

**BEEN102DSC**

# **Reading English Drama**

**B.A. (Hons.)  
4 Year Programme  
First Semester (English)**

**Centre for Distance and Online Education  
Maulana Azad National Urdu University  
Hyderabad-32, Telangana-India**

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## Message

Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) was established in 1998 by an Act of the Parliament. It is a central university with NAAC Grade A+. The mandate of the university is: (1) promotion of Urdu language, (2) accessibility and availability of professional and technical education in Urdu medium, (3) providing education through traditional and distance learning mode, and (4) a specific focus on women's education. These are the points that distinguish this central university from all other central universities and give it a unique feature. It has been emphasized even in the National Education Policy 2020 to achieve education in mother tongues and regional languages.

The very objective of promotion of knowledge through Urdu is meant to facilitate the accessibility of contemporary knowledge and disciplines to Urdu knowing community. For a long time, there has been a dearth of course material in Urdu. Urdu University now has a repository of more than 350 books in Urdu and the number is increasing with each semester.

Urdu University considers it a privilege to be part of the national mission of providing material in mother tongue/home language as per the vision of NEP 2020. Further, the Urdu speaking community is no longer at a disadvantage in gaining updated knowledge and information in emerging areas or newer knowledge in existing fields due to non-availability of reading material in Urdu. The availability of content related to the above domains of knowledge has created new awareness of attaining knowledge that could significantly impact the intellectual growth of the Urdu knowing community.

To facilitate the teaching-learning process for the distance and online learners, the Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE) of the university ensures the preparation of self-learning material (SLM) in Urdu and the concerned language subjects.

MANUU makes available SLM to the students of Distance and Online Learning free of cost. The same is also available for sale at nominal cost to anyone interested in gaining knowledge through Urdu. To further provide access to learning, eSLM in Urdu/Hindi/English/Arabic is available for free download from the University website.

I am immensely pleased that due to the hard work of the concerned faculty and full cooperation of the writers, the process of publications of books for the FYUG B.A, B.Sc. and B.Com. has begun on a massive scale. To facilitate the students of Distance and Online Learning, the process of preparing and publication of Self Learning Material (SLM) is of paramount importance to the University. I believe that we will be able to meet the requirements of a large Urdu knowing community through our Self Learning Material and will fulfill the mandate of this University and justify our presence in this country.

With best wishes,

**Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan**  
*Vice Chancellor*  
**MANUU, Hyderabad**

## Message

In the present era, distance education is recognized as a very effective and useful mode of education all over the world and a large number of people are benefiting from this mode of education. Maulana Azad National Urdu University also introduced the distance learning mode since its establishment in view of the educational needs of the Urdu speaking population. Maulana Azad National Urdu University started in 1998 with the Directorate of Distance Education and the regular programmes commenced from 2004, and subsequently various departments have been established.

The UGC has played a vital role in efficiently regulating the education system in the country. Various programs running under Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode at Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE) are approved by UGC-DEB. The UGC-DEB has emphasized on synchronizing the syllabi of distance and regular mode to enhance the level of distance learning students. Since Maulana Azad National Urdu University functions as a dual-mode institution, offering both distance and conventional modes of learning, it develops in-house Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) to support its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. These materials are structured into blocks and units in accordance with the credit distribution of each course and the guidelines prescribed by the UGC-DEB.

The Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE) offers a total of nineteen (19) programmes comprising of UG, PG, B.Ed., Diploma, and Certificate programmes. Along with this, programmes based on technical skills are also being started. The CDOE has now launched 4-year UG program for July 2025 as per the NEP-2020. The honours programs B.A., B.Sc. & B.Com are design as per the NCF and it will help students in pursuing honours degree. From the year 2025-2026, the MBA program is introduced in ODL mode.

A huge network of nine Regional Centers (Bengaluru, Bhopal, Darbhanga, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar) and six Sub-Regional Centers (Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jammu, Nooh, Varanasi, and Amravati) was established to facilitate the students. Apart from this, an extension center has also been established in Vijayawada. More than one hundred and sixty Learner Support Centres (LSCs) and twenty Programme Centres are run simultaneously under these Regional and Sub-Regional Centers to provide educational and administrative support to the students. The Centre for Distance and Online Education makes full use of ICT in its educational and administrative activities, and offers admission to all its programs through online mode only.

The soft copies of Self Learning Material (SLM) for students are made available on the website of the Centre for Distance and Online Education and the links of audio and video recordings are also made available on the website. In addition, facilities of E-mail and WhatsApp groups are being provided to the students through which the learners are informed about various aspects of the program such as course registration, assignments, counselling, examinations, etc. In addition to regular counseling, additional remedial online counseling is being provided from the last two years to improve the academic standards of the students.

It is expected that the Centre for Distance and Online Education will play a vital role to bring educationally and economically backward population into the mainstream of contemporary education. Changes are made in various programmes as per the New Education Policy (NEP-2020) in view of the educational needs and it is hoped that this will help in making the Open and Distance Learning system more efficient and effective.

**Prof. Mohd. Razaullah Khan**

***Director, Centre for Distance and Online Education***

MANUU, Hyderabad

## **Introduction to the Course**

The course *Reading English Drama* (BEEN102DSC) is prescribed as a discipline specific elective course for the first semester undergraduate students of B.A. in the FYUG programme under NEP 2020. This course is specifically for students who opted the English major. It aims at providing the students an insight into the literary genre - Drama in English providing both theoretical information and a close study of Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus.

The objective of this course is to familiarize you with the origin, history, and development of British drama. You will also learn the different dramatic forms. To give you a sound background to the study of drama, there is a unit on Aristotle's theory of drama. Further, you will learn the characteristic features of Elizabethan drama.

The course is divided into blocks. Each block consists of smaller units. In this SLM, under each unit the objectives, key points of the topic, learning outcomes, glossary and sample questions are given. At the end, a question paper is attached for giving you an idea of the pattern of the question paper. The syllabus is also placed in the SLM.

It is hoped that the Self Learning Material (SLM) in your hand will be helpful in acquiring knowledge about dramatic forms and techniques.

**Prof. Gulfishaan Habeeb**

*Course Coordinator*

# **Unit - 1: Origin, History and Development of British Drama**

## **Structure**

- 1.0** Introduction
- 1.1** Objectives
- 1.2** Origin, History and Development of the English Drama
  - 1.2.1** Origin of the English Drama
    - 1.2.1.1** Mystery and Miracle Plays
    - 1.2.1.2** Morality Plays
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  - 1.2.2** Development of the English Drama
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    - 1.2.2.5** The Restoration Drama
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- 1.3** Learning Outcomes
- 1.4** Glossary
- 1.5** Sample Questions
- 1.6** Suggested Learning Resources

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## **1.0 Introduction**

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The origin of the drama is deeply rooted in the religious tendencies of humans. The ancient Greek and Roman drama was based on rituals. The Bible was written in Latin, and it was difficult for the common people to understand its meaning. Therefore, the clergy tried to find an easy medium to transfer the teachings of the Bible to the common people. They adopted new methods of demonstration and acting. The stories of the Gospel were explained through the living pictures and the actors acted the story in a dumb show. Initially, English plays depicted religious stories and were performed in the churches. Thus, English theatre is the outcome of religion.

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## 1.1 Objectives

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Dear Learners, the objectives of this Unit are to:

- acquaint you with the origin and development of English drama up to the modern time
- make you understand the origin and development of English drama from Mystery and Miracle plays to the modern drama
- inform you about the growth of English drama during the Elizabethan period, the Restoration period, the eighteenth-century period, the Victorian period and the twentieth-century period
- explain the characteristics of the 20th century English drama.

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## 1.2 Origin, History and Development of the English Drama

### 1.2.1 Origin of the English Drama:

#### 1.2.1.1 Miracle and Mystery Plays:

A Miracle play is a dramatization of an event or legend from the life of a saint or martyr. It was developed in 14th and 15th century. Miracle plays were mainly based on the biblical events such as disobedience of Adam and Eve, Noah and the great flood, Abraham and Isaac and events in the life of Christ. Mystery plays are based on the events taken from the Holy Scriptures. The festivals like Christmas and Easter were celebrated with the performance of these events in which priests, chorus and actors would take part. The stories of the Bible were presented through Miracle and Mystery plays. It was a form of worship and could be regarded as the beginning of medieval drama. Initially, these performances were controlled by the church. In the following period, the control was shifted to the Town Council. It is rightly said that Miracle play contained the seeds of both serious and comic drama which flourished in England during the 16th and 17th centuries.

#### 1.2.1.2 Morality Plays:

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Morality play emerged as another form of drama. The Morality play was larger than the Miracle play. It was divided into acts and scenes as in the Senecan tradition. It was enacted by professional actors. The Morality play had direct connection with the Elizabethan plays. The Miracle plays changed focus from Biblical stories to personified abstractions like Life, Death, Repentance, Goodness, Love, Greed and such virtues and vices.

These human emotions are shown as struggling to gain supremacy over the human soul. These subjects were popular among religious preachers. There are references of Morality plays in the 14th and 15th century. The first Morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance*, was written around 1425. Moral truth is presented through these plays in a new and effective manner. The play, *Everyman* is one of the examples of the Morality play.

### **1.2.1.3 Interlude:**

The Interlude is a type of Morality play equally allegorical in content with realistic and comic elements. It is a short play having a set of scenes, real characters, usually the humble rank, citizens and friars. There was an absence of allegorical figures and there was much broad farcical humour, good songs and there were set scenes. The interludes were dramatized at feasts and entertainments which supplied amusement for court and nobility. In other words, it could be considered an advancement upon the Morality play. The Interlude is a brief comedy. The most popular writer of Interludes was John Heywood who wrote *The Four P's* in doggerel verse describing a lying match between a Pedlar, a Palmer and a Pardoner. *The Four Elements*, *The World and the Child*, *Thersites* and *The Play of the Weather* are the other famous interludes before the drama proper in the sixteenth century.

At this time, classicism began to exercise its influence on the emerging English drama, which can be evident in Udall's play *Ralph Roister Doister* appeared in 1553. It is an adaptation from the Roman playwright Plautus's play *Miles Gloriosus*. The next play of this kind, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* was written by William Stevenson in 1562.

## **1.2.2 Development of English Drama:**

### **1.2.2.1 Beginning of Elizabethan Theatre:**

The beginning of the Elizabethan theatre is found in the wandering performers who moved from castle to castle and town to town. The nobles of England maintained troupes of players. Thus, the Elizabethan Acting Troupes came into existence. The opening of theatre in London and *The Red Lion* in Whitechapel in 1567 by John Brayne is regarded as the beginning of early modern English drama. John Brayne and his brother-in-law James Burbage built a theatre known as *The Theatre* at Shoreditch. *The Red Lion* was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas *The Theatre* accepted long-term engagements. The public theatres had circular arenas, a stage was set at one end of the open courtyard and the auditorium was open to the sky. The private theatres were enclosed halls with the stage lightened by candles or torches. The first theatre was built in London by James Burbage in 1576 which was located outside the

city jurisdiction. The Globe, later owned by Shakespeare and Hemminge, was a model for several theatres.

#### **1.2.2.2 First Regular Comedies:**

Nicholas Udall (1505-1556) took steps to write a regular English comedy on classical lines. He wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553), a play written for his boys to act. Another comedy was *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1566) acted at Cambridge University and written in blank verse. Thomas Ingeland's *The Disobedient Child* was printed in 1560. George Gascoigne's *The Glass of Government* (1575) and *Supposes* (1566) are notable works. *Damon and Pythias* by Richard Edward was presented before Queen Elizabeth in 1564.

#### **1.2.2.3 First Regular Tragedies:**

The beginning of regular tragedy holds a very interesting connection with the previous forms of writing. The first two plays *Lamentable Tragedy of Cambises* by Thomas Preston and *Appius and Virginia* by John Webster. *Gorboduc* is the first regular tragedy in English written in blank verse, performed in 1564. The first three acts were written by Thomas Norton and the next two by Thomas Sackville. *The Misfortune of Arthur* (1587) by Thomas Hughes deals with the theme of love.

#### **1.2.2.4 University Wits:**

The group of the writers from Oxford and Cambridge known as 'University Wits' are contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare. It included the writers like John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Green, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nash, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe.

John Lyly (1554-1606): Lyly is commonly considered the leader of the 'University Wits'. He selected classical themes and stories for his plays. His famous plays are *A Most Excellent Comedy of Alexander and Diogenes* (1584), *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Gallathea* (1588), *The Man in the Moon* (1588), *Midas* (1589), *Mother Bombie* (1590), *Love's Metamorphosis* (1590), and *Woman in the Moon* (1597).

George Peele (1557-1596): George Peele has widened the range of English drama by writing a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and romantic literary satire. His work consists of *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581), *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594), *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward I*, *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe*, and *The Old Wives Tales* (1595).

Robert Greene (1558-1592): Greene was well known for the art of plot construction. He wrote *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587), *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589), and *The Scottish History of James IV* (1594).

Thomas Lodge (1558-1625): Thomas Lodge's *The Wound of Civil War* contains power over lyric and a charm in his fiction.

Thomas Nash (1558-1625): Nash was pamphleteer and story writer. He tried his hand at drama. He collaborated with Marston in his *Dido* and in *The Isle of Dogs*.

Thomas Kyd (1558-1594): Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1585) occupied important place in the development of English tragedy. The play is Senecan, adapted to popular requirement. Kyd breathed it into passion of fine blank verse.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593): Marlowe had distinguished scholarly career at the university. He became popular after publication of his first play *Tamburlaine* (1587). His other plays are *Dr. Faustus* (1587), *The Jew of Malta* (1592), *Edward II* (1593). The *Tragedy of Dido*, *The Queen of Carthage* (1594), *The Massacre of Paris* (1596).

#### **1.2.2.5 The Restoration Drama:**

After Elizabethan period, the English drama suffered but the Restoration period opened a new avenue for it. The playwrights of this period did not imitate the Elizabethan comedy and tragedy as a model. There was a complete break from the Elizabethan tradition in drama. Etherege and Congreve wrote the *Comedy of Manners* which reflects aristocratic life and political changes. The Restoration dramatists also promoted Heroic Tragedy based on the heroic convention derived from French. The heroic tragedies had epic themes, and the protagonists were superhuman beings.

#### **Comedy of Manners:**

The comedy of manners was developed during the Age of Dryden or the Restoration period. It was influenced by the French dramatist Moliere and the Spanish dramatist Calderon. The following playwrights contributed to the development of this genre:

Sir George Etherege (1635-1691) wrote three comedies: *The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub* (1664), *She Would If She Could* (1688), *The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), and some light verse.

William Wycherley (1640-1715) came to England from France at the Restoration period. He wrote four plays such as *Love in a Wood* (1671), *The Gentlemen Dancing-Master* (1671), *Country Wife* (1673) and *The Plain Dealer* (1674).

William Congreve (1670-1729) is the master of the comedy of manners. He wrote all his plays before he was thirty. His first play is *Old Bachelor* (1693), a perfect piece of comic portraiture for a young man of twenty-three. Two years after the presentation of *The Double*

Dealer, he wrote his next plays Love for Love in 1695. Congreve's last comedy is The Way of the World.

Sir John Vanbrugh's (1664-1726) three best comedies are: The Relapse (1696), The Provoked Wife (1697), and Confederacy (1705). These plays deal with happy marriages. He brought comedy down from the higher level to the lower depths of farce.

George Farquhar (1678-1707) wrote Love in a Battle, The Recruiting Officer and The Beaux Stratagem. The last one is his best play and deals with the problem of unhappy marriage.

Thomas Shadwell (1642 -1692) wrote many plays, the best of which were Epsom Wells, True Widow, The Sullen Lovers, The Squire of Alsatia, Bury Fair and Squire of Alsatia. He imitated closely Jonson's comedy of humours. His style lacks literary grace, but his plots are usually well-constructed.

### **The Heroic Tragedy:**

During the Restoration period, several playwrights contributed to the development of the heroic tragedy. The following playwrights contributed to the development of heroic tragedy:

John Dryden (1631-1700) stands as the leader of the heroic tragedy. Between 1664 and 1677, he wrote five plays The Indian Emperor, Tyrannic Love, Conquest of Granada (two parts), Aurangzeb. All of these plays have heroes of superhuman ability endowed with super human ideals. The heroines of these plays are faithful, fair and supreme beautiful. Thomas Otway's (1651-1685) first play, Alcibiades, was produced in 1675. It was followed by Don Carlos (1676), The Orphan (1680) and his masterpiece, Venice Preserved (1682). The Language of his plays is less exaggerated than the usual heroic plays. Nathaniel Lee (1653-92) wrote many tragedies, of which the prominent are Nero (1674) Sophonisha (1675), The Rival Queen (1677), and Mithridates (1673). His plays are usual tale of mishaps, miseries and drunkenness. Elkanah Settle (1648-1724) achieved popularity with a Heroic play, The Empress of Morocco (1673). This play has all the faults and defects of the heroic tragedy. John Crowne (1640-1703) wrote Caligula (1698), Thyestes (1681), Sir Courtly Nice (1685). Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) was made Poet Laureate in 1715. His best-known plays are Tamerlane (1702), The Fair Penitent (1703), and Jane Shore.

### **1.2.2.6 Eighteenth Century Drama:**

During the eighteenth-century drama gradually declined and a few dramatists made remarkable contribution to the development of English drama. Goldsmith and Sheridan were the two prominent playwrights who enriched drama by their plays.

### **The Eighteenth-Century Tragedy:**

During the eighteenth century, the pattern of tragedy was a little different from the style adopted by the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. Tragedies of this period were without the emotional force, fire, the moving intensity and the pathetic appeal which we had seen in the tragedies of the Elizabethan dramatists. There were three kinds of tragedies such as classical tragedy, romantic tragedy and domestic tragedy.

The first type of tragedy developed during this age was classical tragedy. Addison, the essayist, produced *Cato* in 1713. It is written in blank verse. The second type of tragedy developed during this age was Romantic tragedy. Nicholas Rowe, poet laureate and editor of Shakespeare, produced *The Fair Penitent* which attracted some popular attention. Another tragedy that Rowe wrote was *Fane Shore*. It is written in imitation of Shakespeare's style. The third type of tragedy developed during this age was the Domestic tragedy. It was written in prose. Lillo was the main proponent of the domestic tragedy and his tragedy *London Merchant or The History of George Barnwell* (1731) gave a domestic tragedy with an apprentice for the hero. Moore's *Gamester* is another domestic tragedy based on gambling.

### **Other forms of Drama:**

#### **Pantomime**

During the eighteenth-century, pantomime became popular. Rich, who was manager first of the theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields and later at Covent Garden, found pantomime very profitable and produced several pantomimes which attracted popular attention. They were puppet-shows which delighted the public.

#### **Opera**

Opera in Italian style was also cultivated during this age. By far the best of the ballad-operas was Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728). Besides the political interest, Gay's Opera had many humorous scenes pretty songs, rollicking gaiety and clever dialogues. Another good ballad-opera was *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737) by Henry Carey.

#### **Burlesque**

Burlesque is a kind of satirical play in which the spirit of true comedy is presented in a satirical manner. During the eighteenth-century, writers excelled in writing burlesque. Carey wrote *The Tragedy of Chronohotonthologos* (1734), Henry Fielding produced several burlesque plays notably *The Tragedy of Tragedies or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731)

and Pasquin (1736) Tom Thumb of Fielding was a great success. It abounds in rollicking fun and it paved the way for Sheridan's *The Critic*.

### **Farce**

Farce is a low type of comedy, replete with ludicrous situations; deficient in plot-construction and sober characters. One of the best farces of this century was Towoley's *High Life Below Stairs* (1759), in which some servants, in their master's absence, act their master's part. The most prolific writers of the farcical comedy were Samuel Foote (1720-1777) and George Colman "the Elder" (1732-1794). Foote's best work is *The Author* which is a satire on servile and wicked publishers who dupe them. His other works are *The Englishman in Paris* (1753), *The Minor* (1760) and *The Liar* (1762). His *Polly Honnycombe* (1760) is a light farce, based round a sentimental novel reading heroine. *The Jealous Wife* (1761) was suggested by Tom Jones.

### **Sentimental Comedy:**

The sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century was a reaction against the comedy of manners. The comedy of manners was characterized by light-hearted fun, obscenity and trenchant dialogues. In this comedy, laughter and humour were completely driven out and in place of comedy which was rich in humour, pathos and pathetic situations were introduced. The playwrights who contributed to the development of sentimental comedy are as follows:

Colley Cibber (1671-1757) wrote two sentimental comedies *Love's Last Shift* and *Provoked Husband*. Mrs. Centlivre (1667-1723) followed Mrs. Aphra Behn as a practitioner of the Comedy of Intrigue. She claims her position among the writers of the sentimental comedy. Her best plays are *The Busybody*, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* and *The Gamester*. Richard Steele (1672-1729) was perhaps the greatest figure among the writers of the Sentimental Comedy. He wrote three sentimental comedies viz. *Lying Lover* (1703), *Tender Husband* (1705) and *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). In these plays, we have the tone of morality, kindness and pathos. Hugh Kelly (1739-1777) carried on the Sentimental Comedy after the middle of the century. Kelly's *False Delicacy* was an enormous success. His brother John Kelly produced *The Married Philosopher*, which introduced sentimentalism by adapting in English a French sentimental work. Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) wrote about thirty plays, some of which are tragedies. He is very fond of emphasizing the moral tone in his plays. In his most typical work are *The Brothers*, *The West Indian* and *The Fashionable Lover*, we have the best of the sentimental comedy.

Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809) was the chief writer of the Sentimental Comedy at the end of the century. His popular work is *The Road to Ruin* (1791).

### **The Comedy of Humour:**

The comedy of humour which Goldsmith and Sheridan cultivated in the eighteenth century was a reaction against the sentimental comedy of Cibber, Steele, Kelly and Cumberland. Let us now look at the contribution of Fielding, Goldsmith and Sheridan to the development of the comedy of humour.

