

**ARULMIGU PALANILANDAVAR ARTS COLLEGE FOR WOMEN,**

**PALANI**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**LEARNING RESOURCES**

**ENGLISH DRAMA**

## BEGINNING OF DRAMA

### MIRACLE PLAYS

#### **Introduction:**

Miracle plays were a popular form of medieval English drama. These plays depicted religious stories and events, particularly biblical narratives and the lives of saints. They were performed during the Middle Ages to educate and entertain the largely illiterate population. Miracle plays involved the portrayal of miracles, often incorporating elements of humour and spectacle. These theatrical productions were significant in conveying religious teachings to the masses and played a crucial role in the cultural and religious life of medieval England. Miracle plays specifically depicted miracles performed and experienced by saints, re-enacting them in the lives of everyday people rather than as they would have occurred in the Bible.

Saints were individuals who, in Catholicism, performed miracles (an extraordinary event that occurs due to divine connection) throughout their lives and usually died as martyrs (someone who dies for a purpose or cause). The saints most commonly referred to in the miracle plays were St Nicholas and St Mary (the Virgin Mary). The only surviving English miracle plays concern these two alone. Both saints had almost cult-like status during the Middle Ages, and importantly, saintly relics were treated with utmost respect due to widespread belief in their healing powers. This reverence created a perfect environment for miracle plays to flourish.

#### **History of Miracle Plays:**

Miracle plays developed from early liturgical dramas of the 10th and 11th centuries. Liturgy is the form in which public religious worship is conducted, particularly Christian worship. The church began staging plays as a way to enhance ceremony and worship on holy days, including festivals and religious feast days. These early miracle plays were usually written specifically for celebrations about a particular saint. By the 13th century, miracle plays attained the form we know now. They shifted away from the church and were performed at public festivals, reaching their height of popularity during the 15th century. At this time, they were performed in the vernacular and included various non-ecclesiastical (not related to the Christian church) elements, including non-biblical scenes with dramatic action and dialogue. Plays became more informal and were largely intended as entertainment rather than to depict Christian history.

English drama had a distinctly religious origin. The first English plays were called Mysteries. They represented scenes from the life of Christ. These plays were performed inside the Church itself. The priests were the actors and the language employed was Latin. On important occasions large crowds came. They could not be accommodated inside the church. So the stage was removed from inside the church to the porch. Later, the venue was shifted to the village green or the city street. Other remarkable changes were the acting of laymen instead of priests and the use of English.

The Miracle Plays staged at Christmas were connected with the birth of Christ. Those staged at Easter related to Christ's Crucifixion and Ascension. In the fourteenth century all these plays were united into cycles beginning with the Creation and ending with the Final Judgement. The performance of each cycle occupied several days. Four complete cycles have come down to us. They are the Chester Cycle of 25 plays, the Coventry of 42, the Wakefield

of 31 and the York of 48. The merchant and craft guilds which produced the cycles were the forerunners of the theatrical companies of Shakespeare's time.

### **Characteristics of Miracle Plays**

The principal characteristics of miracle plays are shared with other vernacular dramas, including:

- Written and performed in vernacular languages
- Narratives based on and heavily featuring Biblical characters and stories
- Usually performed on holy days as part of religious celebrations
- Include some non-religious content
- Relatively short length

Miracle plays are distinguishable from other vernacular dramas, particularly mystery plays, with which they are often confused due to their focus on saints. For this reason, miracle plays are sometimes referred to as 'Saint's plays'. They followed the lives of saints, chronicling and often fictionalising events, miracles and martyrdom. Narratives usually portrayed these in the contexts of Medieval people rather than how they appeared in scripture, making plays increasingly more relatable to ordinary audiences.

### **The Literary Quality of the Miracle Plays:**

The Miracle Plays were generally crude. But the ones dealing with the Crucifixion and the story of Abraham and Isaac were most moving. The humorous element in some of the plays, especially in the play of Noah, was very much enjoyed by the audience. Noah's wife wrangling with the bossing over her husband provided hilarious comedy. In the Crucifixion play Herod was a prankish tyrant. He provided comic relief by leaving the stage and ranting among the audience. The devils, howling and shrieking, dragging the evil characters into hell into the minds of the ignorant people. With these horrors were interspersed pleasant rustic scenes and sweet songs. Shakespeare learnt from these plays how to use music and low comedy to regale the audience.

Miracle plays, a captivating genre of medieval drama, transport audiences to an enchanting realm of religious stories and supernatural occurrences. From awe-inspiring acts of faith to captivating portrayals of saints and biblical figures, these plays invite us to witness the extraordinary and reaffirm our belief in the miraculous. Miracle plays developed during the Middle Ages and chronicled the lives, events and martyrdom of various Catholic saints. Miracle plays included both factual and fictitious material but were primarily concerned with religious teachings.

### **Miracle plays: Examples**

*Mary Magdalene* and *The Conversion of Saint Paul* are the two known surviving miracle plays since the middle ages. In the mid-16th century, King Henry VIII banned miracle plays which ceased all production and performance of more miracle plays. Miracle plays were treated with suspicion due to links with Catholicism, which was not looked upon kindly after the English Reformation. As a result, only the two English miracle plays mentioned are known to have survived to the present day.

## **MORALITY PLAYS**

### **Introduction:**

A Morality Play is an allegorical play popular especially in the 15th and 16th centuries in which the characters personify abstract qualities or concepts (such as virtues, vices, or death). Its dramatic origins are to be found in the Mystery and Miracle Plays of the late Middle Ages; its allegorical origins in the sermon literature, homilies, exempla, romances and works of spiritual edification like the *Lambeth Homilies* (12th c.); *Ancrene Riwe* (1200–50); the homily *Sawles Warde* (13th c.); *Chateau d'Amour* (14th c.); the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (14th c.); *Azenbite of Inwyt* (1340).

### **Characteristics of Morality Play:**

- A morality play is essentially an allegory, told through drama. It shares the feature of allegorical prose and verse narratives. That is, it is written to be understood on more than one level. Its main purpose is two-fold, and the characters are personified abstractions with label names (apronyms).
- Most morality plays have a protagonist who represents either humanity as a whole (*Everyman*) or an entire social class (as in *Magnificence*). Antagonists and supporting characters are not individuals, but rather personifications of abstract virtues or vices, especially the seven deadly sins.
- In essence, a Morality Play was a dramatization of the battle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul; thus, an exteriorization of the inward spiritual struggle: man's need for salvation and the temptations which beset him on his pilgrimage through life to death. The main characters in *Everyman* (c. 1500) are God, a Messenger, Death, Everyman, Fellowship, Good Deeds, Goods, Knowledge, Beauty, and Strength. Everyman is summoned by Death and he finds that no one will go with him except Good Deeds.
- Morality plays were typically written in the vernacular, so as to be more accessible to the common people who watched them. Most can be performed in under ninety minutes. In fact, morality plays are very similar to another form of theater common in the same time, called "moral interludes." There is no clear dividing line between moral interludes and a morality play, and many works are classified under both headings. These works include *The Pride of Life*, *The Castell of Perseverance*, *Wisdom*, *Mankind*, *Like Will to Like*, and many others. Moral interludes were typically 1000 lines long and written in a very rough verse. These were often written to be entertainment at courts, in noble houses, at colleges and University, and at the Inns of Court.
- Morality plays were structured simply, so that they could be performed in almost any open public space, without scenery, and with a minimum of props. Locations were introduced through the dialogue between characters, and after that, were left to the imagination of the audience. As with other types of the drama of the period, the stage was typically on the same level as the audience, rather than on a raised platform like modern stages. Being on the same level giving the audience a tighter connection to the actors, the character, and the story being presented.
- Early morality plays, in particular, were quite crude and the writing was often uneven, the author almost always unknown. However, as time went on, the plays became

better written and the characters showed increasing signs of sophistication and psychology.

- Morality plays are based highly on a religious standpoint in order to teach individuals about proper or true morals; right and wrong.
- The writing in the plays is often uneven, the characterization is crude and the psychology naive. Nevertheless, in their simplicity, a number of them have a certain robust and impressive power. The better ones show an increasingly sophisticated analysis of character and point the way to that examination of human nature and morality in depth which makes the best Tudor and Jacobean drama so remarkable.

### **Examples of Morality Plays:**

The most memorable Morality Plays are: *The Castell of Perseverance* (c. 1425); *Mind, Will and Understanding* (c. 1460); and *Mankind* (c. 1475). These three are considered as a group because they occur in the Macro Manuscript. Then comes *Everyman* (c. 1500), to which there is a slightly earlier Dutch analogue, *Elckerlijck*.

The main characters in *Everyman* (c. 1500) are God, a Messenger, Death, Everyman, Fellowship, Good Deeds, Goods, Knowledge, Beauty, and Strength. Everyman is summoned by Death and he finds that no one will go with him except Good Deeds.

In other plays, we find the forces of evil (the World, the Flesh and the Devil, the Seven Deadly Sins and various demons) deployed against Man, whose champions are the forces of good (God and his angels, and the four moral and the three theological virtues). Nearly all the Moralities are didactic illustrations of and commentaries on a preoccupation that dominated Christian thought throughout much of the Middle Ages: namely, the war between God and the Devil.

From about the middle of the 16th c. Morality Plays became less popular, but they were still being written and many plays bore unmistakable marks of their influence, such as Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* (1563); Fulwell's *Like Will to Like* (c. 1568); Lupton's *All for Money* (c. 1578); Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (c. 1588). Even as late as 1625 Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News* showed strong Morality influences, especially in the person of Lady Pecunia, an allegorical figure representing Riches.

## **EVERYMAN**

### **Everyman- the Morality Play:**

*The Somonyng of Everyman* (*The Summoning of Everyman*), usually referred to simply as *Everyman*, is a late 15th-century morality play. Like John Bunyan's 1678 Christian novel *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Everyman* uses allegorical characters to examine the question of Christian salvation and what Man must do to attain

### **Sources**

The play was written in Middle English during the Tudor period, but the identity of the author is unknown. Although the play was apparently produced with some frequency in the seventy-five years following its composition, no production records survive. There is a similar Dutch-language morality play of the same period called *Elckerlijck*. In the early 20th century, scholars did not agree on which of these plays was the original, or even on their relation to a later Latin work named *Homulus*. By the 1980s, Arthur Cawley went so far as to

say that the "evidence for ... Elckerlijck is certainly very strong", and now Davidson, Walsh, and Broos hold that "more than a century of scholarly discussion has ... convincingly shown that *Everyman* is a translation and adaptation from the Dutch *Elckerlijc*".

### **The Story:**

The plot is that the good and evil deeds of one's life will be tallied by God after death, as in a ledger book. The play is the allegorical accounting of the life of Everyman, who represents all mankind. In the course of the action, Everyman tries to convince other characters to accompany him in the hope of improving his life. All the characters are also mystical; the conflict between good and evil is shown by the interactions between the characters. Everyman is being singled out because it is difficult for him to find characters to accompany him on his pilgrimage. Everyman eventually realizes through this pilgrimage that he is essentially alone, despite all the personified characters that were supposed necessities and friends to him. Everyman learns that when you are brought to death and placed before God, all you are left with are your own good deeds.

After a brief prologue asking the audience to listen, God speaks, lamenting that humans have become too absorbed in material wealth and riches to follow Him, so He commands Death to go to Everyman and summon him to heaven to make his reckoning. Death arrives at Everyman's side to tell him it is time to die and face judgment. Upon hearing this, Everyman is distressed, so begs for more time. Death denies this, but will allow Everyman to find a companion for his journey.

Everyman's friend Fellowship promises to go anywhere with him, but when he hears of the true nature of Everyman's journey, he refuses to go. Everyman then calls on Kindred and Cousin and asks them to go with him, but they both refuse. In particular, Cousin explains a fundamental reason why no people will accompany Everyman: they have their own accounts to write as well. Afterwards, Everyman asks Goods, who will not come: God's judgment will be severe because of the selfishness implied in Goods's presence.

Everyman then turns to Good Deeds, who says she would go with him, but she is too weak as Everyman has not loved her in his life. Good Deeds summons her sister Knowledge to accompany them, and together they go to see Confession. In the presence of Confession, Everyman begs God for forgiveness and repents his sins, punishing himself with a scourge. After his scourging, Everyman is absolved of his sins, and as a result, Good Deeds becomes strong enough to accompany Everyman on his journey with Death.

Good Deeds then summons Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits to join them, and they agree to accompany Everyman as he goes to a priest to take sacrament. After the sacrament, Everyman tells them where his journey ends, and again they all abandon him – except for Good Deeds. Even Knowledge cannot accompany him after he leaves his physical body, but will stay with him until the time of death.

Content at last, Everyman climbs into his grave with Good Deeds at his side and dies, after which they ascend together into heaven, where they are welcomed by an Angel. The play closes as the Doctor enters and explains that in the end, a man will only have his Good Deeds to accompany him beyond the grave.



