. At this point, they are abruptly interrupted by a messenger who informs that danger is approaching towards them and further suggests that she should take the children and flee right away.

Lady Macduff becomes numb and does not know to act as the astonishment and disbelief of the news gradually turns into fear and mortal terror. There is however no time for escape since the murderers are already at the door. They break into the castle and demand to know where Macduff is. The young son shows commendable courage and bravely defies them, but the murderers quickly stab him and then move towards Lady Macduff.

In England at the palace of King Edward, Macduff and Malcolm are discussing the situation in Scotland. The gloomy conditions the dreadful political tyranny under the rule of Macbeth deeply disturb both the men. Macduff suggests that they should join hands and take up arms against Macbeth and declare war on him. However, Malcolm finds it difficult to trust Macduff and his intentions despite assurances. He asks why a man will flee to England and leave behind his wife and children in distress if he does not have any evil at his heart. To this Macduff responds by saying that he has lost all hopes and that is why he had decided to leave suddenly. Showing his unease, Malcolm expresses that he is still worried about his own safety and fearful that his life might be under danger.

Feeling the distrust of the prince, Macduff impatiently cries out that there is no hope for Scotland unless the two of them join hands by trusting each other as he believes that nothing else can take Macbeth down. He is about to leave but Malcolm delays him by continuing to speak. Malcolm says that even if they manage to overthrow Macbeth he will not be replaced by a worthy king. He projects himself as being far worse than Macbeth who is bloody, avaricious, deceitful and malicious. He is convinced that he does not possess any of the royal qualities that a worthy king should have. He tells Macduff that Scotland will surely suffer even under the next king (referring to himself) and proclaims that when compared to him Macbeth would probably seem as pure as snow. To this, Macduff responds by declaring that no hell could produce any one worse than Macbeth whose evil is such that it can have no competition. But Malcolm refuses to be convinced and insistently continues to elaborate on his bad characteristics.

Macduff feels tired and finally, believing that Malcolm is perhaps not fit to govern his country or even himself, gives up the hope of fighting for Scotland. He decides to leave and



bids farewell to Prince Malcolm. But Malcolm once again stops him from leaving and reveals that he had only been testing his integrity and commends his noble passion to fight for his country. He then confesses to Macduff that the character assassination that he did of himself was in fact a tactic to test the honesty and loyalty of Macduff. He says that it was a ploy to test Macduff's trustworthiness and profess his own virtue and promises and pledges to help Macduff overthrow the rule of Macbeth. Malcolm further reveals that they already have an army consisting of Siward and ten thousand English soldiers who are at their command. Macduff is surprised by this revelation and realises that he had been unable to interpret events that have at the same time appeared both as benign and malignant.

They are then interrupted by a doctor who enters to announce that the King is coming. Before exiting, the doctor also describes the King's extraordinary power of healing. Malcolm explains to Macduff that the honourable King possesses the noble gift of prophecy and that he can predict the future turn of events. At this point, nobleman Ross enters and joins the two men. He has just arrived from Scotland. Macduff immediately starts asking questions to Ross about the state of affairs in Scotland and is impatient to know how his wife and children are doing. At first, Ross tries to avoid the questions about Macduff's wife and children as he does not know how to give him the news of their murder. He then learns that Macduff and Malcolm are planning to launch an attack to overthrow Macbeth. Ross feels that this is probably the right moment to let Macduff know about his family. He reports to them that Macbeth's most recent act of brutality was the heart-breaking slaughter of Macduff's family. Macduff becomes engulfed with profound grief and sorrow at the news of his family's death. More than that, he feels guilty and blames himself for leaving behind his family without any defence or protection. After he has vented his shock and grief, Malcolm sympathetically encourages him to put aside his sorrow and turn his grief into a powerful weapon against Macbeth. Macduff agrees with him and composes himself to take charge of his emotions. They then set off to meet with King Edward and prepare for the upcoming battle to overthrow Macbeth and save Scotland.

#### **Check Your Progress**

- What do the witches tell Macbeth this time.
- What makes Macbeth think that he is invincible.
- From whom do Macduff and Malcolm seek help?
- With what intention does Ross tell Macduff about his family in Scotland?



### 1.4.5 ACT V

In the last Act of the play, we see things moving towards a just retribution. Lady Macbeth is driven to suicide by her guilt-ridden conscience. Macbeth fights till his last breath only to realize that he is not invincible and meets his end at the hands of the one he had wronged the most.

The Act opens with a scene at the Dunsinane Castle. An unnamed lady consults with a physician who is there for Lady Macbeth. This lady reports to the physician about Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking but refuses to answer further questions thinking that no one would believe her. At this point, Lady Macbeth enters a trance and begins to rub her hands as if to rub off some stubborn stain that would not come off. She then begins to talk and speaks in a way as if Macbeth were present there. While still rubbing her hands, she says "yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him". She further asserts in her sleep that nothing can make them accountable for their crimes if her husband's power is secure. In her trance, she incriminates both herself as well as Macbeth in the death of Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's family. At last, she returns to bed, leaving the physician shocked at the spectacle he has just witnessed. He suggests that Lady Macbeth is more in need of a priest and not a physician. The scene gives us an insight into Lady Macbeth's tormented mind. She is so wracked with guilt that she walks in her sleep bearing the burden of her crime.

In the next scene, the Scottish lords Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox are discussing the plans for the battle. They are somewhere in the open country near Dunsinane. The air is filled with anticipation for the imminent battle as Scottish soldiers gather amidst beating drums and flying flags. The English army, being led by Malcolm, Macduff and Siward is approaching their country and the battle is about to begin.

Angus announces that they have arranged to meet near Birnam Wood, the place that was mentioned in the last prophecy of the three witches. The conversation further reveals that Malcolm's brother, Donalbain, has not joined the English forces yet. The lords also discuss about Macbeth and his beleaguered state of mind. Macbeth has fortified the palace due to the fear of the forthcoming attack. It is widely and generally believed among the people of Scotland that Macbeth has lost his self-control and has gone mad, and as such, he does not have many supporters. The scene closes as the lords and the soldiers leave for Birnam Wood where the battle for Scotland is about to take place.

Macbeth is afraid of the army which is moving towards him. To keep himself calm he reminds himself of the witches' prophecy that no man born of woman can kill him and surely Macduff is born of a woman. Just then a worried and fearful servant enters to inform him that



the English army is now approaching towards Dunsinane. Macbeth dismisses him not wanting to hear more of it. He then returns to his thoughts and determines to fight the battle till the last bit of his flesh leaves the bones.

As he puts on his armour in apprehension of the approaching army, he asks the doctor about his wife's health and requests him to cure her. The physician reports that she had been "troubled by thick-coming fancies". Macbeth begs the doctor to restore his wife's health. The doctor responds by saying that the only possible cure is that the patient should help and heal herself. The doctor is thus referring to the things that both Macbeth and wife have refused to acknowledge. The scene ends with the doctor wishing to go away from the castle and never to come back to the place no matter the amount of money he is offered.

In the country near Birnam Wood, the Scottish rebel soldiers abandon Macbeth's side and join forces with Malcolm. Before beginning the march towards the castle, Malcolm finally advises his soldiers to camouflage themselves with boughs of trees. As they set off for war, the soldiers seem eager and hopeful as they now have a purpose to fight for. The leadership and encouragement of Malcolm gives them a direction. More importantly, Malcolm's leadership gives them a sense of calm and order which has been missing from Scotland ever since Macbeth took the throne.

At the Dunsinane castle, Macbeth is discussing the safety of his castle with Seyton and his soldiers. His state of mind suggests the graveness of the situation. He believes that the strength of their castle will put the approaching army to shame.

Just then the jarring sound of wailing women interrupts his empty words. Macbeth learns that they are grieving at the death of his queen. He does not express grief at the death of his wife as the weight of the emptiness in his life has become too heavy to bear. He gives his most famous soliloquy "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, ... Signifying nothing." (Act 5, Scene 5, lines 19-26).

Macbeth realises and expresses how blind and greedy he has been in his pursuit of the throne. He has been living an empty life that had no meaning or purpose. The death of his wife and the realisation of the forthcoming doom of his power have completely undone Macbeth. He has succumbed to deep levels of pessimism.

Macbeth's thoughts are interrupted by a messenger who claims that Birnam Wood is in fact approaching Dunsinane. Dramatic irony comes into play here because the audience is already aware that what looks like the woods moving is in fact soldiers from Malcolm's army who have used branches of trees to camouflage themselves. Macbeth remembers the



prophecy of the three witches. Grippled by a mortal fear, he knows he is doomed if the Birnam Woods is truly approaching Dunsinane. Setting aside his fears he makes a death wish “I ’gin to be a weary of the sun”. As he begins to accept and realise that this might be the end for him, he decides to abandon his fears and fight and die like a man.

In the next scene, the prophecy of the three witches that Birnam Woods will come to Dunsinane stands fulfilled. The army led by Malcolm has successfully reached the castle gate at Dunsinane under the camouflage of woods and tress. Malcolm displays the character of a true leader by taking charge of the battle and keeping the spirits of his soldiers high.

The following scene consists of elaborate war scenario, chaotic battles, and military actions. As Macbeth enters the battlefield his thoughts go to the witches’ prophecy that said no man born of woman can kill him. He begins to wonder what sort of man will not be born of woman. He defeats and kills Siward’s son and proceeds to another part of the battlefield. Meanwhile, Macduff enters searching for Macbeth. He is determined to kill him and avenge his family’s brutal slaughter. As he continues his search for Macbeth, Siward enters and informs him that it looks like the battle is over. He explains that the castle has already surrendered without any struggle. Many of Macbeth’s men have deserted him and left him to fight his own battle.

Meanwhile, Macbeth is considering falling on his sword to end the torture of his mind. But as he admits this he also decides to fight till his last breath. He is then spotted by Macduff who calls out to his enemy thus: “turn, hell-hound, turn!” Macbeth remembers his own crimes against the man’s wife and children, and he is gripped by a pang of guilt. Troubled by his deeds and the thoughts in his mind, he tells Macduff to retreat and save himself. Macduff ignores this warning as he can see nothing but the murderer of his family. He advances towards Macbeth and challenges him to a fight. As they begin the fight, Macbeth brags that he is invincible. He boasts that he has a gifted life that cannot be taken by any man born of a woman. To this, Macduff reveals his own truth that shocks the king. Macduff says that he was not born from a woman but he “was from his mother’s womb untimely ripped.” Macbeth gasps as he realises the witches’ trickery and play of words. The fact of his doom dawns upon him. He still decides to fight with Macduff because surrendering without a fight will mean loss of honour. He resolves to rather die like a man than a coward. The vestiges of the heroic warrior that Macbeth once was, are still reflected through his acts in his last moments. He raises his shield and sword, and the combat begins.

Macduff appears with the severed head of Macbeth. He salutes Malcolm and shouts “Hail, King! for so thou art” as the others join him in the acclaim. The sounds of drums and



trumpets fill the scene as they rejoice at their great victory. As Malcolm addresses the crowd, he immediately elevates the Thanes to Earls. He announces that they should call for all their friends who were exiled and bring them back home. The turmoil and fear that Macbeth had unleashed upon their country is over now. There are new hopes as they have saved their country from madness and have brought back sanity. They hope that Scotland will once again live the dream of peace and order.

**Check Your Progress**

- Who all come together to fight against Macbeth?
- What aspect of Lady Macbeth's character is portrayed in the Sleep-walking Scene?
- How is Macduff able to kill Macbeth despite the prophecy that no man born of a woman can kill him?

**PART 2 - MACBETH: ANALYSIS**

**2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

In this Unit, you will be familiarized with the following aspects of the play –

- *Macbeth* as a Tragedy
- Some major Themes in *Macbeth*
- Characterization in the play

**2.2 MACBETH: A TRAGEDY**

“*Macbeth* has been termed the Tragedy of Ambition. All that a great work of art means and teaches can seldom, if ever, be crystallised in a phrase; nor is *Macbeth* an exception to the principle, though it is the least complex of Shakespeare's tragedies and is, indeed marked by a sheer simplicity of theme, motive and treatment which consorts with the simple, unsophisticated period of the events. Still, 'Tragedy of Ambition' seems a true and adequate description of the play, to this extent at least,



that ambition is the mainspring of the action.” (A.W.Verity, p.26)

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Hover through the fog and filthy air.” (*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene 1, lines 12-13)

The witches pronounce these lines at the very beginning of the play and introduce its central themes: the complexity of interpreting conflicting statements; ambition that can drive a person towards heinous deeds; evil and its impact upon the lives of humans. *Macbeth* is a story of a Scottish general and the misadventures that he undergoes mostly due to his unrestrained ambition aided by the influence of evil that he inherits from prophecies of the witches and the counsel of his own wife Lady Macbeth. Although rewarded by King Duncan for his bravery, he kills the King with some persuasion from his wife, to become the King of Scotland and there begins the misery of his life. Evil breeds evil, as the story unfolds and we come across multiple acts of violence.

