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INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
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SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT – I - SHAKESPEARE – I (SHS1208)

I. THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE: 1564-1616

The mysterious death of Marlowe, the Cambridge graduate, and the brilliant subsequent career of Shakespeare, the grammar-school boy from Stratford, have caused some to speculate that his secret service activities make it practical for Marlowe to vanish from the scene and that he uses the name of a lesser man, Shakespeare, to continue his stage career.

Others, similarly inclined to conspiracy theories, have convinced themselves that Shakespeare's plays are the work of the statesman and essayist Francis Bacon. Snobbery (arrogance) rather than scholarship seems to underpin such arguments. Their advocates find it hard to accept that the unknown boy from Stratford should have created the crowning achievement of English literature. The truth is that William Shakespeare is not such an unknown figure, and the education provided in England's grammar schools of the time is among the best available.

Shakespeare's father, John, is a leading citizen of the town and for a while a justice of the peace. It is a safe assumption (though there is no evidence) that Shakespeare is educated at Stratford's grammar school. In 1582, at the age of eighteen, Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. Their first child, Susanna, is baptized in 1583, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith, in 1585. There is then a gap of several years in the documentary record of Shakespeare's life, but he is involved in the London theatre as an actor trying his hand also as a playwright by at least 1592, when he is attacked as an 'upstart crow' in a controversial pamphlet by Robert Greene.

In 1593 he published a poem, *Venus and Adonis*, following it in 1594 with *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Meanwhile he has had performed the three parts of Henry VI and, probably in the winter of 1592, Richard III.

The London theatres are closed for fear of the plague during 1592 and 1593 apart from brief midwinter seasons, but in 1594 things return to normal and Shakespeare's career speeds up. He is now a leading member of London's most successful company which was run by the Burbage family at the Theatre. Patronage at court gives them at first the title of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. On the accession of James I in 1603 they are granted direct royal favour, after which they are known as the King's Men. Shakespeare's share in the profits of this company, operating from the Globe on Bankside from 1599, makes him a wealthy man. Most of the subsequent documentary references relate to purchases in his home town of Stratford.

Shakespeare has shown little interest in publishing his plays, for like others of his time he probably regards them as scripts for performance rather than literature. After his death two of his colleagues, John Heminge and Henry Condell, gather the texts of thirty-six plays which they publish in 1623 in the edition known now as the First Folio.

SHAKESPEARE'S PARENTS

Richard Shakespeare, a husbandman and probably John's father, had settled in Snitterfield near Stratford by 1529 and had died by February 1561, leaving property that he rented from Robert Arden of Wilmcote. Robert Arden was a member of the younger branch of the powerful Arden family; his father, Thomas Arden, lived at Wilmcote and passed lands, probably quite extensive, to his son. Robert married twice: with his first wife, Agnes Hill, *née* Webbe, he had at least eight children, all girls, the youngest of whom was Mary; there appear to have been no children from the second marriage, though there were stepchildren.

The two families, Ardens and Shakespeares, were linked by Richard Shakespeare's tenancy from Robert Arden. But John Shakespeare (*b.* in or before 1530, *d.* 1601) did not continue Richard's occupation. By the time he married Mary Arden (some time between November 1556 and 1558), he had established himself in Stratford as a glover and whittawer (a dresser of light-coloured leather). He lived in Henley Street, buying a house and garden there in 1556 and starting to buy further property in town. In this he might well have been helped by his wife's inheritance: in Robert Arden's will of November 1556 she was named one of the two executors and supervised the substantial inventory of his goods and moveables in December 1556 after his death. She also inherited the valuable estate in Wilmcote known as Asbies, land that on her marriage came to her husband.