Henry Fielding (1707-54) wrote comedy and farce. He made clever adaptations of Moliere's *L'Avare* (*The Miser*) and *Le Medecinmalgre'lui* (*The Mock Doctor*). But it was in parody and political satire that he obtained his most personal success. He achieved success in his *Tragedy of Tragedies* or *The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) and *Pasquin* (1736), and *The Historical Register for the Year* (1736-37).

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74) revived the comedy of humour of the Elizabethan Age and gave a hard blow to the sentimental comedy. Goldsmith's great objection to the sentimental comedy was that it was more like a tragedy than a comedy. Goldsmith's first play was *The Good-Natured Man* produced in 1768. *The Good-Natured Man*, despite introducing laughter and humour, remained for the most part a failure. The next play, *She Stoops to Conquer* or *The Mistakes of a Night*, was produced in 1771. This play marks a departure from the first play and practically introduces the reign of humour in comedy.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's (1751-1816) plays are written in the mood of satirical observation of life. The main plays of Sheridan are *Rivals*, *St. Patrick's Day*, *The Scheming Lieutenant*, *The Duenna*, *A Trip to Scarborough*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The Critic* or, *A Tragedy Rehearsed*. All these works of Sheridan are not of equal importance; his best-known works are *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna* and *The Critic*.

### **1.2.2.7 The Victorian Drama:**

The Victorian age was one of the most remarkable periods in the history of English literature. The literature of the Victorian age was correlated to the social and the political life of the age. A few literary artists of the age struck the note of revolt against the materialistic tendencies of the age. The playwrights who contributed to the development of drama during this period are:

### **The Victorian Dramatists:**

The Victorian period is regarded as the period of novel but there are certain playwrights who tried their hands in the formation of drama some of the contributors among them are as follows:

#### **Major Contributors:**

Alfred Tennyson wrote a poetic play Queen Mary. It is a historical play and has Mary Tudor for its heroine. It is a blank verse play dealing with conflict between Rome and Lutheranism. The next plays The Promise of May speaks about the injurious influence of secularism. The material of The Cup is borrowed from Plutarch and does not deserve any special mention. The Falcon is indebted to Boccaccio and is a lovely idyll. Tennyson's last play The Foresters is a woodland masque and deals with the legends of Robin Hood.

Robert Browning is popularly known as the poet of dramatic monologue. His dramatic contribution could not impress the audience as compared to other playwrights. Strafford is Browning's earliest drama. The historical tragedy deals with the career and death of Strafford. King Victor and King Charles is a blank verse play, based on Alfieri's life of Victor Amedee II. The next play The Return of the Druses is a tragedy in blank verse, in which Browning sought to exhibit the most wild and passionate love. A Blot in the Scutcheon is a play, influenced by Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Colombe's Birthday is one of the pleasant plays of Browning. Luria is a play that has distinct echoes from Othello. A Soul's Tragedy is Browning's masterpiece, and according to Lounsbury, it unites consistency of plot with clearness of expression and truth of life.

Matthew Arnold wrote only one play, Merope, which is the most complete reproduction in English, in the form of convention of Sophoclean tragedy. The poetry of the drama is unmistakable.

#### **Other Contributors of the Victorian Drama:**

Swinburne is one of the Victorian dramatists who wrote several plays. Towards the end of the Victorian period a new literary genre known as problem play came into being. Pinero, Jones and Roberston wrote problem plays in prose. Henrik Ibsen began his literary career as a writer of poetic drama. Poetic drama had fallen on evil days. But the Irish poets sought to revive poetic drama. W. B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and Lady Gregory felt that poetic drama was closely associated with their national culture. The establishment of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin marks the beginning of a new movement in drama.

### **1.2.2.8 The Twentieth Century English Drama:**

In the twentieth century new trends were introduced in drama. The dramatists were at ease in producing once again comedies of manners. Drama was revived in the beginning of twentieth century. In the course of six decades, the English drama had witnessed many trends and currents. Let us study them one by one.

#### **New Trends in the Twentieth Century Drama:**

##### **Realism**

Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern drama. The dramatists of early years of the twentieth century were interested in naturalism and realism and it was their endeavour to deal with real problems of life in a realistic technique in their plays. It was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who popularized realism in modern drama. He dealt with the problems of real life in a realistic manner in his plays. His example was followed by Robertson, Jones, Pinero, Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw in their plays. In the dramas of these realists, we get glimpses of real life, with all its warts and sordid ugliness. They deal with problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife between capital and labour and use the theatre as a means for bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in their days.

##### **Drama of Ideas**

Modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is employed by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they seek to propagate in society. The modern drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age.

##### **Romanticism**

Romanticism, which had been very dear to Elizabethan dramatists found its way modern drama, and it was mainly due to Sir J.M. Barrie's effort that the new wave of romanticism swept over modern drama for some years of the twentieth century. Barrie made excursions into the world of romance, fantasy, magic and super-naturalism in his plays Mary Rose, Peter Pan, A Kiss for Cinderella, Admirable Crichton and Dear Brutus.

##### **Poetic Plays**

Another reaction to realism and naturalism in drama was evinced in the popularization of poetic plays by a host of dramatists T. S. Eliot, Stephen Phillips, J.E. Flecker, John Drinkwater, John Masefield, W.B. Yeats, and Christopher Fry. They have made poetic plays a force to reckon to within modern drama.

### **Historical and Biographical Plays:**

Another trend is found in modern drama that is in the direction of using history and biography for dramatic treatment. Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *St. Joan* are historical plays of great importance. Ervine wrote *The Lady of Belmont* and popularized the old historical characters in Shakespeare's plays. John Drinkwater penned four historical plays: *Abraham Lincoln* (1918), *Mary Stuart* (1921-22), *Oliver Cromwell* (1922) and *Robert Lee* (1923). In each one of these plays there is a central dominating personality standing on a higher pedestal over the multiplicity of individually delineated characters. Clifford Bax wrote several historical plays, the chief of them being *Mr. Pepys* (1930), *Socrates* (1930), *The Venetian* (1936). Bax's effective treatment of character, his skilful wielding of material, and his delicate sense of style give prime distinction to his work.

Biography has been skilfully used in two prominent plays of our times. *Barrets of Wimpole Street* by Rudolf Bezier and *The Lady with a Lamp* by Reginald Berkley. In the former play biographical details about Robert Browning and Mrs. Elizabeth Barret Browning form the texture of the play, while the latter play deals with the life and achievement of Florence Nightingale.

### **The Irish Movement**

A new trend in modern drama was introduced by the Irish dramatists who brought about the Celtic Revival in literature. In the hands of the Irish dramatists like W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Leanox Robinson, T. C. Murray and Edward Martyn, drama ceased to be realistic in character, and became an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the Irish people from remote days to their own times.

### **Impressionism**

Impressionism constitutes another important feature of modern drama. In the impressionistic plays of W. B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality, rather than in presenting reality as it is. Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than to make an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or events.

### **Expressionism**

Expressionism is another important feature of modern drama. It marks an extreme reaction against naturalism. The movement which had started early in Germany made its way in English drama, and several modern dramatists like Sean O'Casey, C.K. Munro, H.F. Rubinstein,

J.B. Priestley, Elmer Rice and Eugene O'Neill have made experiments in the expressionistic tendency in modern drama.

### **The Comedy of Manners**

There is a revival of the comedy of manners in modern dramatic literature. Oscar Wilde, Noel Coward, and Somerset Maugham have done much to revive the comedy of wit in our days. The drama after the Second World War has not exhibited a love for comedy, and the social conditions of the period after the war are not very favourable for the blossoming of the artificial comedy of the Restoration age.

### **The Theatre of the Absurd:**

The Theatre of the Absurd is a term derived from Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), and clear and lucid thought about absurdist drama is found in Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). It is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950s who did not regard themselves as a school but who all seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of the man in the universe. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus defined the absurd as the tension which emerges from man's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which steadfastly refuses to evidence either. Most notable among them were Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. The lesser figures of this school of drama are Robert Pignet, N. F. Simpson, Edward Albee, Fernando Arrabal and Gunter Grass.

Samuel Beckett (1906- 1889) was an Irish dramatist and novelist, but he long lived in Paris and wrote both in French and English with ease and facility. He used a deliberately formless language to present the meaningless void of experience as encountered by his characters. In fiction he scored success by *Murphy*, *Molloy* and *Watt* and in drama his masterpiece is *Waiting for Godot* (1953).

Eugene Ionesco (1909-1994) was a Rumanian-born dramatist who wrote in French. He is leading figure in the Theatre of the Absurd. He dealt with such subjects as the breakdown of language, the proliferation of objects and the absurd vulnerability of man, threatened from both outside and inside. His famous plays are *The Lesson*, *The Chairs*, *The Victims of Duty*, *How to Get Rid of It*, *The Killer*, *Rhinoceros*, *Exit the King* and *The Bald Prima Donna*.

Arthur Adamov (1908–1970) was a Russian-born dramatist who lived in France and wrote in French. He expressed his deep sense of alienation in his autobiographical volume

L'Avew (1938-43). His famous plays are La Parodie (1945), L'Invasion, Professor Taranne, Le Ping-pong, Paolo Paoli (1957) and Printemps '71 (1962).

Jean Genet (1910-1986) was a famous French novelist, dramatist, and poet. Among his well-known plays are Deathwatch, The Maids, The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens. Genet has been classified both as a dramatist of the Absurd and as a follower of Art and in his ritualistic Theatre of Cruelty.

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) was an English dramatist whose works are allied to the Theatre of the Absurd. He wrote several famous plays such as The Room, The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Dumb Waiter, The Servant, The Home Coming, Landscape, Silence, and Old Times.

Edward Albee (1928-2016) was an American playwright. His early one-act plays are brilliant absurdist analyses of contemporary social and psychological tensions. His popular works are The Zoo Story (1958), The Sandbox (1959), *Father and Son* (1960) and the finest, *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1960), on the hysterical nature of Southern sexuality and politics. This dislocations and rituals of the theatre of the absurd are used in his first full-length play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). His next play *Tiny Alice* (1964) is a psychological fantasy of sexual and manipulation in a high camp manner. *Box-Mao-Box* (1968) is probably his most impressive work so far.

### **Expressionism in Modern Drama:**

Certain dramatists of America, Europe and England made new experiments in producing plays not dealing with external realism but with the inner life of the characters. Expressionism in drama is just an experiment in presenting the inner life of the characters in a psychological way. The prominent dramatists of the 'Expressionistic school' are O'Casey, Priestley, Munro, Rubinstein and Elmer Rice. We will briefly deal with the works of these dramatists of the 'Expressionist School'.

Sean O'Casey (1884-1964) was an Irish dramatist. He was a worthy successor of Synge, interested in the presentation of Irish life, not the Irish life of the Aran Islands, but the life of slums of Dublin bringing out all the sordidness and drunkenness of the Irish men and women. His first play *The Shadow of a Gunman* brings out the slum tenements of Dublin. It reveals the bloodiness of the Anglo-Irish war of 1920. The next play *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) is a political play dealing with the execution of a young man by his Republican comrades. *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) also deals with the cruel and brutal folly of civil war. *The Silver*

Tassie combines the naturalistic and Expressionistic methods. The other plays of O'Casey are Within the Gates (1933), The Star Turns Red (1940), Purple Dust (1940), Red Rose for the (1946), Oak Leaves and Lavender (1946), and Cockadoodle Dandy (1949). The plays of O'Casey are about Irish life, and the tragedy and comedy of this life is well brought out in dialogues, which are vivid, racy and rhythmical. The characters of O'Casey are weak. They are crude and pitiable.

C. K. Munro tried to imitate German Expressionism in his play Rumour (1924). It deals with the origin of war and modern international jealousies. It is a significant play of the expressionistic school.

Reginald Berkeley's (1890-1935) play The White Chateau (1927) is in style of Munro's Rumour. It has power, dignity and distinction. His other plays are The Quest of Elizabeth, Mango Island, and The World's End.

H. F. Rubinstein made experiments in the style and manner of Berkeley. His famous play The House (1926) deals with a building having vital entity and power. His next play Isabel's Eleven (1927) expresses something new in dramatic form.

J. B. Priestley (1894-1984) was a playwright who attempted to break the conventions of naturalistic drama. He authored more than thirty plays. He produced comedy, farce, domestic drama and expressionistic plays. His famous Expressionistic play is Johnson over Jordan. It reads like a morality play. The other plays of Priestley are Time and the Conways (1937), Dangerous Corner (1932), Music at Night (1938), I Have Been Here Before (1937), Laburnum Grove (1933), The Long Mirror (1940), They Come to a City (1943), Desert Highway (1943), Home is Tomorrow (1948).

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### **1.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Dear students in this Unit, we have come across the origin and development of English drama up to the Twentieth Century English Drama. We have focused on the Beginning of the Elizabethan Theatre and the contribution made by the University Wits to the growth of English drama. In the course of the chapter, an attempt has been made to consider the Restoration drama and the Eighteenth-Century drama. The Unit further records the Victorian drama and its major contributors. The unit also covers Twentieth century English drama along with new trends, theatre of absurd and expressionism.

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## 1.4 Glossary

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**Ritual:** a religious ceremony consisting of a series of actions.

**Gospel:** the teaching or revelation of Christ.

**Martyr:** a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.

**Chorus:** a large organized group of singers

**Realism:** factual presentation

**Cultivate:** to nourish, to promote

**Farcical:** unwise or humorous

**Absurd:** silly or unwise

**Legend:** a story of unknown authorship

**Strife:** strike

**Expression:** act of showing one's feelings

**Tendency:** belief or intention

**Aspiration:** something that you hope to achieve

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## 1.5 Sample Questions

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### 1.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. The origin of drama is deeply rooted in \_\_\_\_\_ of humans.

- (a) human tendencies
- (b) historical tendencies
- (c) religious tendencies**
- (d) tendencies

2. Who performed Mystery plays?

- (a) Priests**
- (b) chorus
- (c) actors
- (d) all the above

3. What is interlude?

- (a) A brief comedy**

- (b) A brief tragedy
- (c) both 'a' and 'b'

4. Who wrote the play Ralph Roister Doister?

- (a) Richard Edward
- (b) Nicholas Udall**
- (c) George Gascoigne
- (d) none of the above

5. Who among the following is a University Wit?

- (a) George Peele
- (b) Robert Greene
- (c) Thomas Lodge
- (d) All the above**

#### **True or False**

1. George Peele was a university wit dramatist \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) True**
- (b) False

2. The Unfortunate Traveller was written by Thomas Nash \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) True**
- (b) False

3. Doctor Faustus is a play by Shakespeare \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) True
- (b) False**

4. Othello is a play by Shakespeare \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) True**
- (b) False

5. Thomas Kyd wrote Spanish Tragedy \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) True**
- (b) False

#### **1.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. What is a mystery play?
2. What is a miracle play?
3. What is a morality play?
4. What is comedy of manners?
5. What is the heroic tragedy?

#### **1.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Write a detailed note on the Restoration drama.
2. Who are the major contributors of the Victorian drama?

3. What are the characteristics of the twentieth century drama?

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## **1.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

1. Edward Albert, (1979). History of English Literature. Oxford: OUP.
2. Mundra, J. N. & Mundra, S. C (1992). A History of English Literature. Vol. I, II, III Barely:  
Prakash Book Depot.

## Unit – 2: Dramatic Forms

### Structure

#### 2.0 Introduction

#### 2.1 Objectives

#### 2.2 Dramatic Forms

##### 2.2.1 Origin of Drama

##### 2.2.2 Tragedy

##### 2.2.3 Comedy

##### 2.2.4 Melodrama

##### 2.2.5 Historical Drama

##### 2.2.6 Mime or Mute

##### 2.2.7 Chorus

##### 2.2.8 Farce

##### 2.2.9 Satire

##### 2.2.10 Dance

##### 2.2.11 Conclusion

#### 2.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 2.4 Glossary

#### 2.5 Sample Questions

#### 2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 2.0 Introduction

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Drama is a versatile art form that encompasses various styles and techniques to convey stories, emotions, and ideas. Among its many forms, farce relies on exaggerated situations, physical humor, and absurdity to provoke laughter, often highlighting human folly. Satire, on the other hand, uses wit, irony, and exaggeration to critique societal flaws, politics, or human behavior, aiming to inspire change through humour. The chorus, originating in Greek tragedy, serves as a collective voice that comments on the action, provides background, or reflects societal opinions. It enhances dramatic tension and deepens thematic resonance. Dance in drama—seen in musicals, ballets, and traditional performances—uses movement to express emotions, advance the plot, or enhance visual storytelling. Other dramatic forms include melodrama, which emphasizes heightened emotions and clear moral contrasts, and tragicomedy, blending tragic and comic elements to reflect life’s complexities. Each form employs distinct

techniques—dialogue, movement, music, and staging—to engage audiences in unique ways. Understanding these forms enriches appreciation for theater’s power to entertain, challenge, and reflect human experiences.

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## **2.1 Objectives**

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After going through the Unit, students will be able to:

- trace the origin of English drama.
- know in detail about various dramatic forms such as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, historical drama, mime or mute, chorus, etc.

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## **2.2 Dramatic Forms**

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### **2.2.1 Origin of Drama:**

The origin of drama is deeply influenced by human activities related to religion. The ancient dramas written in Roman and Greek were mostly concerned with religious ceremonies. Hence, the role of religion and religious elements played a significant role in the origin and development of drama. The Bible was written in Latin and common people were unable to understand it. To make it within the reach of common people, clergymen developed a method of stories narrated through live pictures. It began with the advent of shows performed on the stage through dumb shows. In the next phase, actors began to act through spoken mode. For that purpose, special plays were written by clerics, which marked the beginning of mystery and miracle plays. As time passed, the purpose of the drama also changed, as it was meant for entertainment as well as for improvement.

Then, the source of drama shifted from religious matters to secular matters. For the purpose of amusement, tumblers, jesters, and jugglers mainstreamed the drama in the Middle Ages. The wit and liberal manners of the actors played a key role in making drama secular as well as a form of entertainment. During the Middle Ages, Pageants played a significant part in providing entertainment through dramatic form. In order to develop drama as a form of genre, the role of the church was also perfected through the skilful use of wit and humorous rituals. After passing through church, the dramatic form came to marketplace guilds used to perform during the 14th century. Guilds took this form of art seriously, and mistakes committed during

performances were heavily taken into account in the form of fines. During those times, performances took place in open spaces, and it was the proper origin of stage shows in public places.

The concept of rich costume on the part of actors also flourished during that period. In addition, wit and humour were frequently used in the dramatic form. The next phase is the phase known as morality plays. The inclusion of mystery and miracle plays gave rise to morality plays. Mystery and miracle play combined serious and humorous elements, while morality plays pay attention to serious issues. Morality plays were didactic in nature as the characters in those plays possessed specific traits such as sin, virtue, and repentance. The characters of morality plays were symbolic, allegorical, and abstract, and such plays were acted during the reign of Henry VI. Comic elements were introduced to relieve too many serious elements, which marked the beginning of modern drama.

### **2.2.2 Tragedy:**

It is a drama that primarily focuses on the tragic hero in the form of a noble character, who comes across difficulties and challenges. In spite of all the circumstances against him, he is put down to his fate due to his personal fault known as hamartia. Such characters are realised at the end of the play about their faults and are shown as committed to coming out of their faults, but are often too late to mend their flaws. The origin of tragedy can be traced back to ancient times, as it was a popular genre among Greek. Tragedy is a form of drama that is a sober representation of human characters or place in a wider context, i.e., the world. Such drama typically ends at an unsatisfying resolution and where the tragic character is left in a worse state as compared to the state in which he started off.

It was Aristotle who laid down the norms of tragedy in the 3rd BC. To him, tragedy should be centred on a noble and powerful character that includes kings or warriors. He was destined to lose either his powers, loved ones, or even life due to his personal flaws. It was due to this trait that such a noble character is referred to as a tragic hero. In addition, according to Aristotle, a tragic drama should include catharsis for the viewers. It means that tragic drama should generate emotions that provide outlet to put off the negative ends of the drama. It acts as an outlet to get viewers out of hopeless feelings. Tragedy was a popular genre of literature in Ancient Greece in which the hero was not a common person. He was noble and powerful, who started off well and led an influential life. But at the end of the play, he had to face tragic agony due to upside-down fate.

It was conventional among ancient tragedians that tragic heroes should fall from a high place to the lowest position to generate distress and suffering. The concept of tragic flaw was also common among conventional tragic dramas. It was some personal fault or weakness among the tragic hero which brought about their downfall. Oedipus Rex was a typical example of a tragic hero, tragic flaw, and downfall of a noble character from high status to the deepest agony. The heart-breaking ending of the tragic drama was also a well-known trait of the play, which means that such dramas ended in death, chaos, or destruction. Whatever the reason for the downfall, the tragic hero accepts the responsibility for his weakness in such drama. It was due to this greatness on the part of the tragic hero that led to catharsis.

It is common for the viewers to feel hopeless feelings while seeing noble and high-ranked characters suffer the deepest agony in a tragedy. But showing such characters having the grace to accept the responsibility leads to outlet and relief to the viewers in the form of catharsis, which is meant to purge the feelings of pity and fear. It authenticates human feelings and values, which, despite being sad, makes the characters feel hopeful and optimistic. Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Shakespeare's Hamlet, and Euripides' Medea are typical examples of tragic heroes, tragic flaws, and catharsis, which are typical to conventional forms of tragic drama. Henrik Ibsen's Emperor and Galilean is a typical example of modern tragedy, which was written in 1873.