*Macbeth* as a tragedy is appreciated by the critics for its unparalleled insight into human nature. The character of Macbeth presents before us a complexity of its own kind. Among the whole range of Shakespearean plays perhaps *Macbeth* emerges as the one that blends both good and evil at the same time. Goodness is his inherent quality, but so is the dark desire to become King. He inherits more evil through external sources and internalizes it to apparently fulfill the prophecy but essentially to realize the ambition of becoming the King. However, the play as it progresses leads us to the world that Macbeth conceives and creates for himself based on what he comes across. He assumes himself to be safe forever, as it is prophesied that he cannot be killed by ‘any man born of woman’ but destiny has an answer in the form of Macduff. The display of great courage by Macbeth has been closely examined by the critics; considering it as his personal attribute and as something induced by the circumstances occupies a central place in discussing the persona of this great Shakespearean anti-hero.

*Macbeth* presents us with a society where the codes of honour and loyalty are supreme. King is the representative of God on Earth; he must be absolute in all terms. The social order depends upon such attributes or virtues which are marked by absolute loyalty and integrity towards the king and the king has the responsibility of assuring the prevalence of same virtues in the kingdom. Based upon such virtues the other relationships of familial and social life get their acceptance and value. Macbeth contemplates the implications of his action if he commits a regicide. He also at the same time thinks about the double trust that exists between him and King Duncan. It is his ability to think rationally and think beyond oneself that compels him to contemplate the political and social imbalance that he would initiate by his act of crime.



At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is a good and brave soldier who gives his loyal service to Scotland. He wins the battle as well as the respect of the King. As a reward the king honours him with the title, the Thane of Cawdor. Ironically, it is precisely this honour that triggers Macbeth's corrupt thoughts of wrongfully seizing the kingship. The witches' prophecy that accurately predicted his new title makes him believe that he is indeed destined to be the king as predicted by their second prophecy. He thus sees the promise of much greater rewards. The prophecies and the realization of one of them tempt Macbeth into achieving his ambition at any cost. Many critics consider Macbeth's unusually high concentration of ambition as a classic example of a tragic flaw. Ambition is not so much a fatal flaw because it is part of the social fabric and possessed in more or less quantity by every human being. However, ambition that is unchecked by morality is most certainly a fatal flaw which is the case with Macbeth.

Macbeth starts out as a good person; but his ambition gets the better of him when he finally kills Duncan despite his hesitations and better judgements. After he commits his first act of treachery, he becomes practically unstoppable as he continues with more and more murders to cover up his previous ones. He becomes the play's primary source of evil as the audience begin to see him as the villain. After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth becomes paranoid about his newly gained throne. He feels compelled to keep killing all possible threats and maintain his grip on power. Each of his crimes results in Macbeth's growing estrangement from reality as well as from himself. He becomes detached from everything as the kingdom of Scotland descends into total chaos. It is believed by those who were wronged by Macbeth that restoring order in Scotland would require Macbeth's death. The throne needs to be in the hands of its rightful heir. Macbeth willingly embraces evil despite knowing that he will be haunted by guilt for the rest of his life.

The ambition or pride of Macbeth results in his fall and is seen as the fall of a great man. It refers to the ancient Greek notion of tragedy involving *hubris* where the hero falls due to his ignorance shrouded by his pride and ambition. The hero may not be pitied for his fall here and the story of Macbeth is a typical case where we do not see any scope for catharsis as his fall is a result of his personal motives. He who is devoid of all the virtues of becoming a king and is not upright all through doesn't deserve to be a king. And if he attains it by some means, it may not last for long. The tragedy of King Duncan gets translated into a tragedy only for King Macbeth although he becomes the agent of change. Macbeth's awareness about his crime makes it increasingly difficult for him to live with himself.

The play has been seen to be very close to the Aristotelian model of a classic tragedy. In Aristotelian norms of tragedy, the tragic hero should be a figure high up in the social ladder



and his downfall must be because of his tragic flaw (*hamartia*) and by the working of fate. In *Macbeth*, the protagonist is a figure of eminence in Scotland, and it is because of his ambition (his tragic flaw) and the role of fate (the three witches) that he becomes the King of Scotland by murdering King Duncan. He goes down a dark path of treachery and violence. His evil act eventually leads to his downfall which makes us take pity on him and also be fearful of fate. Thus, the purgation of feelings of emotions of pity and fear (*Catharsis*) happens in the play leading it to be a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense of the term, though the norms of Unities of Time, Place and Action are not being followed strictly by Shakespeare. In spite of taking liberties with these norms, Shakespeare could create a masterpiece. *Macbeth* is highly notable and unique also because it is the only tragedy that Shakespeare wrote where the protagonist hero is also the villain.

### Check Your Progress

- What is wrong with Macbeth's ambition?
- Why does Macbeth's act of killing the king not only takes away the stability of the political order but creates a social imbalance as well?
- How is *Macbeth* close to the Aristotelian model of Tragedy?

## 2.3 THEMES IN MACBETH

### 2.3.1 Unchecked Ambition: The Tragic Flaw of Macbeth

The most important theme of the play is the corrupting power of unchecked ambition. Macbeth's own ambition leads to his downfall. The same is true in case of Lady Macbeth as well. While having goals and ambitions is generally perceived as a good attribute that drives an individual towards constant betterment, the downside of unchecked ambition can be disastrous. In case of both Macbeth and his wife, their ambition is not restrained by morality; and thus, leads to a trajectory of death and destruction. Their ambition can be contrasted with that of Banquo in order to understand what role morality plays in keeping a check upon ambition. While Banquo too is ambitious when he learns about the witches' prophecy that his son will become king someday, he does not resort to immorality. Whereas Macbeth and Lady Macbeth let their ambition get the better of them by not heeding any moral restrictions. Their individual desire for power and stature brings a cloud of fear and dread over the whole country. And eventually their ambition, tainted by crime and guilt, takes the form of self-



destruction. Macbeth kills Duncan despite his better judgement, but he also realises soon after that he shall never have peaceful sleep again. Although he does achieve what he desires, but rather than enjoying the fruits of his ambition, he becomes obsessed with maintaining the power that he has wrongfully gained. The guilt and paranoia stay with him ever since he murders Duncan. He is so blinded by his ambition to retain his throne that he keeps committing one crime after another. In his paranoia, he keeps eliminating every possible threat to his throne without any hesitation. He even murders the innocent wife and children of Macduff just because he is outraged that Macduff escaped before he could kill him.

The same self-destructive consequence of ambition is displayed by Lady Macbeth as well. She starts off with greater determination to pursue her ambition to become queen and even manipulates Macbeth for it. But she is less capable of bearing the repercussions of her unchecked ambitions. While she encourages her husband to put the past behind, she herself cannot do that as the ghosts of her immoral acts refuse to let go of her mind. She slides into madness as she cannot deal with the guilt of having so much blood on her hands. Thus, through the two main characters Shakespeare shows that unchecked ambition can lead even the strongest of man and woman to commit terrible atrocities and at the same time, the burden of one's immoral actions can drive the toughest person to madness.

### **2.3.2 Kingship vs Autocracy**

The play explores the theme that differentiates between kingship and dictatorship. The contrast and the differences between the two are expressed well when Malcolm attempts to paint a reproachable image of himself in order to test Macduff. In his conversation with Macduff, Malcolm gives the picture of how an ideal king should be and what he should not. A king should always be loyal to his country. Macbeth's thirst for personal power makes him a tyrant, whereas an ideal king should place the interest of the country above his own. Macbeth's rule brings a time of darkness in Scotland, represented through bad weather and gloomy environment. The people of his country do not feel safe from their own king. Rather than provide safety and protection to his subjects, Macbeth keeps on murdering one person after another and does not even spare women and children. Macbeth's character represents everything that an ideal king should not be. His character when contrasted with that of Duncan gives the audience the difference between tyranny and true kingship. While Macbeth only cares about his own gains and powers, in contrast Duncan comes across as a king who appreciated loyalty and rewarded people for their merits. Instead of maintaining law and order like a true king, Macbeth's rule only brings chaos in the country as he lets the country drown and suffer because of his selfish ambitions.



### 2.3.3 Manhood

Another theme of the play is the relationship between violence and masculinity. Lady Macbeth repeatedly questions Macbeth's manhood when he hesitates to kill Duncan. She even wishes for herself to be "unsexed" to get the courage for the violent act. Even when Macbeth persuades the murderers to kill Banquo, he does it by questioning their manhood. Through such instances the play shows that masculinity is equated with naked aggression and violence.

While both men and women are shown to be equally ambitious and cruel, the play shows a stark difference between the means each employ to achieve their ambitions. The ideas of masculinity and femininity are linked to violence and manipulation, respectively. Moreover, the female characters are shown in a way that their behaviour goes against the prevailing expectations of how women ought to behave. This is especially evident when Lady Macbeth's character is shown as wishing to be stripped of feminine traits. Many critics have argued *Macbeth* to be Shakespeare's most misogynistic play.

Nevertheless, by the end of the play the idea of masculinity is revised to show more sensitivity. When Macduff grieves for his family, Malcolm consoles him and suggest he deals with it like a man by fighting Macbeth and taking revenge. To this, Macduff responds, "I shall do so. But I must also feel it as a man". It seems the young heir learns this lesson of sentient nature of masculinity from Malcolm. This is apparent in the way Malcolm responds to Young Siward's death. When Siward responds to his son's death rather complacently, Malcolm says "He's worth more sorrow [than you have expressed] / And that I'll spend for him". Thus, it is shown by the end that feeling grief and sorrow is only human and it is not opposed to masculinity.

### 2.3.4 The Burden of Guilt

Another theme that is dominant in the play is guilt. Right after killing Duncan, Macbeth wonders about his sense of guilt by talking about the blood on his hands. He says to his wife:

"Will all great Neptune's Ocean wash this blood/ Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather/ The multitudinous seas incarnadine". (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 60- 62)

The use of language is of course grand and dramatic, but it reflects gravity and depth of his feelings. He says that the blood is so much that it can turn all the oceans of the world red. He means that the implications of his action cannot be hidden. Even if they hide the evidence from the eyes of people, their own soul will never be able to hide from the consequences of his terrible crime. He knows he will forever be a changed man from that very moment. Lady



Macbeth responds by asking him to simply go and wash away the blood, implying that it can be easily washed off. Ironically, however, it is Lady Macbeth who later begins to hallucinate and, in her hallucinations, she desperately tries to wash the stubborn stains of blood, thus symbolising her sense of guilt.

The play shows the extent to which guilt can torment one's mind. After killing his friend Banquo, Macbeth's guilt makes him hallucinate as he sees Banquo's ghost. Similarly, Lady Macbeth begins to sleepwalk, and, in her dream, she desperately tries to remove her guilt, represented through invisible stains of blood on her hands. Right after the moment he killed Duncan, Macbeth realises that his guilt will not let him sleep ever again. Although Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to leave the past behind as what is done cannot be undone, neither she nor her husband is able to do that. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth carry the burden of their guilt throughout the play. This shows that perhaps they are not entirely cold-blooded but just two people who are blinded by their ambitions. Although they have committed terrible crimes, they know they have done wrong and that the guilt of it will haunt them for the rest of their lives. It is her guilt that ultimately drives Lady Macbeth to insanity and eventually to her death. Macbeth, on the other hand, continues to fight and kill for his crown but every moment of his thoughts is tortured by the guilt of his past deeds.

## **2.4 CHARACTERIZATION IN *MACBETH***

### **2.4.1 Macbeth**

Macbeth is a brave and valorous general. This impression is essentially built through the words of the wounded captain who sings tales of Macbeth's bravery and describes his victory in the battle against the Norwegians. Like King Duncan, the audience also expect great things from Macbeth when he is honoured with the title of Thane of Cawdor, perceiving him as well-deserving and worthy of the title. This great impression of Macbeth, formed through the words of others, begins to change when the audience sees Macbeth for the first time in the next scene interacting with the three witches. His tendency of giving-in to the lure of unchecked ambition is evident when he hears the prophecies that predict great things for him. The audience's perspective is complicated as they realize that his physical strength and courage is tainted by a consuming ambition for political power. The three attributes of bravery, ambition and self-doubt begin to play a game of emotional conflict as Macbeth gradually finds himself contemplating to be king. The inner turmoil that Macbeth begins to experience after hearing the prophecies eventually displays that he lacks strength of character which is often considered as a noble trait for any honest and honourable man. Through



Macbeth, Shakespeare puts across an important and moralistic message about the terrible effects of ambition and greed and what it can do to a man who lacks strength of character. Macbeth's character displays very real and authentic emotions that every common person experiences at multiple times in one's life. It also shows how even the greatest of persons sometimes falls victim to the evil thoughts of one's own mind.