John and Mary Shakespeare were probably married in Aston Cantlow, the parish church for Wilmcote and the place where Robert Arden wanted to be buried. The exact date of the wedding is unknown but their first child, Joan, was born in September 1558 (and may well have died in infancy); Margaret was baptized in December 1562 and was buried the following April. A year later William was born. He survived the devastating plague that killed one in eight of the town's population later the same year. There were five more children: Gilbert (1566–1612), another Joan (born 1569, indicating that John and Mary's first child must have died by that year; she was the only sibling to outlive William, dying in 1646), Anne (1571–1579), Richard (1574–1613), and Edmund (1580–1607). All but Anne lived to adulthood. William's childhood was thus spent in a steadily increasing family and there were other relatives nearby: his uncle Henry Shakespeare, John's brother, lived in Snitterfield and many of his mother's sisters married local men.

John Shakespeare bought more property in Stratford in 1575, almost certainly including the rest of the 'Birthplace', creating a substantial house which even though it incorporated space for his workshop amounted to a fine home for his expanding family. But this period was also one of ever-increasing civic importance for John Shakespeare. He had risen through the lesser offices of the borough and, by the time of William's birth, was one of the fourteen burgesses of Stratford. In 1565 he became an alderman and in 1568 was elected bailiff for the year, the highest office in the town. In 1571 he became chief alderman and deputy bailiff. At about this time he also seems to have applied for a coat of arms. The family's wealth was also growing

and the civic importance and high social standing that John Shakespeare had achieved in a brief period provided the context for William's upbringing.

But in the following years something seems to have gone wrong with John Shakespeare's finances. At the start of the 1570s he was stretching his commercial activities beyond his trade, dealing illegally in wool and also being prosecuted for usury. By the end of the decade he was in debt; in 1578 he mortgaged some of Mary's inheritance and lost it in 1580 when he could not repay the sum, land that would otherwise have been inherited by William in due course. He stopped attending council meetings after 1576 as well, and was replaced as an alderman in 1586. All of this too provided a family context for William's youth; the decline in John Shakespeare's fortunes cannot have been unaccompanied by anxiety.

SHAKESPEARE'S EDUCATION:

Shakespeare would also have acted, as part of his education, either in Latin plays or in oratorical declamation, the latter a crucial part of the performative training in classical rhetoric. William's own education was not likely to have been affected by his father's fluctuating fortunes. It was also probably far better than either of his parents had received. There is no evidence that either John or Mary Shakespeare could write: each signed with a kind of mark. But the marks were not the awkward crosses of the totally illiterate: John often drew a fine pair of compasses; Mary's mark in 1579 was a complex design, apparently incorporating her initials and fluently written. Both may well have been able to read: many who could not write could read. Certainly, given John's status in the community, his four sons would have gone to Stratford's grammar school where their education would have been free. Before that William would have attended 'petty school' from about the age of five to about seven, learning to read.

At the King's New School, Stratford's splendid grammar school, William would have learned an immense amount of Latin literature and history, perhaps using the Latin-English dictionary left to the school by John Bretchgirdle who had baptized him. Among the works that Shakespeare later used as sources for his plays are a number that he would have read as part of his grammar-school education: the history of Livy, the speeches of Cicero, the comedies of Plautus and Terence, the tragedies of Seneca, and the poetry of Virgil and, above all, Ovid, who remained his favourite poet. The range of Latin writing that formed the curriculum was, by modern standards, vast. The mode of teaching, by a good teacher assisted by an usher, was one calculated to ensure the arts of memory, facility in composition, and rhetorical skills.

In addition, regular attendance at church, a legal requirement which his father does not appear to have avoided until later, guaranteed prolonged exposure to the *Book of Homilies* (fairly dull), the *Book of Common Prayer* (rather more exciting), and, especially, the exhilarating language of the *Bible* in English, a resource that Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, knew well, used extensively, and embedded deeply into the fabric of his language

II. WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE THE PLAYER

The next print reference to Shakespeare is in *Greenes Groats-Worth of Witte* (1592), a pamphlet ostensibly by Robert Greene (though possibly written by someone else, probably Henry Chettle) and published after Greene's death in September 1592; the pamphlet attacks Shakespeare as:

an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.