### **2.2.3 Comedy:**

Comedy drama is a broad genre of dramatic form that is intended to provide laughter through humour. Comedy drama has a wide range of forms, ranging from comedy of manners to sitcoms. It gets started from theatre and then takes other mediums such as films, audio plays, and television. It has a long history that can be traced to ancient history, as it was performed at the Lenaia festival in 442 BCE. Furthermore, it was also a significant genre of performance during ancient Rome. Later on, Tragicomedy gained momentum as it was meant to blend both tragic and comic elements. In such plays, characters didn't die, and neither the plays had tragic nor unhappy ends despite having tragic and sad moments. But it was different from Comedy, as there was unhappiness and despair in such plays which were close to death.

Broadly speaking, comedy-drama is a form of dramatic art in which characters experience a change that is meant for the better, and they hope for a better tomorrow. Typically, this type of play has a happy ending. This form of drama is meant to make readers laugh and to show human follies and weaknesses to make a change for betterment. High comedy is meant to use wit, social satire, and subtle characterizations to entertain people, and that is mostly meant

for the educated class of people. Low comedy, on the other hand, makes use of bawdy jokes, silly visuals, drunkenness, and physical humour to make people entertain. Silly characters doing silly stuff and providing odds noises are the most common types of comedy drama termed as low comedy.

As far as the traits of comedy drama are concerned, these are meant to focus on the lives and events of common people, unlike tragedy, which is meant to portray the noble class. Everyday life, events, and situations are portrayed in such dramas to make people laugh. These are based on the lives of common people and about the middle to lower class of society. A comic hero is not a hero or superhuman. He or she is projected as a just likeable character. Readers and audience feel that he or she may succeed at the end of the story. Characters coming from high rank or class are shown as pompous rather than noble in a comedy. Ordinary people are involved in ordinary situations about ordinary problems in a comedy. The plot in a comedy-drama is often predictable, as the concerns are devoid of complications. Comedy drama has a happy ending as the comic hero is shown as successful. The prime intent of this dramatic form is to make people laugh and get entertained.

***Check your progress:***

1. Which plays marked the beginning of English drama in the Middle Ages?

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2. What personal fault leads to the downfall of a tragic hero?

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3. Who laid down the norms of tragedy in the 3rd century BC?

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**2.2.4 Melodrama:**

It is an exaggerated type of drama in which typically one-dimensional characters in the form of heroes, villains, and heroines are portrayed. Such characters are involved in deadly situations, which are extremely exciting, and they are passionate about the events. The plots or stories of this form of drama contain romantic as well as sombre stories. Plots and stories presented in this type of drama are either larger than life or very small and are presented in a very large way. The actions and reactions of the characters in Melodrama are exaggerated and passionate. Characters involved in this type of drama are diverse, i.e., mentors, villains, heroes, and heroines.

Characters have flaws, but these are overcome in the course of the play to attain resolution. It typically has two types of ending; sometimes, the drama ends on a cheerful note, and sometimes, it has a sad ending. This type of drama involves serious situations in serious ways. It is a type of drama that relies on moral themes and grand effects. It originated in the 18th century. However, it was formalised in the 19th century. It became a significant form of entertainment later on. It is a drama which is known for its white and black morality. Heroes are projected as victorious, and villains face demise in the course of melodrama. It is also well known for mixing comedy, spectacle, and music.

In the 20th century, Melodrama shifted from theatre to a big screen called film. The main melodrama includes archetype characters, clear morals, strong emotions, and musical elements. In a plot, each act ends at a strong climax. In this type of drama, the plot is often simple. Fortune coincidence, concealed identity, and disguise are frequent devices used in the plot. It involves complicated themes such as war and love and turns them into binary opposition, which means that something, either good or bad, not in between, but on one side is portrayed. Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" and the play "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams are typical examples of melodrama.

### **2.2.5 Historical Drama:**

It is a form of drama in which writers are involved to re-create a historical record or event to attain a particular objective. This form of drama, unlike most dramatic forms, tries to project records, history, and events as truthful as possible. Historical accuracy is given weightage in this type of drama to preserve historical information. In this form of drama, history or the past is used as a vehicle to address the present time. In historical drama, events and themes are the most important things. In terms of norms and style, it is just the same as the other forms of drama, but in terms of handling themes and truthful accounts of historical events, they are distinctive in historical play.

The most problematic part of historical drama is its handling of the plot as it is unlike the typical format of the drama where events are arranged in a neat story, where tension is built, which leads to climax and resolution. Real life and events are uncooperative and require dramatic solutions to portray those moments. Inconsistency and missing information may affect the accuracy and authenticity of historical drama, so a writer of this form of drama has to take extra measures to address these issues. Then, the concept of truth is also problematic for the

writer as truth itself is subjective for the writer and for the readers. The role of the theme is key as far as the portrayal of historical events with maximum accuracy.

It is essential for a writer to maintain uniformity and accuracy while projecting historical events through dramatic form and must not sway away from the dramatic situations of the narration. Balance is a key that lets the writer be on track and obtain from being swayed away. Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" is a powerful example of historical drama with its intense modern themes. "Massacre at Myall Creek" by John Summons is also a modern historical drama in which historical events of colonial times (1838) in northern New South Wales, Australia are portrayed. The massacre of 38 Aboriginal people and the trials of the massacre's perpetrators are subsequently dramatized with accuracy and truth. It was published by Oxford University Press in 1993.

#### **2.2.6 Mime or Mute:**

Mime is where physical movements take a pivot role to relate thrilling stories without taking into action words, music and dance. It is one of the most well-known forms of physical theatre. It is also a form of silent art where bodily movements act rather than voice. Its history can be drawn from ancient Rome and Greece. It is a form of non-verbal art or communication in which actors or characters use bodily expressions, facial movements, and physical movements to interact with the audience. It is one of the highest forms of expressive art, and the actors or artists who perform in such drama are known as mimes. Mime actors can be distinguished in a crowd very easily because of their typical clothes and make-up.

In theatre performances, mimes are famous for their comic elements, but this form of art is beyond that. A mime performance consists of expression, movements, and gestures to relate vivid tales and interact with the audience in a way that evokes certain emotions among them. It is one of the highest forms of performing art. It is not very easy for characters to act in a mime. Certain levels of control are essential to have over movements and gestures. Likewise, it is a form of dramatic art in which actors or artists can relate tales without uttering a single word. For a mime, it is very much significant to master the art of control over bodily movements, facial expressions, physical gestures and pauses to create a maximum impact.

It is also key for an artist to have command over non-verbal communication because, in this dramatic form, words are absent. Diversity is also highly needed for artists to create an impactful mime drama. The ability to produce and convey multiple expressions in a certain period of time, along with timing techniques, are also prerequisites for a mime actor. In addition,

dedication, commitment, practice, and the expertise in non-verbal art of communication are essential elements that are indispensable for being a mime. As it is a form of dramatic expression where performance is silent, only precise gestures, controlled bodily movements, facial expressions, and pauses are utilised devoid of words, dance, and music.

***Check your progress:***

1. In which century did Melodrama originate?

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2. What is the main focus of Historical Drama?

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3. What are the performers of Mime dramas called?

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**2.2.7 Chorus:**

The origin of the chorus can be derived from the ancient tragedies of Rome and Greece. The purpose of the chorus in those dramas was to inform the audience about the key elements of the plot. It was also aimed at revealing the inner self, thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the characters involved in those dramas. In addition, the chorus was also responsible for delivering the moral messages of the drama to the audience. The chorus was typically the first to speak and was also the last to speak in those plays. The chorus had an added role as they conversed with the characters and, at times, gave them advice and wisdom. But with the passage of time, dramas took complex plots, multiple characters, and complicated dialogue patterns.

But during the Renaissance period, the concept got rebirth as dramatists like Christopher Marlow and William Shakespeare used it in their dramas. As far as the role and function of the chorus in a drama are concerned, it is meant to give time and breath to characters. For a costume change and for a prop-up scene, characters are in need of time, and a chorus is used to fill that time and engage the audience. The chorus is also important as it gives direction to the audience to understand the play by disclosing the hidden meaning and message to the audience. It also acts as a clarifying agent when the play gets confused if one character is playing multiple roles. The chorus is also meant to give access to the inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the characters, which unfolds the characters more than the action.

It makes the audience more engaged and involved with the action of the story. In addition, the chorus conveys the underlying message or moral to the audience, being the last to make an appearance on the stage. It also acts as a warning for the audience not to commit the

same mistakes. The effect of the chorus is deep as it acts as a friend to the audience by providing them with an inside story and information. It also assists the audience in unfolding the story, being a bridge between characters, stories, and audiences. Hence, due to the effective role of the chorus, the interest, and involvement of the audience are kept in the story. The role and scope of the chorus in modern drama are still there, but it is limited and less significant than it was in the past, especially during the Greek and Renaissance periods.

### **2.2.8 Farce:**

It is yet another type of drama that has a broader sense of humour, just like comedy, but there are striking dissimilarities better than the twos. The main themes of farce consisted of exaggerated wit. Lots of exaggeration is presented in such drama, along with wit to create humour. In such a type of drama, jokes are cracked among characters that are slapstick. Plots in farce are not well knit. Rather, these are illogical. Unexpected occurrences, situations and dialogues are exchanged among characters. Humour is there in farce, but that is mostly inappropriate and coarse. In addition, the plot in farce is not probable, predictable, and even inconceivable.

Actually, in such a type of drama, it is the verbal and physical humour that moves the action forward rather than the plot. Characters often in farce are base characters who are either ignorant or from the very low class. They are mixed up and have mistaken identities involved in silly discourse, which creates ridiculous things. The main traits of farce include stereotypical characters, silly things, ridiculous situations, one-dimensional characterization, and the absurdity of dialogues, characters, and situations. *Waiting for Godot*, written by Samuel Beckett, is a typical example of this type of drama in which nobody comes, nobody goes, and nothing happens.

### **2.2.9 Satire:**

It is a genre of dramatic art in which ridicule, irony, humour, and exaggeration are presented to expose as well as criticise human flaws. Apart from being a separate genre, it is also a key literary device that is consumed to criticise political and topical issues of the time. Satire is not merely limited to dramatic form. Rather, it is used in films, literature, and music as well. Satire is a creative and artistic way of critiquing human nature and behaviour. There are three major types of humour that are frequently used across literary genres. Horatian satire is the most common type of satire, which is used to ridicule a person or event comically. The tone is light, and the purpose is to reform. It is commonly used in social commentary and issues of everyday

matters. Juvenalian satire is a darker and more serious type of satire that is meant to give vent to anger or frustration about the current state of affairs.

It is meant to expose cultural and political systems' flaws. George Orwell's 1984, A Clockwork Orange, and Fahrenheit 451 are type examples of Juvenalian Satire. Menippean Satire is meant to expose the flaws in the belief system rather than to expose a person or event. Racism, homophobia, classism, and xenophobia are satirical elements in the TV show South Park. It is important to note that satire is often accompanied by other literary devices to achieve its maximum impact. Anachronism, verbal irony, understatement, proxy, overstatement, juxtaposition, and malapropistic devices are such that have heightened the impact and role of satire. Political satire, social satire, television show satire, film satire, and personal and events satire are the most frequently used forms of satire.

#### **2.2.10 Dance:**

It is a form of drama that was quite frequent in ancient civilizations, where it was an integral part of religious and cultural festivals. Indian Bharatanatyam, Japanese Noh and Kabuki, and Indonesian Wayang Wong are typical instances of classical dance drama. This type of drama consists of dramatic storytelling and intricate dance moves. The prime element of dance drama is the dance performance to express emotions and relate stories. Here, choreography plays a vital role in advancing the plot and developing characters. In addition, dance drama has dramatic elements to relate to the story and advance the plot with defined characters.

It is achieved by means of monologues, dialogues, and interactions among characters accompanied by music and dance. The third key element is the inclusion of music, which is responsible for setting the mood and augmenting the impact of the performance. Makeup and costumes meant for physical appearance are also key elements of dance drama. These are meant to distinguish characters, enhance the physical appeal and set the tone of the performance. Traditionally, makeup and costume are integral parts of dance drama. Dance drama has a special place as far as cultural orientation is concerned due to its ability to express complex emotions and relate intricate storytelling through artistic brilliance.

It has transcended lingual barriers, making it accessible to all types of audiences. The visual and auditory appeal of the dance drama has been responsible for creating an ever-lasting impact. It is a form of art that not only reflects cultural diversity but has also preserved traditional values. Dance drama is a versatile as well as powerful mode of theatre that has combined physicality as well as the narration of a story in a fusion form with beauty artistically.

Its rich history, versatility, and diversity have let it evolve as one of the most dynamic fields of artistic brilliance. Due to novelties brought about with time, it has continued to enchant and inspire audiences.

***Check your progress:***

1. What was the main purpose of the chorus in Greek and Roman dramas?

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2. What is the main feature of Farce drama?

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3. What is the prime element of dance drama?

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**2.2.11 Conclusion:**

One of the most essential and fundamental basics of dramatic art is the inclusion of dramatic form. It is the categorization of a given dramatic work, i.e. tragedy, comedy, mime, melodrama, etc. Typically, the dramatic form is what is chosen by the writer to write his drama. A form in dramatic art is the method or mode the artist selects to relate his or her story to explore themes and advance the plot. One can pick a mime where actors don't use words. Only physical and facial movements are used to articulate emotions or physical theatre, where abstract gestures show and interact with relationships. The form can also be defined as the style of presenting one story. In addition, dramatic forms can refer to various styles and diverse conventions that are derived from literary as well as theatrical work to express emotions, narratives, or ideas.

Broadly speaking, dramatic forms can be distinguished as comedic, tragic, melodramatic, or a fusion of different forms. Dance, satire, chorus, mime, farce, comedy, tragedy, melodrama, and historical drama are the most frequent forms of dramatic art. Dramatic literary traditions have the acceptance to bring about diverse elements and experiences from performing and non-performing art together to create an impact tale to relate. Dramatic forms and dramatic styles are fundamental to shaping theatrical narratives. Dramatic form structures the contents and is responsible for the organisation of dramatic work, while dramatic style expresses the essence of dramatic performance, i.e., how the action is articulated and enacted.

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**2.3 Learning Outcomes**

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After going through the Unit, students are expected to:

- have an understanding of the origin of English drama.
- Know different types of dramatic forms such as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, historical drama, chorus, farce, satire, etc.

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## 2.4 Glossary

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**Absurdity:** Meaninglessness

**Folly:** Foolishness

**Mystery play:** A mystery play is a medieval drama based on biblical stories, performed to teach religious lessons to the public

**Miracle play:** A miracle play is a medieval drama based on the lives, miracles, or martyrdom of saints

**Jester:** Clown

**Juggler:** Performer, Showman

**Pageant:** Spectacular ceremony

**Hamartia:** A fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine

**Catharsis:** Purification or purgation of the emotions (such as pity and fear) primarily through art

**Tragic flaws:** A fault or weakness in the personality of one of the main characters in a play that causes their sudden destruction

**Bawdy:** Obscene, filthy

**Silly visuals:** It refers to images, graphics, or scenes that are intentionally humorous, absurd, exaggerated, or ridiculous in appearance

**Trait:** Characteristic

**Sombre:** Gloomy, melancholy

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## 2.5 Sample Questions

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### 2.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which of the following is a feature of farce?
  - (a) Logical plot
  - (b) Illogical and exaggerated situations**

- (c) Historical accuracy
  - (d) Moral lessons
2. The term Hamartia refers to \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Moral lesson
  - (b) Tragic flaw in a hero**
  - (c) Exaggerated humour
  - (d) Comic ending
3. Melodrama often contains \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Subtle characterisation
  - (b) Clear moral contrasts between good and evil**
  - (c) Logical and realistic plots
  - (d) Minimal emotional display
4. The chorus in Greek tragedy was primarily used to:
- (a) Provide background and commentary**
  - (b) Replace the main characters
  - (c) Dance without speaking
  - (d) Deliver comic relief only
5. Mime performances rely mainly on \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Dialogue delivery
  - (b) Physical movement and expressions**
  - (c) Musical background
  - (d) Narration
6. Which dramatic form blends tragic and comic elements?
- (a) Historical drama
  - (b) Tragicomedy**
  - (c) Melodrama
  - (d) Farce
7. The purpose of catharsis in tragedy is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) To confuse the audience
  - (b) To evoke and then purge emotions like pity and fear**
  - (c) To provide comic relief
  - (d) To give historical details

8. A morality play mainly focuses on \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) **Allegorical characters and moral lessons**
  - (b) Illogical and absurd plots
  - (c) Historical events
  - (d) Dance sequences
9. The typical ending of a tragedy is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Happy resolution
  - (b) Moral compromise
  - (c) **Death, chaos, or destruction**
  - (d) Marriage of main characters
10. The prime intent of comedy drama is to \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Educate only
  - (b) **Make people laugh and entertain**
  - (c) Portray noble characters' downfall
  - (d) Record historical events

### **2.5.2 Short Answer Questions**

1. Define Hamartia and explain its role in tragedy.
2. Mention two main differences between farce and comedy.
3. What are the key functions of a chorus in ancient Greek drama?
4. How does melodrama portray morality?
5. What is the main purpose of catharsis in tragedy?

### **2.5.3 Long Answer Questions**

1. Discuss the origin and development of drama from religious to secular forms in the Middle Ages.
2. Explain Aristotle's concept of tragedy with reference to the tragic hero, tragic flaw, and catharsis.
3. Describe the types of satire and explain how each addresses societal flaws.

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## 2.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 1979.
2. Ronald, Peacock. *The Art of Drama*. London: Routledge and KeganPaul, 1957.
3. A.R., Braunmuller & Michael, Hattaway ed. *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: CUP, 2003.
4. Peter, Happe. *English Drama before Shakespeare*. London. Routledge, 1999.

## **Unit-3: Brief Discussion on Aristotle’s Theory of Drama**

### **Structure**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

#### **3.2 A Brief Discussion on Aristotle’s Theory of Drama**

##### **3.2.1 About the Author - Aristotle**

##### **3.2.2 Poetics and Theory of Drama**

##### **3.2.3 The Nature of Imitation**

##### **3.2.4 The Function of Drama**

##### **3.2.5 Tragedy**

##### **3.2.6 The Elements of Tragedy**

##### **3.2.7 Tragic Hero**

##### **3.2.8 Catharsis**

##### **3.2.9 Epic Poetry**

##### **3.2.10 The Elements of Epic Poetry**

##### **3.2.11 The Differences Between Tragedy and Epic Poetry**

##### **3.2.12 Tragedy and Comedy**

##### **3.2.13 The Influence of Aristotle's Theory of Drama**

##### **3.2.14 The Renaissance and Neoclassicism**

##### **3.2.15 Modern Drama**

##### **3.2.16 Aristotle’s Observation on Style**

#### **3.3 Learning Outcomes**

#### **3.4 Glossary**

#### **3.5 Sample Questions**

#### **3.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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### **3.0 Introduction**

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Aristotle, a towering figure in Western philosophy, made his impacts on diverse fields of thoughts that spans from metaphysics and ethics to politics and aesthetics. Among his many works, Poetics stands out as a foundational text in the study of literature and drama. The Poetics (335 BC) is a systematic analysis of the principles of poetry and drama, focusing particularly on tragedy and epic poetry. Although the text is incomplete, with the section on comedy largely lost, the surviving portions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the nature and function of drama.

This chapter aims to provide an analysis of Aristotle's theory of drama, focusing on his concepts of tragedy, plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. We will also explore the influence of Aristotle's ideas on later literary criticism and dramatic practice, as well as their relevance to contemporary drama.

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### **3.1 Objectives**

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After going through the unit, students will be able to;

- understand the foundations of dramatic theory
- analyze the structure of tragedy
- understand the evolution of drama
- compare tragedy, comedy, and epic poetry
- apply classical theory to modern drama

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### **3.2 A Brief Discussion on Aristotle's Theory of Drama**

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#### **3.2.1 About the Author - Aristotle:**

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) is one of the stalwarts in Western philosophy and thought. He has been the corner stone of all studies such as philosophy, science, ethics, politics, and literature. Systematic approach to knowledge and emphasis on empirical observation are the hallmark of his theories. His loses no relevance in academia over two millennia after his death. He was born in Stagira, a small town in northern Greece. His father, Nicomachus was the personal physician in the court of King Amyntas of Macedon. This connection to the Macedonian court played a significant role in his later life. Aristotle moved to Athens at the age of 17 to join the Plato's Academy. He studied for 20 years in the academy. Although he was one of the most brilliant students in the academy, Aristotle eventually developed his own philosophical ideas, which diverged from his teacher's emphasis on abstract forms. After the death of Plato, Aristotle moved away from Athens and became a gallivant conducting scientific expeditions. He became a tutor to Alexander the Great at the request of King Philip II of Macedon.

Aristotle returned to Athens and founded the Lyceum, a school in 335 BCE. It became a center for research and teaching in subjects ranging from biology and physics to ethics and

politics. The empirical approach to knowledge that he emphasized through observation and logical analysis, laid the foundations for the scientific method. He had been a prolific writer who penned over many topics, including metaphysics, ethics, politics, biology, and literature. His Poetics remains a foundational text in the study of drama, while his Nicomachean Ethics and Politics continue to influence moral and political philosophy.

The anti-Macedonian sentiment that got its momentum in 323 BCE, after the death of Alexander the Great, forced Aristotle to run away from Athens. He died in 322 BCE on the island of Euboea. Despite over two millennia ago, his ideas continue to shape fields as diverse as philosophy, science, literature, and education, making him one of the most enduring and influential thinkers in human history. Aristotle wrote extensively on diverse subjects, including:

Philosophy: Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics, Politics.

Science: Physics, On the Heavens, On the Soul.

Literature and Drama: Poetics, Rhetoric.

Biology: History of Animals, Parts of Animals.

### **3.2.2 Poetics and Theory of Drama:**

Aristotle's Poetics has had a profound and enduring impact on Western literary theory, particularly on drama. It provides a framework for understanding the principles of tragedy, offering insights that remain relevant even today. It is pertinent to explore its significance and examine its enduring influence on dramatic art.