On the night when he kills Duncan, Macbeth is constantly plagued by worry and anxiety as the good in him fights the evil of his thoughts. He is almost about to abort the plan to kill Duncan. His conscience is battling with self-doubt and righteousness. It takes Lady Macbeth's strong-headed character and her steely sense of purpose to push him into killing Duncan to gain the throne. Macbeth shows vulnerability at that point and displays his inability to take charge of situations whether for the good of his soul or the greed for the throne. However, after the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth's powerful personality begins to disintegrate, and it is Macbeth who begins to take control although in a more troubled sort of way. While the part until Duncan's murder shows Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as a team who plan and operate together, the scene after they become king and queen changes completely. Macbeth becomes more solitary as he begins to spend more time in his own thoughts and takes important decisions on his own. It shows how his crimes lead to a tortured mind that ultimately alienates him from everything he holds dear. Macbeth's troubled thoughts resulting from the murder of Duncan isolate him from his wife and from himself. He makes the decision to kill Banquo and plans his murder all by himself without even confiding in Lady Macbeth. He takes it upon himself to secure the throne and its power from all possible threats.

Although Macbeth begins to take charge, he keeps fluctuating between fits of fevered action, in which he plots a series of murders to secure his throne, and moments of terrible guilt and anxiety. At certain points he also displays absolute pessimism as he realises the hopeless circle of crime and guilt that he has got himself into. These fluctuations reflect the tragic tension and conflict inside Macbeth's mind as he is at once too ambitious and determined to murder his way to political power and also too conscientious to be happy with himself as a murderer. At the end when things seem to fall apart Macbeth almost feels relieved that the torture of his mind will finally come to an end. He bravely returns to the character of a warrior where he for the first time in a long time feels at ease without having to deal with thoughts of power or guilt. He shows that somewhere inside he has always been a warrior whose greatest strengths are bravery and courage. He realises the fatal confidence that he has placed on the witches' prophecies has made him egoistic. He understands the trickery of the witches and knows he is about to die but he still decides to fight till his very



last breath rather than yield and surrender. He goes down fighting and thus brings the play to a full circle in the sense that it begins with Macbeth bravely winning on the battlefield and ends with him bravely dying in combat.

### **2.4.2 Lady Macbeth**

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most famous and ruthless female characters. When the audience first sees her, she is already plotting Duncan's murder, and this makes her the most frightening and villainous character. She is strong-headed and ambitious and knows how to take charge. As soon as she reads Macbeth's letter informing her about the prophecies given by the three witches, she knows that she will have to push Macbeth into doing what she believes needs to be done. She thinks Macbeth is weak-minded and will not have the heart and courage to kill Duncan.

Her personality is portrayed as forceful and dominant. Unlike Macbeth who constantly struggles with his conscience and loyalty before finally murdering Duncan, Lady Macbeth has no problem or hesitation with the plan of murder. She gives priority to her ambition and no amount of loyalty or conscience succeeds in making her give it a second thought. Although Macbeth has hoped to find some other alternative to become king without committing murder, Lady Macbeth unflinchingly accepts murder as the only necessary way to fulfil her ambition of becoming the queen.

She is also seen as wishing to strip herself of all feminine qualities so that she can carry out the task of murdering Duncan. This shows Shakespeare's perception regarding the dynamics between gender and power. It is evident that Lady Macbeth merely reflects the general perception of that time that ambition and violence are inextricably linked to masculinity. Through Lady Macbeth's character, Shakespeare also seems to be showing that femininity is more closely linked with the capability of manipulation. This is also reflected in the way the three witches are shown to be manipulating the mind of Macbeth. The play thus shows women as using the feminine method of manipulation to realise their own ambitions. Shakespeare implies that women too can have ambitions and they too can be as cruel as men, but the means through which they achieve their ambitions are shrouded in traits of manipulation which as depicted in the play are feminine traits.

It is therefore evident why Lady Macbeth repeatedly questions Macbeth's masculinity and manhood in order to override his hesitations. She effectively manipulates him into murdering Duncan by telling Macbeth that he needs to prove that he is a man. Lady Macbeth also shows remarkable strength as a woman when she steadies the nerves of Macbeth after he kills Duncan and also takes it upon herself to finish the incomplete task by planting the



evidence on the guards. She plans the whole murder, the escape plan as well, and keeps the whole situation under her control. She even becomes the strength for her husband whenever he is overcome by weakness and anxiety.

Lady Macbeth's remarkable strength of will, however, that persists through the murder of the King loses its strength once Macbeth becomes king and she the queen. The burden of guilt is too heavy for her to bear. She slowly slides into madness as she begins to sleepwalk and desperately tries to wash off invisible blood stains from her hands during her state of trance. It is her guilt that makes her sick and then ultimately culminates in her death. Lady Macbeth is portrayed to be experiencing the feelings of both ambition and guilt more strongly than Macbeth. Perhaps it is Shakespeare's way of suggesting her femininity by showing that women feel emotions more strongly than men.

Over the course of the play, the character of Lady Macbeth changes from an ambitious and ruthless manipulator to a guilt-ridden person who has lost all control over her own life. Her character elicits sympathy towards the end of the play. By the end of the play the audience realises that Lady Macbeth is perhaps not as villainous as she is initially thought to be. Certain moments like her boast to Macbeth that, if she had promised to kill her own child, she would have "dashed its brains out" without hesitation is certainly blood-chilling but it is only an attempt to appear to be cruel through words and not her actual capability to do something like that. She had also admitted that "I have given suck, and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me." She very well seems like she is capable of tenderness and warmth. Her wish to be "unsexed" and request to the spirits to "take my milk for gall," so that she can act without remorse and hesitation, indicate that she fears she has too much of compassion rather than none. Thus, a careful analysis of her character and a willingness to see beyond her strong worded dialogues reveal that there is a difference between who Lady Macbeth is and who she wants to be. We then see a different side of her that suggests that she is not devoid of tender emotions and compassion. We realise that her actual emotions of softness and warmth are shielded by the overriding ambitious desire for power and status making her seem as evil and villainous.

When Lady Macbeth says that she would have killed Duncan herself if he had not resembled her father while sleeping, she portrays herself as ruthless and violent. But her action, or the lack of it, shows that despite her tough exterior, she probably is too soft to kill someone. She has the opportunity to kill the king herself, but she is not able to go through with it. It would have been a lot easier to kill him herself than to convince and manipulate Macbeth into doing it. But the fact that she rather chooses to do the latter, shows that she is probably not as ruthless and cold-hearted as she shows herself to be. Moreover, when



Duncan's death is discovered by the others, Lady Macbeth faints in the scene. The most obvious reading of this is that she pretends to faint in order to distract the others from Macbeth's shaky story. But there is also a possibility that the faint might have been real, and it reveals her soft side, suggesting that she realizes the truth of what they've done, and is overwhelmed by the guilt.

After Macbeth and his wife become king and queen, Lady Macbeth assumes the role of comforter and protector of her husband. Her character becomes more sympathetic as she becomes concerned about Macbeth's guilty state of mind. Her concern for her husband is more prominent when Macbeth gradually estranges from himself and from his essential humanity. Lady Macbeth begins to realise the error of their actions and tries to forget it believing that what's done is done. She encourages her husband as well to put the past behind him. She puts on a brave face for her husband although her mind is tortured by guilt. She also becomes his protector when Macbeth loses control at the banquet. But when Macbeth becomes estranged from everything and focuses only on securing the throne, Lady Macbeth is left isolated in her guilt with no one to share her deepest thoughts and fears with.

#### **2.4.3 The Three Witches**

The three witches are referred to by many of the characters as the "weird sisters". Throughout the play they represent the temptation towards evil that every man has within himself. They play upon Macbeth's latent ambitious desire for political power. They know his weaknesses and specifically target those in order to test his strength of character by tempting him towards evil. They feed upon the dark thoughts of Macbeth and get pleasure from the chaos that unfolds because of their prophecies. The mischief that they cause is a result of their supernatural powers as well as of their ability to understand human weaknesses.

While the other characters speak in blank verses, the witches on the other hand speak in rhyming couplets that often sound like riddles. Part of the reason behind speaking in rhyming couplets might be to hide the mischief and trickery in the crafty play of words. As such, their prophecies and predictions keep the audience at the edge of their seats until the very end wondering what exactly their words might mean. The rhymed speeches along with their weird potions and dance makes them seem slightly ridiculous. These elements give them a sort of caricatured appearance and make them seem comical. But despite all absurdity, the witches are tremendously powerful and extremely wicked. The bloodbath that follows in the play is a result of their manipulations, thereby clearly making them the most dangerous characters in the play.



### 2.4.4 Banquo

Initially, Banquo is a brave and noble friend of Macbeth. He is an equally brave soldier as they valiantly fought together in the battle against Norway. While greeting them after the battle, Duncan acknowledges Banquo's bravery as no less deserving of praise than Macbeth. However, since the very beginning Banquo has been overshadowed by the accomplishments of Macbeth. The audience gets a subtle glance at Banquo's own desires and ambition. He too asks the witches for a prophecy and is pleased to learn that his children will someday become the kings of Scotland. But Banquo is smart enough to consider the possibility that the witches might only be tricking them. When the prediction about Macbeth becoming Thane of Cawdor comes true, both Macbeth and Banquo are surprised. Macbeth is too pleased with the news and begins contemplating about the second prophecy of him becoming king. However, Banquo says to Macbeth that "And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray/ In deepest consequence" (*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3, lines 125-128). He means that the witches might be trying to win their trust through small truth only to later betray them in some big way. He implies that just because the Witches told the truth does not mean that they are not evil. Nevertheless, Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth and thinks that Macbeth might have engaged in foul play in order to make the prophecy come true. When the murderers come to kill him, he cries to his son to fly to safety and take revenge for his murder. This shows that he may have faith in the prophecy that his son, Fleance, will someday rule Scotland.

### 2.4.5 Macduff

Macduff stands out as a noble and honest man. He has been a loyal and brave soldier for Duncan, but not the same to Macbeth. Since the beginning, Macduff finds it difficult to trust Macbeth. He even distrusts Macbeth's claim that the servants had killed Duncan and also finds it hard to believe that Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, have conspired to kill their own father. Macduff's suspicion towards Macbeth is evident when he does not attend Macbeth's coronation. Macbeth too understands that he does not have the loyalty of Macduff and perceives him as a threat. Macduff's decision to flee the country shows that he is smart and foresees the danger. However, his reason behind abandoning his wife and children without any defence or protection is never fully understood. It can be his strong sense of patriotism towards his country that compels him to immediately seek help from the king of England to save his country from Macbeth. Nevertheless, the guilt of leaving his family defenceless hits him hard when he gets the news of their murder. He turns his guilt into a weapon of revenge against Macbeth. He is deeply hurt by his family's death and displays a



strong motivation for revenge. The desire for revenge gives him strength till the very end and that is precisely what makes him victorious against Macbeth.

The play portrays Macduff as an example of a true honest man. His strength of character is brilliantly displayed when he is tested by Malcolm at King Edward's palace. He does not show any desire or greed to take the throne for himself. He comes across as a trustworthy and loyal man who cannot be corrupted even through temptations. Macduff also displays extreme emotional strength as he does not let his grief and guilt overcome him. He sensibly uses his emotion to mould his focus towards overthrowing Macbeth both for personal revenge and to serve the good of his country. By killing Macbeth, Macduff simultaneously deals with his own guilt, avenges his family and places the future of the country in the capable hands of Malcolm.

#### **Check Your Progress**

- What do you think is the reason for Macbeth's downfall?
- How far can the witches be held responsible for Macbeth's doom?
- Is Lady Macbeth a stronger character than Macbeth?
- Why do the Three Witches speak in rhyme?

## **2.5 UNIVERSITY QUESTIONS**

1. Do you agree that William Shakespeare is a playwright of all times? Answer with specific reference to *Macbeth*. What is the universal relevance of the play?
2. Discuss *Macbeth* as a tragedy whose focus has been consistently to delve deeper into the notions of fair and foul?
3. What do you think is the major theme of the play *Macbeth*? Why do you think so? Justify your answer.
4. Do you think the play *Macbeth* deals with ambition? Justify your answer.
5. Write a character sketch of Macbeth with specific reference to his ambition and consequent downfall.
6. How far do you think the three witches are responsible for Macbeth's downfall?