## THE SENECA AND REVENGE TRAGEDY

### Definition of Revenge Tragedy

The Revenge Tragedy as its name implies is a tragic play in which the tragedy results from the revenge that is taken, for some wrong or wrongs, either by the person wronged or by someone else on his behalf. The revenge tragedy has its origin in ancient Greece in the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. Agamemnon is a revenge tragedy: Antigone and Electra belong to this group. But in their tragedies there was nothing of that horror and sensationalism which come to be associated with the revenge tragedy. In the Elizabethan age, the revenge tragedy took on new features and new complexion.

### Characteristics of Revenge Tragedy

It was Seneca, the great tragic dramatist of ancient Rome who introduced the element of horror in the revenge play. The chief features of Senecan revenge tragedy are:

- Some murder is committed and the ghost of the murdered person appears to some close relative and enjoins on him to take revenge.
- Revenge is conceived of as a sacred duty, not as a kind of wild justice. The avenger is moved by a sense of sacred duty and not by any passion greed, hatred or some personal injury.
- It is sensational and melodramatic. The appearance of the ghost, the scenes of madness, crude villainy make the drama complete. In the end the stage is littered with dead bodies.
- There is abundant use of the imagery of violence and horror. Long declamatory speeches are used by the characters.
- There is a Machiavellian villain given to reflection. He is a malcontent type of character.

### The Senecan Tragedy:

The Senecan Tragedy refers to a set of ten ancient Roman tragedies. Perhaps eight of his were written by the Stoic philosopher and statesman Lucius Annaeus Seneca. Many of Seneca's tragedies employ the same Greek mythology as those by Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. However, because Seneca's approach was different, employing familiar themes in his philosophical writings, scholars tend not to view Seneca's works as direct adaptations of those Attic works. This style may have been more directly influenced by Augustan literature. Furthermore, Seneca's Tragedy was probably written to be read aloud in elite gatherings because it focused on extensive narrative accounts of action, reports of horrific deeds, and used long speculative monologues. . . Seneca's tragedies usually have an emphasis on supernatural elements. Gods rarely appear, but ghosts and witches abound.

### Influence of Senecan Tragedy:

In the mid-16th century, Italian humanists rediscovered these works and used them as models for reviving tragedy on the Renaissance stage. His two great but very different dramatic traditions of this period, French neoclassical tragedy and Elizabethan tragedy, both draw inspiration from Seneca. Elizabethan playwrights found Seneca's theme of bloodthirsty revenge more suited to British tastes than his format. The first English tragedy, Gorboduk (1561) by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, is a chain of slaughter and revenge written

in direct imitation of Seneca. It is also evident in the works. Spanish tragedy, Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus and Hamlet. All three films share themes of vengeance, corpse-scattering climaxes, and ghosts in the cast of The Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet. All of these elements can be traced back to the Senecan model. The tradition of French neoclassical drama, culminating in the 17th-century tragedies of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, referred to Seneca in style and stylistic grandeur. These neoclassicals adopted the innovations of Seneca's confidants, moral moderation, replacing action with speech.

### **Examples of Revenge Tragedy in English Literature**

The Revenge tragedy enjoyed great popularity in the 17th century. The influence of Seneca, the romantic love of incident and the Elizabethan interest in abnormal psychology and love of melancholy largely account for this popularity. Almost all the successful dramatists were attracted to write this type of tragedy. Among them the most important are

- **Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*:** Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* inaugurates the type of Revenge tragedy in Elizabethan drama. Kyd introduces the hesitating type of the hero. The hero cannot sweep to his revenge all at once. He proceeds and retreats. The agony of indecision is tragic. *The Spanish Tragedy* excels in crude horror and melodrama. Webster's play is inferior to Shakespeare's because of its note of despair and disillusion and its insistence on the macabre.
- **Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*:** In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Cardinal and Ferdinand, the two brothers torture the Duchess out of morbid pleasure in inflicting pains. Here we do not sympathize with the revenger, but with the victim. There is a free and full exploitation of crude, physical horrors like the dance of mad men, the presentation of a dead man's hand to the Duchess, the appearance of the tomb-maker and the executioner with the apparatus of death-murders by strangling and poisoning. Webster has a strange power of evoking shudders. *The Duchess of Malfi* is, however, superior to the Spanish Tragedy because of poetry and the superb characterization of the Duchess. Webster gets wonderful poetry out of the macabre.
- **Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*:** *The Revenger's Tragedy* is an English-language Jacobean revenge tragedy which was performed in 1606, and published in 1607 by George Eld. It was long attributed to Cyril Tourneur, but "The consensus candidate for authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy* at present is Thomas Middleton, although this is a knotty issue that is far from settled."

### **William Shakespeare:**

Shakespeare takes over all the conventions of revenge tragedy. He has a shot at this kind of drama in Hamlet. Hamlet is called upon to take revenge upon the foul and unnatural murder of his father. He hesitates a good deal. The parallel between Kyd's Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet is very close. Both are stories of revenge: in the one the father is left to avenge the son's murder, in the other the case is the reverse. In both, revenge is duty, duty imposed by the social code demanding 'blood for blood' and 'tooth for tooth, duty to which the father in one case and the son in another is called as much by nature as by social custom. Shakespeare's Hamlet has all the characteristic features of a revenge tragedy- the ghost, the cry for revenge, difficulty in executing revenge, the play, the accumulation of horror, plenty



of action of strong external action, the hesitating type of hero, madness feigned and real, yet Shakespeare's Hamlet is more than a mere revenge tragedy.

## THE SPANISH TRAGEDY

*Thomas Kyd*

### View The Spanish Tragedy as a Revenge Play:

The Spanish Tragedy, written by Thomas Kyd is a revenge play that was highly popular during the Elizabethan era. It is popular because it followed Senecan model of bloodshed and bloody murdering scenes. The play also contains an element of play within a play which was set up as a revenge on the murderers. In the play, all the characters die and it becomes a tragedy of Spain and Portugal. The murder started off with the death of Horatio and the revenge his father decides to inflict upon the perpetrators.

It is a revenge play because there are two characters who wanted to take revenge on the murderers. One is the ghost of Don Andrea who was sent from the underworld with a friend Revenge to check on his murderer Balthazar who will be taken revenge on account of his past murder. The second is the revenge on the death of Horatio by Hieronimo on Lorenzo and Balthazar. The revenge tragedy follows the Senecan model and it also highly influenced the other Jacobean dramatists like Webster and Shakespeare.

It is important to note the reasons behind the death of the characters who were accountable for the trigger of bloodshed revenge. Horatio was killed by Lorenzo's servant Pedrinano. Lorenzo however is a catalyst who did not murder Horatio with his own hands but he ordered his servant to kill Horatio and eventually Horatio's servant is also killed who saw the murder of Horatio. Horatio was murdered by Lorenzo because he was triggered by Balthazar's statement regarding the love between his sister Bel-Imperia and Horatio. Horatio belongs to the lower section of society and Lorenzo felt under the influence of Balthazar will bring shame and embarrassment to their family if Bel-Imperia marries Horatio. Hence, he decides to kill Horatio.

This act of murder triggered the scene of revenge tragedy. Horatio's father Hieronimo turned mad and angry against the murder of his son. He decides to kill the murderers and Bel-Imperia wrote a letter to Hieronimo the list of culprits responsible for the death of Horatio. Hieronimo was angry and decides to plot against Lorenzo and Balthazar on the marriage ceremony of Balthazar and Bel-Imperia. The marriage ceremony is important because the revenge tragedy is fulfilled both for Don Andrea as well as Hieronimo for the culprit was the same. The play within a play enacted by Hieronimo in the marriage scene shows the King Sultan performed by Hieronimo who decides to kill his friend over the jealousy of a woman who was Bel-Imperia. Lorenzo and Balthazar took part in the play and while performing Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo and Bel-Imperia stabs Balthazar and kills herself. Hieronimo tells the audience and to Duke of Castille that they killed Lorenzo and Balthazar in reality and it is not an act and hence he also cut his tongue to deny further inquiries and kills Duke of Castille as well when he approaches near to Hieronimo.

### Summary:

*The Spanish Tragedy* begins with the ghost of Don Andrea, a Spanish nobleman killed in a recent battle with Portugal. Accompanied by the spirit of Revenge, he tells the story of

his death; he was killed in hand-to-hand combat with the Portuguese prince Balthazar, after falling in love with the beautiful Bel-Imperia and having a secret affair with her.

When he faces the judges who are supposed to assign him to his place in the underworld, they are unable to reach a decision and instead send him to the palace of Pluto and Proserpine, King and Queen of the Underworld. Proserpine decides that Revenge should accompany him back to the world of the living, and, after passing through the gates of horn, this is where he finds himself. The spirit of Revenge promises that by the play's end, Don Andrea will see his revenge.

Andrea returns to the scene of the battle where he died, to find that the Spanish have won. Balthazar was taken prisoner shortly after Andrea's death, by the Andrea's good friend Horatio, son of Hieronimo, the Knight Marshal of Spain. But a dispute ensues between Horatio and Lorenzo, the son of the Duke of Castile and brother of Bel-Imperia, as to who actually captured the prince.

The King of Spain decides to compromise between the two, letting Horatio have the ransom money to be paid for Balthazar and Lorenzo keep the captured prince at his home. Back in Portugal, the Viceroy (ruler) is mad with grief, for he believes his son to be dead, and is tricked by Villuppo into arresting an innocent noble, Alexandro, for Balthazar's murder. Diplomatic negotiations then begin between the Portuguese ambassador and the Spanish King, to ensure Balthazar's return and a lasting peace between Spain and Portugal. Upon being taken back to Spain, Balthazar soon falls in love with Bel-Imperia himself. But, as her servant Pedringano reveals to him, Bel-Imperia is in love with Horatio, who returns her affections. The slight against him, which is somewhat intentional on Bel-Imperia's part, enrages Balthazar. Horatio also incurs the hatred of Lorenzo, because of the fight over Balthazar's capture and the fact that the lower-born Horatio (the son of a civil servant) now consorts with Lorenzo's sister. So the two nobles decide to kill Horatio, which they successfully do with the aid of Pedringano and Balthazar's servant Serberine, during an evening rendez-vous between the two lovers. Bel-Imperia is then taken away before Hieronimo stumbles on to the scene to discover his dead son. He is soon joined in uncontrollable grief by his wife, Isabella.

In Portugal, Alexandro escapes death when the Portuguese ambassador returns from Spain with news that Balthazar still lives; Villuppo is then sentenced to death. In Spain, Hieronimo is almost driven insane by his inability to find justice for his son. Hieronimo receives a bloody letter in Bel-Imperia's hand, identifying the murderers as Lorenzo and Balthazar, but he is uncertain whether or not to believe it. While Hieronimo is racked with grief, Lorenzo grows worried by Hieronimo's erratic behavior and acts in a Machiavellian manner to eliminate all evidence surrounding his crime.

He tells Pedringano to kill Serberine for gold but arranges it so that Pedringano is immediately arrested after the crime. He then leads Pedringano to believe that a pardon for his crime is hidden in a box brought to the execution by a messenger boy, a belief that prevents Pedringano from exposing Lorenzo before he is hanged. Negotiations continue between Spain and Portugal, now centering on a diplomatic marriage between Balthazar and Bel-Imperia to unite the royal lines of the two countries. Ironically, a letter is found on Pedringano's body that confirms Hieronimo's suspicion over Lorenzo and Balthazar, but Lorenzo is able to deny Hieronimo access to the king, thus making royal

justice unavailable to the distressed father. Hieronimo then vows to revenge himself privately on the two killers, using deception and a false show of friendship to keep Lorenzo off his guard.

The marriage between Bel-Imperia and Balthazar is set, and the Viceroy travels to Spain to attend the ceremony. Hieronimo is given responsibility over the entertainment for the marriage ceremony, and he uses it to exact his revenge. He devises a play, a tragedy, to be performed at the ceremonies, and convinces Lorenzo and Balthazar to act in it. Bel-Imperia, by now a confederate in Hieronimo's plot for revenge, also acts in the play. Just before the play is acted, Isabella, insane with grief, kills herself.

The plot of the tragedy mirrors the plot of the play as a whole (a sultan is driven to murder a noble friend through jealousy over a woman). Hieronimo casts himself in the role of the hired murderer. During the action of the play, Hieronimo's character stabs Lorenzo's character and Bel-Imperia's character stabs Balthazar's character, before killing herself. But after the play is over, Hieronimo reveals to the horrified wedding guests (while standing over the corpse of his own son) that all the stabbings in the play were done with real knives, and that Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia are now all dead.