Aristotle defines drama as a form of poetry that represents action through the imitation of characters. Unlike epic poetry, which is narrative in structure, drama is enacted by actors who perform the actions and speak the dialogue. Drama, therefore, is a mimetic art form that seeks to imitate human actions and emotions.

According to Aristotle, tragedy is the exalted version of poetry. He defines the nature of it in his panoramic definition - "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." (Poetics)

### **3.2.3 The Nature of Imitation:**

Mimesis, or imitation is the core of Aristotle's theory. He observes that art, including drama, is an imitation of human action. However, this imitation is not merely a superficial copying of reality. It is a selective and purposeful representation aiming to capture the essence of

human experience. He traces the origins of drama to the natural human tendency to imitate. He observes that imitation is an innate human instinct and people build knowledge through imitation. Drama, as a form of imitation, is a natural and universal art form. Aristotle also notes that drama evolved from religious rituals, particularly the dithyramb, a choral religious song offered to appease Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility in Greek mythology. In *Poetics*, he explores the role of imitation in art, particularly in poetry and drama. It is a natural human instinct and a fundamental aspect of learning and creativity. Some key points about imitation are: Imitation as Natural: Aristotle argues that humans are naturally inclined to imitate. From childhood, we learn through imitation, and it is a source of pleasure. This innate tendency is the foundation of artistic expression.

Imitation in Art: In the context of art, imitation does not mean simply copying reality. Instead, it involves representing reality in a way that reveals universal truths or ideals. For example, a tragic play imitates actions that evoke pity and fear, allowing the audience to reflect on human nature and morality.

Difference from Plato's View: Unlike Plato, who criticized art as a mere imitation of the physical world (which is itself an imitation of the ideal forms), Aristotle saw artistic imitation as a creative and meaningful process. He believed art could provide insight into the human condition and the world.

Types of Imitation: Aristotle identifies different forms of imitation based on the medium, object, and manner. For instance, poetry imitates through language and rhythm, while painting imitates through visual representation. Tragedy, a key focus of *Poetics*, imitates noble actions and characters, while comedy imitates less serious or flawed individuals.

In short, for Aristotle, imitation is a central concept in art and human development. It is not mere replication but a creative process that reveals deeper truths about life, morality, and the human condition.

### **3.2.4 The Function of Drama:**

According to Aristotle, the primary function of drama is to provide pleasure through the imitation of action. However, drama also serves a higher purpose: it has the power to educate and morally improve the audience. Through the representation of universal truths and ethical dilemmas, drama can evoke emotions such as pity and fear, leading to a cathartic experience that purges the soul of these emotions.

### **3.2.5 Tragedy:**

Aristotle defines tragedy, "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (Poetics). This definition encapsulates the key elements of tragedy: it is a serious representation of a complete action, expressed in elevated language, and designed to evoke pity and fear in the audience, leading to catharsis. He emphasizes that tragedy is the most "philosophical" form of imitation, as it explores universal human concerns such as good and evil, justice and injustice, and the nature of human suffering.

***Check your progress:***

1. Where was Aristotle born?

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2. Name one important literary work of Aristotle related to drama.

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3. What does the term 'mimesis' mean in Aristotle's theory?

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### **3.2.6 The Elements of Tragedy:**

Aristotle identifies six essential elements of tragedy: plot (mythos), character (ethos), thought (dianoia), diction (lexis), melody (melos), and spectacle (opsis). These elements are hierarchically ordered, with the plot being the most important, followed by the character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle.

#### **Plot (Mythos)**

Plot (or mythos) is the most important element of tragedy. Aristotle defines plot as "the arrangement of the incidents" and emphasizes its role in creating a cohesive and emotionally impactful narrative. He distinguishes the role of simple plots and complex plots in tragedy based on the structure and nature of the events that unfold in the plot.

#### **Simple Plot**

A simple plot is one in which the action moves forward in a straightforward, linear manner without major twists or turns. The change in fortune (from good to bad or vice-versa) occurs without unexpected happenings in the story. The major characteristics of a simple plot are- a) The events follow a logical cause-and-effect sequence. b) There are no surprising or unexpected developments. c) The focus is on the progression of the story rather than intricate narrative devices.

## **Complex Plot**

A complex plot involves reversal (peripeteia) and recognition (anagnorisis), which create twists and turns in the narrative. These elements make the plot more engaging and emotionally impactful. The characteristics of the complex plot include -

**Reversal (Peripeteia):** A sudden change in the protagonist's circumstances, often from good to bad or vice-versa. This change should arise naturally from the structure of the plot. The complication brings a sudden shift in the situation of the protagonist.

**Recognition (Anagnorisis):** A moment of critical discovery or revelation, where the protagonist gains knowledge about their situation, identity or past action. The revelation or denouement intensifies and culminates in the tragic end of the hero. The combination of reversal and recognition creates a more intricate and emotionally resonant narrative.

Aristotle considered complex plots superior to simple plots because they create greater emotional engagement and intellectual satisfaction. The interplay of reversal and recognition allows the audience to experience pity and fear, leading to catharsis (the purging of emotions), which is the ultimate goal of tragedy. The plot, as the soul of tragedy, must be carefully constructed to create a coherent, emotionally engaging, and morally instructive narrative. The structure, logic, and emotional impact of the plot are what make tragedy a powerful and enduring art form.

## **Three Unities**

According to the principles of Aristotle, the plot must have strengthened with the Three Unities, i.e., unity of action, unity of time, and unity of place. These are principles often associated with classical drama. However, it is important to note that Aristotle explicitly discussed only the unity of action in detail. The other two unities (time and place) were later inferred or emphasized by Renaissance and Neoclassical scholars interpreting Aristotle's work.

### **Unity of Action**

This principle limits tragedy to have one central plot, with all events logically connected and contributing to the main narrative. Subplots are not entertained. But, if they exist, they should be minimal and directly related to the primary action. This is the most important unity he considered for a successful plot. He argued that a well-constructed plot must have a clear beginning, middle, and end, with all incidents following a chain of actions with cause and effect. The focus should be on a single, unified action that drives the story forward.

### **Unity of Time**

Aristotle briefly mentions that tragedy typically confines its action to "one revolution of the sun" (a single day). The action of the play should take place within a day, or at most, 24 hours. But he does not rigidly enforce this as a rule. This unity was later emphasized by Renaissance and Neoclassical critics, who sought to formalize dramatic structure.

### **Unity of Place**

Poetics does not explicitly discuss the Unity of Place. This unity was inferred by later scholars who believed that limiting the setting would maintain the focus and realism of the play. The unity of place insists the action of the play to happen in a single location. There should be no change of setting.

### **Character (Ethos)**

Character is the second most important element of tragedy. Aristotle defines character as the moral qualities of the agents in the play. The characters must be good, appropriate, true to life, and consistent. Characters should be believable and consistent, possessing qualities that make them admirable or reprehensible. They should also be appropriate to their social status and the demands of the plot. The protagonist in tragedy should be a person of high status and noble character, but not perfect. The tragic hero should have a flaw (hamartia) that leads to their downfall.

Aristotle also emphasizes the importance of character to the plot. The actions of the characters should be motivated by their moral qualities, and the plot should arise naturally from the decisions and actions of the characters.

### **Thought (Dianoia)**

Thought is the intellectual property of the play, including the themes, arguments, moral reflections, and ideas expressed through the dialogue. Thought is closely related to character, as it reflects the moral and ethical beliefs of the characters. Aristotle suggests that thought is expressed through the speeches of characters, particularly in moments of deliberation and decision-making. This refers to the intellectual content of the play, including the expression of ideas and arguments. Thought is conveyed through dialogue and soliloquies.

### **Diction (Lexis)**

Diction is the language used in the play, including the choice of words, the style of speech, and the use of rhetorical devices. It encompasses the choice of words and how they are used. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of clarity and appropriateness in diction. It should be

appropriate to the characters, the subject matter, and tone of the play. The language should be elevated and poetic, but it should also be clear and understandable to the audience.

Aristotle emphasises ‘clarity and propriety’ as the hallmarks of good writing. He advocates for the use of current vocabulary but also suggests that ‘dignity and charm’ can be achieved through the judicious use of archaic forms, foreign words, specific dialect, or coined words. Metaphorical language is preferred for its ability to surprise and delight the audience. In drama, metaphorical language is particularly effective, while compound words suit lyric poetry, and rare words are appropriate for epic poetry. In prose, clarity and simplicity are paramount, with metaphorical language used sparingly to add novelty.

### **Melody (Melos)**

Melody refers to the musical elements of the play, including the choral odes and the use of music to enhance the emotional impact of the drama. In ancient Greek tragedy, the chorus played a significant role, providing commentary on the action and expressing the emotional and moral themes of the play. Aristotle observes that melody should be integrated into the structure of the play, enhancing the emotional and aesthetic experience of the audience. In Greek tragedy, music played a significant role, enhancing the emotional impact of the drama.

### **Spectacle (Opsis)**

The visual elements of the play, like the costumes, scenery, and special effects are the spectacle. While spectacle can enhance the emotional impact of the drama, Aristotle considers it the least important element of tragedy. He argues that the power of tragedy lies in the plot and the characters, not in the visual effects. However, he acknowledges that spectacle can contribute to the experience of the play, particularly in creating a sense of awe and wonder.

### **3.2.7 Tragic Hero:**

The theory of tragedy reserves the central figure to the tragic hero. Aristotle suggests the tragic hero to be a person of high status and noble character, but they are not perfect. They have a tragic flaw (hamartia) that leads to their fatal tragedy. The fall of the tragic hero is often the result of fate and their own choices, creating a sense of inevitability.

To attain the purpose of tragedy, the persona of a tragic hero must keep a balanced personality. Since the plot revolves around a tragic hero, a character of noble stature who is neither entirely good nor entirely evil will be a perfect choice for the tragedy. The downfall of the hero is often caused by hamartia (a tragic flaw or error in judgment), which leads to the

reversal of fortune. This flaw makes the hero relatable to the audience and their suffering emotionally resonant.

Aristotle emphasizes the importance of the moral qualities of the tragic hero. The hero should be good, but not too good, as their downfall must be the result of their own actions and choices. The error or flaw of the hero should be a moral failing, such as pride (*hubris*), that leads to their downfall.

The downfall of the tragic hero evokes pity and fear in the audience. Pity is aroused because the hero is a person of high status and noble character who suffers a terrible fate. Fear is aroused because the audience recognizes that the fate of the hero could be their own. Through the experience of pity and fear, the audience undergoes a cathartic experience, purging their own emotions and achieving a sense of emotional and moral clarity.

### **3.2.8 Catharsis:**

The emotional purging or purification that occurs in the audience through the tragedy is referred to as catharsis in *Poetics*. It is the sole purpose of tragedy, according to Aristotle. He observes that tragedy must allow the audience to release emotions like pity and fear in a controlled and meaningful way. Through the sufferings of the hero and the resolution of the plot, the audience gains a deeper understanding of human nature and morality. The audience feels pity for the tragic hero, who is generally a good person but suffers due to a flaw (*hamartia*) or a mistake. The suffering of the hero seems undeserved or disproportionate, creating a sense of compassion. The audience experiences fear because they recognize that the fate of a hero could happen to anyone. This fear arises from the universality of the struggles the hero undergoes and the inevitability of their downfall. Aristotle suggests that the purpose of tragedy is to evoke these emotions in the audience, leading to a cathartic experience that purges or purifies the soul of these emotions.

The concept of catharsis has been the subject of much debate among scholars. Some interpret catharsis as a medical metaphor, suggesting that tragedy has a therapeutic effect on the audience, purging them of harmful emotions. Others interpret catharsis as a moral or intellectual process, suggesting that tragedy leads to a deeper understanding of human nature and the human condition. Regardless of the interpretation, catharsis is a key element of tragedy. It is through the experience of pity and fear that the audience achieves a sense of emotional and moral clarity, making tragedy a powerful and transformative art form.

### **3.2.9 Epic Poetry:**

Although Aristotle's *Poetics* focuses primarily on tragedy, he also discusses epic poetry, which he considers a related but distinct form of poetry. Epic poetry, like tragedy, is a form of imitation that represents action through the use of language. However, epic poetry is narrative in form, rather than dramatic, and it is typically longer and more expansive than tragedy.

### **3.2.10 The Elements of Epic Poetry:**

Aristotle identifies several key elements of epic poetry, including plot, character, thought, diction, and melody. These elements are similar to those of tragedy, but they are adapted to the narrative form of epic poetry.

#### **Plot**

The plot of an epic poem should be unified and complete, with a beginning, middle, and end. However, epic poetry allows for greater flexibility in the structure of the plot, as it can include multiple episodes and digressions. The plot of an epic poem should also be complex, involving a change of fortune and a recognition, similar to the plot of a tragedy.

#### **Character**

The characters in an epic poem should be noble and heroic, reflecting the values and ideals of the society in which the poem is set. The protagonist of an epic poem is typically a hero who embodies the virtues of courage, strength, and wisdom. However, the hero may also have flaws that lead to their downfall, similar to the tragic hero.

#### **Thought**

Thought in epic poetry refers to the intellectual content of the poem, including the themes, arguments, and ideas that are expressed through the narrative. The thought of an epic poem should be elevated and profound, reflecting the moral and ethical values of the society.

#### **Diction**

The diction of an epic poem should be elevated and poetic, reflecting the grandeur and seriousness of the subject matter. Epic poetry often uses formal and archaic language, as well as rhetorical devices such as similes, metaphors, and epithets, to enhance the aesthetic quality of the poem.

#### **Melody**

Melody in epic poetry refers to the use of rhythm and meter to create a musical effect. Epic poetry is typically written in a specific meter, such as a dactylic hexameter, which contributes to the overall aesthetic experience of the poem.

*Check your progress:*

1. How many essential elements of tragedy did Aristotle identify?

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2. Which unity did Aristotle explicitly discuss in detail?

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3. What is catharsis in Aristotle's theory of tragedy?

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### **3.2.11 The Differences between Tragedy and Epic Poetry:**

Despite a shared foundation, epic narratives and tragic dramas diverge in crucial ways. While tragedy emerged later, both art forms emulate significant, complete actions, possessing a defined beginning, middle, and conclusion. Their structural similarities extend to plot elements, encompassing complication, resolution, and the potential for complex or simple narratives, including moments of reversal and recognition. Both aim to evoke catharsis, a purging of emotions. However, epic poems, being primarily recited or read, dispense with the musical and visual spectacle integral to tragedy. Furthermore, the narrative form of the epic allows for greater length and scope than the concentrated structure of tragedy. Unlike the singular event focused on by tragedy, epics weave together multiple interconnected episodes, enhancing breadth and grandeur. The reliance on imaginative perception permits the epics to include the improbable occurrences; these would appear ludicrous when staged, yet are accepted within the realm of mental visualization. Such extraordinary elements, enhancing the enjoyment of epic, are encouraged by Aristotle, who favored probable impossibilities over improbable possibilities. The incorporation of supernatural elements in epics exemplifies this. Although epic poetry appeals to sophisticated audiences and functions independently of theatrical devices, Aristotle ultimately prioritizes tragedy. He contends that tragedy, with its musical accompaniment, generates a more intense pleasure, and its concise form achieves a superior unity.

In short, tragedy is a dramatic form, enacted by actors, while epic poetry is a narrative form, recited by a poet. Tragedy is typically shorter and more focused, while epic poetry is longer and more expansive. Tragedy is designed to evoke pity and fear, leading to catharsis, while epic poetry is designed to inspire admiration and awe. Despite these differences, Aristotle considers both tragedy and epic to be forms of imitation that represent action through the use of language. Both forms are capable of achieving the highest artistic and moral goals, making them essential components of the literary tradition.

### **Tragedy and Comedy**

Aristotle observes that poetry imitates two types of actions: the noble actions of good individuals and the base or meaner actions of bad individuals. Tragedy, he argues, originates from the imitation of noble actions, while comedy stems from the imitation of base actions. Epic poetry celebrates the virtues of the hero. The simple noble actions of the hero are glorified in epic terms. Unlike epic, satire always intensifies the meaner follies and wickedness of the hero with blasphemy and contempt. The satire mocks the hero for his meaner characteristics and makes him a laughing stock in front of the public. Tragedy shares similarities with epic poetry, whereas comedy aligns more closely with satire. Aristotle regards tragedy as superior to epic poetry because it encapsulates all the elements of an epic but in a more concise form. This brevity allows tragedy to deliver a more focused and impactful narrative. Tragedy is the exalted form of poetry.

Aristotle considers comedy inferior to tragedy. The roots of comedy extend to satire, which emerged from phallic songs sung to appease Dionysus, the god of fertility. While tragedy portrays individuals as nobler than they are, comedy depicts them as worse, highlighting human vices and follies. The characters in comedy are not inherently vicious but are rendered ludicrous by their flaws, which are neither painful nor destructive. They are not contemptible also. Like poetry, comedy shows not what has happened, but what may happen. The characters are presented in particular situations in which every human being would have acted in the same way. Aristotle distinguishes comedy from satire, stating that comedy ridicules general human weaknesses rather than specific individuals.

### **3.2.12 The Influence of Aristotle's Theory of Drama:**

Poetics has had a profound influence on the development of Western literature and drama. His ideas about the nature of tragedy, the importance of plot and character, and the concept of catharsis have shaped the way that writers, critics, and audiences understand and appreciate drama.

### **3.2.13 The Renaissance and Neoclassicism:**

During the Renaissance, Poetics was rediscovered and became a central text in the study of literature and drama. Renaissance writers and critics, such as Sir Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson, drew on the ideas of Aristotle to develop their theories of drama. The neoclassical movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, which sought to revive the principles of classical antiquity, was heavily influenced by Poetics. Neoclassical writers, such as Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, adhered closely to the principles of unity, coherence, and decorum in their plays.

### **3.2.14 Modern Drama:**

In the modern era, Aristotle continues to influence the theory and practice of drama. Playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and Arthur Miller have drawn on his concepts of plot, character, and catharsis to create powerful and enduring works of drama. Contemporary critics and theorists, such as Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke, have also engaged with the ideas of Aristotle, using them as a foundation for their theories of literature and drama.

### **3.2.15 Aristotle's Observation on Style:**

Aristotle believed good writing should be clear and correct. He thought using everyday words was best. But he also wanted writing to be impressive and pleasing. To achieve this, he suggested using old words, words from other languages, local slang, and even making up new words. These kinds of words can surprise the reader. He also preferred using metaphors over plain language. Aristotle thought the best writing mixes all these different kinds of words in a thoughtful way. Compound words are the most suitable for the lyric, rare or unfamiliar words suit the epic form, and metaphorical use of language is best for drama. In the "Rhetoric" Aristotle comments that common, familiar words are best for prose that deals with everyday subjects. But metaphorical language may be employed to introduce an element of novelty and surprise. Simple language could be better for prose. Use too many phrases, extra bits in parentheses, or confusing words should be avoided. Sentences can be written in two ways: a simple way or a more structured way. The simple way is just a complete sentence with a start and a finish. The structured way is easier to understand and sounds better.

Aristotle's Poetics remains one of the most important and influential works in the history of literary criticism. His theory of drama, with its emphasis on the importance of plot, character, and catharsis, has shaped the way that we understand and appreciate drama for over two millennia. While the Poetics is a product of its time, reflecting the values and beliefs of ancient Greek society, its insights into the nature of drama and the human condition continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. The theory of drama is not only a valuable tool for understanding the works of the past, but also a source of inspiration for the creation of new works of drama. By engaging with the ideas of Aristotle, writers, directors, and critics can continue to explore the power and potential of drama as a form of artistic expression and a means of understanding the human experience.

***Check your progress:***

1. From what did comedy originate according to Aristotle?
2. Name two Renaissance writers influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*?
3. What type of language did Aristotle consider best for prose dealing with everyday subjects?

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### **3.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of the earliest and most influential works on dramatic theory. Studying it provides a foundational understanding of how drama was conceptualized in ancient Greece. It helps students trace the evolution of dramatic forms and conventions, from classical Greek tragedy to modern theater and film. Aristotle identifies: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. Understanding the six key elements of drama helps students analyze and create compelling narratives. His emphasis on plot as the "soul of tragedy" highlights the importance of structure, coherence, and causality in storytelling. Aristotle's concept of catharsis helps students and practitioners create works that resonate deeply with audiences, evoking powerful emotional responses. Aristotle's concept of the tragic hero—a noble character with a fatal flaw (*hamartia*)—provides a framework for analyzing character development and moral complexity. This understanding helps students create relatable and multidimensional characters, whether in literature, theater, or film. Aristotle's *Poetics* is deeply rooted in his broader philosophical ideas about ethics, psychology, and aesthetics. Studying his theory of drama helps students connect literature and theatre to larger philosophical questions about art, emotion, and human behavior. Aristotle's principles remain relevant to contemporary forms of storytelling, including film, television, and digital media. Studying his theory helps students analyze and create modern narratives that adhere to or challenge classical conventions. Aristotle's work intersects with fields such as philosophy, psychology, ethics, and cultural studies. Studying his theory of drama encourages students to explore the connections between literature and other disciplines, fostering interdisciplinary thinking and research. Aristotle views drama as a means of educating and morally improving the audience. Studying his theory encourages students to reflect on the role of art in shaping societal values and individual behavior.

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## 3.4 Glossary

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**Anagnorisis (Recognition):**

A moment in a play when a character makes a critical discovery, often leading to a reversal of fortune. For example, Oedipus realizing he has killed his father and married his mother.

**Catharsis:**

The purging or purification of emotions, particularly pity and fear, through the experience of watching a tragedy. Aristotle argues that tragedy achieves this emotional release in the audience.

**Comedy:**

A form of drama that represents characters as worse than they are, often highlighting human follies and vices. Aristotle considers comedy inferior to tragedy but acknowledges its role in providing amusement and social critique.