## 16th and 17th Century English Drama



7. Write a brief character sketch of Lady Macbeth.
8. Write a critical note on the structure of the play *Macbeth*.
9. Write short notes on one of the following –
  - a. Sleep-walking Scene
  - b. Porter Scene
  - c. Murder Scene
  - d. The Last Act
10. In what ways do you think Macbeth has led himself to his doom due to his ambition?

### 2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## THE ROVER

Aphra Behn

Nalini Prabhakar

### 1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This lesson will enable you to

- Understand the main features of Restoration drama and theatre
- Understand the importance of the play's title and setting
- Critically summarize the play with emphasis on plot development, character analysis and gender issues

### 2. INTRODUCTION

Very little is known about the life of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), and what little is known has been pieced together by biographers from Behn's own writings. Did she actually go to Surinam in 1650's? What exactly was the nature of her mission in Antwerp? Was she a secret spy for King Charles II? The answers to these questions will be a matter of conjecture. Behn led a difficult life, was in financial distress on many occasions, but nevertheless managed to overcome tough situations. Her life spans over the period of civil war (1642-1648), the period of the Republic (1649-1660) and the period of Restoration (When Charles II was crowned the King). Although there were women writers before Behn, she is the first woman writer in England to have made a living out of writing. In an age when women were restricted to the domestic sphere, she ventured into the world of literature totally dominated by men, and held her own despite the prejudices and sexism of the literary world.

#### Notable works:

**Plays:** The Forced Marriage (1670) Abdelazar (1676) The Rover (1677) The Feign'd Curtezans (1678) The City Heiress (1682) The Lucky Chance (1686) The Widow Ranter (1689) The Younger Brother (1696- staged posthumously)

**Novels:** The Fair Jilt (1688) Oroonoko (1688)



**Letters:** Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his sister (1684) Love Letters (1687)

**Poems:** Upon Several Occasions: with a voyage to the Island of Love (1684)

### **3. RESTORATION COMEDY**

English Comedies written and performed from 1660-1700 are called the Restoration Comedies. Restoration refers to the restoration of Monarchy, and the enthronement of King Charles II. All stage performances were banned during the Republican/Puritan regime (1649-1660) under Oliver Cromwell. Two theatre companies—King's Company and Duke's Company— were granted staging rights by Charles II. They built theatres, which made provisions for music, dancing, moveable scenery, machines for thunder and lightning etc. The Restoration theatre stage was constructed in such a way that it offered many places (archways, balconies) where characters eavesdropping on the other characters were visible to the audience but not to the others on stage. Such scenes are many in number in *The Rover*. To name one, Angellica observes Willmore and Hellena's flirtation and infatuation from her balcony.

For the first time professional actresses were introduced on stage which invited both curiosity and censor. Women engaging in witty repartees, and seduction scenes on stage was a novelty. (This interestingly gave rise to the "breeches role's". Playwrights created roles where women act as men, which necessitated the actresses to wear breeches, which were tight fitting and revealed their bodies to the male gaze.) To quote Kanwar and Prakash "...Restoration drama marked a radical departure from Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in which female sexuality was either seen in sinful terms or defined as a trait within the parameters of love and marriage... In the earlier periods, the expression of female desires observed the code of passivity which increased its appeal in the eyes of the male. The new Restoration trend broke all this and placed as per the market gaze, male and female conduct on the same pedestal." (p.7)

The development of this genre is inextricably linked to the historical context. The ban on the theatres and all forms of entertainment and the strict moral code of social behaviour during the Puritan Interregnum (1649-1660) gave rise to an audience which demanded plays different from the plays of the Jacobean and Caroline period. The focus of the playwrights was to create plays free of sexual constraints and moral rigidity. Comedy of Manners is perhaps the most preferred sub-genre of the Restoration comedy. As the title suggests comedy of manners holds up for ridicule the manners of the sophisticated gentry and the comic effect is mostly derived from witty dialogues and repartees. The plot of these plays



generally revolved around the intrigues and relationships of aristocratic high class ladies and gentlemen. The pace of these plays is fast and full of action. Marriage and love were prominent themes; the marriages portrayed, however, were loveless and unhappy and the love affairs flew in the face of conventional morality. Even during its time, Restoration comedy attracted moral condemnation owing to the portrayals of explicitly sexual and immoral situations, and indecent dialogue.

### Check Your Progress

1. What does 'Restoration' in Restoration comedies refer to?
2. Which two theatre companies were granted staging rights by Charles II?
3. What were the prominent aspects of Restoration theatres?
4. How is the development of this genre inextricably linked to the historical context?

## 4. TITLE OF THE PLAY

The original title of the play when it was first stage was *The Rover; or The Banish'd Cavaliers*. The "Cavaliers" in the title must have been a tribute to the restoration of monarchy, especially the exiled cavalier Charles II re-installed on the throne of England. Two of the main characters Willmore and Belville are Cavaliers who like most other supporters of the executed King Charles I, had to flee England. The "Rover" could refer to Willmore as also Hellena. Critics have often pointed out that the character of Willmore, a rake who wanders around taking pleasure in casual sex with women, has many similarities with Charles II during in exile. Hellena on the other hand is being forced into a life of a nun by her father. She is a 'Rover' too, as she is looking to experience love during the carnival. Most of the witty dialogues, loaded with sexual innuendos, during the course of the play are between these two "Rovers".

### Check Your Progress

1. Who are referred to as 'The Banish'd Cavaliers' in the original title?
2. Which character bears a resemblance to Charles II?



## **5. SETTING OF THE PLAY**

The play is set in Naples during the carnival, where all the action takes place. The carnival setting allows the characters, especially the female characters to hide their identity behind a mask. The mask gives them the freedom to move freely and behave differently without the social restrictions that are imposed by their social position. They gain entry into places which otherwise would be out of their reach. Florinda and Hellena, who are nobility, use mask and the carnival atmosphere to dress, speak and behave like gypsies, to express their sexuality. Since the mask hides the facial expression of the characters, what assumes primacy is the voice, the dialogues and the bodies of the actresses and actors.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. How is the setting of the play important?

## **6. CRITICAL SUMMARY**

### **Prologue**

In the Prologue the playwright claims that the play will face harsh criticism from both spectators and other playwrights. She reminds her audience that wit requires effort and that even plays which appear simple and straightforward are a product of the playwright's diligent labour. She also adds that the audience have come to witness reflections of their own debauched selves on stage. The Restoration era audience were primarily nobility and didn't expect a strong story-line involving deep emotions; they expected wit and humour. Behn promises the audience that her play will be sharp, audacious, and ruthless in its parody of contemporary culture.

### **ACT-1**

Florinda and Hellena, two Spanish sisters, are conversing in their chambers in Naples during Carnival, while their father is abroad in Rome. Their brother Don Pedro is their guardian. Hellena is making fun of her sister for being in love and hints that Florinda perhaps has set her heart on Belvile, a colonel in the English cavalry, loyal to the British monarchy. Hellena's impertinence disgusts Florinda, who reminds her that she is headed for a nunnery. Hellena continues by inquiring as to whether Florinda's preference is for Don Antonio, or for the old



but wealthy Don Vincentio. Although their father wants Florinda to wed old Vincentio, their brother Don Pedro would rather she weds his friend Antonio. Florinda blushes “with fury,” declaring that Vincentio is unworthy of her and that she will never wed him. Hellena commends Florinda for her courage, and praises the Englishman Belvile’s character and appearance.

Florinda berates Hellena for her obsession with love when she is destined to become a nun. Hellena responds by saying she has no plans to don the robes of a nun. She continues by saying that she wants her sister to fall in love with Belvile because she thinks her own prospects of falling in love might improve if Belvile has a “mad Companion”. She even promises to initiate contact in order to take part in the “Carnival” of love. Although Hellena has been ordered to become a nun by her father, she has no desire to do so. She intends to use the Carnival’s free-for-all atmosphere, where conventional roles and norms are relaxed or even overturned, to find love. Florinda cautions Hellena against being so brazen, but Hellena responds that she has “Sense enough” to exploit her youth, attractiveness, and “Sense enough” to find a lover.

Florinda reveals that she got acquainted with Belvile when he shielded her from being raped by “ordinary soldiers” during the Spanish Civil War. She claims that while she now feels responsible to him, she has also fallen in love with him.

The opening scene establishes Florinda as a conventional woman, whereas Hellena is unconventional and quite willing to challenge her father’s authority. Their conversation also reveals that they lead extremely protected lives as they belong to the nobility. The future course of their life is already decided for them and they have no say in the matter.

### Check Your Progress

1. What is the subject of the conversation between the two sisters?
2. Who is Belvile and how does Florinda get to know him?
3. Who is Florinda supposed to marry?
4. What is the future decided for Hellena? Is she happy with it?
5. What alternate plan does Hellena have in mind?

Don Pedro and his aide Stephano enter each holding a carnival mask. The governess for the sisters, Callis, travels with him. He reminds his sister that their father wants her to wed



Don Vincentio so that she can inherit his wealth. Florinda pleads with Pedro to persuade their father to reconsider, mentioning how much she despises Vincentio. Florinda blushes when Don Pedro mentions Belvile, and while Florinda makes clear the sexual brutality she faced during the Spanish Civil Wars, Pedro recognises Florinda's physical signs of love. Don Pedro commends Belvile for his bravery but then points out Don Vincentio's wealth to Florinda. In response, his sister points out Don Vincentio's advanced age to Pedro. Belvile is young and attractive, but Pedro warns his sister that the knight can only give her the "Jewels" of "his Eyes and Heart." Belvile's poverty surpasses his morality in Don Pedro and his father's eyes; Florinda's affection for him, on the other hand, is of no consequence.

Hellena interjects, claiming that Vincentio's wealth isn't worth as much as the "Jewels" Belvile has to offer. Asking if she learned this in the nunnery, Don Pedro makes fun of her. Hellena goes on to remark that while Vincentio might offer her sister money, he is too old to give her children. Hellena starts to argue with her brother verbally, exposing his folly with her wit. Hellena is witty and quick in her reparte, but Don Pedro exercises dominance because he can decide her fate irrespective of her wishes. Hellena expresses shock that Don Pedro would compel Florinda into a loveless marriage and force her into a nunnery. Pedro retorts that she is insane if she believes that living in luxury with Vincentio constitutes captivity. Hellena speculates on the opulent lifestyle he alludes to. She paints a rather sorry image of Don Vincentio in his "Moth-eaten" bedroom, burping and falling asleep. She also makes fun of Don Vincentio's dark skin by referring to him as "Indian." Hellena proves she is resolute, not complying with his demands for silence. Despite her cleverness, she does, however, show a trace of racism by making fun of Don Vincentio's dark skin tone; such racism was prevalent in the drama of the time. Don Pedro asserts that Florinda will wed Don Vincentio by pointing out that Belvile lacks wealth and is a refugee from his native country.

Don Pedro is furious and orders Callis to lock Hellena up and keep her away from the Carnival until she is ready to become a nun. Hellena responds that becoming a nun is preferable to suffering the same fate as her sister. We begin to realize that locks will not deter Hellena once she has resolved to find herself a lover. Pedro it seems has been trying to find out Florinda's thoughts regarding Vincentio. Contrary to his father's wishes Pedro wants Florinda to marry his friend, "brave and young," Don Antonio. He predicts that Florinda and Antonio will get married the next day. Don Pedro and Stephano leave after she answers that she will endeavour to behave "as shall become your sister."



### Check Your Progress

1. What is Don Pedro's objection to Belvile?
2. What are Hellena's thoughts with respect to her sister's match with Don Vincentio?
3. Who does Don Pedro want his sister to marry?

Florinda, who is both young and wealthy, bemoans the fact that she will not be able to get away from Don Antonio. In the meantime, Hellena begs Callis not to confine her. She tells her that only if she is allowed to experience the carnival, she will join the nunnery. In her own words, Hellena intends to act "crazy" while remaining "innocent" during the course of the carnival. In an effort to cheer up her sister, she asks Florinda to go with her. Hellena is bold, yet she is also reserved and chaste. At Carnival, she and Florinda might discover freedom, but they'll also be exposing themselves to the danger of sexual assault.

Florinda and Hellena decide to go to the Carnival with their cousin Valeria, and they urge Callis to join them. Once inside, Stephano informs the group that their masks are prepared. Florinda makes the decision to pen a letter to Belvile, letting him know that she is still in love with him in case she runs into him. The atmosphere of the carnival is one of complete freedom, where the constricting societal norms are set aside. The mask and the attire of the gypsies can be viewed as symbols of this freedom. Florinda's letter to Belvile is the starting point of the intricate plot of the play.