Greenes Groats-Worth of Witte, 1592, sig. F1r

The passage transforms the Duke of York's vicious attack on the even more vicious Queen Margaret in *3 Henry VI*: 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!' (i.iv, l. 138).

Whatever else Shakespeare may have been doing between 1585 and 1592 it is clear that he had been and was still an actor, that he had now become a playwright, and that, whatever other jobs this jack of all trades ('Iohannes fac totum') was doing in the theatre, he had become well enough known to irritate Robert Greene or whoever wrote the pamphlet. The attack was so sharp that Henry Chettle, who had been responsible for its publication, is often thought to be apologizing to Shakespeare later that year in his *Kind-Hartes Dreame* for not having 'moderated the heate' in preparing the piece for the press, praising Shakespeare for as 'divers of worship have reported, his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his fa[ce]tious grace in writing, which approves his Art' (H. Chettle, *Kind-Hartes Dreame*, 1592, sigs. A3v–4r), though the passage is probably an apology to someone other than Shakespeare. Neither at this period nor later is there any firm evidence of the roles Shakespeare acted or of the quality of his performances. Anecdotes ascribe to him various roles in his own plays, for example Adam in *As You Like It*, a choice which does not suggest any especially great thespian talent. He is named first in the list of 'the Principall Actors in all these Playes' in the collection of his own works in 1623 and appears in the lists of actors in Ben Jonson's *Workes* (1616) for *Every Man in his Humour* ('first Acted, in the yeere 1598') and *Sejanus his Fall* (1603). However much or little he may have acted, it is significant that he was known as a player, for example in the sneer by Ralph Brooke, the York herald, in 1602 at the grant of arms to 'Shakespeare the Player' (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 172).

When Shakespeare became a player is not clear but it is at least possible that he joined the Queen's Men. They played in Stratford in 1587 and their repertory included a play based on Montemayor's *Diana* (the source for Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), anonymous plays on the reigns of King John (*The Troublesome Reign*), Richard III (*The True Tragedy*), Henry IV, and Henry V (both covered by *The Famous Victories of Henry V*), all subjects of plays by Shakespeare himself in the 1590s, as well as *King Leir* which, as well as being the major source for Shakespeare's *King Lear*, has possibly left its trace on a number of his earlier works. Though he was influenced by many other plays, not least the work of Christopher Marlowe, in developing his own style in his early works, there is no

comparable body of sustained influence. If not actually in the Queen's Men, he certainly seems to have known their work especially well and the plays that belonged to them were crucial to Shakespeare's histories, the works that established the Lord Chamberlain's Men as the pre-eminent company of the age. The Queen's Men's works were virulently anti-Catholic and the company may even have owed its existence to a political aim of touring anti-Catholic propaganda; Shakespeare's plays that owe something of their existence to the Queen's Men's repertory, while hardly being Catholic apologetics, are strikingly less factional in their religion. The idea that Shakespeare joined the company in 1587 after one of their actors, William Knell, died in a fight in Thame, Oxfordshire, is no more improbable than the deer-poaching narrative.

PLAY, 1594-1596

In December 1594 the Chamberlain's Men performed *The Comedy of Errors* at Gray's Inn. The play's design as a classical farce based on Plautus's *Menaechmi*, a play Shakespeare might well have read at school, made it especially suitable for the Christmas revels of the young gentry at one of the inns of court. In the course of the next year or so the company also performed *Love's Labour's Lost*, probably its lost sequel '*Love's Labour's Won*', *Richard II*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an extraordinary output that was perhaps the result of Shakespeare's busy writing activity during the plague time. In the flow of creativity in this period and with the imprecision inevitable in attempting to date the plays' writing and first performances accurately, other work may also belong to this period or even earlier: *King John* was probably written in 1595 or 1596, a history play which, like *Richard II*, was written without being part of a sequence and which, in its extraordinary veering of tone from full-blown tragedy to mocking and satiric comedy, marks Shakespeare's most extreme view of the action of history and the legitimacy of kingship.