**Epic Poetry:**

A narrative form of poetry that shares similarities with tragedy, such as the imitation of serious actions. However, epics are longer, more expansive, and meant to be recited rather than performed.

**Imitation (Mimesis):**

The representation or imitation of human actions, emotions, and life. Aristotle considers imitation the basis of all art, including drama.

**Peripeteia (Reversal of Fortune):**

A sudden change in circumstances, often from good to bad or vice versa, that drives the plot of a tragedy. For example, a character's plan to achieve success backfires, leading to disaster.

**Tragedy:**

A form of drama that imitates serious and complete actions, evoking pity and fear in the audience and leading to catharsis. Aristotle defines tragedy as the highest form of drama.

**Poetics:**

Aristotle's treatise on the theory of literature and drama, focusing on the principles of tragedy, epic poetry, and, to a lesser extent, comedy.

**Mimesis:**

The act of imitation or representation, which Aristotle considers the foundation of all art. Drama imitates human actions and emotions to create a meaningful experience for the audience.

**Hamartia:**

A tragic flaw or error in judgment that leads to the downfall of the tragic hero. It is a key element in Aristotle's concept of tragedy.

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### 3.5 Sample Questions

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#### 3.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. What is the primary focus of Aristotle's Poetics?
  - (a) Comedy
  - (b) Tragedy**
  - (c) Satire
  - (d) Epic poetry
2. According to Aristotle, what is the most important element of tragedy?
  - (a) Character
  - (b) Plot**
  - (c) Diction
  - (d) Spectacle
3. What does Aristotle mean by "catharsis"?
  - (a) The resolution of the plot
  - (b) The purging of emotions like pity and fear**
  - (c) The introduction of the tragic hero
  - (d) The use of song in tragedy
4. Which of the following is NOT one of the six elements of tragedy identified by Aristotle?
  - (a) Thought
  - (b) Melody
  - (c) Setting**
  - (d) Spectacle
5. What is the term for the tragic hero's fatal flaw?
  - (a) Anagnorisis
  - (b) Peripeteia
  - (c) Hamartia**
  - (d) Catharsis
6. What does "peripeteia" mean in Aristotle's theory?

- (a) A moment of recognition or discovery
  - (b) A reversal of fortune**
  - (c) The tragic hero's downfall
  - (d) The use of metaphorical language
7. What is "anagnorisis"?
- (a) The tragic hero's fatal flaw
  - (b) A moment of recognition or discovery**
  - (c) The resolution of the plot
  - (d) The use of song in tragedy
8. What is the primary purpose of tragedy, according to Aristotle?
- (a) To entertain the audience
  - (b) To teach moral lessons
  - (c) To evoke pity and fear and achieve catharsis**
  - (d) To showcase the skills of actors
9. What does Aristotle consider the least important element of tragedy?
- (a) Plot
  - (b) Character
  - (c) Spectacle**
  - (d) Thought
10. What does Aristotle consider the best kind of tragic plot?
- (a) One that focuses on spectacle and visual effects
  - (b) One that has a simple, straightforward structure
  - (c) One that includes a complex plot with reversal and recognition**
  - (d) One that avoids any form of emotional engagement

### 3.5.2 Short Answer Questions:

1. What are the six elements of tragedy according to Aristotle, and why is plot considered the most important?
2. How does Aristotle define the tragic hero, and what role does hamartia play in their downfall?
3. What is catharsis, and how does Aristotle believe tragedy achieves it?
4. How do peripeteia and anagnorisis contribute to the effectiveness of a tragic plot?
5. How does Aristotle's theory of drama influence modern storytelling in literature, theatre, and film?

### **3.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Aristotle's concept of tragedy and tragic hero.
2. Define the following terms in view of Aristotle's Poetics - epic poetry, satire, tragedy, comedy etc.
3. The interplay of mimesis, catharsis, and hamartia in Aristotle's theory of tragedy.

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## **3.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Golden, Leon and O.B. Hardison. Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature. University Presses of Florida, 1981.
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6. Fergusson, Francis. The Idea of a Theater. Princeton UP, 2015.
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## **Unit - 4: Features of Elizabethan Drama**

### **Structure**

- 4.0** Introduction
- 4.1** Objectives
- 4.2** Features of Elizabethan Drama
  - 4.2.1** Historical Context of Elizabethan Drama
  - 4.2.2** Features of Elizabethan Drama
  - 4.2.3** Major Playwrights and their Works
- 4.3** Learning Outcomes
- 4.4** Glossary
- 4.5** Sample Questions
- 4.6** Suggested Learning Resources

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### **4.0 Introduction**

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Elizabethan England saw a remarkable blossoming of arts and literature. Renaissance, humanism, protestant zeal, geographical and scientific discovery all contributed to this upsurge of creative power. Dramas took a change in this age. Though drama existed in England even before the Elizabethan age, in the form of medieval morality and mystery plays, the full artistic glory came about only under Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603). Drama at this time came to be known as the “Drama of the Empress” because it thrived under her patronage. She was an arts-loving and an important patron of art in England, who took part actively in encouraging drama and literature. She gave patronage to the playwrights and playing companies, such as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, which greatly encouraged the development of skills in drama. During her reign, many theatres like ‘The Theatre,’ ‘The Globe,’ ‘The Rose,’ and ‘The Swan’ were constructed. The commoners as well as the rich had access to drama. The origin of the first English comedy and the first blank verse tragedy occurred in the mid-1550s to 1560s. Ralph Roister Doister by Nicolas Udall is considered to be, more or less, the first comedy to be written in the English language around 1553. The earliest of the blank verse plays was presented before the queen in 1562, known as Gorboduc, and is thus marked as the first English blank verse tragedy. Elizabethan drama detached itself from dominative religion, which had been a predominant theme in medieval mystery and morality plays. The Elizabethan drama has

oftentimes employed, if not always, a poetical meter (rhythm) for dialogue, most frequently of all an iambic pentameter of five feet (pairs of syllables unstressed followed by stressed).

The learners will study Elizabethan drama with a view to understanding the theatrical traditions, themes, and artistic forms characteristic of the Elizabethan ‘golden’ age of English literature. Through the study of the chapter, the learners will be in a good position to understand the development of characterization, poetic language, and dramatic forms that have shaped modern-day theatre. Moreover, a strong grasp of Elizabethan drama will allow students to analyze and interpret its major components confidently, thereby making it easier to write corresponding questions in the examination.

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## **4.1 Objectives**

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Objectives of this chapter on ‘Features of Elizabethan Drama’ are as below:

- To read and understand the historical context of Elizabethan drama.
- To learn key features of Elizabethan Drama.
- To acquaint learners with the famous Elizabethan playwrights and their works.
- To develop aesthetic sense in the reader so as to examine theatrical conventions and performance styles.
- To help learners prepare examination-based questions without any difficulty.

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## **4.2 Features of Elizabethan Drama**

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### **4.2.1 Historical Context of Elizabethan Drama:**

Elizabethan drama was deeply influenced by the political, social, and cultural context of 16th-century England. The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was marked by stability, national pride, and a spurt of Renaissance vigor, all of which contributed to ‘the golden age of English literature’. Several major historical events impacted the themes, styles, and popularity of drama at this time:

**Political Influences:** During Queen Elizabeth’s reign, England emerged from the defeat of the Spanish Armada in the year 1588 as a mighty nation. The defeat generated a strong sense of nationalism manifest in the drama of the time. Playwrights such as William Shakespeare incorporated themes of nationalism, the supremacy of authority, and divine appointment of kings

in their works, with King Henry V providing perhaps the most famous line: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.” The Tudor dynasty also actively sought to establish the basis of its legitimacy, with drama serving the purpose of political propaganda. History plays such as Richard III and Henry IV by Shakespeare portrayed views of previous monarchs that oftentimes concurred with the interests of the ruling monarchs. The court of Elizabeth also put on extravagant performances, thus sealing the image of the Queen as the patroness of the arts.

**Social Influences:** The Elizabethan society followed hierarchical and very strict with class systems. Nevertheless, there arose great opportunities for drama to cross over social divides. The establishment of permanent theaters such as ‘The Globe’, ‘The Rose’, and ‘The Swan’, paved a way for the aristocracy and even common folk to interact with art. Groundlings would for a penny be able to witness the plays; in essence, the theater became an experience for each class. In the plays, the themes of social order, ambition, and human struggles came forth. Christopher Marlowe’s masterpiece, Doctor Faustus, for example, explores the repercussions of having too much ambition, while William Shakespeare’s Hamlet puts moral dilemmas and personality to the test. The messages were loud and clear, crossing across the various classes.

**Cultural and Religious Influences:** The Elizabethan era was deeply shaped by the Renaissance, a cultural movement that emphasized humanism, exploration, and artistic innovation. Moreover, the renewed interest in classical Greek and Roman texts encouraged playwrights to use elaborate narrative techniques, poetic dialogue, and complex characterizations. Religious strife between Protestantism and Catholicism also helped shape the form of the dramas. After Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church, England became a Protestant nation under Elizabeth I. Religious plays that dominated the medieval theater were on a decline, and playwrights turned their attention toward the secular, mythological, and human experiences instead. The supernatural, which was both feared and fascinated by Elizabethans, became a recurring element in plays like Macbeth, where the witches symbolize fate and the unknown:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air.”(Macbeth, Act 1, Scene i)

Additionally, censorship by the state ensured that playwrights avoided direct criticism of the monarchy or religious authorities. Instead, they used allegory and historical settings to discuss contemporary issues indirectly.

**Economic growth:** The economic prosperity of the Elizabethan era allowed for the development of professional theater companies. This era saw wealthy patrons supporting playwrights, their works met with such wide-range acclaim that many were published in printed scripts. The

introduction of the printing press opened the door for drama to be more readily available, thus assuring it a continued existence beyond the actual performances.

Though it is an inevitable fact that the drama declined after Shakespeare. The decline in drama at the end of the Elizabethan Age was primarily occasioned by political and social changes such as the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 and the subsequent accession of James I, the court of which favored masques over traditional plays. Further, growing Puritan influences led to the increased opposition to theatrical performances as immoral. There was an equally disastrous outbreak of the bubonic plague in the early 17th century, resulting in the closing of many theatres and disrupting the flourishing theatrical culture. All these factors contributed to the waning of the eager Elizabethan drama. The audience itself had changed slowly: instead of plain people who wanted a story and knowledge, a larger and larger part were those who attended plays largely because they had nothing else to do. Shakespeare's successors catered to the depraved tastes of this new audience which led to closing of theaters in 1642.

In the next section, we will examine the key themes and characteristics of Elizabethan drama, highlighting what made it distinct and influential.

***Check your progress:***

1. Which event in 1588 strongly influenced Elizabethan drama?
2. Which playwright explored ambition in *Doctor Faustus*?
3. Which factor contributed to the decline of Elizabethan drama?

**4.2.2 Features of Elizabethan Drama:**

The Elizabethan drama was, during the last part of the sixteenth and the early years of the seventeenth centuries, characterized by wide-ranging themes, numerous genres, ornate language, and new styles of performance. Some important aspects of Elizabethan drama:

**1. Structural Features:** The structural features of Elizabethan drama—first in the five-act division, blank verse and prose, the features of soliloquies and asides, act and scene divisions—were among the most influential in determining the storytelling methods of their times. They enabled dramatists to construct complex plots, draw nuanced characters, and reach the audience on an emotional level. Their influence remains apparent today in modern drama and literature.

**a) Five-act structure:** As one of the more defining characteristics of Elizabethan drama, the five-act structure was influenced by Roman playwrights such as Seneca and Plautus. The structure was formalized by the German playwright and theorist Gustav Freytag in his

description of Freytag's pyramid, which pulls together certain progressing stages into five concise phases: Exposition, Rising action, Climax, Falling action, and Denouement or Resolution. By such example: In Shakespeare's Hamlet, one notices the five act sequence: Act I-Provides information about the ghost of King Hamlet and how Hamlet is actually set out for revenge. Act II-There is a rise of tension as Hamlet pretends to be mad. Act III-Surpasses climactically with the "To be or not to be"-soliloquy-and ends with the announcement of Polonius's murder. Act IV-Consists of the falling action that deals with Ophelia's madness and Laertes's return to Elsinore. Act V concludes the action with the physical combat of the duel and the quick deaths of several characters including Hamlet himself- "The rest is silence." (Hamlet Act V, Scene ii). This structure would gradually build up tension and keep the audience interested and engaged throughout the play.

**b) Use of blank verse and prose:** The Elizabethan drama made use of blank verse-unrhymed iambic pentameter-another rhythm for dialogue to give it a natural speech. Generally blank verse is evidently used for noble or serious characters, prose for lower-class characters or comic relief. Shakespeare juxtaposes blank verse in Macbeth to show the scale and complexity of Macbeth's internal struggle:

"Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee." (Macbeth, Act II, Scene i)

This passage reflects the poetic intensity of blank verse, deepening the dramatic significance.

On the other hand, the prose for lower-class characters, for example, in Hamlet, when the gravediggers exchange jokes about death:

"A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,

For and a shrouding sheet;

O, a pit of clay for to be made

For such a guest is meet." (Hamlet, Act V, Scene i)

This change in language style made plays more dynamic and relatable to audiences from different social backgrounds.

**c) Soliloquies and Asides:** The soliloquy and the aside were vital structural aspects of Elizabethan drama that made these characters put their thoughts and feelings unrestrainedly to the audience. Soliloquies enabled deep psychological insight into the feelings and dilemmas of any character. Hamlet's "to be or not to be", perhaps the most famous soliloquy in all literature, contemplates existence:

“To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them?” (Hamlet, Act III, Scene I)

The audience is granted such access to Hamlet’s soul as far as the dramatics go; it is a device that heightens in dramatic intensity.

Asides allowed for brief comments made directly to the audience, disclosing private thoughts or plans. Unlike soliloquies, these were generally short speeches in the context of larger dialogue. In Othello, Iago repeatedly uses the aside to express his treacherous intentions:

“O, you are well tuned now!  
But I I’ll set down the pegs that make this music,  
As honest as I am.” (Othello, Act II, Scene I)

Such a moment gave a definite advantage to the audience over the rest of the characters, enhancing the dramatic irony.

**2. Thematic Elements:** Elizabethan drama presents rich treatment of a wide range of thematic elements concerning human nature and society. Among the various popular subjects are love, power, ambition, vengeance, justice, fate, destiny, the supernatural, and moral dilemmas. These themes lend depth to the plays and thereby appeal to the audience across all regimes and cultures, giving dramatic works eternity.

**a) Love, Power, and Ambition:** Love in Elizabethan drama becomes a cause for great joy and also an anguish. The theme of love is well epitomized in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, which shows how love becomes a fateful instrument for uniting young lovers, leading them from conflict to tragedy because of their families. Another example of love, twisted with power and ambition is represented in Macbeth, where Lady Macbeth tantalizes her husband’s love for her as a bypass for him to satisfy his ambition for the throne. In Antony and Cleopatra, love becomes a motivation to make political decisions, where Antony leans toward divorcing Rome duties for the love of Cleopatra and ultimately leading to his downfall. These plays truly illuminate how love, when twisted with power and ambition, can bring greatness only to serve as a bedrock of destruction.

**b) Revenge and Justice:** The theme of revenge and justice is central to many Elizabethan dramas, often challenging the morality of vengeance. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a prototypical

revenge tragedy. Prince Hamlet is on the quest for avenging his father's murder by his uncle, King Claudius. The internal conflict in his mind contrasting action versus inaction, justice versus morality itself, spirals into a pattern of tragic events, leading into his own demise, among others. It is similarly reflected in *The Spanish Tragedy* of Thomas Kyd, where Hieronimo, the protagonist, seeks to avenge his son's murder by means of a play-within-a-play, which leads to a violent culmination. These works reflect the Elizabethan obsession with revenge and the moral dilemmas of justice.

**c) Fate And Destiny:** The Elizabethan drama often deals with the contrasting nature of fate and free will. Witches' prophecies in *Macbeth* set Macbeth on the path toward kingship; however, a freestanding and self-sure aim of kingship also leads to his downfall, bringing the resolution of whether fate was destined for him or inflicted by his own actions. Likewise, we have the concept of the lovers being "star-crossed" in *Romeo and Juliet*, putting their fates in a sealed box from the very beginning. Despite their attempts to defy their circumstances, fate seems to work against them, ultimately leading to their untimely deaths. This theme resonates with the Elizabethan belief in the influence of destiny while also allowing room for personal choices to shape outcomes.

**d) The Supernatural (Ghosts, Witches, Omens):** Most of the plays raised diverse supernatural phenomena, fuelling the dramatic tension and foreshadowing events. Besides containing ghosts directing Hamlet toward revenge, thus igniting the plot of the entire play, the witches of *Macbeth* are also responsible for the prophecies concerning the rise and fall of Macbeth and which dictate his actions as they inspire paranoia. Such supernatural forces reflect a vast and pervasive pecuniary interest with these very chrysalis mediators in Elizabethan's consciousness. The perspective of the same augur could be eclipsed into *Julius Caesar*. Calpurnia, the wife of Caesar, dreams of Caesar being murdered that morning, while the soothsayer cautions, saying, "Beware the Ides of March." These events, which assume a somewhat supernatural proportion, depict the constant conflict raging over the fate of man, ambition, and the teeth of its consequences.

**e) Religious and Moral Dilemmas:** Private interests against moral or religious beliefs are among the themes generally examined in Elizabethan drama. In *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, its protagonist, Dr. Faustus, struggles on the temptation of unlimited knowledge and powers that compel him to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for worldly pleasures. The strife within himself of being repentant and at the same time indulging accentuates the moral dilemmas of sin versus redemption. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare considers moral, justice, and

hypocrisy; Angelo administers the law on others while clearly being subject to his selfish pleasures. Such a balance of freedom and captivity reflected the Elizabethan conscience's preoccupations over salvation, sins, and divine justice.

**3. Characterization:** The character archetypes at stake grant Elizabethan drama an earthen depth, complexity, and emotional intensity. The tragic heroes with flaws, the comic relief of the clowns, the strong females played by men, the Machiavellian villain, and, finally, the fool or jester, without whom no Elizabethan drama is complete. What these provided were enthralling storytelling along with a reflection of the socio-political and philosophical ethos of that period.

**a) Tragic Heroes and Their Fatal Flaws (Hamartia):** One of the hallmarks of Elizabethan tragedy is the presence of a tragic hero noble in stature, but flawed to the point of self-destruction; this is what hamartia best describes. For instance, Hamlet who is frequently regarded as the best tragic hero. His tragic flaw is that he is indecisive and prone to too much reflection on his actions. Due to his inability to carry out revenge for his father's murder in a timely manner, Hamlet ends up causing the death of others and putting himself in a position to die. Further down the list is Macbeth, whose hamartia is unchecked ambition, inspired first by the witches' words and Lady Macbeth's harangue into an aggressive, fatal attack on King Duncan. Macduff's individuality soon ends with his self-doubt and lust for power. Another celebrated tragic hero is Othello, where excessive jealousy becomes his hamartia, beautifully twisted into making use of Iago, resulting in the wrongful slaying of Desdemona, then on to Othello's tragic death. These heroes seem to be the embodiment of Elizabethan ideas about the consequences of humanity's weakness and fate.

**b) Clown Characters and Comic Relief:** While the themes are often dark and tragic, Elizabethan drama brought in comic relief to break the intensity of a painful moment and entertain audiences. Clown characters, played by gifted comic actors, provided laughter through wit, wordplay, and physical comedy. In Hamlet, the gravediggers joke about death in a humorous exchange just before the tragic climax occurs. Likewise, the drunken porter scene in Macbeth comes right after the murder of Duncan, affording the audience a moment of comic relief to release tension. Another good example is Sir John Falstaff from Henry IV, one of Shakespeare's most beloved comedy characters. His wit, cowardice, and amusing self-indulgence entertain while simultaneously giving social commentary on honor and leadership. These comedic interruptions made sure that the plays appealed equally to all and sundry, from the doted elite to the pitiful commoners in the pit of the theatre.

**c) Villains and Machiavellian Characters:** Elizabethan dramas usually feature complex and manipulative villains, many of them imbued with Machiavellian doctrine-cunning, deceit, and ruthless ambition. Iago from Othello is the perfect Machiavellian villain, who expertly manipulates Othello's trust, planting seeds of jealousy that lead to destruction. Similarly, Richard III in Shakespeare's Richard III is a power-hungry schemer who deceives and murders his way to the throne. In Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, Barabas is yet another Machiavellian figure who uses treachery and deception as tools for wealth and revenge. These very characters, though morally corrupt, command audience appreciation for both their intellect and ability to manipulate others, illustrating an Elizabethan fascination for power and corruption.

**d) Role of the Fool or Jester:** The fool or jester was an important character in Elizabethan drama, being the entertainer and at the same time the wisdom-bearer. While other clown characters were generally viewed as comic-relief characters, fools were, in most instances, intelligent and used humour to disclose what others chose to ignore. In King Lear, the Fool is the one among the few characters showing Lear where he has made poor judgments with the use of riddles and irony to illustrate his mistakes. In Twelfth Night, jester Feste plays a similar role by using his wit and his song to expose the foolishness of other characters. These jesters were often the only characters who could speak freely to the nobility, so making them a crucial element in the process of storytelling and social commentary.

**4. Language and Literary Devices:** Elizabethan drama is distinguished by the richness and complexity of language and use of various literary devices giving greater meaning, emotion, and dramatic expression. Not having to peer too far, playwrights like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson had all the poetry and rhetoric of expression mastered to the degree that their works have attained immortality. Into this configuration, the elements of iambic pentameter, metaphors and imagery, puns and irony, dramatic monologues and dialogues, and rhetorical devices play a major role in establishing the beauty and force of the Elizabethan drama.