Blunt and Frederick, two English gentlemen, as well as a depressed Belvile, enter a street. Belvile is made fun of by Frederick for his melancholy, especially at Carnival time, unless he is in love. Belvile claims that neither Naples nor Paris saw him make any new conquests. The male attitude toward love is not quite the same as that of the women; males seem to mock love, while women actively seek it. According to Blunt and Frederick, Belvile must desire either money or a lady. They are inquisitive about the woman (Florinda) Belvile is in love with, and when told that he has not met her again, Belvile is chastised for seeking a woman who is too upright to fulfil him. Frederick and Blunt believe that desiring a noblewoman is unwise because she will want marriage, before having sex. What prevents Belvile from seeing Florinda is his lack of wealth. Belvile informs his friends, that Florinda has expressed her love to him in letters and by staring out of her window. However, Don Pedro has forbidden him from entering her home in order to make room for the affluent Don Antonio. Blunt and Frederick express their preference for whores over women as they would



never allow a woman to have such influence over them since they find women to be “pleasant” at night but “troublesome” in the morning.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Why do Frederick and Blunt believe that desiring a noblewoman is unwise?
2. What prevents Belvile from seeing Florinda?
3. Why do Blunt and Frederick prefer whores to women?

Unexpectedly, Willmore, a promiscuous cavalier “the Rover”, enters the scene. He is warmly embraced by Belvile and Frederick, who enquire about his purpose for being in Naples and introduce him to Blunt. Willmore responds that although he is on a business trip, he has come ashore to take part in the Carnival. Willmore is a cunning and wicked cavalier whose main ambition in life is to seduce as many ladies as he can. He fits the stereotype of a “rake,” which would have been familiar to audiences during the Restoration. As the men watch, a group of masked, revelling men and a group of women costumed as courtesans enter the street.

The Englishmen, particularly Willmore, start a conversation with the prostitutes while observing that each of them is carrying a basket of flowers and notes that are pinned to their breasts. They all talk sarcastically and crudely about flowers, prostitution, and venereal disease.

Willmore starts to flaunt his wit with obscene jokes and becomes upset when a prostitute he had been admiring leaves, lamenting that he had been on the verge of falling in love with her.

Willmore uses the word “love” to signify “desire” in order to trick numerous partners into having sex with him. All of the Englishmen will exploit the wild and outrageous atmosphere of Carnival in different ways throughout the play.

As gypsies, Florinda, Hellena, and Valeria enter. Callis, who has permitted them to attend Carnival after all, joins Stephano and a group of revellers, including Lucetta, Phillippo, and Sancho. Each wears a mask. Belvile is quickly identified by Hellena, and makes Florinda aware of him. Hellena seems to have found the ‘mad companion’ in Willmore. She is attracted to him and to further her acquaintance with him, like all gypsies offers to tell him about his future. This chance meeting is important for the development of the plot and for a considerable part of the play both these characters struggle to overcome their attraction for



each other- Willmore, because he does not believe in marriage and monogamy; and Hellena, because she cannot trust him to be faithful and rightfully so. In this instance, Hellena chooses to reveal to Willmore his fortune and fate, yet in a sense, they are both each other's fate.

Willmore starts to flirt with Hellena, calling her a “young Devil,” because he thinks she is a gypsy. Hellena recognises him as a common Englishman and meets Willmore's sharp wit with her own. The cavalier gives Hellena his heart, but she declines, saying she is aware of his “inconsistency.” She claims that his heart is not much more valuable than his wallet. Willmore admits to being promiscuous, on account of being a sailor deprived of the company of women for long periods and hence has enough love to give her. The conversation between Willmore and Hellena, is full of fun and wit. Despite the fact that she is a noblewoman, she can match his crudeness with sexual jokes of her own while still refusing to share a bed with him. He is fascinated and frustrated by her unidentified identity as well as her combination of wit and chastity.

When Hellena says that she intends to pass away virginal, Willmore warns her that by doing so, she would doom herself and offers his assistance in persuading her otherwise. Hellena, however, claims that he will have to endure terrible hardships for her benefit, despite the possibility that his “passionate eyes” will win over her “sensitive heart.” In response, Willmore promises to wield his sword to free her from any “long siege,” expressing his expectation that it won't take long to seduce her and obtain her virginity.

Despite using sexual language and adopting the usual roles of the male seducer and the seduced woman, Hellena and Willmore have already started to feel more than just intense attraction toward one another. Their back-and-forth banter indicates that they are each other's intellectual partners. There will be further instances of “swords” being employed as sexual metaphors in the play. Willmore's guiding principle in life is to sexually engage with as many beautiful women as he can, and so his reply on being told by Hellena that she is going to be a nun is along expected lines. He uses all his charm to convince Hellena that she should experience the joys of life before renouncing them.

Willmore says he wants to attend her “Banquet of Love” first and asks Hellena to give him “Credit for a Heart.” He also requests that she take him back to her house right now. He warns her that he will perish if he does not have her. Hellena replies mockingly, asking whether he wants her to be found guilty of either murder or extramarital sex. She continues by asking him if there is a distinction between love and lust. Hellena here is raising a crucial issue in the play: Willmore's response, “The two are the same” tells us that for Willmore they are coterminous, and he does not attribute a higher moral position to love vis-a-vis lust.



**Check Your Progress**

1. How does Willmore come across in this scene?
2. Briefly describe the interaction between Hellena and Willmore.

Lucetta a prostitute, and Sancho her pimp plan to rob Blunt, while Hellena and Willmore joke around. Lucetta starts to flirt with Blunt and he reciprocates. Florinda reads Belvile's palm in yet another location on the street, lamenting the fact that she has yet to get the chance to expose herself to him because Callis is keeping an eye on her. Belvile tires of the game and starts to leave her, but she stops him and asks if he has been honest or dishonest with Florinda. Belvile is conversing with his beloved Florinda, but he is unable to identify her. As the play progresses, Belvile will continue to be confused about Florinda's identity and speak to her numerous times before realising who she is. This ridicules the notion that love enables one to see past all barriers to knowing another. Florinda is loved by Belvile, but he has no idea who she is. Belvile, who had been leaving, reacts at hearing Florinda's name with surprise and delight. Florinda invites him to visit her brother's garden gate to get her love as she continues to pass for a gypsy. Florinda breaks away from Belvile as he tries to question her, but she manages to hand him a note before Don Pedro and other partygoers show up. In the meantime, Willmore and Hellena arrange to meet later that night. All the women leave but Lucetta lingers to ensnare Blunt, as she sets in motion the plan to rob Blunt.

Three distinct lust/love relationships are introduced in Act-1: Blunt and Lucetta's relationship is entirely lust, while Willmore and Hellena's is in-between lust and love. Belvile and Florinda's is pure and innocent love.

Belvile enlists the support of his friends in rescuing his beloved from Don Pedro. The other men giggle at Blunt as he leaves with Lucetta, predicting that she might con him out of his money. When Willmore enquires about Blunt's character, Belvile and Frederick make fun of his illiteracy and lack of culture but go on to say that they are only exploiting Blunt for his money. Willmore bemoans the fact that Blunt has found a woman who is so receptive, and Frederick reacts by enquiring about the gypsy (Hellena) they overheard him speaking to. Willmore responds that he thinks she is chaste and honourable due to her sharp intellect, discarding her in essence because it would take too long to overcome her purity. He queries his companions as to whether they are aware of any other women who might be more receptive to his advances. When Hellena leaves, Willmore shifts his attention to other



possibilities. Willmore, is basically immoral who values sex and adventure above all else. Frederick tells Willmore about Naples' most desired and expensive courtesan, Angellica, who was once the mistress of a now-deceased Spanish general.

### Check Your Progress

1. How does the plot progress in this scene?
2. What are the three distinct love/lust relationships introduced in Act-1?
3. What notion of love is undermined by Belvile's lack of recognition of Florinda?

### ACT-2

Angellica and are intent on finding her; the first two are wearing masks to conceal their identities and more importantly their actions, but Willmore does not find it necessary to hide behind a mask. Willmore remarks that he would not have met his "little Gypsy" (Hellena), had he worn a mask. He hopes that she is unattractive behind her mask so that he won't be drawn to her wit. The connection between Hellena and Willmore has a strong emphasis on disguise; their true identity is unknown to each other until the end. Willmore is looking for physical intimacy and a chaste woman, no matter how witty and intelligent does not fit in his scheme of things. He is however apprehensive that he might fall in love if Hellena is attractive as he is already drawn to her intelligence and wit, and this for him is catastrophic. Willmore, who is clearly frustrated because Hellena has spurned his sexual advances, adds that in order to get rid of the gypsy girl from his head, he needs to find another woman like Angellica who isn't quite as moral. Belvile believes that Willmore will only seek Hellena's body even if he develops feelings for her, abandoning her heartbroken.

Angellica's portrait "is not out" when they get to her home. Angellica displays her portrait outside her home as a representation of her vanity and self-assurance in her appearance. It also illustrates how she utilises her beauty as a commodity and exhibits it like a vendor displays his goods. Willmore has come to view the portrait because it would give him the opportunity to enjoy free access to beauty.

Blunt enters the scene in a state of unbridled joy, calling himself a fool for putting off falling in love for so long. He describes how gorgeous and loving Lucetta was, even kissing Frederick to let him taste her lips. The stupid Blunt falls head over heels in love with the



alluring and cunning Lucetta right away. In other words, Blunt is entangled in the version of the “trap” of love that Willmore fears. Blunt admits that he doesn’t know the name of his new love and reveals that she expects him back that very night and shows them the bracelet she gave him in return for the diamond he used to wear. Both, the characters and the spectators can see that Blunt is being duped. Lucetta had already deceived him into trading his pricey diamond for a cheap bracelet. Frederick cautions Blunt to take care of his wallet because it must sustain everyone in the group. Blunt tries to give the handbag to Frederick, but he declines, claiming that Blunt needs to keep it so that he may be tricked out of it and made fun of by his friends. The code of friendship here is a strange one, wherein for a few moments of amusement and making fun, they are willing to allow their friend to suffer humiliation at the hands of a prostitute. Three portraits of Angellica are hung up onstage by two slaves, with the price of 1000 crowns per month, prominently written. Willmore is mesmerised by the image, but Blunt laughs at it and calls Angellica a depraved prostitute. Willmore bemoans his lack of wealth, which prevents him from getting Angellica.

The Englishmen leave to observe the festivities after seeing Don Pedro enter in his mask who then decides to get a thousand crowns to buy time with Angellica. Don Pedro despite his mask is recognized by a servant, and Angellica responds with joy upon hearing this as she is aware that his uncle, who was also her previous lover, had left him a sizable inheritance. Angellica has no interest in love and only wants to make money. Her vanity, however, is one of her vulnerabilities; despite the fact that the Englishmen won’t give her money or authority, she appreciates their attention. She is convinced that men always betray the women who love them, and considers love an even worse trap for women than it is for men.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why is Willmore torn about his attraction for Hellena?
2. What does Angellica’s portrait with the price mentioned, represent?
3. When Blunt tries to give the handbag with money to Frederick, he declines. Why?
4. Why do the men desire Angellica, but also fear her?

Angellica has two suitors; Don Pedro and Don Antonio. Pedro and Antonio both approach Angellica’s photo, however, neither person acknowledges the other. Pedro and Antonio’s enmity is significant for the plot. Antonio’s lack of recognition of Pedro adds to



the play's complex web of false identities. The intended marriage to Florinda does not prevent Antonio from seeking sexual relationship with Angellica in exchange for money. Like Pedro and others, Antonio is only concerned with gratifying his lust and is impervious to the moral dimensions of his actions. Pedro is aware that Antonio is his disguised adversary, and he is horrified by both the treatment of Florinda by his friend and the possibility that he may not now be in possession of Angellica. It is unclear if Pedro is more worried over his sister's dignity or his own unfulfilled lust. Angellica starts to play a love tune on her lute to get the attention of her admirers. In response, Antonio takes off his mask and starts to give her kisses while promising her a reward of a thousand pounds. Pedro responds angrily, claiming that he will also pay the thousand pounds. The two men argue before starting to duel. When Blunt and Willmore enter to break up the brawl, Willmore says that if fighting alone would win Angellica, he would take part in the duel. The following day, Pedro and Antonio decide to fight in the public square. Pedro claims that they would fight not for Angellica but for Florinda's honour, whom Antonio has insulted. They also promise to duel while disguised. Pedro and Stephano walk away after deciding on a time and location. Pedro is aware of Antonio's identity, but Antonio is unaware that Pedro would be his opponent. Antonio concludes mistakenly, that his opponent is Belvile, the potential adversary for Florinda's affections. The men's duplicity regarding passion and love is evident here; Antonio is jealous of a potential rival and yet at the same time will employ the services of a prostitute. Willmore, is so mesmerised by Angellica's beauty, that he takes down a picture of Angellica.