Shakespeare's plays were also now beginning to be printed: unauthorized versions of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* appeared in 1594 and 1595 respectively; *Titus Andronicus* was published in 1594. A version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, with different character names and considerable adjustment of the plot, also appeared in 1594 as *The Taming of a Shrew*. Some of this print activity may have been the result of the collapse of the companies which had owned the plays. The publication in 1595 of *Lochrine*, 'Newly set foorth, overseene and corrected, By W.S.' as the title-page describes it, may, if Shakespeare is the man behind the initials, be evidence of further work, seeing an anonymous play into print.

Shakespeare was now demonstrating his consummate ease in a wide range of genres and theatrical techniques: the frenetic farce within a potentially tragic frame of *The Comedy of Errors*; the learned, witty, verbal games and inconclusive ending of *Love's Labour's Lost*; the lyrical virtuosity and sharply personal politics of *Richard II*; the outrageous sexy comedy, romantic love, and tragic conclusion of *Romeo and Juliet*; and the metrical pyrotechnics and supernatural mechanism of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is in this list a sustained experimentation with form, with theatricality, and with language. There was, as well, a new

attitude to the materials out of which his plays were created. For *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, he went back to a work he had used in part for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Arthur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562; reprinted 1587), an immensely long poem in fourteeners, turning Brooke's rather dull epic into an exhilarating and immediate drama while mining the original for details to feed into his play. But it is striking, too, that neither *Love's Labour's Lost* nor *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a single narrative source, something that could have offered Shakespeare a clear shape for the plot. Both comedies are also concerned with the nature of theatre itself, embedding into their final sequence a performance (the pageant of the Nine Worthies and the play of Pyramus and Thisbe) that both comments on the drama as a whole and analyses audience response. Shakespeare is clearly reflecting on his own art.

PLAY, 1596-1598

Over the next two years, Shakespeare continued to write comedies set in Italy: *The Merchant of Venice* marked the continuing influence of Marlowe, depending on *The Jew of Malta* as *Richard II* had on Marlowe's *Edward II*; *Much Ado about Nothing* turned a traditional trope of mistaken identity into a dark comedy on the social pressures to marry. But he also returned to *Richard II* and began a new cycle of plays, explicitly designed, as the epilogue to *Henry V* would make plain, to connect with his earlier cycle which had dramatized the collapse of rule, empire, and nation after the early death of Henry V. He turned back to the Queen's Men's play *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, with its sharp contrast of the prince's riotous youth and victorious adulthood, as a foundation for a prolonged meditation on the looming threat of succeeding to the crown, on the nature of kingship and the identity of England itself. The two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* created a complete and continuous cycle of eight plays in all, a work of extraordinary ambition and scale, something no English dramatist had attempted before or would attempt again.

But *I Henry IV* brought him into conflict with a powerful family. In articulating a tension between the world of politics and an alternative culture in which Prince Henry resists the inevitable future call to the throne, Shakespeare originally named the prince's tavern companion Sir John Oldcastle. Whether deliberately or not, the name was guaranteed to offend the family of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who had been lord chamberlain from 1596 to his death in 1597, for Oldcastle, the Lollard leader revered as a protestant martyr, was Cobham's ancestor. Under pressure from the family the name was changed to Sir John Falstaff, but only after *I Henry IV* had been performed. Other names were changed in the play: Russell became Peto since the family name of the earls of Bedford was Russell, while Harvey became Bardolph since Sir William Harvey was about to marry the countess of Southampton. The politics of naming continued into *The Merry Wives of Windsor* where Master Ford's original name in his disguise, Brook, while allowing watery puns on 'ford', had to be changed to Broom, again after the first performances: Shakespeare may well have first used Brook as a joke at the expense of Lord Cobham's surname.

Rowe reported that Shakespeare wrote *Merry Wives* at Queen Elizabeth's request, the queen being so pleased with the character of Falstaff that she 'commanded him to continue it for one Play more, and to shew him in Love' (*Works*, ed. Rowe, 1.viii–ix). The anecdote is unlikely to be true, but it is far more probable that the play was performed at the celebrations in May 1597 before the installation into the Order of the Garter of Sir George Carey, now Lord Hunsdon, the son of the founder of the Chamberlain's Men and himself now in the same office after Cobham's death.