**a) Use of Iambic Pentameter:** Iambic pentameter, a rhythmic pattern of five iambs (unstressed-stressed syllables) per line, was the dominant meter in Elizabethan drama. This structure provided a natural flow to dialogue, making it both rhythmic and demonstrative. Shakespeare adopted the use of iambic pentameter with various variations throughout Hamlet:

“To be, or not to be: that is the question.” (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene i)

This well-known soliloquy follows the iambic pentameter pattern and provides an insight toward Hamlet's inner conflict between life and death. The meter was excellently used by Marlowe in his Doctor Faustus:

“Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” (Doctor Faustus, Act 5, Scene i)

Faustus, with a gifted command over the musicality of iambic pentameter, is here extolling the beauty of Helen of Troy, pulling the drama that much higher due to that lovely form of the poem.

**b) Metaphors, Similes, and Imagery:** Elizabethan playwrights frequently employ metaphors, similes, and vivid imagery to potentiate layered meanings and striking comparisons. Macbeth is steeped in metaphor:

“Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more.” (Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5)

Macbeth compares life to a shadowy stage performer, emphasizing the essence of transience and futility. Similarly, in Romeo and Juliet, Romeo wields a simile in praise of Juliet's beauty:

“It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.” (Romeo and Juliet, Act 1, Scene 5)

That simile commands Juliet's brightness against the background of darkness, proving her beauty is surpassing in enabling this contrast.

**c) Pun, Irony, and Wordplay:** There are lots of puns, irony, and wordplay in Elizabethan drama, adding great humor and depth to the dialogue. Shakespeare was especially proficient at puns. Mercutio makes a dark pun even as he is dying in Romeo and Juliet:

“Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.” (Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, scene 1)

Here, “grave” serves a double meaning- both serious and literally in the grave. His effective use of dramatic irony can be seen in Othello: Here, the audience knows of Iago's deception and Othello remains oblivious. This heightens the tragic tension.

**d) Use of Rhetorical Devices:** The anaphora, alliteration, and antithesis were among the common rhetorical devices used in Elizabethan dramatists to heighten the power of speech. In Richard III, Shakespeare employs anaphora:

“And thus I cloth my naked villainy  
With odd old ends stolen forth of holy writ,  
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.” (Richard III, Act 1, Scene 3)

The anaphora of “And” drives home further Richard's manipulative nature. The use of rhetorical questions as well as irony stands out in Julius Caesar through Antony:

“You all did love him once, not without cause:

What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?” (Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2).

Here, rhetorical questions create pathos, putting the audience against the conspirators.

**5. Performance and Staging:** The very physical configuration of theatres played a distinctive role on the staging and performance of Elizabethan drama, along with the limitations of stage technology and audience engagement. Unlike modern theatre, which plays a vital role regarding stage scenery and lighting effects, Elizabethan plays put great stress on language, costumes, and imagination based on the spectator's paradigm. Some of the important features to note in performance include open-air theatres like ‘The Globe’, very few stage settings, male actors playing female roles, and a very engaged audience.

**a) Open-Air Theatres (e.g., The Globe Theatre):** Elizabethan drama took a centre stage and was mainly performed outdoors, with The Globe Theatre-the most associated with William Shakespeare-being the most famous of such locations. Established by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599, The Globe was a circular, three-storied structure that had a large open central yard where spectators known as “groundlings” would stand to watch performances. Other audiences who could afford it could sit in covered galleries, while the nobility would sit in the best-placed seats. Since no artificial light was available, the performances often had to take place in the daylight, forcing the actors to fall back on natural facial expressions and exaggerated movements to attract spectators. For example, as in Julius Caesar, the assassination scene could have been staged in broad daylight; it was up to the actors to convey tension and horror through inflection and gestures. The open-air environment also allowed room for a free passage of sound, such as a roll of drums to announce a battle or trumpets to herald a royal entrance.

**b) Lack of Elaborate Scenery; Reliance on Language and Costumes:** The Elizabethan theatres lacked scenic backdrops, relying purely on descriptive, figurative language and representative props to create the setting. For example, in Hamlet, there is a transition from the Danish royal court to a graveyard without changing much on stage. In other words, Shakespeare employs conversation and props like Yorick's skull to set the environment afresh.

The costume became an important ally in sumptuousness. Because there were no elaborate settings, actors wore opulent costumes revealing the rank and personality of their characters. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, for instance, would wear regal attire in the play to

symbolize their even course to power. Some costs were taken or rewarded by a donation from an aristocrat because law was buying-clothes to show rank.

The actors also used props to set the scene in the audience's mind. For example, the actors used a throne or scepter for setting a royal court or a torch or sword for convincingly portraying a battle. Again, our Shakespeare in Henry V uses this occasion of the prologue to shamelessly mention those battles in large scales that were impossible to depict on stage.

“Can this cockpit hold

The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram

Within this wooden O the very casques

That did affright the air at Agincourt?” (Henry V, Prologue)

This acknowledges a limitation of a stage and requests the audience to stretch their imagination: to envisage great scenes of war and battle.

**c) Use of Chorus and Messengers in Some Plays:** The Greek chorus was an important part of classical drama, but instead of using them in the classic Greek sense, Elizabethan playwrights changed their roles. Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, instead, uses the chorus to introduce and comment upon the action, just as is done in Seneca's plays. In Shakespeare's Henry V, the Chorus speaks directly to the audience to beg their pardon for being incapable of presenting great battles that indeed took place and to ask that they do not judge the theatre too harshly:

“O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend

The brightest heaven of invention!” (Henry V, Prologue)

Since Elizabethan theatres had no elaborate scenery and off-stage action events were common, the role of a stage messenger was created to give news of significant events taking place off-stage. In Macbeth, a messenger warns Lady Macduff of the coming assault on her household, which acts as a dramatic device in heightening the tension.

**d) Male Actors Playing Female Roles:** In Elizabethan England, women were not allowed to act on stage: Hence, all female roles were performed by young boys before their voices deepened. This order of things was to some extent reflected in the way female characters were treated, written, and performed. Quite a number of very strong and memorable female characters did make their entrance in Elizabethan drama across the centuries with practices such as Viola disguised as a man in Twelfth Night, Lady Macbeth in Macbeth, Portia in The Merchant of Venice, Juliet in Romeo and Juliet, and Desdemona in Othello.

**6. Genre Blending:** Elizabethan Drama is characterized by its particular propensity toward a mix between Tragedy, Comedy, and History. Its authors and playwrights strove to combine tragedy together with comedy, pastoral elements with romantic comedies, and political with historical themes in the plays. The mixing of these genres allowed deeper emotional engagement and a more dynamic spectacle.

**a) Mixing Tragedy, Comedy, and History (Tragicomedy):** Tragicomedy became the popular dramatic form of the Elizabethan age, literature that had tragedies but with interspersions of comedy-of the supernatural or improbable, with humorous moments and surprising close. Such blurring of emotional boundaries gave rise to deeper character play that produces significant divergence in character depiction. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, a near-legendary tragicomedy, appeared in 1596-1599. He interweaves elements of tragedy with comedy. The serious plot centers on a Jewish moneylender, Shylock, who demands a pound of flesh from a merchant, Antonio, who has defaulted on his loan. This line of thought is tragically scary, dramatic, revengeful, justice-dominated, and discrimination-horrified. But the thread of the love between Bassanio and Portia, intermixed with the casket test and ridiculous disguises, lends comedic devices to the sad line. Mostly, it portrays a happy ending (no laughs for Shylock), thus further fortifying the tragic-comic tone. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is another of such cases wherein he plumbs the depths of motives for justice, corruption, immorality, and power, reminiscent of a considerably dark and tragic paradigm in some sections. Yet, comic elements are intertwined, notably through that of Lucio, who mocks the honoring fools and, thus, offers a sense of razing satire on the Viennese legal system. *The Faithful Shepherdess* by Beaumont and Fletcher made the genre distinct and palpable around 1608. It shows a pastoral romance harbors serious issues of chastity and virtue to resolve.

**b) Pastoral Elements in Romantic Comedies:** Pastoral drama, which romanticized country life and portrayed shepherds, nature, and courtly love, was a large influence on Elizabethan romantic comedies. Playwrights employed pastoral settings as a foil to the corruptions of court life so that characters could examine love and identity in a freer and more innocent setting. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599-1600) is staged in the Forest of Arden, a traditional pastoral environment in which characters flee the threats and guile of court life. The forest provides cover for Rosalind, heroine of the play, to assume the disguise of a man (Ganymede) and try out Orlando's devotion, introducing the twists of mistaken identity and comedy. Rustic simplicity in its ideal form is contrasted with the intrigue of the court, evidencing pastoral influence. *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream by Shakespeare (1595-1596) incorporates romance, fantasy, and the pastoral form since much of the action in the play unfolds within an idyllic woodland forest that's peopled with fairies and troublesome sprites. The characters break free from the limitations of Athenian society, as in pastoral literature, where love and comedy thrive in nature. John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* adheres to a pastoral tradition, with shepherds and shepherdesses who experience love and virtue in an idealized rural environment.

**c) Political and Historical Themes in History Plays:** Elizabethan play histories were politically charged, usually mirroring concerns of the time regarding monarchy, legitimacy, and power. England's past rulers and political battles were dramatized by these plays and related to the here and now. Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1592-1594) represents Richard III as a shrewd, ambitious villain, showing fears about political corruption. Richard's Machiavellian methods, manipulation, and ruthlessness in achieving the throne reproduce fears about tyrannical leaders. It is Tudor propaganda, validating the Elizabethan reign by presenting Richard's loss at Bosworth as the victory of divine justice in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1 and 2* (1597-1598). These plays trace the transfer of power from a weak king (Henry IV) to the powerful and charismatic Henry V. Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599) celebrates English nationalism and the heroism of King Henry V, especially in the renowned "St. Crispin's Day Speech", which motivates his outnumbered soldiers before the Battle of Agincourt. Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592) historical drama explores the downfall of King Edward II, highlighting themes of political intrigue, betrayal, and the struggle between monarchy and the nobility. It also addresses the controversial topic of Edward's relationship with Piers Gaveston, which was scandalous at the time, making it one of the earliest examples of an openly discussed same-sex relationship in English drama.

**6. Influence of Classical Drama Influence of Seneca (Tragedy) and Plautus/Terence (Comedy) on Elizabethan Drama:** Elizabethan drama owed a great debt to classical Greek and Roman conventions, especially the tragedies of Seneca and the comedies of Plautus and Terence. These classical playwrights supplied English dramatists with structural, thematic, and stylistic models, which they borrowed and developed to form a uniquely English theatrical tradition. Both the use of the chorus and messengers, as well as imitation of Greek and Roman dramatic tradition, serve to illustrate that influence. Perhaps the most overt influence of Seneca can be found in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), which set the fashion for the popular revenge tragedy genre. Kyd adopted Seneca's structure of vengeance-seeking protagonist,

extreme soliloquies, and brutal action. The hero, Hieronimo, as with most of Seneca's tragic heroes, is motivated by a sense of justice but ultimately destroyed by it. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601) also adheres to this Senecan model of revenge, in which Hamlet procrastinates in avenging his father's assassination, indulging in profound philosophical introspection and moral conundrums, similar to the characters in Seneca's tragedies like *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens*. Seneca's tragedies habitually featured ghosts and supernatural omens as devices, which were to become the norm in Elizabethan drama. King Hamlet's ghost in *Hamlet* is an obvious Senecan touch, leading the hero to seek revenge, just as the ghost in *Thyestes*. Again, in *Macbeth*, the visions of Banquo's ghost and the prophecies of the witches conform to Seneca's employment of supernatural powers to foretell catastrophe. Whereas Greek tragedies tended to stage violence off-stage, Seneca vividly described violent acts, which were used by Elizabethan playwrights for their own dramatic purposes. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is perhaps the most Senecan of all plays, with revenge, mutilation, cannibalism, and excessive violence, as in Seneca's *Thyestes*, where a father eats his own children unwittingly.

Elizabethan comedies were also shaped by the Roman comic playwrights Terence and Plautus, whose works were marked by clever dialogue, mistaken identity, disguise, and stock characters. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a reflection of Plautine comedy, with Viola masquerading as a man and a series of misunderstandings and farcical situations following. The *Comedy of Errors* is a wholesale borrowing from Plautus' *Menaechmi*, with twins born at the same time who are frequently confused with each other, causing uproarious misunderstanding. Plautus' plays frequently included witty servants, windy soldiers, and senile fools, who became pois in Elizabethan comedy. The "braggart soldier" character of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, such as Falstaff, finds its prototype in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*. In the same vein, the sarcastic servant Lancelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice* reflects Plautus' witty slaves who trick their masters. Terence's comedies, known for their double plots, influenced Shakespeare's use of multiple storylines in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which interweaves the stories of lovers, fairies, and a group of bumbling actors.

***Check your progress:***

1. What theme did Shakespeare often include to reflect national pride?
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2. Which Shakespearean play contains the famous line "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers"?

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3. What was the purpose of history plays like *Richard III*?

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#### **4.2.3 Major Playwrights and their Works:**

William Shakespeare was the greatest playwright of this time. Shakespeare's works comprise an immense range of comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies and sonnets. Due to his influence; this age is also sometimes referred to as his 'The Age of Shakespeare.' Although, Elizabethan drama witnessed the rise of some of the finest playwrights in English literature. Following are the prominent playwrights and their notable works: William Shakespeare (1564–1616) authored some well-known plays such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV (Parts 1 & 2)*, *Henry V*. Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) is renowned for his plays namely, *Doctor Faustus* (a play about a scholar who sells his soul to the devil), *Tamburlaine the Great* (a two-part play about the ascendancy of a shepherd to power), *The Jew of Malta* (a revenge tragedy with a Machiavellian hero), *Edward II* (a historical drama about the fall of King Edward II). Ben Jonson (1572–1637) authored *Volpone* (a satirical comedy of greed and corruption), *The Alchemist* (A farcical play about gullible individuals being duped by con artists), *Every Man in His Humour* (A comedy that formalized the "humours" theory for drama), *Bartholomew Fair* (A social satire of London's fair culture). Thomas Kyd (1558–1594) was acclaimed for *The Spanish Tragedy* (a extremely influential revenge tragedy, antecedent to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). John Webster (1580–1634) composed *The Duchess of Malfi* (a dark and bloody tragedy of a widowed duchess defying her brothers), *The White Devil* (a revenge tragedy describing political and private corruption). Thomas Dekker (1572–1632) became popular for *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (a comedy about the lives of London's ordinary people), *The Honest Whore* (a play with themes of virtue and redemption). Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) & John Fletcher (1579–1625) co-authored *Philaster* (a romantic tragicomedy), *The Maid's Tragedy* (a political and personal betrayal tragedy), *A King and No King* (a comedy-drama play).

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### **4.3 Learning Outcomes**

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Upon completing the study of the chapter on the features of Elizabethan drama, students will have an integrated idea about its identifying marks, such as its combination of tragedy and comedy, blank verse, complex plots, and complicated characters. They will examine how historical, social, and cultural aspects, like the Renaissance frame of mind, humanism, and the patronage of Queen Elizabeth I, shaped the development of drama under this period. The Elizabethan drama's themes reveal deep insights into humanity, probing emotions, desires, and moral dilemmas that are as pertinent today as they were then. Through love and ambition, revenge and justice, predestination and free will, supernatural powers, and moral issues, the plays proffer a riveting study of humanity. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Kyd, and other playwrights' works are still popular among audiences, indicating that these issues are universal and timeless. Through the study of the plays of famous playwrights, the learners will be able to identify their contributions to the genre and their enduring legacy in English literature. They will also investigate the function of Elizabethan theatres, specifically the Globe Theatre, and how stagecraft, audience engagement, and performance practice influenced the theatrical experience. In addition, the students will be able to try examination- based questions.

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## 4.4 Glossary

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**Renaissance:** refers to the time of revival of art, culture, and knowledge in England

**Patronage:** sponsorship offered by a monarch

**Spurt:** a sudden surge in intensity or activity

**Concurred:** to express formal agreement with someone

**Pecuniary:** financial transactions

**Paranoia:** a mental disorder where one suspects persecution

**Augur:** to predict a future incident

**Chrysalis:** transformational phase

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## 4.5 Sample Questions

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### 4.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Which monarch's reign is associated with the golden age of Elizabethan drama?

(a) Henry VIII

- (b) James I
  - (c) Elizabeth I**
  - (d) Charles II
2. What is the typical verse form used in Elizabethan drama?
- (a) Free verse
  - (b) Heroic couplets
  - (c) Blank verse**
  - (d) Rhymed quatrains
3. Who is considered the most influential playwright of the Elizabethan era?
- (a) Christopher Marlowe
  - (b) William Shakespeare**
  - (c) Ben Jonson
  - (d) Thomas Kyd
4. Which of the following is a key characteristic of Elizabethan tragedy?
- (a) Strong religious themes
  - (b) A hero with a tragic flaw**
  - (c) Happy endings for all characters
  - (d) Absence of soliloquies
5. What is the name of the famous theatre associated with Elizabethan drama?
- (a) The Rose Theatre
  - (b) The Globe Theatre**
  - (c) The Blackfriars Theatre
  - (d) The Curtain Theatre
6. Which of the following is a major theme in Elizabethan drama?
- (a) Science and technology
  - (b) Humanism and individualism**
  - (c) Realism and minimalism
  - (d) Romantic love only
7. Who is the author of Doctor Faustus, a classic Elizabethan tragedy?
- (a) Ben Jonson
  - (b) William Shakespeare
  - (c) Christopher Marlowe**

- (d) John Webster
8. What was the role of the "groundlings" in Elizabethan theatres?
- (a) They performed in plays
  - (b) They were wealthy patrons
  - (c) They stood in the pit and watched plays**
  - (d) They were theatre owners
9. What is the primary purpose of a soliloquy in Elizabethan drama?
- (a) To introduce a new character
  - (b) To reveal a character's inner thoughts**
  - (c) To provide comic relief
  - (d) To transition between acts
10. Which poetic device was commonly used in Elizabethan drama?
- (a) Haiku
  - (b) Iambic pentameter**
  - (c) Acrostic poetry
  - (d) Free verse

#### **4.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Define a tragic hero. What is the main characteristic of a tragic hero in Elizabethan tragedies?
2. What themes were commonly explored in Elizabethan drama?
3. How did Elizabethan drama differ from medieval drama?
4. What is a soliloquy in Elizabethan drama? Elaborate it with suitable examples.
5. What was the role of 'supernatural elements' and 'comic relief' in Elizabethan drama?

#### **4.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. In what ways did the social, political, and cultural environment of the Elizabethan period shape the themes and the style of its drama?
2. How did dramatists such as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson employ comedy to satirize social convention or human nature?
3. In what ways did Elizabethan dramatists and the theatre respond to the larger intellectual movements of the time, e.g., Humanism or the Renaissance?

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## 4.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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3. Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
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7. Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
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9. Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2004.

## Unit - 5: Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe

### Structure

#### 5.0 Introduction

#### 5.1 Objectives

#### 5.2 Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe

##### 5.2.1 Life of Christopher Marlowe

##### 5.2.2 Works of Christopher Marlowe

##### 5.2.2.1 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

##### 5.2.2.2 *Tamburlaine*

##### 5.2.2.3 *The Jew of Malta*

##### 5.2.2.4 *Doctor Faustus*

##### 5.2.2.5 *Edward the Second*

##### 5.2.2.6 *The Massacre at Paris*

#### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 5.4 Glossary

#### 5.5 Sample Questions

#### 5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 5.0 Introduction

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Christopher Marlowe was a prominent Elizabethan playwright, poet, and translator. He was one of the most prominent dramatists of the University wits. The University Wits are 16th Century Playwrights. They are called so because all of them studied at the Universities of either Cambridge or Oxford. The prominent playwrights of this group are Robert Greene, John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nash, George Peele and Thomas Lodge. Thomas Kyd is part of this group, although he was not studied either Oxford or Cambridge. Christopher Marlowe was baptized on February 26, 1564, and died on May 30, 1593. Often referred to as Kit Marlowe, he was a contemporary of William Shakespeare. Most of Marlowe's plays were written in blank verse, a form characterized by a regular meter but lacking a rhyme scheme. His works gained popularity due to their captivating protagonists and the exploration of deeply humanistic and realistic themes. Ben Jonson famously referred to Marlowe's blank verse as a "mighty line." The major works of Christopher Marlowe include "*Dido*," "*Tamburlaine*," "*The Jew of Malta*," "*Doctor Faustus*," "*Edward II*," and "*The Massacre at Paris*". "*Tamburlaine*" is recognized as the

first play to be written in blank verse, which Marlowe popularized. Later, Thomas Kyd utilized blank verse in his play "*The Spanish Tragedy*". It is important to note that Shakespeare was influenced by Marlowe's writing style. Prominent plays by Shakespeare, such as "*Antony and Cleopatra*," "*The Merchant of Venice*," "*Richard II*," and "*Macbeth*," were inspired by Marlowe's works, including "*Dido*," "*The Jew of Malta*," "*Edward II*," and "*Doctor Faustus*". In this chapter, we will explore the life of Christopher Marlowe and delve into his major works.

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## 5.1 Objectives

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The objectives of the unit are to:

- provide you with a comprehensive understanding of the life and works of Christopher Marlowe.
- Gain insight into the Elizabethan era of English literature through a detailed examination of the writings of Christopher Marlowe.

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## 5.2 Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe

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Christopher Marlowe was born at Canterbury, Kent, in England. He was a prominent Elizabethan English playwright. He was baptized on 26th February 1564 and died on 30th May 1593 Deptford, Kent, in England. He died at the young age of 29. John Marlowe, his father, was a shoemaker. His mother was Katherine. She was the daughter of William Arthur of Dover. He studied at The King's School and Corpus Christ College, Cambridge. His Major works are Dido, Tamburlaine, The Jew of Malta, Doctor Faustus, Edward II, and The Massacre at Paris.