Antonio threatens Willmore with his sword since he thinks he has insulted Angellica; Willmore answers by claiming that he will keep the picture even if Antonio has a thousand crowns to spend on Angellica. Angellica comes out to stop the men from brawling, and Willmore true to his nature, while still fighting with Antonio begins to verbally flirt with Angellica. He claims that he is injured by her beauty, and he has taken her portrait as a balm to cure the injury caused by her.

Given that he is engaged in combat as he speaks, his use of the metaphor of a wound is appropriate. Note that he used a similar phrase to try to entice Hellena earlier: that only her beauty can keep him alive. Willmore is instructed to keep the photo by Angellica, but Antonio takes offence and the argument ensues. Belvile and Frederick join the battle, and the Englishmen ultimately prevail. Moretta bemoans the fact that the Englishmen have turned off a potential consumer for Angellica. Despite Angellica's best efforts to promote peace, the men are just as drawn to her as they are to the violence. The duel irritates her rather than enhancing her conceit because it eliminates a potential source of revenue. The Englishmen



take pride in their victory over the Spaniards because they see it as proof that they are stronger than their adversaries. For them, being a good fighter and being a man are synonymous. Willmore is summoned by Angellica, to apologise for his rudeness. Inside her home, when asked to explain why he took her photo down, Willmore replies by asking why she had the temerity to display her picture, and if she was trying to make him feel hopeless by displaying things he couldn't afford. Willmore, who is proud and fearless despite his lack of wealth, chastises Angellica for her exorbitant price while also praising her attractiveness. His banter is met by Angellica, who is both intelligent and attractive.

Despite Willmore's lack of wealth, Angellica is already beginning to like him. Moretta, her assistant on the other hand, is uninterested in Willmore's wit and mocks his impoverished state. Moretta wants to safeguard the independence and freedom that Angellica enjoys. She is convinced that love is an emotional bondage which will cause misery and ruin her mistress. When Willmore requests to buy just a few seconds with Angellica, she bluntly tells him to pay the entire sum of 1000 crowns. Undeterred Willmore bargains for a collective purchase whereby he can split the cost and time with his friends and then recover the cost by selling the extra time in the open market.

Despite the insults, Angellica says in an aside that she can never be angry with Willmore and that she is actually falling in love with him. Willmore confesses that he has conflicting feelings for Angellica; he despises her for placing a price on love yet would give up everything for her. He claims that by knowing she can be purchased, he will be able to mend the heartbreak her eyes have caused. Finally, he holds her and continues to admire her beauty. Because, Angellica deals in passion and thinks love is poisonous, she is shocked by her feelings for Willmore. Even though they struggle with their emotions, the two maintain their witty banter. Willmore seemed to have completely forgotten about Hellena.

Willmore continues by claiming that his feelings for her are merely sexual and not romantic because he is steadfast in the face of her rejection rather than wallowing at her feet. Angellica then accuses Willmore of being "mercenary" like her, saying that he won't get married unless his future wife is rich, implying that if he marries a wealthy woman, he will turn into a kind of male prostitute. Willmore disputes this and states that he will not get married for money.

If Willmore could ever forget that Angellica's love and favour are for sale, Angellica wonders. She advises him to tell her that it is true even if it is not because doing so will make her happy. Willmore slams Angellica's charms, adding that despite being a fraud, she managed to win his heart. He turns away from her in wrath. She asks Willmore if he loves her



enough to overlook the fact that she is a prostitute. Willmore in no uncertain terms tells her that he does not trust women in general, much less a prostitute, as they are deceitful and untrustworthy. The two passionate characters hurt and misunderstand one other, but ultimately they are unable to hide their intense attraction and feelings for each other. After calling Angellica a demon and offering to pay her in “vows,” Willmore kisses Angellica’s hand as she continues to demand payment not in the form of money but in the form of affection. Willmore excitedly concurs and offers that they leave so that he can show her how much he cares; Unlike Hellena, she gives in to Willmore’s advances rather than insisting on getting married first, and the two leave the stage to satisfy their passion.

Moretta, who has been quiet up to this point, berates Angellica for falling in love. Moretta is a voice of both reason and avarice. She has a healthy suspicion of men, but for good reason; she knows that Willmore will eventually betray Angellica by exploiting and misleading her for his own purposes before moving on to another woman. According to Moretta, women can only become powerful and wealthy independently, and they should avoid falling in love because it is the antithesis of independence.

### Check Your Progress

1. How many Suitors does Angellica have?
2. Why do Pedro and Antonio start to duel?
3. Why does Antonio conclude mistakenly, that his adversary for Angellica’s favours is Belvile?
4. Why do Blunt and Willmore start a fight with Antonio and his friends.
5. Despite Willmore’s lack of wealth, what attracts Angellica to Willmore?
6. Do you agree that Moretta’s voice is one of reason and avarice?
7. How does the interaction between Willmore and Angellica end?
8. Do you agree that Pedro and Antonio have double standards where sexual morality is concerned?

### ACT-3

Later in the afternoon Florinda, Valeria, and Hellena reach the street where Angellica resides. They remain concealed. Willmore has forgotten Hellena, but she can’t help but think of him. The women are unaware that their brother is upset due to the disagreement with Antonio



regarding Angellica. Valeria tells the others that she attempted to tell a stranger (Frederick) his fortune but became uneasy and nearly abandoned the ruse. Florinda and Valeria begin to make fun of Hellena as she starts to yearn for Willmore. Hellena admits she regrets seeing the “crazy” cavalier, but she is adamant that she is not in love. Valeria and Frederick’s courtship forms one of the sub-plots in the play. Hellena is reminded of Willmore when she hears about this liaison. She is aware that she should not fall in love with Willmore but she is unable to suppress her feelings for him. Hellena sees love as an important aspect of life that must be experienced.

Florinda and Valeria, meanwhile, find it amusing that the clever Hellena has fallen in love with someone like Willmore who does not believe in love. Florinda thinks that Hellena’s acceptance of love somehow renders her unrighteous and wicked and is unable to appreciate that Hellena, has a much more mature conception of love. Hellena masked, observes that the Englishmen have arrived without Willmore. Hellena discovers Willmore’s activities when she overhears the Englishmen discuss the fate of Willmore and his liaison with the courtesan. Willmore, who has just left Angellica’s home, walks in. Hellena, who is still hidden, reacts angrily. Belvile questions him, and Willmore answers triumphantly, extolling the delight he has discovered in her embrace, her beauty, her eyes full of cupid’s arrows. Willmore is delighted that he has used his cleverness to entice the seemingly unreachable Angellica and has also received gold from her to spend. When Blunt inquires whether they have wed, Willmore responds that he and Angellica have had all the delights of marriage but none of the bitterness that marriage vows entail. Blunt leaves the scene as Lucetta sends a message through Sancho that she is eagerly awaiting his visit to her chambers. Willmore is asked by Belvile if he has forgotten about his gypsy girl. Willmore replies that he doesn’t want to be reminded of her. Willmore has no moral qualms about having multiple partners and seems to move from one to another quite naturally. However, the fact that he became upset at being reminded of Hellena shows that he may have stronger affections for her than he professes. Hellena emerges from hiding and Willmore after the initial shock, resumes his flirtatious behaviour. Hellena, despite being aware of his deception, engages in conversation with him. As the two are having a conversation, Angellica walks in, but quickly hides herself, and expresses astonishment at discovering Willmore with Hellena. Angellica was hesitant to fall in love, but now that she has, the pain of betrayal shows when she tells Moretta, “I expected my love to make Willmore noble and true”.

Marriage would require a rakish man like Willmore to be faithful to just one lady, which he is incapable of. Hellena makes use of this knowledge to make fun of him. She tells Willmore that she is just as inconstant as he is and finds fidelity boring. She explains to him



that she will adore him for a year, then be indifferent to him for another, and finally detest him for a third before losing interest in him completely. Willmore says that even if he wanted to, he could not confine her inside his heart because she had torn a hole through it. Willmore, who is unaccustomed to encountering a woman he cannot seduce, and is attracted by this smug and surprising attitude. Angellica, in hiding expresses anger at Willmore's behaviour, but unlike Hellena, she has already committed herself to Willmore, therefore she is unable to respond to his promiscuity in a carefree and witty manner. Angellica leaves the scene and instructs Biskey to bring Willmore to her and commands Sebastian, to find out who Hellena is.

All this while, Belvile converses with Florinda in disguise, still unaware that the woman is actually his beloved. Frederick pursues Valeria. Belvile who is yearning for Florinda is encouraged by Valeria to seduce Florinda who is disguised as a gypsy, but he finds this proposition unattractive. Belvile at this point does not know that the gypsy is Florinda and comes across as a faithful and honourable man. Florinda decides to entice Belvile by presenting him with a jewel to demonstrate her affluence. She also tells him that she has secretly spied upon him, and bemoans the fact that women of her rank have "few opportunities for Love". Belvile appears to be contemplating giving in to her seduction while Frederick begs his friend to seize the jewel. Florinda is not confident about Belvile's loyalty, which is not surprising given the promiscuity of men like Willmore. Given how destitute the cavaliers are, Frederick, who is pragmatic but not totally moral, instructs Belvile to take the jewel. Belvile declines, claiming that accepting the gem would violate his promise to his woman. Belvile rejecting such fortune astounds Frederick. Belvile refuses to be unfaithful to Florinda in the face of overwhelming temptation, demonstrating his noble character.

In the meantime, Hellena informs Willmore that she will reveal her identity on the condition that he confesses to her his doings in Angellica's home. Willmore is forced to lie giving Hellena an opportunity to make fun of him. She responds that there are men who are as attractive and erratic as he is, disputing Willmore's claim that some women are kinder than she is. She vows never to see him again unless he ends his relationship with Angellica, and he promises to do so while kneeling in front of her and kissing her hand. By tricking Willmore into telling a lie, Hellena reveals that she is aware that he has been spending time with infamous Angellica. He reacts by attributing his infidelity on Hellena's chastity. While pledging to stay faithful to Hellena, Willmore appears to have forgotten about the courtesan, much as he did while he was with Angellica. The women must leave because it is getting dark. Florinda quickly gives Belvile the jewel, which turns out to have a picture of her in it. Willmore also bids Hellena farewell and informs her that he will see her again the next day.



Frederick, who is always pragmatic, celebrates the worth of the jewel that Florinda has left while Belvile understands his error. For a brief moment, Willmore and Belvile believe they are competing for the same lady. By displaying a picture of Florinda, Belvile clears up their confusion, and the two men decide to save her that night together with Frederick.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why are Florinda and Valeria amused that the clever Hellena has fallen in love with someone like Willmore?
2. How does Hellena discover Willmore's liaison with Angellica?
3. How does Antonio boast to his friends about his conquest of Angellica?
4. How do Hellena and Angellica react to Willmore's promiscuity? What difference do you find in their reactions?
5. Why does Florinda offer Belvile an expensive jewel?
6. Why does Belvile refuse to take the jewel? What does this tell you about his character?
7. What is the misunderstanding between Willmore and Belvile?

In a different sub-plot, Lucetta has brought Blunt to her home with the intention of robbing and seducing him. Even though this episode is meant to be humorous, it also serves as an example of the type of cunning, promiscuous woman that the males in the play fear and despise. But isn't there also a parallel between what Lucetta is doing here and what Willmore did when he seduced Angellica and took her money? Willmore's betrayal of Angellica is equally predictable, however Lucetta's actions are more deliberate because she intended to rob Blunt from the start.

Sancho takes Blunt to Lucetta's chamber where she is on the bed. Blunt continues to profess his love as he gets undressed. He moves toward the bed wearing his undergarments, and is asked by Lucetta to blow out the candle. He searches in the pitch black for the bed but is unsuccessful. He becomes more and more upset until a trap door opens and he drops into it.

Blunt is robbed of all his possessions including the sword and hat. Since Blunt doesn't know Lucetta's name, address, or even how to get back to his own house, Sancho and Phillippo claim they won't be discovered. Phillippo who is Lucetta's lover argues that he is too jealous and begs Lucetta to go to bed with him. She accepts, and they leave with Sancho.



Lucetta however believes she should have given Blunt at least one night of pleasure. Blunt returns, filthy and naked. He bemoans his own stupidity and curses Lucetta and all women. He thinks of his friends and realises that he will have to deal with their cruel ridicule the following day. Due to Lucetta's wrongdoing, the sluggish and gullible Blunt decides to detest all women, rather than just the one who mistreated him.