Where there is neither proof nor likelihood that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written for and performed at an aristocratic wedding, as is often suggested, *Merry Wives*, while also performed at The Theatre, was adapted to this specific occasion. The company clearly would have wished to praise their patron and mark his high honour and their playwright used his latest play, capitalizing on the exceptional success of Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays, to provide an appropriate tribute. Plays could earn companies money and goodwill in more ways than through the box office.

SHAKEPEARE IN LONDON, 1598 - 1601

In the course of less than a decade Shakespeare had earned, borrowed, or been given enough to spend nearly £900 in his home town. By comparison, it is not clear what sort of property Shakespeare lived in while in London at this time. Late in 1596 he was known to have been living in the parish of St Helen's, Bishopsgate, by having failed to pay various levies due at this time. His goods were valued in 1598 at a mere £5, a comparatively small sum. The location was reasonably convenient for walking to The Theatre. He had moved away by 1599 and was now resident in the Clink parish in Surrey, in the Liberty, conveniently close to the site of the new Globe Theatre where the company was resident for the rest of his career, once it had rebuilt The Theatre on its new site south of the Thames when the lease expired on the land it had occupied. None of this suggests much of a commitment to living in London by comparison with the sustained, substantial, and frequent investment in and around Stratford.

But the move to be near the Globe Theatre marks a new stage in Shakespeare's professional career and it is an apt moment to take stock. He had become a widely known and admired playwright and poet. The *Parnassus* plays, performed by students of St John's College, Cambridge, at the Christmas celebrations between 1598 and 1601, mock Gullio who speaks 'nothinge but pure Shakspeare, and shreds of poetrie that he hath gathered at the theators' and praises 'sweet Mr. Shakspeare!'; Gullio will sleep with 'his *Venus*, and *Adonis* under my pillowe' (Chambers, 2.200–01). Poets like Richard Barnfield, John Marston, Robert Tofte, and John Weever referred to Shakespeare's plays and poems in their own poems and epigrams published in 1598 and 1599. In 1598, in *Palladis tamia: Wits Treasury*, Francis Meres praised Shakespeare fulsomely (all Meres's praise is fulsome):

'As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage', going on to list six comedies and six tragedies (four of which would now be identified as histories) as

proof of Shakespeare's status (F. Meres, *Palladis tamia*, fol. 282r). In 1600 a collection of quotations, *Belvedere, or, The Garden of the Muses* included over 200 passages from Shakespeare, mostly from *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and *Richard II*.

In March 1602 John Manningham, a barrister at the Middle Temple where Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* had been performed the previous month, noted a bawdy story about Shakespeare and Burbage in his diary; whether true or not, the story (of Shakespeare having sex with a woman who had wanted an assignation with Burbage whom she had fallen for as Richard III) indicates that Shakespeare was a figure to be gossiped about, though Manningham had to remind himself of Shakespeare's first name. Sir George Buck, unsure who had written *George a Greene* (1599), wrote on his copy that Shakespeare had told him it was by 'a minister who acted the pinner's part in it himself' (Nelson, 74); Shakespeare's information was probably wrong but Buck saw him as someone worth consulting on such matters. Finally, in this sequence of contacts, Shakespeare's success was sufficient to make one of his colleagues mock him: Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) has a number of satirical allusions to Shakespeare's recent plays as well as to his gentrified status. This amounts to more than a private dig at a friend: Jonson appears to have expected the audience to understand the barbs, yet another sign of Shakespeare's popularity.