Then he tries to kill himself, but the King and Viceroy and Duke of Castile stop him. In order to keep himself from talking, he bites out his own tongue. Tricking the Duke into giving him a knife, he then stabs the Duke and himself and then dies. Revenge and Andrea then have the final words of the play. Andrea assigns each of the play's "good" characters (Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, Horatio, and Isabella) to happy eternities. The rest of the characters are assigned to the various tortures and punishments of Hell.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE THEATRES & THEATRE GROUP**

### **The Red Lion Theatre**

The Red Lion was an Elizabethan playhouse located in Mile End (part of the modern Borough of Tower Hamlets), just outside the City of London. Built in 1567, by John Brayne, formerly a grocer, this theatre was a short lived attempt to provide a purpose built playhouse for the many Tudor touring theatrical companies. The Red Lion had been a farm, but a single gallery multi-sided theatre, with a fixed stage 40 feet by 30 feet, standing 5 feet above the audience, was built in the garden of the farmhouse. The stage was equipped with trapdoors, and an attached turret, or fly tower - for aerial stunts and to advertise its presence. The construction cost £20, and while it appears to have been a commercial success, the Red Lion offered little that the prior tradition of playing in inns had not offered, and it was too far from its audiences to be attractive (at the time, the area was open farmland) for visiting in the winter. There is little documentary evidence that it survived beyond the summer season of 1567.

### **The Theatre**

The Theatre was an Elizabethan playhouse located in Shoreditch (part of the modern Borough of Hackney), just outside the City of London. Built by actor-manager James Burbage, near the family home in Holywell Street, The Theatre is considered the first theatre built in London for the sole purpose of theatrical productions. The Theatre's history includes

a number of important acting troupes including the Lord Chamberlain's Men which employed Shakespeare as actor and playwright. After a dispute with the landlord, the theatre was dismantled and the timbers used in the construction of the Globe Theatre on Bankside.

### **The Red Lion**

John Brayne, originally a grocer and one of the partners in The Theatre, had built an earlier playhouse in Mile End, called the Red Lion, in 1567. It appears to have been a success, but scant information about it survives. The Red Lion was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas The Theatre accepted long term engagements, essentially in repertory. The former was considered a continuation of the tradition of playing at inns, the later a radically new form of theatrical engagement. There is no evidence that the Red Lion continued beyond the summer of 1567, although the law suit, from which we know much of the little we know of it, dragged on until 1578.

### **The Swan Theatre**

The Swan was a theatre in Southwark, London, England, built between 1594 and 1596, during the first half of William Shakespeare's career. It was the fourth in the series of large public playhouses of London, after James Burbage's The Theatre (1576) and Curtain (1577), and Philip Henslowe's Rose (1587-8). The Swan was located on the west end of the Bankside district of Southwark, across the River Thames from the City of London. It was at the northeast corner of the Paris Garden estate that Francis Langley had purchased in May 1589, east of the manor house, and 150 yards south of the Paris Garden stairs at the river's edge. Langley had the theatre built almost certainly in 1595-6. When it was new, the Swan was the most visually impressive of the existing London theatres.

### **The Rose Theatre**

The Rose was an Elizabethan theatre. It was the fourth of the public theatres to be built, after The Theatre (1576), the Curtain (1577), and the theatre at Newington Butts (c. 1580?) — and the first of several playhouses to be situated in Bankside, Southwark, in a liberty outside the jurisdiction of the City of London's civic authorities. The Rose was built in 1587 by Philip Henslowe and by a grocer named John Cholmley. The theatre was built on a messuage called the "Little Rose," which Henslowe had leased from the parish of St. Mildred in 1585. It contained substantial rose gardens and two buildings; The building was of timber, with a lath and plaster exterior and thatch roof. It was polygonal in shape, about 21 meters in diameter. City records indicate that it was in use by late 1587.

### **The Globe Theatre**

The original Globe was an Elizabethan theatre which opened in Autumn 1599 in Southwark, on the south bank of the Thames, in an area now known as Bankside. It was one of several major theatres that were located in the area, the others being the Swan, the Rose and The Hope. The Globe was the principal playhouse of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (who would become the King's Men in 1603). Most of Shakespeare's post-1599 plays were staged at the Globe, including Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet.

## **THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE CONVENTIONS**

Some of the more identifiable acting and staging conventions common to Elizabethan theatre are:

**Soliloquy**

Hamlet's "To be or not to be..." is literature's most famous soliloquy. This popular Elizabethan convention is a literary or dramatic technique in which a single character talks aloud inner thoughts to him or herself, but not within earshot of another character. Typically, a soliloquy is lengthy with a dramatic tone.

### **Aside**

The aside existed in Shakespeare's times, but happily continued into the melodramas of the 19th century many years later. An aside is a convention that usually involves one character addressing the audience "on the side", offering them valuable information in relation to the plot or characters that only the audience is privy to. The audience now feels empowered, knowing more about the events on stage than most of the characters do.

### **Boys Performing Female Roles**

Acting in Elizabeth's England was frowned upon by many in society as a profession unsuitable for women, as it was rough and rowdy instead of genteel. As a result, women were not legally permitted to act on the English stage until King Charles II was crowned in the year 1660 (even though women were already acting in various European countries in Commedia dell'Arte plays for some years). Shakespeare and his contemporaries therefore had no choice but to cast young boys in the roles of women, while the men played all the male roles on stage.

### **Masque**

Existing before Elizabethan England and also outliving it, the masque was normally performed indoors at the King or Queen's court. Spoken in verse, a masque involved beautiful costumes and an intellectual element appropriate for the mostly educated upper class. Masques were allegorical stories about an event or person involving singing, acting and dancing. Characters wore elaborate masks to hide their faces.

### **Eavesdropping**

Eavesdropping was a dramatic technique that sat neatly between a soliloquy and an aside. Certain characters would strategically overhear others on stage, informing both themselves and the audience of the details, while the characters being overheard had no idea what was happening. This convention opened up opportunities for the playwright in the evolving plot.

### **Presentational Acting Style**

It is generally agreed by scholars Elizabethan acting was largely presentational in style. Plays were more overtly a "performance" with clues the actors were aware of the presence of an audience instead of completely ignoring them as part of their art. Movements and gestures were more stylised and dramatic than one might ordinarily expect in a modern naturalistic or realistic drama, speech patterns were heightened for dramatic effect, and the use of conventions such as the aside, prologue, epilogue and word puns directly connected characters to the audience watching. The aside, the prologue, the soliloquy and the epilogue were all variations on a character's direct address to the audience when staged.

### **Dialogue**



Elizabethan plays commonly consisted of dialogue that was poetic, dramatic and heightened beyond that of the vernacular of the day. While often the lower class characters' speech was somewhat colloquial (prose), upper class characters spoke stylised, rhythmic speech patterns (verse). Shakespeare took great care in composing dialogue that was sometimes blank (unrhymed), but at other times rhyming (couplets) and often using five stressed syllables in a line of dialogue (iambic pentameter).

### **Play Within A Play**

This Elizabethan convention was a playwriting technique used by Shakespeare and others that involved the staging of a play inside the play itself. It was not a flimsy convention, but rather one that was used judiciously and with purpose. One of the most famous examples of this convention occurs in *Hamlet*, when the title character is convinced his uncle Claudius murdered his father for the throne. So Hamlet organises an out-of-town troupe of performers to attend one evening and perform a play before King Claudius that involves the same plot line as the events in the larger play (murder of a King), but in a different setting ... all to let Claudius know Hamlet is on to him!

## **THE ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND ACTORS**

### **The Elizabethan Audience:**

The crude taste of the Elizabethan audience was affected by Shakespeare's art. Many of Shakespeare's contemporaries fulminated against the unrefined tastes of the audience. But Shakespeare made a virtue of necessity and in the process of catering to the needs of the audience achieved artistic effects. Thus Shakespeare had to insert comic scenes even in tragedies to satisfy the craving of the audience for mirth and merry-making. Instead of protesting against this compulsion, Shakespeare used comedy artistically in tragedies. He perfected the device of comic relief and introduced the porter in *Macbeth*, the grave-diggers in *Hamlet* and the old countryman in *Antony and Cleopatra* to relieve the intolerable tragic tension.

### **Music and noise:**

The Elizabethan audience craved for music. Dramatists like Marston (in his *Antonino* and *Mellida*) introduced songs even in places where they did not serve any dramatic purpose. Shakespeare's songs are always dramatically relevant. They either conjure up an atmosphere as the songs sung in Arden in *As You Like It* or throw light on the character of the singer or listener. As Feste's songs do in *Twelfth Night*.

The Elizabethan audience loved din and bustle. Shakespeare gave them plenty of noise and at the same time made art out of it. Thus, thunderstorm is used to intensify the abnormality and villainy of Casca and Cassius who, dark thoughts within them, walk the streets of a Rome in a terrific thunderstorm in *Julius Caesar*. The alarm-bell is used for the purpose intensifying excitement in the brawl. That ruins Cassio in *Othello*. Its effect is manifested in Othello's immediate order. "Silence that dreadful bell".

Sometimes the players staged their performances in an inn. Shakespeare meant his plays not to be read but to be enacted and that too on particular stage and for a particular audience. Thus, instead of scorning the audience for their weaknesses, Shakespeare catered to their tastes and in the very process, rose to great artistic heights.

### **The Elizabethan Actors:**



The life of an actor changed dramatically during Shakespeare's lifetime. At first actors toured in companies, travelling the country to perform in towns and cities and in private homes. By the time Shakespeare died, London had several permanent theatres where the actors performed, drawing in huge audiences. Yet, despite the popularity of play-going, the acting profession had a bad reputation. Actors were seen as unruly and a threat to a peaceful society.

In Shakespeare's time acting was a profession only open to boys and men. Women were acting elsewhere in Europe but they were not allowed to perform in public theatres in England until 1660. In an Elizabethan production boys would play the female parts, like Ophelia in *Hamlet* or Desdemona in *Othello*, whilst occasionally men would play the older women. There were many more actors working across the country at the time, but these are some of the best known Elizabethan actors: Richard Burbage, Edward Alleyn, Robert Armin, William Kemp and Nathan Field.

Many actors began their careers as young boys. They could join a company as an apprentice and be taught by one of the more senior actors within the company. Actors were expected to be able to sword fight, sing and dance, as well as having a good memory for learning lines. Actors normally performed in the afternoon because they relied only on natural light to be seen. Plays were performed in repertory, so the same play was never performed two days in a row. Actors might spend the morning rehearsing and then perform in the afternoon, but they did not have much time for rehearsals. Often they were juggling several plays and several parts at one time.

There were a great variety of characters to be played and some actors were renowned for playing a certain type of part. This led to some parts being specifically written to suit the actor playing them. For example, Shakespeare's clown, Dogberry, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, was written for William Kemp because he was very good at physical comedy. Similarly, the fool in *King Lear* was written for the actor Robert Armin, who focused on witty language rather than slapstick. And did you know that as well as writing plays, Shakespeare himself also acted in them? Legend has it that he played the Ghost in his own play *Hamlet*.

### **THE ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY AND COMEDY**

The English drama reached its meridian between 1590 and 1614 when Shakespeare was at the peak of his dramatic career. His predecessors -Marlowe, Kyd, Greene, and Lyly paved the way and Shakespeare marched on taking English drama to a level that could not be surpassed till today. The main features of the English drama of that time are - revenge themes, ghastly melodramatic scenes, inner conflict, hero-villain protagonists, tragic-comedy, presence of ghosts and use of blank verse.

#### **Tragedies:**

Tragedies in the Elizabethan period were deeply influenced by the Seneca revenge tradition. Thomas Kyd introduces it in English drama through his *The Spanish Tragedy*. Shakespeare's revenge plays, particularly his much controversial but even perplexing tragedy *Hamlet* an example of the popularity of revenge themes in Shakespeare's time. Kyd's innovations of madness in characters, real or feigned, soliloquy, and play within the play also became popular in this period. Shakespeare used all of them in his great tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*.

Presenting the protagonists with conflicting emotions was another important feature of the Elizabethan dramatic tradition. Marlow's *Dr. Faustus* is a bright example of this tradition. Shakespeare's tragic heroes go further in the display of inner conflicts. For example, Brutus, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Othello suffer intensely for wavering between conflicting emotions. Their complexities tear their souls apart showing the eternal conflicts of mankind.

The Elizabethan tragedies are marked by melodramatic scenes. The then audience expected these thrilling scenes in which murder, bloodshed, and outburst of excessive emotions were shown on the stage. The play of Kyd and Shakespeare show them profusely. Thus, we have ghastly murders in Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello. This tradition of melodramatic scenes was taken from Seneca. However, in Seneca's plays the ghastly activities were not shown on the stage, they were reported. But in the Elizabethan period, those melodramatic scenes on the stage became popular.