### Check Your Progress

1. How does Lucetta rob Blunt of all his possessions?
2. What is Blunt's immediate concern after he is robbed?
3. How does this incident change Blunt's character?

In only her nightgown, carrying a box of jewels, Florinda enters her family's garden to meet Belvile, who is yet to arrive. Willmore enters disguised, in an inebriated state, irate because he has been unable to locate Belvile or Frederick. Florinda is standing outside at night in her nightgown; Willmore approaches Florinda not knowing who she is and belligerently demands a kiss. When she resists his advances, Willmore responds aggressively and brutally, accusing her of opening her garden door intentionally to lure men into her trap. He tries to pay her as he would a prostitute, and while she resists, he wrestles her to the ground. Willmore had acted immorally in the past, but this is the first time we witness him almost commit rape. His incredibly problematic mindset of masculine entitlement is exemplified by his statement that Florinda was virtually asking for it. Belvile and Frederick come in wearing masks in search of Willmore. They hurry to Florinda's aid after hearing her screams, removing Willmore from her. He draws his sword on his friends while still intoxicated and aggressive. This act of Willmore highlights the shadowy side of his character as also the play. Florinda asks Belvile to come over to her chamber window but hearing her brother Don Pedro approaching, she escapes just in time. Pedro and his men drive out the cavaliers and Pedro is reassured that Florinda is safe inside the house by Stephano. Belvile suffers as a result of Willmore's actions because he once again misses the opportunity to see Florinda. Willmore argues that he could not have known that the woman was Florinda. He then expresses yet another unsettling attitude, claiming that if he had realised Florinda was a noblewoman, he would not have attacked her, reinforcing the idea that a woman should be protected from rape only if she is of high birth. Frederick implores Belvile to pardon their friend while Willmore places the responsibility of his actions on alcohol. Belvile demands a duel with Willmore, but Willmore defends his actions without any remorse. Willmore, who is



always pragmatic, claims that he is too inebriated to duel and promises to do it the next day. Belvile, who is unaware of the rift between Antonio and Don Pedro, recalls that Florinda is scheduled to wed Don Antonio the next day. Willmore offers help, but neither Willmore nor Belvile is familiar with Antonio's appearance. This uncertainty and carnival environment of disguises and concealment, has ramifications later in the play.

They arrive at Angellica's home and Willmore decides to honour the promise he made to spend the night with her. He is stopped by a sword wielding Antonio, who has exclusive rights over her as he has purchased her sexual favours. Willmore seems to have moved his affections back to Angellica, notwithstanding his recent flirtation with Hellena. He is furious that another man will be having sex with Angellica and starts a fight with Antonio and injures him. Willmore is unsure if he has actually slain his adversary and even if he has, like a typical carnival figure lacks morality and is impervious to repercussions.

A troop of soldiers enter as Belvile looks for Willmore, worried for his friend despite his annoyance. The troopers seeing an injured Don Antonio assume that Belvile has committed the crime, and take Belvile into custody. Antonio accuses Belvile of assaulting him twice; mistaking him for Don Pedro in the first instance (in the fight outside Angellica's home) and Willmore in this second instance. He commands the soldiers to carry the Englishman to his own home. The honourable and guiltless Belvile is taken into custody for Willmore's misdeeds.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What explanation does Willmore offer to Belvile for his sexual assault of Florinda?
2. Why is this explanation unsettling?
3. Why does Willmore get into a fight with Antonio?
4. Why does Belvile get arrested and locked up in Antonio's home?
5. Why does Antonio think that he has been assaulted twice by Belvile? Who is he mistaking him for? What has caused this confusion?

#### **ACT-4**

In the first scene of Act 4, we find Belvile locked up in a dimly lit room. Antonio enters and asks how he came to be hated by Belvile. The Englishman claims innocence and says that the



only reason he fought was to protect Willmore. Belvile is graciously given a sword by Antonio, who claims to have prevented Belvile's capture. The cavalier thanks Antonio, who then discloses his identity. Although Belvile now knows that Antonio is his rival for Florinda's love, Antonio is still in the dark. Antonio has a selfish interest in presenting the sword; he wants the Englishman to take his place and engage Don Pedro in the combat. Neither Antonio nor Belvile know that Pedro is the opponent in the duel. Belvile is also not aware that the two men are duelling over Angellica and not Florinda. Belvile is under the impression that there is one more challenger for his love. In order to defeat this new threat, he resolves to fight in Antonio's place and consents to use Antonio's identity and wear his clothes.

Florinda and Callis dressed as men have come to watch Don Pedro duel. Florinda seems to believe mistakenly that her brother is in a duel with Belvile to protect her honour.

By this point in the play one has become accustomed to the notion of men fighting for a lady. Florinda, meantime, is torn between praying for her brother or her beloved. Her sorrow and unhappiness are a direct result of men embracing violence as a social norm, as also her status as a woman wherein she is a dependent confined by the men in her life.

Pedro professes to be fighting for Florinda, but when Belvile enters disguised as Antonio, all that Pedro can think of is his former friend in Angellica's arms. Florinda however is relieved when Belvile enters dressed as Antonio since she thinks her beloved is not taking part in the duel. Pedro vehemently accuses the disguised Belvile of currying favour with Angellica. Belvile is surprised that Antonio would choose to battle for Angellica—a "common Prize"—instead of Florinda, but he nonetheless gets ready to fight. Belvile finds it inexplicable that these Spanish noblemen would compete for the love of a common harlot after learning that Pedro is also fixated on Angellica. In the duel Belvile disarms Pedro. At this point, a disguised Florinda steps in once more to save her brother. Belvile declines, once more failing to recognise her. But he drops his blade at her feet when she pleadingly implores him in the name of his love. The mere mention of Florinda's name is enough to make him put down his sword.

Don Pedro congratulates Belvile on winning back Florinda's hand and his own friendship while still believing him to be Antonio. Don Pedro extends Florinda's hand to Belvile, giving the impression that his lie will benefit him. Pedro feels that because it is Carnival season, he may marry Florinda to Antonio (rather than Vincentio), despite the fact that normally a son defying his father would be impossible. Florinda protests about being forced to wed the man she still believes to be Don Antonio. As Callis diverts Don Pedro,



Belvile pulls her away and tells her who he is. Willmore and Frederick enter at precisely the wrong time, looking for Belvile. Willmore wears expensive clothing that he paid for using Angellica's funds. When Willmore recognises Belvile, he rushes to embrace him while yelling his name. Belvile and Willmore both draw their swords to defend Florinda when Don Pedro realises his error and tries to take her back. Despite the cavalier's clear acts of valour and nobility, the hypocritical Don Pedro refuses to give Florinda to him because of his poverty.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why does Antonio present the sword to Belvile?
2. Do Antonio or Belvile know that Pedro is the opponent in the duel?
3. Why does Belvile agree to fight in Antonio's place and use Antonio's identity?
4. Why does Florinda believe that her brother is in a duel with Belvile?
5. Over which woman are Pedro and Antonio actually duelling? How does Belvile come to know this?
6. What makes Belvile spare Pedro's life?
7. Why does Pedro offer Florinda in marriage to Belvile? When does he realize his error?

Moretta, Sebastian, and Angellica enter, enquiring about Willmore. Angellica tells Moretta that Hellena is Don Pedro's sister and that she thinks Willmore is in love with the aristocrat. She bemoans his infidelity, saying that he has not only abandoned her but also stolen 500 crowns from her. All of Angellica's worst fears have come true, the beautiful courtesan realises that despite her beauty and wealth she has no chance of winning against Hellena because she will never be as affluent or as attractive as a noble. Angellica believes that love is just as terrible and dangerous as she first thought. Sebastian enters the room again with Willmore. Angellica tells him that she is aware of his deceit and declares her intention to exact retribution as he has already found a more moral mistress than her. Willmore replies that he has no desire for a morally upright woman. Willmore, as usual, doesn't think he did anything wrong. He doesn't think that cheating on her counts as sin. Angellica still enraged, tells Willmore that she witnessed him flirting with Hellena the previous night and accuses him of courting her for her wealth. Willmore is astounded by how much his gypsy lady is



worth and secretly harbours the wish that Angellica will become so incensed as to demand that he leave her so that he may go back to Hellena. Love, lust, and money are all intertwined for the cavalier.

Hellena comes in, disguised as a boy. She knows Angellica and Willmore, and moves closer to Willmore eager to humiliate him for his disloyalty. She claims to be a relative of a young noblewoman who fell in love with a charming, witty Englishman due to his eloquence. Like Willmore, Hellena enjoys deceit, and she adds to the confusion by inventing a fictitious lover for Willmore. Willmore who is conceited believes Hellena even though he is unsure of who she is referring to. Hellena offers to end her story about the noblewoman when she notices the pain in Angellica's eyes, but Angellica begs the cloaked Hellena to continue in an effort to snuff out her own love for Willmore. Hellena and Angellica are romantic rivals, but Hellena harbours sympathy and understanding for the jilted prostitute. Meanwhile, Willmore appears utterly uncaring about how much he has harmed Angellica.

Willmore asks Hellena who her alleged mistress is and how he might locate her home while Angellica is preoccupied. Hellena finds his promiscuity astounding. When Angellica turns around, Willmore reassures her that he is not the man described by Hellena. This scene is absurd and comical as Willmore continually soothes Angellica just to act unfaithfully toward her when she turns her back. This pattern is not only amusing, but it also demonstrates just how brazen and smug the cavalier really is. Finally ending the cycle, Angellica begs Hellena to recognise Willmore by looking into his face. Willmore recognises Hellena as his gypsy girl when their eyes make eye contact. He regrets that the mystery woman he had hoped for is a fabrication and intends to punish Hellena for her deceit.

To teach her a lesson Willmore decides to reveal her identity. The Englishman declares that the woman Hellena is referring to is not a noblewoman but rather an obnoxious gypsy girl. He continues to belittle Hellena by telling her that Angellica shouldn't be envious of such a hideous creature.

Don Antonio is introduced by Sebastian as he arrives on the scene; upon hearing his name, Hellena runs away fearing that he would detect her disguise. Angellica by accepting Antonio returns to her profession of a prostitute, and it appears that she has given up on finding love with Willmore. She eventually sees through Willmore's rhetoric and rejects his attempts to re-seduce her, despite his best efforts to persuade her that he hasn't been unfaithful. With Willmore gone, Angellica expresses her sorrow and admits that due to his adultery, she has lost faith in both love and in herself. She decides that she will exact revenge on the cavalier since she is "not fit to be loved."



**Check Your Progress**

1. Why does Angellica think that despite her beauty and wealth she has no chance of winning against Hellena?
2. Love, lust, and money are all intertwined for the cavalier Willmore. Explain.
3. Why does Hellena offer to end her story about the supposed noblewoman in love with Willmore?
4. How does Willmore come to know that the rich noblewoman he had hoped for is a fabrication?

Florinda and Valeria disguised, leave Don Pedro's home after confining Callis in a wardrobe on the pretext of going to the convent. Valeria has given Belvile a note, who is now aware that Florinda intends to flee that day and would rather die than wed Don Antonio. Additionally, Valeria has informed him that although her brother is in church, Florinda is currently being held captive in her room by Don Pedro. Valeria is trying to aid Florinda, but her efforts have only served to distance the couple because Belvile is unaware that Florinda has left her home and is looking for him. The women put on their masks as they see Don Pedro and Belvile walking down the street. Willmore and the men enter, and they notice Florinda staring at them. Willmore follows her misinterpreting her glance for an invitation.

Frederick walks in with the news about Blunt. Don Pedro and Belvile are delighted by the Englishman's offer to take Pedro to Blunt. Blunt's story diverts Don Pedro's attention. The cavaliers, on the other hand, are ecstatic that their wealthy friend has been humiliated.

Florinda is being pursued by Willmore who keeps mistaking her sideways glances for flirtation. They both leave the scene. Hellena enters next, followed by a page. She asks her page to track Willmore and provide updates on his whereabouts after spotting that he is after a woman. When she sees she is getting close to Don Pedro, she quickly leaves. Belvile, Willmore, and Don Pedro all follow suit and cross the stage at the same time.

Florinda decides to hide at a house with an open door to avoid her brother, which turns out to be Belvile's accommodation. She is all by herself and separated from Valeria.

The scene shifts to Blunt reading a book about the risks of travel while only wearing his shirt and underwear within Belvile's quarters. He puts on a rusty sword in the hopes that it will stop the cavaliers from making fun of him. He then goes on to talk about how he



despises all women and threatens to harm any that he encounters. Florinda finds herself in a far worse position than before. Leave alone helping her, Blunt becomes her aggressor. He starts to attack her despite her protestations that she is a “harmless virgin”, with the intention to “bear vengeance on one whore for the Sins of another.” Blunt, who initially was a comical character, now assumes a frightening and menacing persona and makes it plain that he wants to rape Florinda. He now thinks that all women are deceptive whores who are only deserving of abuse and violence since he was duped by one courtesan.