Shakespeare's plays were also starting to appear in print both in versions that give unauthorized and often inaccurate versions of the plays and in reasonably carefully prepared versions, the latter often in response to the former: for example the quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* published in 1599, 'Newly corrected, augmented, and amended', in answer to the imperfections of the 1597 quarto. The suspect quartos often bear apparent traces of performance in their more elaborate stage directions. A positive flurry of editions appeared in 1600: *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*, as well as reprints of three other plays and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Some of these published editions of his plays now carried the author's name on their title-pages—for example, *Love's Labour's Lost*, the second quartos of *Richard II* and *Richard III* all published in 1598, or the third quarto of *1 Henry IV* in 1599—another indication of Shakespeare's growing reputation and significance, since playwrights were not usually named on their plays in print.

In 1605 the placing of Shakespeare's name on the title-page of *The London Prodigal*, a play certainly not by Shakespeare, is a further sign that his name was a good marketing ploy; the same (presumably deliberate) misattribution happened with the publication of Middleton's *A Yorkshire Tragedy* in 1608 (though some have argued that the play is by Shakespeare). Similarly, in 1599 William Jaggard published the second edition of a collection of poems called *The Passionate Pilgrim* (the date of the first edition is uncertain) which the title-page also attributed to Shakespeare, much to Shakespeare's annoyance that Jaggard, as Thomas Heywood noted, 'altogether unknowne to him ... presumed to make so bold with his name' (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 219). Very little of the collection was by Shakespeare but it included pirated and unattributed printings of three extracts from *Love's Labour's*

Lost offered as poems and of two of Shakespeare's sonnets (138 and 144). Meres had noted that 'the sweete wittie soule of *Ovid* lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.' (F. Meres, *Palladis tamia*, fols. 281v–282r). Whenever the sonnets were written, these two at least were by 1599 available in versions Jaggard could use.

PLAY, 1598 – 1601

Having completed the second tetralogy in his history cycle, with the epilogue to *Henry V* gesturing to the earlier sequence ('Which oft our stage hath shown'; epilogue, l. 13), Shakespeare might reasonably have thought he had dramatized enough English history and had made enough use of Holinshed's *Chronicles*. He turned to Roman history, a field he had ignored since *Titus Andronicus* but a rich resource for political analysis of contemporary society. *Julius Caesar* was probably the first play the Chamberlain's Men performed at their new theatre, the Globe, where Thomas Platter, a Swiss traveller, saw it on 21 September 1599. Shakespeare's main source was North's Plutarch—perhaps he had now acquired a copy from Richard Field—and Shakespeare kept closer to his source than ever before, dramatizing Plutarch often simply by turning North's prose into verse. Roman historical tragedy may have been successful but *Julius Caesar*, like *Titus*, was not to be the start of a sequence, though *Antony and Cleopatra* would later take up the story.

Women disguising themselves as young men had been a useful plot device in both *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Something, perhaps the expertise of a particularly brilliant boy player, made the prospect of making this transformation especially central to a comedy clearly appealing. In *As You Like It* (1599–1600) and *Twelfth Night* (1601), Shakespeare explored the idea to something approaching its limits. For *As You Like It*, his principal source was Thomas Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde* (1590) but, where Lodge's work is unequivocally placed in the forest of the Ardenne, Shakespeare's play is set ambiguously in France and in the Forest of Arden that had covered the centre of England and from which his mother's family derived its name. In this play Shakespeare also paid a small tribute to Marlowe as Phoebe remembers the words of the 'Dead shepherd': 'Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?' (iii.v, ll. 82–3). *Twelfth Night's* first recorded performance was at the Middle Temple; John Manningham noted its likeness to Plautus's *Menaechmi* and 'most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*' (Chambers, 2.328).

In both plays Shakespeare made use of the talents of the Chamberlain's Men's latest recruit, Robert Armin, who replaced Will Kemp in 1599; Armin's skills as a singer are clear in *Touchstone* and *Feste*, the first signs of the line of fools that Shakespeare wrote for him, far more bitter than those for Kemp.