The use of supernatural elements in the plays is another important factor of the Elizabethan drama. The theatre houses were built in such a way that they could present ghosts and supernatural horror. *Dr. Faustus*, Hamlet, and Macbeth are a few examples of this tradition. Similarly, the creation of hero-villain protagonists was popular in this age. Marlowe's concept of the hero-villain tragedy seems to have influenced, Shakespeare. Both Macbeth and Richard III have hero-villain protagonists. The Elizabethan comedies, like tragedies, have distinct features. Robert Greene, John Lyly, and Shakespeare entertained the Elizabethan audience with their comedies. The comedies of this age are marked by romantic settings, engaging plots, lively characters, and diverting dialogues.

#### **Comedies:**

In comedies, Shakespeare makes use of romantic love among young men and women. They laugh in happiness, they wean in despair, and they burst out in passionate utterances. The comedies show Shakespeare's unique uses of wit and humor. Delicate feelings, youthful charms, a sense of beauty, and sincere trust dominate his comedies. One remembers in this regard Beatrice and Benedict, Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Portia and Bssanio. However, Shakespeare's comedies, though having a dream-like atmosphere, are not bereft of realism. His plots are rooted in realism lying just beneath the surface of the romantic world.

One more distinct feature of the Elizabethan plays is the use of blank verse. Major parts of comedies and tragedies are written in blank verse. Major parts of comedies and tragedies are written in blank verse. The mighty lines of Marlowe and the grand dialogues of Shakespearean tragic heroes are all put in brilliant blank verse. The specialty of Shakespearean blank verse is that it rises and falls with the passion and mood of the speakers.

Finally, the plays of the Elizabethan period have so distinct characteristics that they are, by their own virtues, separable from other English plays. Shakespeare's vision of life, his objective observations, his unique skills in characterization, his grand blank verses, his negligence to three unities, his wit and humor and most of all his affinity with realism have distinguished his plays from others.

#### **CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE – THE JEW OF MALTA**

*The Jew of Malta* or *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* is a play by Shakespeare contemporary Christopher Marlowe. Written sometime around 1589 or 1590,

the story follows the Maltese merchant Barabas with the Spanish and Ottoman struggle for control of the Mediterranean as a backdrop. The character Machiavel, a ghost based on Niccolo Machiavelli, introduces the story as a tragedy and posits that power is amoral.

### **Summary:**

The play opens with a Prologue narrated by Machevill, a caricature of the author Machiavelli. This character explains that he is presenting the "tragedy of a Jew" who has become rich by following Machiavelli's teachings.

Act I opens with a Jewish merchant, called Barabas, waiting for news about the return of his ships from the east. He discovers that they have safely docked in Malta, before three Jews arrive to inform him that they must go to the senate-house to meet the governor. Once there, Barabas discovers that along with every other Jew on the island he must forfeit half of his estate to help the government pay tribute to the Turks. When the Barabas protests at this unfair treatment, the governor Ferneze confiscates all of Barabas's wealth and decides to turn Barabas's house into a convent. Barabas vows revenge but first attempts to recover some of the treasures he has hidden in his mansion. His daughter, Abigail, pretends to convert to Christianity in order to enter the convent. She smuggles out her father's gold at night.

Ferneze meets with Del Bosco, the Spanish Vice-Admiral, who wishes to sell Turkish slaves in the market place. Del Bosco convinces Ferneze to break his alliance with the Turks in return for Spanish protection. While viewing the slaves, Barabas meets up with Ferneze's, Lodowick. This man has heard of Abigail's great beauty from his friend (and Abigail's lover) Mathias. Barabas realizes that he can use Lodowick to exact revenge on Ferneze, and so he dupes the young man into thinking Abigail will marry him. While doing this, the merchant buys a slave called Ithamore who hates Christians as much as his new master does.

Mathias sees Barabas talking to Lodowick and demands to know whether they are discussing Abigail. Barabas lies to Mathias, and so Barabas deludes both young men into thinking that Abigail has been promised to them. At home, Barabas orders his reluctant daughter to get betrothed to Lodowick. At the end of the second Act, the two young men vow revenge on each other for attempting to woo Abigail behind one another's backs. Barabas seizes on this opportunity and gets Ithamore to deliver a forged letter to Mathias, supposedly from Lodowick, challenging him to a duel.

Act- III introduces the prostitute Bellamira and her pimp Pilia-Borza, who decide that they will steal some of Barabas's gold since business has been slack. Ithamore enters and instantly falls in love with Bellamira. Mathias and Lodowick kill each other in the duel orchestrated by Barabas and are found by Ferneze and Katherine, Mathias's mother. The bereaved parents vow revenge on the perpetrator of their sons'murders.

Abigail finds Ithamore laughing, and Ithamore tells her of Barabas's role in the young men's deaths. Grief-stricken, Abigail persuades a Dominican friar Jacomo to let her enter the convent, even though she lied once before about converting. When Barabas finds out what Abigail has done, he is enraged, and he decides to poison some rice and send it to the nuns. He instructs Ithamore to deliver the food. In the next scene, Ferneze meets a Turkish emissary, and Ferneze explains that he will not pay the required tribute. The Turk leaves, stating that his leader Calymath will attack the island.

Jacomo and another friar Bernardine despair at the deaths of all the nuns, who have been poisoned by Barabas. Abigail enters, close to death, and confesses her father's role in Mathias's and Lodowick's deaths to Jacomo. She knows that the priest cannot make this knowledge public because it was revealed to him in confession.

Act IV shows Barabas and Ithamore delighting in the nuns' deaths. Bernardine and Jacomo enter with the intention of confronting Barabas. Barabas realizes that Abigail has confessed his crimes to Jacomo. In order to distract the two priests from their task, Barabas pretends that he wants to convert to Christianity and give all his money to whichever monastery he joins. Jacomo and Bernardine start fighting in order to get the Jew to join their own religious houses. Barabas hatches a plan and tricks Bernardine into coming home with him. Ithamore then strangles Bernardine, and Barabas frames Jacomo for the crime. The action switches to Bellamira and her pimp, who find Ithamore and persuade him to bribe Barabas. The slave confesses his master's crimes to Bellamira, who decides to report them to the governor after Barabas has given her his money. Barabas is maddened by the slave's treachery and turns up at Bellamira's home disguised as a French lute player. Barabas then poisons all three conspirators with the use of a poisoned flower.

The action moves quickly in the final act. Bellamira and Pilia-Borza confess Barabas's crimes to Ferneze, and the murderer is sent for along with Ithamore. Shortly after, Bellamira, Pilia-Borza and Ithamore die. Barabas fakes his own death and escapes to find Calymath. Barabas tells the Turkish leader how best to storm the town. Following this event and the capture of Malta by the Turkish forces, Barabas is made governor, and Calymath prepares to leave. However, fearing for his own life and the security of his office, Barabas sends for Ferneze. Barabas tells him that he will free Malta from Turkish rule and kill Calymath in exchange for a large amount of money.

Ferneze agrees and Barabas invites Calymath to a feast at his home. However, when Calymath arrives, Ferneze prevents Barabas from killing him. Ferneze and Calymath watch as Barabas dies in a cauldron that Barabas had prepared for Calymath. Ferneze tells the Turkish leader that he will be a prisoner in Malta until the Ottoman Emperor agrees to free the island.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VOLPONE / BEN JENSON**

### **Summary**

*Volpone* takes place in seventeenth-century Venice, over the course of one day. The play opens at the house of Volpone, a Venetian nobleman. He and his "parasite" Mosca—part slave, part servant, part lackey—enter the shrine where Volpone keeps his gold. Volpone has amassed his fortune, we learn, through dishonest means: he is a con artist. And we also learn that he likes to use his money extravagantly.

Soon, we see Volpone's latest con in action. For the last three years, he has been attracting the interest of three legacy hunters: Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old gentleman; and Corvino, a merchant—individuals interested in inheriting his estate after he dies. Volpone is known to be rich, and he is also known to be childless, have no natural heirs. Furthermore, he is believed to very ill, so each of the legacy hunters lavishes gifts on him, in the hope that Volpone, out of gratitude, will make him his heir. The legacy hunters do not

know that Volpone is actually in excellent health and merely faking illness for the purpose of collecting all those impressive "get-well" gifts.

In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to Volpone, except for Corbaccio, who offers only a worthless (and probably poisoned) vial of medicine. But Corbaccio agrees to return later in the day to make Volpone his heir, so that Volpone will return the favor. This act is a boon to Volpone, since Corbaccio, in all likelihood, will die long before Volpone does. After each hunter leaves, Volpone and Mosca laugh at each's gullibility.

After Corvino's departure Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight living in Venice, arrives at the house but is told to come back three hours later. And Volpone decides that he will try to get a close look at Corvino's wife, Celia, who Mosca describes as one of the most beautiful women in all of Italy. She is kept under lock and key by her husband, who has ten guards on her at all times, but Volpone vows to use disguise to get around these barriers.

The Second Act portrays a time just a short while later that day, and we meet Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic's husband, who is conversing with Peregrine, an young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain. The two are walking in the public square in front of Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua," actually Volpone in disguise as an Italian mountebank, or medicine-show man.

Mop Scotto engages in a long and colorful speech, hawking his new "oil", which is touted as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. Corvino arrives, just as she does this, and flies into a jealous rage, scattering the crows in the square.

Volpone goes home and complains to Mosca that he is sick with lust for Celia, and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone. Meanwhile, Corvino berates his wife for tossing her handkerchief, since he interprets it as a sign of her unfaithfulness, and he threatens to murder her and her family as a result. He decrees that, as punishment, she will now no longer be allowed to go to Church, she cannot stand near windows (as she did when watching Volpone), and, most bizarrely, she must do everything backwards from now on—she must even walk and speak backwards. Mosca then arrives, implying to Corvino that if he lets Celia sleep with Volpone (as a "restorative" for Volpone's failing health), then Volpone will choose him as his heir. Suddenly, Corvino's jealousy disappears, and he consents to the offer. The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his power and his independence from Volpone. Mosca then runs into Bonario, Corbaccio's son, and informs the young man of his father's plans to disinherit him. He has Bonario come back to Volpone's house with him, in order to watch Corbaccio sign the documents (hoping that Bonario might kill Corbaccio then and there out of rage, thus allowing Volpone to gain his inheritance early). Meanwhile Lady Politic again arrives at Volpone's residence, indicating that it is now mid-morning, approaching noon. This time, Volpone lets her in, but he soon regrets it, for he is exasperated by her talkativeness. Mosca



rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that Sir Politic has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan (a high-class prostitute).

Volpone then prepares for his seduction of Celia, while Mosca hides Bonario in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. But Celia and Corvino arrive first—Celia complains bitterly about being forced to be unfaithful, while Corvino tells her to be quiet and do her job. When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone greatly surprises Celia by leaping out of bed. Celia had expected an old, infirm man, but what she gets instead is a lothario who attempts to seduce her with a passionate speech. Always the good Christian, Celia refuses Volpone's advances, at which point Volpone says that he will rape her. But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia. Bonario wounds Mosca on his way out. Corbaccio finally arrives, too late, as does Voltore.

A short while later, in the early afternoon, Peregrine and Sir Politic are still talking. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under consideration for making a great deal of money. They are soon interrupted by Lady Politic, who is convinced that Peregrine is the prostitute Mosca told her about—admittedly, in disguise. But Mosca arrives and tells Lady Politic that she is mistaken; the courtesan he referred to is now in front of the Senate (in other words, Celia). Lady Politic believes him and ends by giving Peregrine a seductive goodbye with a coy suggestion that they see each other again.

Peregrine is incensed at her behavior and vows revenge on Sir Politic because of it. The scene switches to the Scrutineo, the Venetian Senate building, where Celia and Bonario have informed the judges of Venice about Volpone's deceit, Volpone's attempt to rape Celia, Corbaccio's disinheritance of his son, and Corvino's decision to prostitute his wife. But the defendants make a very good case for themselves, led by their lawyer, Voltore. Voltore portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son. The judges are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and (set up perfectly by Mosca) identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.

In the final Act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is actually growing ill, for he is now feeling some of the symptoms he has been faking. To dispel his fears, he decides to engage in one final prank on the legacy hunters. He spreads a rumor that he has died and then tells Mosca to pretend that he has been made his master's heir. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three legacy hunters are fooled. Volpone then disguises himself as a Venetian guard, so that he can gloat in each legacy hunter's face over their humiliation, without being recognized. But Mosca lets the audience know that Volpone is dead in the eyes of the world and that Mosca will not let him "return to the world of the living" unless Volpone pays up, giving Mosca a share of his wealth.

Meanwhile, Peregrine is in disguise himself, playing his own prank on Sir Politic. Peregrine presents himself as a merchant to the knight and informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the Turks. Politic, who once mentioned the idea in jest, is terrified. When three merchants who are in collusion with Peregrine knock on the door,



Politic jumps into a tortoise-shell wine case to save himself. Peregrine informs the merchants when they enter that he is looking at a valuable tortoise.