### 5.2.1 Life of Christopher Marlowe:

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury, Kent, England. He was a prominent English playwright during the Elizabethan era. Marlowe was baptized on February 26, 1564, and died at a young age of 29 on May 30, 1593, in Deptford, Kent. His father, John Marlowe, was a shoemaker, and his mother, Katherine, was the daughter of William Arthur from Dover. Marlowe studied at The King's School and later at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree. Initially, he had intended to become an Anglican clergyman. However, there is little evidence about his adult life beyond his literary works. His writings often explore themes such as espionage and atheism, leading to significant discussion in literary circles. There

are some indications of homosexuality in Marlowe's work. However, literary scholar J.B. Steane argued that there is "no evidence for Marlowe's homosexuality at all." In his poem "Hero and Leander," Marlowe describes the male youth Leander as possessing "all that men desire." Additionally, in "Edward the Second," he includes a passage that suggests homosexual relationships:

“The mightiest kings have had their minions:  
Great Alexander loved Hephaestion,  
The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept;  
And for Patroclus, stern Achilles dropped.  
And not kings only, but the wisest men:  
The Roman Tully loved Octavius,  
Grave Socrates, wild Alcibiades.”

There are various accounts regarding Marlowe's death. In "Palladis Tamia," published in 1598, Francis Meres claims that Marlowe was “stabbed to death by a bawdy serving man, a rival of his lewd love” as punishment for his hedonism and atheism. In contrast, Sir Sidney Lee posits that Marlowe was killed in a drunken fight. Consequently, Marlowe was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas in Deptford.

### **5.2.2 Works of Christopher Marlowe:**

Christopher Marlowe was a prominent writer during the Elizabethan era of English literature. He is believed to have authored around six plays, either alone or in collaboration with other writers. It is thought that *Dido* was Marlowe's first play; however, his play "Tamburlaine" was first performed in London in 1587. *Tamburlaine* was the first play written in Blank Verse. In 1580, Marlowe translated Ovid's *Amores*. Another of his well-known works, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*, was written either in 1587 or 1588. Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, published in 1593, was completed by George Chapman in 1598. He also translated *Pharsalia Book I*, authored by Lucan, in 1593. Other significant works by Christopher Marlowe include *The Jew of Malta*, *Doctor Faustus*, *Edward II*, and *The Massacre at Paris*.

#### **5.2.2.1 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*:**

The original title of the play is *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*. It is a short play by Marlowe with a possible contribution from Thomas Nashe. It was published in 1594. The primary source of the play was Book I, II, and IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The play presents the love relationship between Dido, the queen of Carthage, and Aeneas. Later, Aeneas went to Italy. His

departure made Dido to commit suicide. The major characters in the play are Dido, Aeneas, Ascanius, Iarbas, Achates, Ilioneus, Cloanthus, Sergestus and Jupiter. Aeneas told the story of the Trojan War to Dido. She rejects her lover, Iarbas and later falls in love with Aeneas. Dido's sister Anna, who is in love with Iarbas, encourages Dido to pursue Aeneas. Dido and Aeneas entered a cave to have sex. Iarbas declares that he will take the revenge. Later, Aeneas and his followers decided to go to Italy. Dido repeatedly requested Aeneas not to leave her. But, Aeneas departed leaving Dido in despair. Dido declares to Iarbas and Anne that she is going to make a funeral pyre and she will burn everything associated with Aeneas. However, Dido throws herself into the pyre after cursing the progeny of Aeneas. She committed suicide. Seeing this Iarbas kills himself. Later, Anna, too, committed suicide.

***Check your progress***

1. In which era did Christopher Marlowe live?

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2. Give a short profile of Christopher Marlowe.

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3. Which are the prominent plays of Christopher Marlowe?

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4. What was the plot of the play *Dido*?

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5. What is a Blank verse?

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6. What is university wits? Who are the main university wits?

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**5.2.2.2 *Tamburlaine*:**

The play *Tamburlaine the Great* has two parts. *Tamburlaine* is a historical play that revolves around the life of Timur, a Central Asian Emperor. It was written in either 1587 or 1588 and is notable for being the first English play written in blank verse. The play depicts the conquering nature of Tamburlaine, who starts as a Scythian shepherd. At the beginning of the play, the Persian Emperor Mycetes sends troops to eliminate Tamburlaine. Meanwhile, Tamburlaine is pursuing Zenocrate, the daughter of the Egyptian king. He ultimately defeats Mycetes and takes control of the Persian Empire. Following this, Tamburlaine conquers Bajazeth, the emperor of the Turks, and his wife, Zabina. He humiliates the defeated emperor by

keeping him caged, which leads Bajazeth to take his own life by dashing his head against the bars. Upon witnessing her husband's death, Zabina also commits suicide. Tamburlaine then conquers Africa and declares himself its Emperor. His attention turns to Damascus, which is also the target of the Egyptian sultan, who is Zenocrate's father. However, due to Zabina's pleas, Tamburlaine spares her future father's life. The first part of the play concludes with the wedding of Tamburlaine and Zenocrate. In the second part of the play, Tamburlaine attempts to train his sons to become warriors and conquerors. However, his ambition proves to be in vain. His eldest son, Calyphas, consistently chooses to stay with his mother, which incites Tamburlaine's wrath against him. During this time, Callaphine, the son of Bajazeth, escapes from prison and gathers a group of kings to rise against Tamburlaine. Unfortunately, in battle, Callaphine is defeated and killed. In his assault on Babylon, Tamburlaine captures the governor and hangs him on the city wall. He also orders the inhabitants of the city to bind themselves and throw themselves into a nearby lake. Later, Tamburlaine falls ill. As he approaches death, he urges his sons to conquer the rest of the earth. The play celebrates the theme of Renaissance humanism. Renaissance Humanism was an intellectual movement during the 15th century that studied classical literature from a new perspective, focusing more on human experience and downplaying religious aspects. In the play, Christopher Marlowe portrays the strength and power that exist in human beings. Moreover, he expresses his atheism through the play.

### **5.2.2.3 *The Jew of Malta:***

The original title of the play is *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*. It was written in 1589 or 1590 and tells the story of Barabas, a wealthy Jewish merchant from Malta. The play is set against the backdrop of a political struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Spain in the Mediterranean, specifically on the Island of Malta. It falls under the genre of revenge tragedy. The major characters in the play include Barabas, Abigail (his daughter), Ithamore, Ferneze (the governor of Malta), Don Lodowick, Don Mathias, and Katharine. In the first act, we learn that Barabas is a prosperous Jewish merchant in Malta. The ongoing political rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Spain affects the personal lives of the citizens living in Malta. In the second act, the repercussions of the state's dues on its subjects become evident. Ferneze, the governor, orders that all Jews in Malta must contribute half of their estates to repay the debt to the Turkish authorities, or they must convert to Christianity. Barabas rejects Ferneze's proposal, which leads to a rivalry between the two. As a result, Ferneze confiscates Barabas's wealth and converts his mansion into a nunnery. Barabas and Abigail, his daughter, plot to retain

the treasure hidden in the mansion. They decide to have Abigail join the nunnery in order to safeguard the wealth. Meanwhile, a young man named Mathias, who is in love with Abigail, observes the situation and informs Lodowick, Ferneze's son. Both Mathias and Lodowick are determined to confront Abigail. Later, Barabas devised a deceptive plan to create a rift between Lodowick and Mathias. He instructed Ithamore to write a forged letter to Mathias, claiming that Lodowick was challenging him to a duel. Barabas wrote the same forged letter to Lodowick as well. His true intention was to plot his revenge against Ferneze, using his daughter's beauty as part of the scheme. As he intended, the two young men ended up fighting each other and both were killed. Mathias's mother, Katherine, and Lodowick's father, Ferneze, decided to uncover the culprit behind this treachery and vowed to seek revenge. Meanwhile, Abigail became sorrowful after the tragic incident and ultimately decided to become a priestess. Barabas felt dejected when he realized that his daughter was converting to Christianity. Barabas decides to kill Abigail by poisoning her food, with the assistance of Ithamore. Meanwhile, Ferneze informs the Turkish emissary, Bashaw, that he will not repay the dues owed. The emissary then brings news of impending war. As a result of the food poisoning, all the nuns perish, including Abigail. In her final moments, Abigail confesses everything, revealing her father's involvement in the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. Barabas, determined to silence any further revelations, plans to kill the priest to whom Abigail confessed, enlisting Ithamore's help once again. They killed the priest Bernardine. Later, Ithamore began to threaten Barabas declaring that he will reveal the secrets committed by them and demanded money from Barabas. In short while, Barabas decided to kill Ithamore in order to hush up the crimes that he committed. Later, Ithamore confessed to the crime committed by Barabas in front of Ferneze. As a result, Barabas was arrested and imprisoned. However, with the support of Calymath, the Turkish leader, he managed to escape. Subsequently, he allied with Ferneze to defeat Calymath and the Turkish troops. For this plan, Barabas demanded a substantial payment from Ferneze. Unfortunately, he fell into the trap he had set to kill the Turks. In the end, Barabas confessed to his crimes against Ferneze and Calymath, dying while cursing “damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels.”

***Check your progress***

1. Whose life is depicted in the play Tamburlaine?

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2. What is Renaissance Humanism?

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3. What was the original title of *The Jew of Malta*?

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4. Whose political rivalry is depicted in *The Jew of Malta*?

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#### **5.2.2.4 *Doctor Faustus*:**

The original title of the play is *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. This play is one of the prominent Elizabethan tragedies written by Christopher Marlowe, likely in 1592 or 1593. The main characters include Doctor Faustus, Lucifer, Mephistophilis, and Beelzebub. The Chorus explains that Faustus earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Wittenberg. However, due to his excessive ambition, he sought to learn more, eventually delving into necromancy—a dark magical practice that involves communicating with the dead. Doctor Faustus instructs his servant, Wagner, to summon the magicians Valdes and Cornelius. At this point, a good angel appears before him, urging him to refrain from pursuing necromancy. Conversely, a bad angel appears and encourages him to continue. Two scholars from the University learn of Faustus's intent to practice necromancy and decide to inform the rector. Meanwhile, Mephistophilis arrives, leading to a confrontation between him and Faustus. A contract is signed between Mephistophilis and Faustus with Faustus's blood. The contract stipulates that Mephistophilis must serve Faustus for 24 years; after that, Lucifer will claim both his body and soul. As time passes, Faustus reflects on God. However, Lucifer arrives to remind him of the contract, showcasing the seven deadly sins to entertain Faustus. After the 24 years have elapsed, Lucifer comes to claim Faustus's body and soul. The hamartia of Faustus was over vaulting ambition. The word hamartia means “a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine.” Near the end of his life, Faustus laments.

"O soul, be changed into little water drops,  
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.  
My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!  
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile!  
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer;  
I'll burn my books! Ah, Mephostophilis!"

#### **5.2.2.5 *Edward the Second:***

The full title of *Edward II* is *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer*. This play is one of the earliest historical dramas in English literature. A historical play depicts real historical events, either as they occurred or with slight variations based on the author's imagination. The play depicts the relationship between King Edward II of England and Piers Gaveston. The main source for the play was Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). It recounts Gaveston's return after his exile. Edward II and Gaveston were in a romantic relationship; however, after a conflict arose in Edward's court, he was compelled to send Gaveston away to Ireland. Isabella of France, the Queen, sought to bring Gaveston back with the support of Mortimer, who later became her lover. Their true intention was to execute Gaveston. Edward requested to see Gaveston one last time before his execution, and nobles Arundel and Pembroke agreed to this request. However, Warwick attacked and killed Gaveston. In response, Edward executed two nobles who had conspired against Gaveston: Warwick and Lancaster. Edward eventually discovers new favorites, Spencer and his father. Meanwhile, Isabella finds her lover, Mortimer. However, both Spencers are executed, and the king is taken to Kenilworth. His brother, Edmund, Earl of Kent, attempts to assist the king, but Mortimer's power is overwhelming. Eventually, Edward II is executed by Mortimer, who argues that Edward II poses a threat to the throne. In jail, Edward II was killed with the support of Lightborn, orchestrated by a plot involving Mortimer and Isabella. Later, Edward III, the son of Edward II and Isabella, uncovered the conspiracy behind his father's death. Mortimer was arrested and prosecuted, while Isabella was imprisoned. Eventually, Edward III ascended to the throne and became the king of England.

#### **5.2.2.6 *The Massacre at Paris:***

*The Massacre at Paris* is an Elizabethan play written by Christopher Marlowe in 1593. In 1689 Nathaniel Lee, a Restoration Dramatist, wrote a play with the same title. Both of these plays were based on the historical incident of Bartholomew's Day Massacre which took place in Paris in 1572. The play takes place in Paris and the occasion is the marriage of Henry of Navarre with Margaret of Valois. Henry of Navarre is a Huguenot noble while Margaret of Valois is the sister of the Catholic King. It is clear from the very beginning of the play that both the families are under hostilities due to the variations in religious affiliations. The play dramatizes the real-life St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, during which thousands of French Huguenots (Protestants) were killed by Catholic mobs. The story focuses on the rivalry between the Catholic

Duke of Guise and the Protestant Admiral Coligny. Guise orchestrates the massacre by manipulating the Catholic King Charles IX and his mother, Catherine de' Medici. As the massacre unfolds, many characters meet their demise, including Coligny, the King of Navarre (who would later become Henry IV of France), and several other prominent Huguenots. Throughout the play, Marlowe explores themes of religious conflict, power struggles, and the dangers of unchecked ambition. The authorship of *The Massacre at Paris* has been a subject of historical controversy. While the play is often attributed to Christopher Marlowe, some scholars question whether he was the sole author. Some scholars believe that Thomas Nashe, a fellow playwright and friend of Marlowe's, might have co-authored or even written the play on his own. Another theory suggests that the play was written by an unknown or anonymous author, possibly someone familiar with Marlowe's style. Despite these controversies, most scholars still attribute *The Massacre at Paris* to Christopher Marlowe, citing stylistic similarities and historical evidence. However, the debate continues, and the true authorship of the play remains a topic of ongoing scholarly discussion.

***Check your progress***

1. What was the original title of the play *Doctor Faustus*?

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2. Define the term Necromancy?

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3. What was the contract between *Doctor Faustus* and Mephistopheles?

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4. What was the hamartia of *Doctor Faustus*?

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5. What was the original title of the play *Edward II*?

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6. What type of relationship existed between *Edward II* and Gaveston?

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7. Which massacre is depicted in the play *The Massacre at Paris*?

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### 5.3 Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this unit, you should have a clear understanding of the life of Christopher Marlowe, the Elizabethan dramatist. Additionally, you will be able to identify his major works and their themes. You should also grasp literary terms such as Renaissance Humanism, Hamartia, and historical plays. Furthermore, you will become familiar with the various characters in his plays.

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### 5.4 Glossary

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**University Wits:** The university wits are 16th century English playwrights. They were educated at either the university of Oxford or Cambridge. The prominent playwrights of this group are Robert Greene, Thomas Nash, Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, and George Peele.

**Elizabethan Era:** The Elizabethan Age is from 1558 to 1603 and is often referred to as the Golden Age due to the flourishing of artistic works during this period. Notable writers and poets from the William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser are the stalwarts during the Elizabethan Era.

**Blank verse:** A blank verse is a specific form of poetry characterized by the following features like unrhymed iambic pentameter. Each line consists of five metrical feet, where each foot contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. There is no rhyme scheme.

**Renaissance Humanism:** Renaissance Humanism was an intellectual movement during the 15th century that studied classical literature from a new perspective, focusing more on human experience and downplaying religious aspects.

**Atheism:** Atheism is the absence or rejection of belief about the existence of gods. Atheists often argue that there is no empirical evidence supporting the existence of gods and that religious beliefs are unnecessary for explaining the world or leading a moral life.

**Revenge Tragedy:** Revenge tragedy is a drama where the primary motive is revenge for a real or perceived injury. It was a popular form of English tragedy during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.

**Chorus:** In ancient Greek tragedies, a Chorus was a group of people who spoke together about the actions of the characters.

**Necromancy:** A dark magical practice that involves communicating with the dead.

**Hamartia:** The word hamartia means tragic flaw which leads to the tragic end of the hero or heroine. It is a kind of error of judgement. Over vaulting ambition was the hamartia of Doctor Faustus while procrastination was the hamartia of Hamlet.

**Historical play:** A historical play depicts real historical events, either as they occurred or with slight variations based on the author's imagination.

**Protestants:** Protestants are those group of Christians against the Roman Catholics. Their principles are based on the principles of Reformation.

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## 5.5 Sample Questions

### 5.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. Christopher Marlowe was a \_\_\_\_\_ playwright. (**Elizabethan**)
2. Most of Christopher Marlowe's plays were written in \_\_\_\_\_ verse. (**blank verse**)
3. What was the tragic flaw of Doctor Faustus? (**his excessive ambition**)
4. Who was the daughter of Barabas? (**Abigail**)
5. What was the original title of *The Jew of Malta*?
  - (a) *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*
  - (b) *The Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*
  - (c) *The Famous Tragedy of the Jew of Malta*
  - (d) None of the above
6. The main source for the play *Edward II* was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) *Hamlet*
  - (b) *Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles*
  - (c) *Hamlet and Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles*
  - (d) None of the above
7. Who is not a University Wit?
  - (a) Christopher Marlowe
  - (b) Thomas Nash
  - (c) Thomas Lodge
  - (d) **Thomas William**
8. Who was the Jew of Malta?

(a) **Barabas**

(b) Ithamore

(c) Macbeth

(d) Hamlet

9. A blank verse is in \_\_\_\_\_.

(a) Iambic tetrameter

(b) **Iambic pentameter**

(c) Iambic hexameter

(d) Iambic meter

10. Who completed Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* after his death?

(a) Thomas Nashe

(b) Ben Jonson

(c) **George Chapman**

(d) William Shakespeare

#### **5.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Write a short note on the romantic relationship between Edward II and Gaveston.

2. What is a Blank Verse? Give an example for the same.

3. Do you think that the tragic flaw of Doctor Faustus was over vaulting ambition? Elucidate your answer.

4. Write a short note on the theme of Renaissance Humanism in the play *Tamburlaine*.

5. Critically evaluate the theme of rivalry between Christianity and Jews in the play *Jew of Malta*.

#### **5.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. What is revenge tragedy? Write an essay on Revenge tragedy focusing on the plays of Christopher Marlowe.

2. What is Renaissance Humanism? Write an essay on Renaissance Humanism focusing on the plays of Christopher Marlowe.

3. Write an essay on how Christopher Marlowe exploited the theme of atheism in his different plays.

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## 5.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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1. Marlowe, C. *Doctor Faustus*. New York: Routledge Publishers, 2005. Print.
2. Scarsbrook, M.G. *The Life & Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*. Red Herring, 2010. Print.
3. Bolt, Rodney. *History Play: The Lives and Afterlife of Christopher Marlow*. USA: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print

## Unit - 6: *Doctor Faustus*: Reading & Critical Appreciation

### Structure

#### 6.0 Introduction

#### 6.1 Objectives

#### 6.2 *Doctor Faustus*: Reading and Critical Appreciation

##### 6.2.1 *Doctor Faustus*: Summary

##### 6.2.2 *Doctor Faustus*: Reading

##### 6.2.3 *Doctor Faustus*: Critical Appreciation

#### 6.3 Learning Outcomes

#### 6.4 Glossary

#### 6.5 Sample Questions

#### 6.6 Suggested Learning Resources

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### 6.0 Introduction

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Christopher Marlowe was a notable Elizabethan playwright, poet, and translator. He is recognized as one of the leading dramatists among the University Wits, a group of 16th-century English playwrights educated at Oxford and Cambridge. The prominent playwrights from this group include Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, and George Peele. Thomas Kyd is also associated with the University Wits, despite not attending either university. Marlowe was baptized on February 26, 1564, and he died on May 30, 1593. Often called "Kit Marlowe," he was a contemporary of William Shakespeare. Most of Marlowe's plays were written in blank verse, a form characterized by a regular meter but without a rhyme scheme. His works became popular for their compelling protagonists and their exploration of deeply humanistic and realistic themes. Ben Jonson famously praised Marlowe's blank verse, calling it a "mighty line." The original title of the play is *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. This play is one of the prominent Elizabethan tragedies written by Christopher Marlowe, likely in 1592 or 1593. The main characters include Doctor Faustus, Lucifer, Mephistophilis, and Beelzebub. The play depicts the fall of Doctor Faustus, a scholar from Wittenberg University. Due to his intellectual curiosity, he learns necromancy, which later causes his downfall.

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## 6.1 Objectives

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The objectives of the Unit are to:

- provide a comprehensive understanding of the play *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe.
- gain insight into the Elizabethan era of English literature through a detailed examination of *Doctor Faustus*.
- understand the literary term "Tragic Heroism" by analyzing the character of *Doctor Faustus*.
- explore Renaissance Humanism and its ideals, such as intellectual curiosity, individualism, and the pursuit of knowledge.

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## 6.2 *Doctor Faustus*: Reading and Critical Appreciation

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### 6.2.1 *Doctor Faustus*: Summary

*Doctor Faustus* is one of the major works by Christopher Marlowe. The play is divided into five acts and explores the downfall of Doctor Faustus, which is primarily caused by his tragic flaw. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each act in the play.