Between the two comedies Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, rewriting the '*Hamlet*' play that had been playing on the London stage by 1589 and may have been written by Thomas Kyd. Now lost and probably never printed, the earlier play and its own sources can be presumed to have

provided a similar narrative but a simpler one. Nothing in them would have been as complex or provocative as Shakespeare's creation of the prince whose thought processes have been so profoundly influential on Western literature. Whatever else made the writing of *Hamlet* happen at this time, the extraordinary talents of Richard Burbage were a major determinant on the creation of the role, his lifelike acting deeply affecting Shakespeare's portrayal of the prince's mind. But, in creating Ophelia, Shakespeare seems also to have remembered a Stratford event, the inquest into the drowning, just outside Stratford in December 1579, of the aptly named Katherine Hamlett.

THE ESSEX UPRISING

Hamlet has its topical references to the work of the boys' companies, the popular rivals to the success of the Chamberlain's Men, but Shakespeare's *Henry V* had made a more direct and political reference in its anticipation of the return of Essex, 'the General of our gracious Empress' (v, chorus, l. 30), from subduing the rebellious Irish during the earl of Tyrone's uprising. But when Essex did return, unexpectedly and without permission, the eventual tension placed Shakespeare and the Chamberlain's Men in danger: Essex's ally Sir Gilly Meyrick and others of Essex's faction paid for the company to perform Shakespeare's *Richard II* two days before Essex's attempt at a coup in February 1601, daring to suggest to the audience that Essex would be Elizabeth's Bolingbroke. The actors claimed later, examined in the dangerous days following the failed coup, that they had argued that the play was 'so old and so long out of use' that 'they shold have small or no Company at yt' (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 160) but were persuaded to perform it for an extra £2. Shakespeare's play was clearly perceived as dangerous and the scene of Richard's deposition was never included in published versions until the fourth quarto (1608). The performance did no lasting damage to Shakespeare or to the theatre company which continued to be summoned to play at court for the Christmas festivities.

SHAKESPEAR IN STRATFORD, 1601- 1609

Other events of 1601 link Shakespeare and Stratford upon Avon. In March Thomas Whittington, who had been shepherd to Shakespeare's father-in-law, made his will, bequeathing to the poor the £2 which Anne Shakespeare had and which William therefore owed to his estate. Quite why the money had been loaned or deposited with Anne is unclear but it seems to indicate Shakespeare's absence from her. On 8 September 1601 John Shakespeare was buried in Stratford. No will survives but William, as the eldest son, would have inherited the house in Henley Street, though, with New Place, he had no need of it: his mother and his sister Joan, who had in the 1590s married William Hart, a hatter, together with her family continued to live there.

Unsurprisingly, most of the documents that speak of Shakespeare in connection with Stratford over the next few years concern legal matters: in spring 1604 he sold malt to a neighbour, Philip Rogers, and subsequently lent him 2s.;

Rogers repaid 6s. and Shakespeare sued for the remainder of the debt, 35s. 10d. There was another suit for a debt owed by John Addenbrooke: Shakespeare pursued him in the courts from August 1608 to June 1609, seeking £6 plus 24s. damages. Clearly Shakespeare was not willing to let such matters drop whether the sums were substantial or not, though in 1608 he may have been short of income with the theatres again shut by plague.

POEMS AND PLAYS, 1601 - 1603

Shakespeare's densely enigmatic allegorical poem '*The Phoenix and Turtle*' was published in 1601, appended to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr* in a group, *Poeticall Essaies*, including poems by Marston, Chapman, Jonson, and others, offered as a tribute to Sir John Salusbury with whom Shakespeare has no other known connection. In the following year Shakespeare wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, in part a response to George Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, a section of which had been published in 1598, and in part an engagement with Chaucer's long poem and Henryson's continuation, the first time Shakespeare had made extensive use of Chaucer since *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Cynical about sexual desire and war, the play's bleakness may have been aimed at a different audience from that of the Globe—if it was performed at all—since, when it was published in 1609, it carried an epistle identifying it as 'a new play, never stal'd with the Stage, never clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulger' (*Troilus and Cressida*, 1609, sig. ¶ 2r); the phrase may refer to performance in a space other than the Globe.