The merchants decide to jump on the tortoise and demand that it crawls along the floor. They remark loudly upon its leg-garters and fine hand-gloves, before turning it over to reveal Sir Politic. Peregrine and the merchants go off, laughing at their prank, and Sir Politic moans about how much he agrees with his wife's desire to leave Venice and go back to England.

Meanwhile, Volpone gloats in front of each legacy hunter, deriding them for having lost Volpone's inheritance to a parasite such as Mosca, and he successfully avoids recognition. But his plan backfires nonetheless. Voltore, driven to such a state of distraction by Volpone's teasing, decides to recant his testimony in front of the Senate, implicating both himself but more importantly Mosca as a criminal. Corvino accuses him of being a sore loser, upset that Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate upon his death, and the news of this death surprises the Senators greatly. Volpone nearly recovers from his blunder by telling Voltore, in the middle of the Senate proceeding, that "Volpone" is still alive.

Mosca pretends to faint and claims to the Senate that he does not know where he is, how he got there, and that he must have been possessed by a demon during the last few minutes when he was speaking to them. He also informs the Senators that Volpone is not dead, contradicting Corvino. All seems good for Volpone until Mosca returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it.

Mosca, after all, has a will, written by Volpone and in his signature, stating that he is Volpone's heir. Now that Volpone is believed to be dead, Mosca legally owns Volpone's property, and Mosca tells Volpone that he is not going to give it back by telling the truth. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Volpone ends up being sent to prison, while Mosca is consigned to a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. At the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the audience, simply asking them to applaud if they enjoyed the play they just saw.

\*\*\*\*\*

## JACOBEAN DRAMA

### JOHN WEBSTER – THE WHITE DEVIL

**View *The White Devil* as a Revenge Play:- (or) What traits of the Jacobean drama are reflected in *The White Devil*?**

*The White Devil* was written by English playwright John Webster in 1612. It is a tragedy in five acts. It tells a story of adultery, corruption, murder, and revenge among the wealthy and privileged "great men" and women of the Italian nobility. Webster based *The White Devil* on the sensational murder of a young Italian noblewoman, Vittoria Accoramboni, in 1585. When first performed at the Red Bull Theater, *The White Devil* was not a success. Webster blamed both the cold weather and the audience of "ignorant asses"

for the play's failure. *The White Devil* later enjoyed great acclaim, and along with Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, is regarded as a masterpiece.

Considered a revenge play, *The White Devil* demonstrates many of the conventions of the genre, including a theme of vengeance, use of the supernatural, a dumb show, characters in disguise, madness, and many violent murders. In addition to its focus on retribution, *The White Devil* also explores themes of misogyny, double-standards, and the deceptive nature of appearances.

The play opens as Count Lodovico, a murderous villain who has been banished from Rome for his crimes, talks to his two henchmen, Gasparo and Antonelli. Accepting Lodovico's money, they promise to get his banishment revoked.

In the next scene, the Duke of Bracciano visits the home of the beautiful Vittoria Corombona and her husband, Camillo. Passionately in love with Vittoria, Bracciano plans to seduce her, even though both are separately married. Flamineo, Bracciano's cynical, misogynistic secretary and Vittoria's brother, offers to help the two get together, believing this will further his own career. He and his girlfriend, the Moorish ladies' maid, Zanche, arrange for Bracciano and Vittoria to meet secretly. The two express their love for each other, and Vittoria shares a recent bad dream in which Camillo and Bracciano's wife, Isabella, try to bury her alive. Bracciano vows to protect Vittoria by killing their inconvenient spouses. Vittoria's mother, Cornelia, overhears their discussion, accuses them of adultery, and curses them.

Isabella arrives with her brother, Francisco de Medici, and Cardinal Monticelso. Isabella asks her brother to be kind to Bracciano when the two men upbraid him about his infidelity. After Francisco and Monticelso depart, Bracciano tells Isabella he will never sleep with her again, essentially divorcing her. Flamineo and Bracciano plot to murder both Isabella and Camillo. Bracciano meets with a Conjuror who magically shows Bracciano the two murders as they happen. Before retiring for the evening, Isabella routinely kisses her portrait of Bracciano. This time, however, the unscrupulous Doctor Julio and his assistant have painted poison on the picture's lips: Isabella kisses it and dies. Meanwhile, Camillo and Flamineo, out drinking with some companions, have a gymnastics competition. When Camillo and Flamineo are alone in the room, Flamineo breaks Camillo's neck and arranges the body to look as though his death was a vaulting accident.

Cardinal Monticelso and Francisco believe Vittoria killed her husband. Since they don't have any hard evidence, they plan to get her convicted by assassinating her character. Monticelso acts as prosecutor and judge, defaming Vittoria and calling her a "whore." Vittoria bravely defends herself, saying "Grant I was tempted, / Temptation to lust proves not the act." Vittoria argues that they are condemning her because Bracciano loved her, which she compares to blaming a river for the death of someone who drowned themselves in it. Despite her logical arguments, Monticelso sentences her to prison in a convent for reformed prostitutes. Flamineo feigns insanity to avoid answering questions about his part in the murders.

Now pardoned, Lodovico returns to Rome. He reveals that he loved Isabella and vows to avenge her death. Francisco plots his own revenge, writing an anonymous love letter to Vittoria with the intent of making Bracciano jealous. Francisco's plan works: Bracciano angrily calls Vittoria a "whore." Vittoria convinces him that she loves him, and

he promises to break her out of prison. Bracciano, Vittoria, Flamineo, and Giovanni take advantage of the confusion in Rome and flee to Padua where they get married and hold court. Monticelso is named the next Pope and promptly excommunicates the lovers. Francisco hires Lodovico to kill them.

In disguise and out for vengeance, Francisco, Lodovico, and Gasparo present themselves for work in Bracciano's court. Francisco takes the identity of a Moor, calling himself Mulinassar. Lodovico and Gaspar pretend to be monks.

Flamineo fights with his younger brother, Marcello, over his relationship with Zanche and stabs him to death. Before a staged fight, Lodovico puts poison on Bracciano's helmet. As Bracciano dies, Lodovico and Gasparo reveal themselves and strangle him. Meanwhile, Zanche has transferred her affections to Mulinassar, unaware he's really Francisco. She discloses the truth about Camillo and Isabella's murders. At Lodovico's urging, Francisco departs, leaving Lodovico to finish exacting their revenge. Giovanni takes over his father's title, and as the new Duke, banishes Flamineo. Bracciano's ghost appears to Flamineo, offering him a bowl filled with lilies and a skull. When the ghost throws dirt on him, Flamineo believes it is an omen of his death.

Flamineo visits Vittoria and Zanche, announcing that he promised Bracciano he would kill Vittoria if Bracciano died. He convinces the two women to participate in a murder/suicide plot, first shooting him, then killing themselves. Vittoria and Zanche shoot Flamineo and rejoice in his death, disclosing that they never intended to go along with his scheme. Flamineo, however, stands up and reveals that the pistols were not loaded. Lodovico, Gasparo, and two of their henchmen, Carlo and Pedro, burst in and stab the three to death. Giovanni enters and captures the avengers. Lodovico admits to the slaughter, saying he was acting under Francisco's orders and is content now that he has avenged Isabella. Giovanni sends Lodovico off to be tortured, concluding with a warning to evildoers: "Let guilty men remember their blacke deedes, / Do leane on crutches, made of slender reedes."

## RESTORATION

### WILLIAM CONGREVE – THE WAY OF THE WORLD

**View the "The Way of the World" as a Comedy of Manners:-**

#### **Introduction:**

William Congreve is the best and finest writer of the comedy of manners. He has invented a new art of comedy. His 'The Way of the World' is considered as a work of art and as a pure comedy of manners. It is the apotheosis of the comedy of manners. It is a remarkable demonstration of Congreve's technical skill as a playwright. William Congreve was an English playwright and poet of the Restoration period. He is known for his clever, satirical dialogue and influence on the comedy of manners style of that period. Congreve shaped the English comedy of manners through his use of satire and well-written dialogue. He achieved fame in 1693 when he wrote some of the most popular English plays.

Congreve's "The Way of the World" is widely regarded as one of the best Restoration comedies. It is a play in five acts. It ridicules the assumptions that governed the society of his time, especially those concerning love and marriage. The plot concerns the efforts of the

lovers Millamant and Mirabell to obtain the permission of Millamant's aunt for their marriage. After several misunderstandings and other complications getting cleared up, the two finally obtain her consent.

### **Characteristics:**

The comedy of manners is a genuine reflection of the temper of the upper classes of the nation. It deals the external details of life, the fashion of the time, its manners, its speech and its interest. The dramatists confine themselves to the drawing rooms, the coffee houses, the clubs, the gambling centers, the streets and gardens of London. The characters represent the people of fashion. The plots of comedy of manners are mainly love intrigues. They are remarkable for neat, precise, witty, balanced and lucid prose style.

### **The Aristocratic London Society:**

'The Way of the World' has all the important characteristics of the comedy of manners. The aim of this comedy is to show the manners of the upper ranks of contemporary society. It satirically presents the aristocratic London society. The purpose is to hit at the follies and foibles of people. Congreve has regarded London as his world. The presentation of the high society of London is his soul concern. All the scenes in this play are laid in Lady Wishfort's house, a chocolate house and St. James' Park. All the characters are imbued with the spirit of London life. They are chiefly people of fashion. They are fond of games of love intrigues. This is the true style of the comedy of manners.

### **Love and Marriage:**

Male-female relationship is treated with utter frankness and candidness in the comedy of manners. Its subject is the intimate relation between men and women. The lovers love the game of love 'the chase'. They want to continue the game of love up to the very end. The dramatists make fun of marriage. Love is all right but marriage is a dreaded calamity. In 'The Way of the World' we find all these things. Millamant loves Mirabell but is most reluctant to get married. She can marry him if he agrees to give her full liberty even after the marriage. Marriage is treated as bargain.

Love intrigues occupy an important place in the plot of comedy of manners. It is the major theme of the play. 'The Way of the World' follows this convention. The entire play deals with the intrigues of Mirabell to gain the hand of Millamant. To achieve his aim, he pretends to make love to Lady Wishfort, an aged lady. When he fails, he hatches a deeper plot. At any cost Lady Wishfort wants to have a husband. Thus he gets her servant married to Lady Wishfort's maidservant. Thus here we find love intrigue. On this basis we can say that this is a beautiful comedy of manners.

### **Characters from Upper Strata of Society:**

The characters in the comedy of manners are of a set pattern. They are largely types. Sometimes their names show their characteristics. In such comedies we find fops and gallants in the company of gay ladies and butterflies of fashions. We find giddy girls, lustful women, deceived, jealous and impotent husbands. Fops and ladies spend their time to conspire against their rivals in love. In 'The Way of the World' we get characters of this type. They belong to the upper strata of the society. Mirabell has had an affair with a young widow. But he persuades her to marry Fainall. After her marriage she has soft corner for Mirabell. Fainall marries her only to get her property. Behind her he flirts with Mrs. Marwood. Millamant loves Mirabell but she has soft corner for Petulant and Witwoud. In spite of her old age, Lady

Wishfort wants to marry some young man. She uses cosmetics to hide her faded beauty and her wrinkles. Thus 'The Way of the World' is a true comedy of manners.

**Conclusion:**

Thus 'The Way of the world' is a fine comedy of manners. It has all the important characteristics of it. Here Congreve has introduced intrigues and illicit love. But his dialogue has wit. On the whole this play is a faithful reflection of the upper class life of the day. The characters are well drawn. Its prose is lucid and pointed. Congreve is undoubtedly the greatest of the Restoration comedy writers. In 'The Way of the World' the comedy of manners has reached at its perfection.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Summary**

Arabella's first husband, Languish, has died and left her his fortune. She begins a secret affair with Edward Mirabell. They end the affair and she gets married to a man Mirabell has selected (Fainall) because Mirabell is afraid that they will conceive a child out of wedlock (Congreve never explains why Mirabell just doesn't marry her himself). Mirabell and Mrs. Arabella Fainall remain good friends after the affair ends.

Mirabell begins courting Mrs. Fainall's cousin, Millamant, who lives with Millamant's aunt and Mrs. Fainall's mother, Lady Wishfort. To gain Wishfort's favor for his marriage to Millamant, Mirabell flatters Wishfort and lavishes much attention on her. Wishfort becomes convinced that he loves her and falls for him. However, after Wishfort's best friend, Mrs. Marwood, reveals what Mirabell was up to, her feelings for Mirabell change from love to hate. Now, she will not grant her permission for Mirabell to marry Millamant, an important problem because she controls Millamant's £6,000 dowry.