Frederick comes in, and rather than assisting Florinda, makes fun of Blunt for being naked. In response to Florinda’s cries for assistance, Blunt suggests that they both rape her. Frederick concurs, stating that he is always eager to assist “in issues of Revenge” when doing so will bring him pleasure.

Florinda desperately calls out Belvile’s name, stating that she is aware that the two are his companions and pleading with them to be kind to her for his benefit as they try to take her into the bedroom. In response, Blunt crudely claims that after satisfying their lust, they will entrust her to Belvile. Florinda gives them a ring to convince them that she is not a commoner. Frederick is concerned that they may have tried to rape a noblewoman instead of a common harlot, while Blunt is envious of the diamond. Blunt continues to insist that Florinda is lying, but the two resolve to hold off until Belvile arrives. Don Pedro and Belvile’s arrival is announced and once again Florinda is saved. She is however locked up in a chamber. Blunt refuses to see any of them. The men practically take control of Florinda by locking her up because they are still dubious that she is truly virtuous.

### Check Your Progress

1. Why does Willmore follow Florinda?
2. What makes Florinda hide at an unknown house?
3. What stops Blunt and Frederick from raping Florinda?
4. Why is Florinda locked up?

### ACT-5 Summary

Blunt, who is still feeling humiliated, tries to hide in his room, but to no avail—his friends actually surround the door in an effort to pry it open. No one believes Blunt despite his claims that he is with a woman after first claiming to be praying. When Willmore hears there is a



woman inside, he discloses that Frederick has told everyone about the captured Florinda, and quips that he must share her with his friends. Belvile, Willmore, Don Pedro, and a page finally break down the door and enter, laughing at Blunt as he draws his sword. The men, unaware that Blunt and Frederick have kidnapped Florinda, find the entire scenario humorous, including Pedro and Belvile. While Pedro apologises for his nation's rudeness and promises to assist Blunt in exacting revenge, Willmore and Belvile show sympathy. Blunt reveals that he still has Florinda and intends to ruin her. None of the men find Blunt's detention of Florinda alarming or morally reprehensible because they are convinced that they can abuse and assault lower class women without facing any repercussions.

Blunt reveals Florinda's ring to his friends, and when he does, Belvile quickly identifies it as the one he gave Florinda. Willmore suggests that they see Florinda in order to ascertain her nobility and suggests that they all draw swords, the man with the longest sword going in first. Even though they have repeatedly mistaken Florinda for a commoner throughout the play, the men are confident that they will be able to identify her nobility. The sword competition, however, is a crude joke where the winner is determined by who possesses the "longest" sword and who is therefore the best qualified to evaluate Florinda.

Don Pedro triumphs because Spaniards often wield longer swords than Englishmen, and the other men relinquish their claim to Florinda. Belvile berates Willmore for his "mischief" as Pedro leaves, not realising that he is about to endanger his own sister. Belvile laments his friend's apparent foolishness while Willmore responds angrily after learning he lost the competition. Still wearing a mask, Florinda returns, followed by Don Pedro. He implies that he believes she is a prostitute by asking who she is and why she is here. At the same time, Willmore wonders if Florinda is the same woman he recently followed, and Belvile and Florinda are both concerned that her brother would find out who she is.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. How would you characterize the attitude of the men regarding the imprisoned 'woman'?
2. How does Belvile identify the woman as Florinda?
3. Comment on the sword competition.

Don Pedro catches Valeria off guard as she enters. Valeria quickly recovers herself and informs Pedro that Florinda has run away. Pedro leaves but not before telling Belvile that if she comes to him, he must give her back to her family. Belvile makes a commitment to



uphold his love and honour, and Pedro leaves happy. Valeria demonstrates once more that she is not only courageous but also smart. Don Pedro, on the other hand, demonstrates his foolishness by assuming that Belvile will continue to be loyal to him and not Florinda. Valeria is embraced by a relieved Florinda. Willmore and Blunt watch in confusion as Valeria implores Florinda and Belvile to get married as soon as possible before Don Pedro shows up. Willmore asks Florinda for forgiveness and kisses her hand after realising who she is; she accepts and he compliments her beauty. They dispatch the page to find a priest. With Florinda and Belvile's reunion, the confusing web of identities finally starts to unravel. The men are ashamed of their error and now that they realise Florinda is the honourable beloved of Belvile, they once again esteem her. Forgiving them so readily demonstrates how ladies in Restoration comedy like the men believed that there is nothing wrong in lower-class women being targets for sexual assault.

Frederick and Valeria choose to get married as well despite having only recently met, in keeping with the play's carnival-like atmosphere. This kind of group marriage is a typical plot device in comedies of this kind because it is considered that finding love and being happy are synonymous. Finally, Blunt seeks Florinda's pardon, which she promptly grants despite his despicable behaviour.

The four lovers leave to get married when the page returns with a priest. Willmore stays on stage to deter Don Pedro from coming back. The page informs Willmore that a woman has come to see him and she is asked to be shown in.

### Check Your Progress

1. How does Valeria manage to help Florinda from being discovered?
2. Do you find Florinda's ready forgiveness of the men's sexual assault acceptable?
3. Which two couples wed in this scene?

Angellica comes in wearing a mask and a veil. She approaches Willmore and threatens him with a gun. Willmore requests to see her face since he is perplexed as to who she is. Taking off her disguise, Angellica accuses him of being a traitor and claims that he has already forgotten about her. The careless actions of Willmore have brought Angellica to the brink of insanity and violence. Angellica's actions, like the earlier duel between the males, show the debilitating effects of lust and love. Willmore continues to believe in his persuasive abilities even when his life is at danger. Willmore claims that because of Angellica's



prolonged relationship with the senior general, she has become selfish and indolent and lacks an understanding of the behaviour of youthful loves. Willmore, according to Angellica, has taken the strength out of her eyes, and she now recognises her true inner frailty. She claims that because she gave in to love, now she can't live without the compliments Willmore provided her. Willmore responds with what appears to be sincere regret, expressing that he wishes he could be dependable and devoted for her sake. But in a rare instance of self-awareness, he acknowledges that this will never occur because it goes against his nature. He also hands her a gold purse and says that he will compensate her for her time. Angellica prepares to fire after declaring that she must still murder him for the benefit of all female kind as well as her own anguish.

Don Antonio unexpectedly walks through the door after spotting Angellica's coach outside the residence. Despite being hurt, he takes her gun and offers to shoot Willmore but the courtesan begs him not to fire. Don Pedro returns only to run away when he sees Don Antonio with Angellica. Willmore is cursed by Angellica that he should fall in love with a woman who will exact retribution for their entire sex. Finally, she walks out. Instead of killing Willmore, Angellica wishes the worst thing she can think of for him: that one day a woman will degrade him like she has been degraded.

Don Antonio follows Angellica as she exits, but Don Pedro stops him and demands to know why he sent a proxy to their morning duel. Antonio declares that he is incapable of holding a sword and expresses amazement that Don Pedro was his unknown adversary. Pedro insists, horrified that Antonio would send Belvile, one of his rivals, to defend Florinda's honour. The two men decide to fight when Antonio is recovered. Finally, Antonio understands that Don Pedro was the opponent in their duel. Behn leaves the prospect of a duel with them open-ended, presumably hinting that while her play may come to an end, the cycle of men abusing women (and abusing each other) may never end.

Don Pedro, who is still enraged, decides to send Florinda to Belvile as payback for Antonio. Willmore says the union has already taken place and perhaps even consummated. Incredulous, Don Pedro enquires as to whether Belvile is not terrified of his influence; Willmore responds that they do not fear the Spaniard and makes a threat to use the ship's crew to capture Don Pedro if the marriage is not approved.

Belvile walks in, and when Don Pedro discovers that Belvile has wed Florinda, he extends his congratulations and embraces him. Willmore follows the two as they leave to inform Florinda about this fortunate turn of events.



### Check Your Progress

1. What brings Angellica to the brink of insanity and violence.
2. What reason does Angellica give for her actions?
3. Why does Angellica spare Willmore's life? What retribution does she envisage for him?
4. Why does Don Pedro decide to send Florinda to Belvile as payback for Antonio.
5. How are Pedro and Belvile reconciled?

Willmore is about to leave the stage when Hellena reappears, this time dressed as a boy, and she drags him back. Having been excluded from the coupling going on all around him and being unattached to Angellica, Willmore responds to Hellena with enthusiasm. Of course, the fact that Hellena is wealthy probably contributes to some of his excitement.

Willmore promises that they won't ever be apart when Hellena asks whether he would have left her behind. She then wonders if a virgin like herself, who is innocent, can repose her trust in a man like Willmore. But he continues to insist that she has done him wrong and that he is frightened of falling in love. Hellena admits that aside from tenacity, she lacks any other attributes of nobility to commend her. Willmore exclaims with joy that he prefers a crazy, jovial mistress to a coy one.

Even after everything that has happened, the two can return to their light-hearted banter with ease. However, their conversation has a more sincere tone now that both characters openly acknowledge to having reservations about starting a relationship. They are still incredibly drawn to one another despite their newly discovered honesty; this connection is not just sexual but also cerebral.

Willmore and Hellena concur that they shouldn't waste any time, and the cavalier suggests that they head up to his chamber right away. However, Hellena insists that they get married first. Willmore tries to talk her out of getting married, but Hellena doesn't want a love which will leave her with regrets and an illegitimate child. As Hellena once again declines to have a sexual relationship with Willmore before marriage, the couple reverts to the classic pattern of the male seducer and the seduced female. Also take note of the fact that Hellena effectively proposes to Willmore, which is a radical reversal of gender expectations.



Willmore begs Hellena for at least one kiss, but she simply responds with derision, declaring that if he is content with just one, he doesn't truly love her. She tries to leave, but Willmore stops her and says that they are so similar that he loves her and wants to marry her. He kisses her hand and decides to let love and luck control his destiny.

All the other principal characters enter for the final scene. Pedro, tries to separate his sister Hellena from Willmore, but is prevented from doing so. Hellena openly professes her love for Willmore. Hellena is not in the least bit afraid of her brother now that she has finally subdued Willmore. She seems to have gained power through love; the idea of her entering a nunnery no longer seems conceivable.

Don Pedro is indignant that both of his aristocratic, wealthy sisters have fallen in love with lowly Englishmen. Willmore claims that the only thing he can give Hellena to defend her is his sword, but he declares that he loved her when he thought she was a gypsy, before he knew how wealthy she was. Despite the fact that they have argued and fought throughout the play, the crucial attribute required for a marriage seems to be noble blood. Meanwhile, Willmore, who has finally experienced love, has conveniently forgotten how much of his fascination with Hellena originates from her money. Hellena decides to forego the holiness of becoming a nun and asserts that she is a self-sufficient woman who would prefer to spend that money on love rather than religion. Despite the fact that Pedro has influence over Hellena due to his gender, he cannot eventually deprive her of her wealth or power. Last but not least, Don Pedro pardons Valeria as well and hopes that his father would also forgive them all.

In the concluding scene, all the major characters including Blunt are assembled on stage. The page appears and informs them that partygoers have arrived at the home to dance with them as they hear music being played. Willmore asks Hellena if she is afraid to marry him as the couples start to dance. Hellena responds that she feels something akin to what he would feel before a battle or a storm. Willmore praises her for her bravery and tells her that he loves her, adding that people who face "the Storms" of a "Marriage-Bed" need not worry about "any Other Dangers." All leave.

Given the play's emphasis on Carnival, it is fitting that it concludes with fun, mirth, and a masquerade. The primary pair shares a scene of quiet honesty amidst the chaos. Both are fearful, and it is impossible to predict whether they will stay loyal. This is a realistic admission by Behn that marriage does not always result in fidelity and happiness, a relatively innovative statement at the time, within the silliness of Restoration comedy.



### Check Your Progress

1. How is the relationship between Hellena and Willmore resolved?
2. What is the basis of their relationship? Love, lust or both?
3. Do you agree that the title applies to both Willmore and Hellena? Explain in the context of the play.

### Epilogue:

The author again makes fun of contemporary audiences in a rhymed epilogue, saying that if *The Rover* doesn't appeal to them, it's because they have poor taste. She makes fun of contemporary drama, calling viewers fops and morons. She concludes by asserting that members in the audience would behave more foolishly than even the most well-known actors.

Behn reminds her audience that they have come to her play to be mocked, and that no matter how ridiculous and outrageous the actions depicted in the play, real life is always more ridiculous and outrageous.

### All References are from:

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