*Doctor Faustus*

The original title of the play is *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. This play is one of the prominent Elizabethan tragedies written by Christopher Marlowe, likely in 1592 or 1593. The main characters include Doctor Faustus, Lucifer, Mephistophilis, and Beelzebub. The Chorus explains that Faustus earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Wittenberg. However, due to his excessive ambition, he sought to learn more and eventually delved into necromancy—a dark practice that involves communicating with the dead. Doctor Faustus instructs his servant, Wagner, to summon the magicians Valdes and Cornelius. At this point, a good angel appears before him, urging him to refrain from practicing necromancy. Conversely, a bad angel appears and encourages him to continue. Two scholars from the University learn of Faustus's intent to practice necromancy and decide to inform the rector. Meanwhile, Mephistophilis arrives, leading to a confrontation between him and Faustus. Faustus signs a contract with Mephistophilis in his own blood. The contract stipulates that Mephistophilis must serve Faustus for 24 years; after that time, Lucifer will claim both his body

and soul. As time passes, Faustus reflects on God. However, Lucifer arrives to remind him of the contract and showcases the seven deadly sins to entertain Faustus. Once the 24 years have elapsed, Lucifer comes to claim Faustus's body and soul. Faustus's hamartia is his overreaching ambition. The term "hamartia" refers to a fatal flaw that leads to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine. Near the end of his life, Faustus laments:

“O soul, be changed into little water drops,  
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.  
My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!  
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile!  
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer;  
I'll burn my books! Ah, Mephistophilis!”

***Check your progress***

1. Who were the University Wits?

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2. What is a blank verse?

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3. Define the term hamartia.

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***Doctor Faustus: Act I***

The play opens with a Chorus that introduces the protagonist, Doctor Faustus, a renowned scholar from Wittenberg, Germany. Faustus is in his study, surrounded by books and contemplating his life's work. He expresses dissatisfaction with his current knowledge and ambition, seeking more power and wisdom. Faustus meets with two fellow scholars, Valdes and Cornelius, who introduce him to the concept of necromancy (black magic). They offer to teach him this art, which he eagerly accepts. Faustus begins to study necromancy and soon becomes skilled at conjuring spirits. He summons the devil Mephistophilis, who appears before him. Mephistophilis is initially hesitant to serve Faustus, but Faustus persuades him to agree. Mephistopheles consents to serve Faustus for 24 years in exchange for his soul. Faustus signs the contract in blood, sealing his fate. The Chorus comments on Faustus's decision, warning of the dangers of ambition and the consequences of making a pact with the devil. Act 1 sets the stage for the rest of the play, introducing themes of ambition, power, and the consequences of pursuing knowledge and wisdom through forbidden means.

## ***Doctor Faustus: Act II***

After signing with Mephistophilis, Faustus gained the power of necromancy and expressed a desire for a new wife. However, Mephistophilis warned him that marriage was not suitable for him. Despite this, Faustus insisted, and Mephistophilis brought him a devil disguised as a woman. This devil woman later disappeared. Faustus then demanded to visit Rome, and Mephistophilis transported him there. In Rome, they played a trick on the Pope, causing chaos in the Vatican. Upon returning to Germany, Faustus was received as a hero. Once again, the good and bad angels appeared to him. The Good Angel urged him to repent, while the Bad Angel encouraged him to continue down his sinful path. Faustus's servant, Wagner, appeared alongside a group of clowns intended to provide comic relief. The presence of these clowns also highlights the tragic situation of Doctor Faustus. This act concludes with Faustus's firm determination to continue his partnership with Mephistophilis and to pursue the worlds of knowledge and power. It illustrates Faustus's strong desire to explore the limits of knowledge while also depicting his remorse for continuing in sin. The scene in Rome and the comical situations there reflect the realities of Papal society.

## ***Doctor Faustus: Act III***

The Emperor Charles V seeks the help of Doctor Faustus to discover the whereabouts of the town of Milan from the Duke of Saxony. Faustus agrees and creates an illusion of the town, impressing the Emperor. A Knight and his attendants discuss Faustus's powers, expressing skepticism about his abilities. During this time, Mephistophilis appears again and informs Faustus about the limited time left for him. Faustus becomes anxious about his fate and current situation. The scholars and the Knight notice his unease, leading Faustus to feel increasingly alienated. He finds himself in a state of paranoia, suspecting that everyone is plotting against him. Mentally dejected and sad, Faustus reflects on the nature of the world he inhabits. He repeatedly laments about his actions and the contract he made with Mephistophilis. Despite committing many sins, he becomes aware of his wrongdoings. However, the Bad Angel continually directs him toward a path of pleasurable sins, prompting Faustus to persist on his chosen course.

### ***Check your progress***

1. Who was Doctor Faustus?

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2. What was the agreement between Doctor Faustus and Mephistophilis?

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### 3. What was the role of the Bad Angel and the Good Angel?

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#### ***Doctor Faustus: Act IV***

Faustus realizes that his time is very limited. He requests Mephistophilis to bring him Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world. Mephistophilis delivers a figure who he claims is Helen of Troy, but in reality, it is a devil disguised as her. Faustus is enchanted by her beauty, captivating the attention of scholars who are observing his behavior. He engages in communication with this version of Helen and becomes entranced once again by her charm. Meanwhile, Faustus's students and the scholars discuss the impending danger he faces. As he becomes increasingly aware of the shortness of his time, Faustus's fear grows. In this act, Christopher Marlowe explicitly portrays the final moments of Faustus's sin. Despite his awareness, Faustus continues to indulge in his sinful behavior, and his fascination with Helen of Troy is a testament to this. However, he shows no signs of repentance for the sins he has committed.

#### ***Doctor Faustus: Act V***

As Doctor Faustus's last hour approaches, he becomes increasingly fearful. The scholars once again urge him to repent, but Faustus refuses to accept their advice, continuing along his sinful path. Mephistophilis arrives to take Faustus's life, and despite Faustus's repeated pleas for more time, Mephistophilis denies his requests. The devils, including Lucifer, come to claim Faustus's soul. Ultimately, Faustus's soul is taken by the devils, leaving his body behind. The scholars find Faustus's lifeless body and lament his tragic fate. The play concludes with a warning from the Chorus, which informs the audience about the dangers of pursuing pride and knowledge beyond acceptable limits. The Chorus declares:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough  
That once grew within this learned man.  
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendish fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose depth entices forward thinkers  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

### **6.2.2 Doctor Faustus: Reading**

The play *Doctor Faustus* can be read on different levels, including theological, psychological, historical, philosophical, and cultural perspective.

#### **Theological Reading**

Theology is the study of God, divine beings, and the nature of the divine. Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* prominently addresses themes of theology and divinity. It explores the Christian concepts of sin, redemption, and damnation. Faustus's pact with Mephistopheles symbolizes the nature of sin itself. The presence of the Good Angel and the Bad Angel in the play represents the theological idea that both good and evil exist within the human self. As a human being, Doctor Faustus fails to heed the call of his better nature, which urges him to pursue the path of goodness. Instead, he succumbs to the temptation of the Bad Angel. This temptation leads him to make a pact, agreeing to serve Satan for 24 years in exchange for power and knowledge. After those years, Satan will claim his soul. Despite repeatedly engaging in various sins, Faustus's soul yearns for redemption and forgiveness. However, the pleasures he derives from sin and the allure of the Bad Angel continually pull him deeper into a life of wrongdoing. Faustus's enchantment of Helen of Troy highlights the accumulation of sins within him. The play emphasizes that there are limits to knowledge; surpassing these limits breeds pride, which can ultimately lead to one's doom. As a scholar, Doctor Faustus is dissatisfied with his existing knowledge and seeks more. He makes a pact with Mephistopheles and Satan, acquiring the forbidden knowledge of necromancy. It's important to note that Marlowe creates a character embodying Renaissance humanism, which prioritizes individual desires and impulses. Nonetheless, throughout Faustus's sinful actions, his conscience consistently warns him of the divine consequences he faces.

#### **Psychological Reading**

The play *Doctor Faustus* serves as a psychological study of its protagonist, Doctor Faustus. It vividly presents his psychological turmoil as he navigates a world filled with dilemmas and doubts about the path he has chosen. The good angel and the bad angel represent the inner conflict within Faustus' mind. After committing each sin, he longs deeply for redemption and forgiveness; however, he lacks the courage to resist the temptations of the bad angel. Doctor Faustus is a product of his time. The Renaissance emphasis on Humanism highlighted the importance of individual self and self-actualization. Faustus' desire for greater knowledge reflects the psychological tendencies of that era. It was a period marked by conflicts

surrounding the human condition, where theological warnings often hindered the self-actualization of characters like Faustus. Yet, his intense desire to learn was an intrinsic part of his identity. His spirit of inquiry was not a flaw; rather, it was a reflection of the psychological climate of his time. The play also provides valuable insights into human nature and the consequences of pursuing deadly sins. After signing the pact with Mephistopheles and Lucifer, Faustus gains knowledge in necromancy. However, this forbidden knowledge ultimately leads to mental strain and inner conflict. With each sin he commits, he is plagued by regret and gloom. Doctor Faustus stands as a significant example of psychological exploration in literature.

### **Historical Reading**

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is a remarkable play that illustrates the historical dynamics of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. It reflects the principles of Renaissance Humanism, which emphasizes the importance of individual potential. This movement prioritizes the individual's power to seek knowledge and achieve self-actualization. The Protestant Reformation emerged as a response to the corruption within the Catholic Church. The extravagant lifestyles of the clergy sparked dissent and protest within the community, as those who preached virtue often violated its tenets and restricted the freedoms and choices of their followers. Doctor Faustus represents not just himself but also the collective voice of individuals who challenged the existing norms of society. During this time, people began to interpret texts in their own ways and pursue knowledge that resonated with them. Faustus is a product of his historical period, and his anxieties and fears mirror those of others living in that era. There was a significant struggle between Medieval Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation, and the play critically examines the excesses of Renaissance Humanism and unchecked ambition. Faustus's desire for knowledge ultimately leads him down the forbidden path of necromancy, which is condemned by religion. The play vividly explores the tensions and anxieties Faustus experiences as a result of his excessive individualism. Overall, Doctor Faustus serves as a compelling representation of the historical context in which Christopher Marlowe lived.

### **Philosophical Reading**

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is a remarkable play from the Elizabethan era that explores significant philosophical arguments. It critically examines the nature of knowledge, power, and morality. Renaissance Humanism places a strong emphasis on individuality, and this is evident in Doctor Faustus's insatiable thirst for knowledge, which ultimately drives him to

pursue necromancy—an act associated with forbidden knowledge. The play forcefully challenges the idea of placing boundaries on knowledge, suggesting that such limits are misguided. Furthermore, it philosophically illustrates the roles of reason and faith, highlighting their inherent conflicts in human life. Doctor Faustus's pact with Mephistopheles serves as a clear example of the tension between reason and faith prevalent during the Renaissance era.

### **Cultural Reading**

The play critically examines the cultural world of the Elizabethan era, which included beliefs in witchcraft and the supernatural. Doctor Faustus' affinity for necromancy reflects not only his personal pursuits but also the broader beliefs of the Elizabethan society. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge leads him to explore necromancy, a practice that involves communicating with the dead. During this time, people were deeply inclined to believe in supernatural elements. Shakespeare, as a contemporary of Christopher Marlowe, also illustrates similar notions about supernatural forces in his works. The culture of society during this era is strongly reflected in the play. By seeking knowledge through necromancy, Faustus continues to indulge in his sins without restraint. The play critically evaluates the human tendency to pursue evil and sinful actions as a consequence of seeking forbidden knowledge. Faustus' tragic downfall is ultimately a result of his insatiable desire for knowledge. Furthermore, the play explores the hierarchical relationships between humans and other celestial beings, which are intricately tied to the power structures of the time. The hierarchical order depicted in the world of Mephistophilis and Lucifer underscores this theme throughout the narrative.

### **6.2.3 Doctor Faustus: Critical Appreciation**

The play consists of five acts, each exploring the theme of Doctor Faustus's downfall. It features numerous soliloquies in which Christopher Marlowe reveals the inner turmoil of Doctor Faustus. The narrative centers on Faustus's tragic decline; he is portrayed as a respected scholar at Wittenberg University whose insatiable thirst for knowledge drives him to study necromancy—a form of forbidden knowledge. His tragic flaw is his overreaching ambition. Faustus makes a pact with Mephistophilis, ensuring that the demon will serve him for 24 years, after which Faustus's soul will belong to Mephistopheles and Lucifer. With the power he gains through this agreement, Faustus engages in numerous sins. Following each sin, the Good Angel warns him to repent and return to virtuous behavior. However, Faustus lacks the courage to heed these warnings and continuously succumbs to the temptations of the Bad Angel, leading him to commit even more sins. Driven by a desire for power, Faustus's relentless pursuit ultimately

leads to his tragic downfall. Characters such as Mephistophilis and Lucifer symbolize the embodiment of sin. Faustus's pact signifies his rejection of God and his embrace of darkness. To convey the true spirit of this theme, Christopher Marlowe employs blank verse throughout the play. Additionally, the play offers a critical examination of living conditions during the Renaissance Humanism period, which emphasized the pursuit of knowledge and individual choice. It also reflects the Elizabethan cultural, moral, and social contexts, particularly the tension between Catholicism and Protestantism. Faustus's actions can be seen as a manifestation of his repressed feelings and desires. *Doctor Faustus* can be interpreted on multiple levels, including the psychological realm of Faustus himself and the historical context of the time. The philosophical message of the play warns that overreaching ambition can lead to ruin and death. It argues that pursuing knowledge beyond moral boundaries is forbidden and may lead to one's doom.

***Check your progress***

1. How did Doctor Faustus become a tragic hero?

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2. What are the various levels of reading Doctor Faustus?

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3. What is the psychological analysis of the play Doctor Faustus?

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4. What is the cultural analysis of the play Doctor Faustus?

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5. What is the historical analysis of the play Doctor Faustus?

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### **6.3 Learning Outcomes**

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By the end of this unit, you should have a clear understanding of the play *Doctor Faustus*. Additionally, you will be able to identify major interpretations of the play. You should also comprehend literary concepts such as Renaissance Humanism, hamartia, and the tragic flaw. Furthermore, you will gain a critical analysis of the play.

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## 6.4 Glossary

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**The Protestant Reformation:** The Protestant Reformation was a significant religious movement in 16th-century Europe, arising in response to the corruption of the clergy.

**Medieval Catholicism:** Medieval Catholicism refers to the dominant form of Christianity in Europe from the 5th to the 15th century.

**Tragic Flaw:** Tragic Flaw, also known as hamartia, refers to the error in judgment that ultimately leads to the tragedy of the tragic hero.

**Protagonist:** The protagonist is the main character in a story, novel, or play.

**Skepticism:** The term skepticism refers to doubt. It involves questioning the existence of truth related to a particular subject.

**Paranoia:** Paranoia is a mental state marked by intense anxiety and fear.

**University Wits:** The university wits are those 16th century English playwrights who were educated at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The prominent playwrights of this group are Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Thomas Nash, John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, and George Peele. Thomas Kyd is also included in this group though he was not from either Oxford or Cambridge.

**Elizabethan Era:** The Elizabethan Age lasted from 1558 to 1603 and is often referred to as the Golden Age due to the flourishing of artistic works during this period. Notable writers and poets from the Elizabethan Age include William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser.

**Blank verse:** A blank verse is a specific form of poetry characterized by the following features like unrhymed iambic pentameter. Each line consists of five metrical feet, where each foot contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. There is no rhyme scheme.

**Renaissance Humanism:** Renaissance Humanism was an intellectual movement during the 15th century that studied classical literature from a new perspective, focusing more on human experience and downplaying religious aspects.

**Chorus:** In ancient Greek tragedies, a Chorus was a group of people who spoke together about the actions of the characters.

**Necromancy:** A dark magical practice that involves communicating with the dead.

**Hamartia:** The word hamartia means “a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine. Over vaulting ambition was the hamartia of Doctor Faustus while procrastination was the hamartia of Hamlet.

**Protestants:** A member or follower of Western Christian Churches that are distinct from the Roman Catholic Church based on Reformation principles, including Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran Churches.

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## 6.5 Sample Questions

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### 6.5.1 Objective Questions:

1. In which era did Christopher Marlowe live? (**Elizabethan era**)
2. What is the common name for the 16th-century English playwrights educated at Oxford and Cambridge? (**University Wits**)
3. In which verse were most of Christopher Marlowe's plays written? (**Blank verse**)
4. At which university was Doctor Faustus a scholar? (**University of Wittenberg**)
5. Who was the servant of Doctor Faustus? (**Wagner**)
6. Who were the magicians in the play *Doctor Faustus*?
  - (a) Mephistopheles and Lucifer
  - (b) Beelzebub and Lucifer
  - (c) Wagner and Mephistophilis
  - (d) Valdes and Cornelius**
7. What is the original title of the play *Doctor Faustus*?
  - (a) The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus**
  - (b) The History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus
  - (c) The Tragical Life and Death of Doctor Faustus
  - (d) The History of Doctor Faustus
8. How many acts are there in the play *Doctor Faustus*?
  - (a) 4
  - (b) 5**
  - (c) 3
  - (d) 6
9. What was the tragic flaw of Doctor Faustus?

- (a) **Ambition**
- (b) Procrastination
- (c) Jealousy
- (d) Over vaulting ambition

10. Among the following playwrights, who is not a University Wit?

- (a) **William Shakespeare**
- (b) Christopher Marlowe
- (c) Thomas Nashe
- (d) Thomas Lodge

### **6.5.2 Short Answer Questions:**

1. Write a short note on the tragic flaw of Christopher Marlowe.
2. How did Christopher Marlowe portray the theme of Renaissance Humanism in the play *Doctor Faustus*?
3. What is necromancy, and how did Doctor Faustus learn it?
4. What is the Protestant Reformation, and how is it reflected in the play *Doctor Faustus*?
5. Who is the chorus? Discuss the role of the Chorus in the play *Doctor Faustus*.

### **6.5.3 Long Answer Questions:**

1. Write an essay on the major readings of the play *Doctor Faustus*.
2. "Doctor Faustus was a product of his time." Write an essay discussing the characteristics of the Elizabethan era with a focus on the character of Doctor Faustus.
3. What is Hamartia? How did Doctor Faustus become a tragic hero by succumbing to his tragic flaws?

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## **6.6 Suggested Learning Resources**

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1. Marlowe, C. *Doctor Faustus*. New York: Routledge Publishers, 2005. Print.
2. Bolt, Rodney. *History Play: The Lives and Afterlife of Christopher Marlow*. USA: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.
3. Scarsbrook, M.G. *The Life & Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*. Red Herring, 2010. Print.

# Syllabus

## DSE-1

**Course Title:** *Reading English Drama (BEEN102DSC)*

***Scheme of Examination***

Maximum Marks: 50 (Assignments: 15 & End Semester: 35)

Exam Duration: 2 hrs

*Instruction Mode:* Counselling Classes (Blended Mode)

**Course Objectives:** To familiarize students to British drama, its origin and development, and to introduce them critically to the select text under study.

**Course Outcomes:** Upon the completion of the course the students are expected to have learnt dramatic forms and techniques.

Course Title: <i>Reading English Drama (DSE-1)</i>	
Unit No.	Unit Title
1	Origin, History and Development of British Drama
2	Dramatic forms (farce, satire, chorus, dance etc.)
3	Brief discussion on Aristotle's theory of Drama
4	Features of Elizabethan drama
5	Life & works of Christopher Marlowe
6	<i>Dr Faustus</i> : Reading & Critical appreciation

**Suggested Readings:**

- Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Keefer, Michael, editor. *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*. Broadview Press, 2007.
- Peacock, Ronald. *The Art of Drama*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.
- Braunmuller, A. R., and Michael Hattaway, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Happe, Peter. *English Drama before Shakespeare*. Routledge, 1999.
- Deats, Sara Munson, editor. *Dr Faustus: A Critical Guide*. Continuum International, 2010.

## Model Question Paper

### Maulana Azad National Urdu University

Programme: B.A. (Hons.)

I Semester Examination

Paper Code: BEEN102DSC Paper Title: Reading English Drama

Time: 2 Hours

Total Marks: 35

**Note:** This question paper consists of three parts: **Part-A**, **Part-B** and **Part-C**. The number of words to answer each question is only indicative. Attempt all parts.

**Part-A** contains **05** compulsory questions of multiple choice/fill in the blank/very short answer type question. Answer all the questions. Each question carries **1** mark. **(5x1=5 marks)**

**Part-B** contains **08** questions of which students are supposed to answer **05** questions. Answer each question in approximately 200 words. Each question carries **04** marks. **(5x4=20 marks)**

**Part-C** contains **02** questions of which students are supposed to answer **01** question. Answer the question in approximately 250 words. Each question carries **10** marks. **(1x10=10 marks)**

#### Part-A

1. Answer all the questions.

i. Who wrote the play *Ralph Roister Doister*?

- (a) Richard Edward (b) Nicholas Udall  
(c) George Gascoigne (d) None of the above

ii. The term Hamartia refers to \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) Moral lesson (b) Tragic flaw in a hero  
(c) Exaggerated humour (d) Comic ending

iii. According to Aristotle, what is the most important element of tragedy?

- (a) Character (b) Plot  
(c) Diction (d) Spectacle

iv. What is the name of the famous theatre associated with Elizabethan drama?

- (a) The Rose Theatre (b) The Globe Theatre  
(c) The Blackfriars Theatre (d) The Curtain Theatre

v. The main source for the play *Edward II* was \_\_\_\_\_.

- (a) *Hamlet* (b) *Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles*  
(c) *Hamlet and Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles* (d) None of the above

#### Part-B

2. What are the key functions of a chorus in ancient Greek drama?

3. How do peripeteia and anagnorisis contribute to the effectiveness of a tragic plot?

4. What are the six elements of tragedy according to Aristotle, and why is plot considered the most important?

5. What themes were commonly explored in Elizabethan drama?

6. What was the role of 'supernatural elements' and 'comic relief' in Elizabethan drama?

7. What is a Blank Verse? Give an example for the same.

8. Do you think that the tragic flaw of Doctor Faustus was over vaulting ambition? Elucidate your answer.

9. Who is the chorus? Discuss the role of the Chorus in the play *Doctor Faustus*.

#### Part-C

10. Write an essay on how Christopher Marlowe exploited the theme of atheism in his different plays.

11. Describe the types of satire and explain how each addresses societal flaws.