The night before the first scene of the play, the first time Mirabell has gone back to Wishfort's house since she found out his plan, Wishfort unceremoniously dismisses Mirabell from her "cabal night" club in front of Millamant, who doesn't stand up for him, and a number of other people. Undiscouraged, Mirabell has already begun hatching a plan to coerce Wishfort into accepting the marriage, a plan that Millamant learns all about through Foible. While all this is going on, Fainall has been having an affair with his wife's and Lady Wishfort's friend, Mrs. Marwood. Mirabell is the only one who suspects that this is going on. Foible and Mincing have witnessed the affair but have been sworn to secrecy by Marwood.

Unfolding in a single day, the play begins in the morning. Mirabell is waiting for word that his servant, Waitwell, and Wishfort's servant, Foible, have gotten married according to his plan. In the meanwhile, he is playing cards with his enemy, Fainall. Mirabell hints that he knows that Fainall and Marwood are having an affair. But he also reveals to Fainall his love for both Millamant's strengths and weaknesses of character. Hearing this, Fainall encourages him to marry her.

Later, the two men are joined by Witwoud and Petulant. Mirabell learns from the two that last night, Wishfort discussed her plan to marry Millamant off to his uncle, Sir Rowland, in order to disinherit Mirabell from his uncle's fortune (we do not yet know that Sir Rowland isn't a real person and that this is all actually part of Mirabell's plan).



Mirabell's plan is going well until Marwood, while hiding in a closet, overhears Mrs. Fainall and Foible discussing Mirabell's entire plan and learns exactly what he's up to. She shares this news with Fainall and they concoct a plan to ruin Mirabell and blackmail Wishfort.

That same afternoon at Wishfort's house, Millamant also accepts Mirabell's proposal and rejects the proposal of Sir Wilfull, whom Lady Wishfort wanted her to marry.

Together, Marwood and Fainall begin to counteract Mirabell's plan. They reveal Foible's betrayal and Sir Rowland's true identity (Waitwell) to Wishfort, and Fainall has Waitwell arrested. He threatens Wishfort that unless she surrenders her fortune, including Millamant and Mrs. Fainall's shares, he will reveal Mrs. Fainall's affair with Mirabell to the town, which would bring great disgrace to her family. He also demands that Wishfort herself agree never to get married (unless he permits it).

Mrs. Wishfort thinks she has found a loophole in Fainall's plan when she learns that Millamant and Sir Wilfull have agreed to get married. However, Fainall is undeterred because he can still gain control of Wishfort and her wife's fortunes. All seems lost for Wishfort and her family until Mirabell steps in. Before he offers his help, he has Wishfort promise that she will let him marry Millamant, which she readily does.

Then, he calls forward first Mincing and Foible to reveal the affair between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Wishfort is dissatisfied that this is Mirabell's trump card but Mirabell has one more trick. He calls forward Waitwell, who brings with him a deed to all of Arabella Languish's property. Before marrying Fainall, Mirabell and Arabella suspected that Fainall might try to cheat her, so Arabella agreed to sign over her fortune to Mirabell as a precaution. As her trustee, Mirabell still controls her fortune and the legally binding document thus preempts Fainall's claim on his wife's fortune.

With Fainall and Marwood beaten and Mrs. Fainall and Wishfort's fortunes and reputations saved, Sir Wilfull releases Millamant from the engagement so she can marry Mirabell and he can continue with his plans to travel. Mirabell returns the deed to Arabella and tells her to use it to control a very upset and vengeful Fainall.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **J.M. SYNGE – THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD**

**View J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* as a satirical tragic-comedy with its Irish countryside background:-**

J.M. Synge's highly controversial play *The Playboy of the Western World* exposed the middle-class Dublin audience to a different portrayal of Irish countryside life as opposed to the traditional idyllic image they were accustomed to. Synge strongly employs the element of satire in his play, implemented as a device to shock his conventional audience; the play's lack of morals would have offended the audience, so satire is also used to inject humour, creating a light-hearted tragicomedy. In pages 59 – 62 the presence of satire can be analysed in terms of satirising gender, religion and the presentation of rural Ireland, in addition to how satire is present throughout the entire play.

*The Playboy of the Western World* takes place in a run-down pub in the countryside of the North West of Ireland in the early 1900s. The pub's young barmaid, Margaret Flaherty, better known as Pegeen Mike, is making a list of items she needs for her upcoming wedding



to Shawn Keogh, her second cousin. When Shawn comes into the pub, Pegeen tells him of her worry of being left alone in the pub all night—her father, the pub owner Michael Flaherty, is going to be at a wake. Shawn is too afraid of what the local priest, Father Reilly, would think if he were to stay overnight with Pegeen, especially as he needs permission from the priest to approve their wedding between cousins. Pegeen berates him for being so god-fearing, and Shawn makes things worse when he lets slip that, on his way over, he heard what sounded like a young man “groaning wicked like a maddening dog” in a ditch. Pegeen is exasperated that Shawn was too cowardly to investigate.

Soon, Michael Flaherty comes in with his friends, Jimmy Farrell and Philly O’Cullen. The three men are about to go to the wake, an occasion that will last all night and involve a lot of drinking. Pegeen tells her father of her fear of being alone during the night. Michael, Jimmy and Philly try to convince Shawn to stay over, who dodges past his future father-in-law and runs out of the pub.

Shawn soon returns, scared that the man from the ditch is chasing him. That man, Christy Mahon, comes in. He is tired, frightened and dirty, and on the run from the law. Michael, Jimmy, Philly and Pegeen interrogate Christy about the nature of his crime, which he eventually reveals to be patricide—murdering his father. He explains that he killed his father by striking him over the head with a loy when they were in a potato field. Assuming that he must have had good reason to kill his “da,” the locals are mightily impressed by Christy’s courageous deed. Sensing an opportunity, Michael offers Christy the vacant job of “pot-boy,” which will mean Pegeen has someone to keep her safe overnight. Michael, Jimmy and Philly go to the wake. Shawn, now worried about Christy’s presence in the pub, offers to stay—Pegeen tells him to “go on then to Father Reilly.”

Left alone, Christy tells Pegeen more details about his life and the murder of his father, describing a life of rural drudgery and his father’s tyrannical character. During this conversation, she calls him handsome, and the two develop an attraction towards each other. Soon enough, Widow Quin, a thirty-year-old woman who killed her husband, arrives at the pub. She has instructions from Father Reilly and Shawn to take Christy with her back to her house, an idea that Pegeen fiercely resists. The two women squabble over Christy until he eventually insists that he will stay at the pub. Widow Quin leaves, and Christy, in his first comfortable bed for a long time, feels “great luck” at his new situation, wishing he had killed his father sooner.

The next morning. Christy, still thinking about the attentions of Pegeen and Widow Quin, admires his face in a looking-glass. Four local village girls, Susan Brady, Sara Tansey, Honor Blake and Nelly McLaughlin, come to the pub, excited to catch a glimpse of the young man who killed his father. Christy tries to hide, but they find him and give him gifts from their farms. They notice the looking-glass, which he is trying to hide behind his back, laughing that “them that kills their fathers is a vain lot surely.” Widow Quin comes in and tells the village girls to make Christy breakfast.

At Widow Quin’s and the girls’ request, Christy tells the story of how he killed his father, using a chicken bone as a theatrical prop and evidently enjoying the attention. Pegeen comes in and shoos Widow Quin and the girls away. Feeling jealous, she teases Christy by convincing him that the village girls, who she says are often in contact with the “peelers” (local police), might cause the law to come after him. He resigns himself to leaving the pub

and moving on, lamenting how he'll "not be waking near you [Pegeen] another dawn of the year till the two of us do arise to hope or judgment with the saints of God." She finally gives in and reassures him that he will be safe at the pub.

Shawn comes in with Widow Quin and gets Pegeen out of the pub by telling her that her sheep are misbehaving. With Pegeen out of earshot, Shawn offers Christy a one-way ticket to America and his best clothes in exchange for Christy leaving the pub forever, fearing that Christy will get in the way of his marriage to Pegeen. When Christy takes the clothes but refuses the ticket, Widow Quin hatches a plan with Shawn for her to marry Christy in exchange for a reward from Shawn consisting of a ram, a cow, and right of way across his property.

Just as Christy is swaggering around in his smart clothes and enjoying his newfound status, he spots his father, Old Mahon, wounded but not dead, wandering near the pub. Christy frantically hides behind the door as Mahon comes in and asks Widow Quin if she has seen his son, who he describes as a "fool" and the "laughing joke of every woman." She buys Christy some time by saying she thinks she saw him heading to the coast to catch a boat, sending Mahon off in that direction.

Christy begs Widow Quin not to tell Pegeen that his father is still alive. She suggests that he marry her instead of pursuing Pegeen, given that they have murder/attempted murder in common, and promises him a good life. Christy is steadfast in his commitment to Pegeen and asks Widow Quin to help him; she agrees to keep his secret in exchange for provisions from the pub when he marries Pegeen.

Jimmy and Philly are in the pub discussing Christy's victories at the village games and sports, and point out how often he mentions his murderous act. Just then, Old Mahon returns. He shows the two men his head wound and explains that it was his son who hit him, arousing Philly's suspicion. Widow Quin enters, shocked to see Mahon again. She tries to convince Jimmy and Philly that Mahon is a madman who, having earlier said that his wound was inflicted by a "tinker," changed his story on hearing about Christy Mahon. This persuades Jimmy, but Philly still suspects that Old Mahon might be Christy's father. Mahon hears cheering outside, which Widow Quin explains is for "a young lad, the champion playboy of the western world." Mahon takes a look outside, sure that the man in question is Christy; Widow Quin points out that he must be going mad, as he had earlier described his son as a loser—certainly not someone who would be winning the affections of an entire village. Mahon is temporarily convinced that he has gone mad and leaves; Jimmy and Philly go after him.

Christy comes in, surrounded by a crowd of admirers including Pegeen and the village girls. The crowd gives him prizes for winning their sports games. Pegeen gets the others to leave so that Christy can have a short respite from their attentions. Christy, buoyed by his success, convinces Pegeen to marry him, using poetic language to conjure an image of their future together. Michael enters, drunk from the wake and supported by Shawn. After some hesitation, he is convinced by Pegeen and Christy that they should marry, especially by the thought that his grandchildren will become "little gallant swearers" rather than "puny weeds" like Shawn.

Just as Michael joins Pegeen and Christy's hands together to celebrate their engagement, Mahon comes in for a third time, followed by the crowd and Widow Quin. He

runs at Christy and starts beating him. Christy tries to convince everyone that Mahon is a lunatic stranger, but they don't believe him. They quickly turn on him for having deceived them, with Pegeen especially dismayed at Christy for being "an ugly liar." Christy, increasingly desperate, chases Mahon out of the pub with a loy. Outside, he deals him another blow, thinking that this one will be fatal. The crowd, led by Michael, are concerned that Christy has now committed murder within their community, and that this will attract unwanted attention from the "peelers" (the police). They decide to hang Christy and bind him in rope. Pegeen, still furious, threatens Christy with fire. Christy fights back aggressively and bites Shawn's leg.

As Christy is being pulled toward the door, Old Mahon crawls back into the pub. He asks why Christy is tied up, to which Michael apologetically replies that they have to take care of Christy themselves to ensure the safety of the wider community. Mahon loosens Christy's ropes and insists that his son will be leaving with him.

As they leave, Christy states boldly that, from now on, he will be the "gallant captain," and his father the "heathen slave." Christy wishes blessings on the pub community, saying that he will "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day." With Christy gone, Shawn tries to talk to Pegeen about their engagement, but she just hits him around the head. She pulls a shawl over her and breaks out into "wild lamentation," crying out after Christy: "I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world."

\*\*\*\*\*

## EPIC THEATRE

### BERTOLT BRECHT – MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

*Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939) is the antiwar musical stage-play written by exiled German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. Set in seventeenth-century Europe, the play follows Anna Fierling, aka Mother Courage, a woman who operates a rolling canteen business during the Thirty Years War. Along with her three children, Anna travels across Europe in a covered wagon, selling goods to locals and alcohol to soldiers. While Anna vows to keep her children safe from the war, in the end, she finds herself poor, childless, and alone. The play takes place over the course of twelve years, depicted in twelve scenes. The name Mother Courage derives from the German writings of Grimmelshausen, whose novel *The Rungate Courage* inspired Brecht's title. *Mother Courage and Her Children*, originally performed on stage in Zurich in 1941, has since been produced sixteen times globally, most recently in 2017.

The play begins in 1624 Dalarna, Sweden. The Sergeant and Recruiting Officer lament the lack of soldiers to join the Swedish effort in Poland. A canteen wagon pulls up with provisions to sell to the soldiers. Inside the wagon are Anna Fierling, aka Mother Courage, her dimwitted daughter, Katrin, and two sons, Eilif and Swiss Cheese. The Recruiting Officer coaxes Eilif to join the army, but Courage insists he leaves her children alone. Eilif claims he wants to join the army. Courage warns him that his bravery will kill him if he does so. The Sergeant pretends to buy a belt from Courage, allowing the Recruiting Officer time to enlist Eilif away from his mother.

Two years later, Courage is stationed beside a Swedish Commander's tent. Courage berates a chef over the sale of a chicken, as The Commander and Eilif arrive. The Commander, also a Chaplain, commends Eilif for bravely killing local peasants and slaughtering cattle. Courage senses trouble ahead. She begins singing "Fishwife and the Soldier" with Eilif, before reprimanding her son for imperiling himself.

Three years pass. Swiss Cheese finds work as an army money-collector. The camp prostitute, Yvette Pottier, sings "The Fraternization Song," which Courage uses to dissuade Katrin away from romancing soldiers. The Commander discusses politics with The Cook before they deliver a message from Eilif. When the Catholics suddenly invade, Courage and her kin change their logo from Protestant to Catholic to avoid harm. Swiss Cheese stashes the cashbox inside the wagon, away from invading soldiers.

Three days later, Courage and The Chaplain travel into town; Swiss Cheese attempts to return the cashbox. Unaware of the advancing soldiers, Swiss Cheese is captured and tortured by the Catholics. When Courage returns, she and Swiss Cheese pretend not to know each other. Attempting to free her son, Courage has Yvette bribe the army with 200 guilders to let Swiss Cheese go. Courage plans to pawn the canteen-wagon to an old Colonel to pay for her son's freedom, and then use the money from the cashbox to repurchase the wagon. When Swiss Cheese claims he threw the cashbox in the river, Courage tries to reduce the price from 200 to 120 guilders. The Catholics refuse the offer after initially agreeing, swiftly killing Swiss Cheese. Since Courage pretends not to know the boy, she refuses to identify the body, and is forced to watch as Swiss Cheese's corpse is cast into the carrion ditch.

Later, Courage rests beside a Colonel's tent, preparing to file a complaint about the destruction of her goods. A young soldier storms in intending to kill the captain over low wages. Courage sings "Song of Great Capitulation," which discourages both from lodging a formal complaint. The young soldier leaves; Courage follows suit. Two years later, the wagon appears in a war-torn village. The Chaplain stumbles by, soliciting linens to dress the wounds of a nearby peasant family. Courage refuses, but the Chaplain takes garments from her wagon anyway.

In 1632, as the funeral of Catholic General Tilly nears, The Chaplain informs Courage that the war will persist and insists she stockpile supplies. Courage sends Katrin into town to gather supplies. The Chaplain proposes marriage to Courage, but Courage declines. Courage vows to oppose any war effort, especially after finding Katrin brutally raped and injured across the eye and forehead by a drunken soldier. Although she curses the war, Courage soon follows the Protestant army, enriching herself by providing merchandise. Courage goes from cursing the war to celebrating as a war profiteer.

A year later, peacetime is declared with the death of the Swedish king. The cook abruptly arrives, poor and dirty, and flirts with Courage. The Chaplain appears and argues with The Cook. Siding with The Cook, Courage is deemed a "hyena of the battlefield" by The Chaplain. Courage suggests disbanding. Shortly after, while Courage is at the market, Eilif is carried in by soldiers. Eilif is murdered for killing a peasant guilty of stealing livestock, an act that earned him heroic stripes during wartime. Courage never hears of her son's fate. When she learns the war is continuing, Courage and The Cook press on with the wagon.

As year seventeen of the war commences, there are little food and supplies left. The Cook, inheriting a lodge from his mother in Utrecht, suggests Courage help him operate it. Courage declines when The Cook refuses to keep Katrin with them. The cook sings "The Song of the Greatest Souls on Earth." Courage and Katrin continue on with the wagon alone. While trading among Protestants in Halle city, Courage leaves Katrin to stay with a peasant family overnight. Catholic soldiers approach the area, planning a sneak attack. Aware of this, Katrin warns the townsfolk by beating a drum on the rooftop in the morning. Katrin saves the town but is shot to death. The next morning, Courage singing a lullaby for her daughter's soul, has the peasants bury her corpse. The play concludes in 1636, with Mother Courage harnessing herself to the canteen-wagon. "I must get back into business," she claims before resuming course.

### COMEDY OF MENACE / HAROLD PINTER – BIRTHDAY PARTY

#### View Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* as a Comedy of Menace:-

As a playwright, Harold Pinter is an innovator of a new kind of drama which becomes famous as the Comedy of Menace. Unlike Coleridge, the famous Romantic poet, Harold Pinter begins his plays in our known, familiar world but gradually makes us move into the trajectory and psychodynamics of a world which is beyond our comprehension. In Pinter's Comedy of Menace, the laughter and elation of the audience in the same or all situations are immediately followed by a feeling of some impending disaster. An audience is, therefore, made aware, in the very midst of his laughter of some menace. The feelings of insecurity and uncertainty throughout the play also enhance the menacing atmosphere of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. The menace in Pinterian drama is also produced by potential or actual violence or from an underlined sense of violence throughout the play. Pinter makes the audience feel that the security of the principal character (Stanley) and even the audiences' own security are threatened by some sort of impending danger or disaster. Actually the term 'Comedy of Menace' was first coined by David Campton who used the phrase as a subtitle of his four short plays *The Lunatic View*, published in 1957. However, in Pinter's hand, the concept of menace becomes highly symbolic and vague.

Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is a perfect example of Comedy of Menace. Throughout the play, we find that the hint of menace is inflected upon the individual freedom of a person and it juxtaposes the comic element drastically dilutes the comic appeal. Pinter shows his state in the existential view that danger prevails everywhere and life can't escape from it. Pinter thinks that Stanley, the protagonist, might have committed a serious crime and is on the run for escaping the consequence and legal implications of his life. This is precisely comprehended while he almost never leaves his room and becomes furiously apprehensive when Meg informs him that two gentlemen are coming to stay in this boarding house. Stanley soon tactfully tries to conceal his apprehension by mentioning his successful concert and about a favourable job proposal of a pianist. But we can realize his innate apprehension for imminent interrogation or arrest by the two new guests at the boarding house:

***They won't come. Someone's taking the Michael. Forget all about it. [Act - I]***

In his attempt to percolate his fear upon Meg, Stanley informs her ironically that some people would come to the boarding house in a van along with a wheelbarrow and take away Meg permanently along with them:



*They're looking for someone. A certain person.* [Act - I]

In a mood of topsy-turvy-dom, Pinter often shows an apparent fearful apprehension, but actually gives occasion to amusement. Lulu's arrival and knocking at their boarding's door fulfil the purpose. Similarly, Meg's funny answer to Goldberg's question about Stanley also sustains the suspense of Stanley's immediate arrest. Thus, the dramatist gives a comic relief to his audience.

When Goldberg continuously refers to the "job" which he has to execute, makes an audience conscious about their unknown job, so as to say, by enhancing menace. Again the conversations between Goldberg and McCann are often comical but the possibility of danger and violence always pervade above the comedy:

*Goldberg: But why is it that before you do a job you're all over the place, and when you're doing the job you're as cool as a whistle?* [Act - I]

The interrogation of Stanley by the "two gentlemen" is sometimes funny or comical but have threatening impact both upon Stanley and the audience. Even the birthday party which begins in a light and jovial manner ends with Stanley's attempt to strangle Meg and rape Lulu. Similarly, the birthday party also becomes the excuse of Goldberg's seduction and deflowering Lulu. Again the arrangement of the birthday party acts as a plan to prove Stanley lunatic and takes him away from the boarding:

*Goldberg: ...All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself.* [Act - I]

At the end of the play, audiences are given an unsolved riddle about what has been of Stanley which is of paramount significance in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* - a perfect example of Comedy of Menace. Some critics even believe that it is a superimposition of the European concept of absurd (Martin Esslin has been described the drama as an example of the Theatre of the Absurd) to the English native wit. Here what is true or what is false, is not matter but the ambience which Pinter clarifies as his concept of menace: '*...menace and fear do not come from extraordinary sinister people but from you and me; it is all a matter of circumstances.*' (Pinter, Harold).

### **Summary:**

*The Birthday Party* is often considered *absurdist*—a type of play where the plot is nonsensical, the characters can't connect with each other, and language is slippery and ineffectual. Time and place are inconstant or unclear, and the characters' identities are frequently unstable, with major questions left unanswered even at the play's end. *The Birthday Party* is considered one of Pinter's major works and embodies many of these core characteristics of his absurdist style.

The play centers on Stanley Webber, a disheveled, out-of-work pianist in his late thirties who is staying in a seaside boarding house owned by Petey and Meg Boles, a married couple in their sixties. At the opening of Act I, Meg and Petey play out their morning routine of meaningless conversation while Meg serves Petey breakfast. Before going to work, Petey mentions two strange men who inquired about a room, and Meg is delighted. Meg decides to wake Stanley, giggling wildly despite his angry protests. She



fawns over him, sometimes even flirtatiously, undeterred by his responses that alternate between cruel, berating, and mild teasing.

When Meg mentions the two strange men, Stanley is instantly worried but reassures himself. Meg goes shopping and meets Lulu outside, a young woman who is bringing a large, wrapped package. When Lulu sees Stanley, she scolds him for being so ungroomed, and when she asks him to go out with her for some fresh air, he rejects the offer. After Lulu leaves, the two strange men, McCann and Goldberg, arrive, and Stanley slips out the door. They cryptically discuss some kind of job and are vague about details.

Meg returns and greets them pleasantly, claiming that it's Stanley's birthday. The men insist that they throw a party, and Meg delightedly agrees. Once the men are in their room, Stanley comes back in. Although he says that it isn't his birthday, Meg insists that it is and gives him the package Lulu brought in, which contains a child's drum. Stanley accepts the drum and begins to play it, beating more and more aggressively.

Act II takes place in the evening. Stanley meets McCann, who refuses to allow him to sneak out and miss his party. Petey enters, chats warmly with Goldberg, then leaves for his chess night. Stanley attempts to convince McCann and Goldberg to leave, or at least to leave him alone, but they hurl a barrage of questions and accusations at him, some of which are absurd. Then, they announce that Stanley is dead, and Stanley kicks Goldberg. Before McCann can smash him with a chair, Meg enters, dressed for the party. They all drink and toast to Stanley.

Lulu arrives and joins in, and she is quickly taken in by Goldberg's flirtation. They play blind man's buff (a game of tag where the person who is "it" is blindfolded), and Meg, the first one blindfolded, finds McCann. McCann is then blindfolded, and he finds Stanley and smashes his glasses. Stanley, in turn, finds Meg and begins to choke her, but McCann and Goldberg rush to stop him. The lights suddenly go out. Lulu faints in fear, and Stanley places her on the table. A flashlight reveals Stanley standing over her and laughing hysterically.

Act III occurs the next morning. Petey reads his newspaper, and Meg, hungover, tells him that Goldberg and McCann ate all of the breakfast. Meg worries about Stanley, who has yet to come down. When Meg brought him his tea earlier that morning, McCann had answered his door. Goldberg enters, and Meg leaves to shop. Petey asks about Stanley, who Goldberg says has had a sudden "breakdown." Petey wants to call a doctor, but McCann brings in their suitcases, and Goldberg insists that they will take Stanley with them. Petey leaves, promising to return quickly.

Lulu enters and speaks with Goldberg, and their conversation cryptically alludes to some encounter they had after the party: Lulu berates Goldberg for taking advantage of her. Goldberg insists that she encouraged him, and he calls McCann to intimidate her until she leaves. McCann brings Stanley in, now tidily dressed and clean-shaven. Goldberg and McCann make rapid-fire promises about helping Stanley to get better and become successful. When prompted to speak, Stanley can only make some choked, nonverbal sounds. Petey returns and tries to convince them to leave Stanley behind, but Goldberg threatens him, and they leave, taking Stanley with them. When Meg returns from shopping and asks about Stanley, Petey says that he's still in bed and that Meg should let him sleep.

Happily, Meg talks about how wonderful the party was and how she was the most beautiful and popular woman there.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POST -MODERN -DRAMA / WAITING FOR GODOT - SAMUEL BECKETT**

### **View *Waiting for Godot* as a Post-modern Drama:-**

Post modernism was originally a reaction or response to modernism in late 20th century. It is considered to be a break from the 19th century realism. In it, the story is told from an objective point of view. The postmodernist theory deals with the turn of external reality into an inner state of consciousness. So, the writer's use of postmodernism in his characters means that these characters unconsciously show and manifest their inner consciousness through the things that they do. It is used to describe a wide gamut of aesthetic, cultural, historical, literary, and philosophical goings-on. Influenced by Western European disillusionment, postmodernism refers to a cultural, intellectual or artistic state lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle. Actually, postmodernism is a dramatic deviation of man's thought line. It dismisses the existence of an absolute reality. It believes in the premise 'irrational is real , real is irrational'. There is no pre-determined rules, well established and long term principles of the literary works of postmodernism. There is no unity of time, place and action in literary work in it. The ending of it can be interpreted in many different ways. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* shares some postmodernist features.

The play depicts the concept of postmodernism through its major characters, Estragon and Vladimir. These main characters in the play primarily depicts the concept of having "hope" in a situation which does not seem to give hope. The play is basically about two men, Estragon and Vladimir, waiting for Godot. Throughout their waiting time, the only thing they do is to make the time pass by doing things that would practically entertain them.

The title of the play associated with the act of waiting itself. Technically, the play depicts the idea of waiting for someone who is not coming. Through the entire play, Godot does not arrive. He is never present or never introduced on the stage. He represents the thing or person whom most of us want to meet. Waiting entails hope and patience. This work represents the reality that happens most people in real world.

So, from beginning to end, the play explores a static situation. In the play, there is no absolute truth. All things are relative here. Postmodernism asserts that truth is not mirrored in human understanding of it. It is rather constructed as the mind tries to understand its own personal reality. The universe may be ordered by a God with pity for his creations or the universe might be controlled by chance or a cruel fate. The world may sometimes seem peaceful or it may be conditioned by sudden changes.

The characters in *Waiting for Godot* depicts the meaninglessness of everyday life activities. They are carefree, but hopeful and patient. These characteristics primarily show the real characteristics of people in reality. The play illustrates that the everyday life activities of people is meant to show and emphasize a perspective that tells that there is no future meaning that can put meaning to any action done in the present. The writer, Beckett, aims to

emphasize the meaningless, pointlessness and nothingness of life. The play suggests that people should make what is present worthwhile.

The present play appears to be about nothing at all. The play is actually not just a play about nothingness at it projects. Thus we can say that the play is an interesting play for a study from postmodernist view. The character setting, language, and the style of the play go with the later 20th century literary movement called postmodernism.

### **Summary:**

#### **Place and Persons:**

The rising curtain exposes a landscape that is strange and alien. It most resembles some strange place in outer space with its haunting and brooding sense of despair. A country road or an actual lonely road is the main setting, and there is a single tree. We know there is a ditch on the other side of the road because immediately Estragon tells Vladimir that he slept last night in the ditch. The loneliness and the isolation of the setting set the tone for the play. The idea of a road implies a journey, a movement, a purpose to life, but we see, instead, two deserted, isolated figures with no place to go and with no journey to look forward to. These figures are dressed in rags and tatters, clothes that would be worn by two tramps in an old, second-rate burlesque production. Thus the setting and the clothing make an ominous comment before we are too far into the drama.

#### **Concept of Nothing to be done:**

The play opens with Estragon involved in a tremendous struggle — but not a struggle of a highly metaphysical nature; instead, it is a physical struggle to get his stuck boot off his sore foot. The struggle has literally exhausted him, and he gives up the struggle with the opening words of the play: "*Nothing to be done*" (emphasis ours). Estragon's words are repeated two more times by Vladimir in the next moments of the play, and variations of this phrase become one of the central statements of the drama. The phrase is innocent enough in itself and obviously directed toward a specific struggle the removal of the boot. But as frustrating as the boot is, this is still a minor concern when compared to what Estragon and Vladimir are to do with the problem of waiting for Godot. In response to Estragon's struggle with his foot, Vladimir ignores the immediate physical problem but agrees with Estragon metaphysically that there is "nothing to be done," even though he has not "yet tried everything."

Thus the two opening speeches, innocent and simple enough in themselves, set the tone for the entire drama. The words carry a foreboding overtone which will be later associated with the word "appalled," or as Vladimir calls it, "AP-PALLED," and also the two tramps' inability to laugh.

#### **Estragon in the Ditch:**

After the opening words, we find that the two tramps are linked to each other in some undefined, ambiguous way. Vladimir greets Estragon with the comment "I thought you were gone forever," and since they are "together again at last," they will "have to celebrate." Vladimir then discovers that Estragon spent the night "in a ditch . . . over there" and that he was beaten by "the same lot as usual." This could be an oblique reference to the biblical story of the Good Samaritan who finds a man beaten, robbed, and thrown into a ditch and rescues him. But no Good Samaritan has come to Estragon's rescue. Instead, he has apparently spent

the entire night alone in the ditch, which means that both of them are, as their clothes indicate, in the most extreme, impoverished condition that they have ever known.

### **The Physical Disabilities of Estragon and Vladimir:**

Estragon remains concerned with his boots; Vladimir, however, is extremely impatient and finds the conversation about the boots to be profitless. He turns the conversation to more abstract matters. Very early in the play, then, the difference between the two tramps is established: Estragon is concerned about immediate, practical problems — the removal of his boots, the beating, and now his aching foot; Vladimir, in contrast, laments the general nature of their sufferings by remembering better days that used to be. Whereas Estragon's foot *hurts*, Vladimir is concerned with suffering of a different nature. Estragon has sore feet which *hurt* him, and Vladimir has some type of painful urinary infection which causes him to suffer; one character *hurts* and the other one *suffers*. Ultimately, the physical disabilities characterize the two men and also symbolize the various spiritual disabilities of the two characters.

Vladimir's thoughts shift from his urinary problems to the biblical concept of "Hope deferred maketh the something sick . . ." but he is unable to complete the proverb. The proverb fits Vladimir and Estragon's condition perfectly since we will see them in a state of sickness of heart; their hopes are constantly deferred as they continually wait for Godot, and their desires are never fulfilled since Godot never arrives. Vladimir then concludes as did Estragon: "Nothing to be done."

### **Estragon Blaming others:**

Estragon has not gotten his boot off, and he looks inside it to see what was causing the difficulty. Vladimir then chastises Estragon for one of man's most common faults: blaming one's boots for the faults of one's foot. This accusation, of course, refers to the tendency of all of mankind to blame any external thing — boots, society, circumstances, etc. — for deficiencies in one's own nature. It is easier for Estragon to blame the boots for his aching feet than to blame his own feet.

### **Reference to Bible:**

This suffering and lack of hope turn Vladimir's thoughts to the suffering of the two thieves on the cross and their lack of hope. Then from the Old Testament proverb about hope, Vladimir's thoughts turn to the New Testament and the possibility of hope expressed in the story of Christ and the two thieves on the cross. There were *two* thieves, as there are now *two* tramps, and *one* of the thieves was saved; therefore, maybe there may be hope for either Vladimir or Estragon if they repent — but there is nothing to repent of, except being born. This remark causes "Vladimir to break into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles," and he reminds Estragon that "one daren't even laugh any more"; one may "merely smile." They both have a nagging awareness of the precariousness and insecurity of their condition.

### **Play with the Ball:**

In the discussion of the thieves, Estragon is unable to participate fully because he can't remember the details. In frustration, Vladimir yells to Estragon: "Come on . . . return the ball can't you, once in a way?" Vladimir's complaint is descriptive of much of the dialogue in the remainder of the play; it is very much like two people playing a game with one another and one is unable to keep the ball in play. Estragon constantly fails to "keep the ball in play"; that

is, throughout the drama, he is unable to sustain his end of the conversation. Even in response to the matter of being saved "from hell" or "from death," Estragon merely replies, "Well what of it?" Therefore, even if they were to repent, Estragon can't understand what they might be saved from, who their saviour would be, and, furthermore, why the four Gospels differ so significantly. The discussion is brought firmly to a close with Estragon's pronouncement: "People are bloody ignorant apes."

### **When to Meet the Godot?**

From this discussion, the two tramps confront the central problem of the play. Estragon looks about the bleak, desolate landscape and tells Vladimir: "Let's go." The recurring thematic refrain is then put forth. They can't leave because they are "waiting for Godot." They are not sure they are in the right place; they are not sure they are here on the correct day; they are not sure what day of the week it is; they think they were to meet Godot on Saturday, but if today is Saturday, is it the right Saturday? At least, they are fairly certain that they were to meet by a tree, and there is only one tree on the horizon, but it could be either a bush or a dead tree. The tree, whatever its symbolic value (the cross, the hanging tree, spring's renewal), is a rather pathetic specimen and cannot be a very hopeful sign. Completely frustrated, they resign themselves to waiting. Vladimir paces, and Estragon sleeps.

### **The Never-Narrated Dream:**

Suddenly, Vladimir, feeling lonely, awakens Estragon, who awakens from his dream with a start. Estragon wants to tell about his dream, but Vladimir refuses to listen to it. Estragon's nightmare, even without its subject being revealed, symbolizes the various fears that these tramps feel in this alienated world. Vladimir's refusal to listen suggests his fear and apprehension of all of life and of certain things that are best left unsaid. Estragon, then, unable to tell about his nightmare, tries to tell a joke about an Englishman in a brothel. Again Vladimir refuses to listen and walks off.

Estragon's attempt to tell his nightmare and then his attempt to tell the joke about the Englishman — a story that is never finished represent an effort to pass the time while the two are waiting for Godot. Since they have been waiting and will be waiting for an indeterminate time, the essential problem is what to do with one's life while waiting, how to pass the time while waiting.

When Vladimir returns, the two embrace and then they try to decide what they are going to do while waiting. During the embrace, the tender, fraternal rapport of the moment is suddenly broken by Estragon's mundane observation that Vladimir smells of garlic. This technique is typical of Beckett's method of deflating man's pretensions by allowing the absurd and the vulgar to dominate the action.

### **Is Suicide a Solution to Waiting?**

The eternal question returns: what to do while waiting? Estragon suggests that perhaps they could hang themselves. That would certainly put an end to their waiting. But the matter of hanging creates some problems. Vladimir should hang himself first because he is the heaviest. If the straggly tree does not break under Vladimir's heavier weight, then it would be strong enough for Estragon's lighter weight. But if Estragon went first, the tree might break when Vladimir tried it, and then Estragon (Gogo) would be dead, and poor Vladimir (Didi) would be alive and completely alone. These considerations are simply too weighty to



solve. Man's attempts to solve things rationally bring about all types of difficulties; it is best to do nothing — "It's safer." Accordingly, they decide to "wait and see what [Godot] says," hoping that he, or someone, will make a decision about them or that something will be done for them. They will make no effort to change their rather intolerable and impossible situation, but, instead, they will hope that someone or some objective event will eventually change things for them.

### **Mystery of Godot:**

Having resolved to wait for Godot, they then wonder what he might offer them and, even more important, "what exactly did we ask him for?" Whatever it was they asked him for, Godot was equally vague and equivocal in his reply. Maybe he is at home thinking it over, consulting friends, correspondents, banks, etc. The tramps' entire discussion about Godot indicates how little, if indeed anything at all, they know of this Godot. They are unable to understand their own needs. They rely on someone else to tell them what they need. Similarly, the request and the possible response are discussed in terms of a person requesting a bank loan or some type of financial transaction. A philosophical question then begins to emerge: how does one relate to Godot? If he is God, can one enter into a business contract with this person? And if so, where is He? If Godot (or God) has to consult many outside sources before replying or appearing, then Vladimir and Estragon's condition is not very reassuring. And, if, as it now begins to become obvious, Vladimir and Estragon represent modern man in his relationship with God (Godot), then the modern condition of man is disturbingly precarious.

What, then, is man in this modern world? He is a beggar or a tramp reduced to the most dire circumstances: he is lost, not knowing where to turn. He is denied all rights, even the right to laugh:

ESTRAGON: We've no rights anymore?

VLADIMIR: You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.

Furthermore, they are reduced to crawling "on [their] hands and knees." Of course, in ancient cultures, man always approached a deity on his hands and knees. But in Beckett's dramas, a character's physical condition is correlated with his spiritual condition; all outward aspects of the two tramps reflect man's inward condition.

In a feeble attempt to assert their freedom, Estragon murmurs that they are not tied, but his assertion does not carry much conviction. The assertion, however feeble, that they are not tied might suggest man's revolt from God, because as soon as the idea of revolt is verbalized, they immediately hear a noise as though someone is approaching — Godot or God — to chastise them for heresy. They huddle together in fear:

ESTRAGON: You gave me a fright.

VLADIMIR: I thought it was he.

ESTRAGON: Who?

VLADIMIR: Godot.

After the discussion of whether or not they are tied has occupied their thoughts, Vladimir gives Estragon their last carrot to eat. Now they have only a turnip left to eat, and these reduced circumstances make it necessary for them to continue to wait for Godot and possible salvation.

### **What are Human Beings Tied to?**

While eating his carrot, Estragon ruminates further about being "tied" or "ti-ed." Even though Vladimir feebly asserts that they are not tied, we noted that they are indeed tied to the idea of waiting. They cannot assert themselves; they have ceased struggling; there is even "no use wriggling." They are merely two stranded figures on an alien landscape who have given up struggling and are dependent upon waiting for Godot, realizing there is "nothing to be done." Thus, the play opens, and this section closes on the same note: nothing to be done.

\*\*\*\*\*