The accession of James I brought the Chamberlain's Men an extraordinary honour: soon after arriving in London, James took over the patronage of the company, now to be known as the King's Men. For the king's entry into London in May 1604, Shakespeare and the other players, like the members of the Queen's Men, Prince Henry's Men, and many other members of the royal household, were each given four and a half yards of red cloth, possibly to march in the procession or line the route. The King's Men frequently performed at the new court: between November 1604 and October 1605 they played eleven different works, seven of which were by Shakespeare, including new plays such as *Measure for Measure* and *Othello* and older ones such as *The Merchant of Venice* (twice) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; between the patent of May 1603 and Shakespeare's death they performed at court on at least 107 occasions.

Yet royal patronage could not solve some of the company's problems: performances at the Globe in 1603–4 had been frequently stopped for lengthy periods because of a sequence of plague, Elizabeth's final illness, public mourning, and further outbreaks of plague. The king gave the company £30 to tide them over while they could not perform. Not until April 1604 was public playing allowed again.

PLAYS, 1603 - 1606

Shakespeare had hardly been idle during this difficult time for the company: *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, and *All's Well that Ends Well* belong to 1603–4. They follow the

ambiguity of genre that characterizes *Troilus and Cressida* which was variously identified as a comedy in the prefatory epistle, a history on the title-page of the quarto of 1609, and a tragedy in the first folio. They share a world of misplaced sexual desire where one body can be substituted for another either unknowingly, as in the bed-tricks of *Measure* and *All's Well*, or in fantasy, as in Iago's report that Cassio had taken Othello's place in the marriage-bed. While *Othello* is a tragedy using the materials of comic cuckoldry, the other two can be wrenched from potential tragedy towards an uncertain comic ending.

In 1605 and 1606 Shakespeare's playwriting energies were spent on unequivocal tragedies: the astonishing sequence of *Timon of Athens*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Timon*, for the first time since the early stages of his career (depending on exactly when Shakespeare contributed to 'Sir Thomas More'), Shakespeare collaborated with another dramatist, the younger and equally successful Thomas Middleton, the two dividing the play up between them. Middleton was probably also responsible for some of the witches' scenes in *Macbeth* in the only form in which they reached print and he revised *Measure for Measure* in 1621 shortly before it was first printed in the first folio. Shakespeare was not a dramatist who worked in isolation from his fellow playwrights: he was strongly influenced by their plays and by their audiences' responses, just as his work also influenced them. Collaboration became increasingly a part of his playwriting method for the remainder of his career.

Political and other contemporary events affected the plays too. Both *King Lear* and *Macbeth* reflect in some ways the accession of King James: James's concern to unite Scotland and England seems to underpin the division of the kingdom in *Lear*, a warning of the consequences of disunity, while his claim of descent from Banquo is explicitly imaged in *Macbeth* where the witches show Macbeth the line of Banquo's descendants stretching towards James himself. *King Lear* also reflects a recent case in 1603 when Brian Annesley's eldest daughter tried to have her father declared insane and was prevented by the loving care of Annesley's youngest daughter, Cordell.

Yet if all these plays cannot be seen as other than tragedies, they are deliberately 'impure'. As Antony Scoloker commented in 1604 in the epistle to his poem *Diaphantus*: a good poem should be 'like *Friendly Shakespeare's Tragedies*, where the *Commedian* rides, when the *Tragedian* stands on Tip-toe: Faith it should please all, like Prince *Hamlet*' (Chambers, 2.214–15). *Lear* and *Macbeth* are both based on events that, for Shakespeare and his audiences, were the stuff of the chronicles: the source material for both lay in Holinshed; both are histories, as the first published edition of *Lear* (1608) is identified on its title-page. Shakespeare continued to rely on sources that had served him well so far: Holinshed and Plutarch above all but also the repertory of the Queen's Men (for the anonymous *King Leir*), Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, and Ovid.

PLAYS AND PUBLICATION, 1607 – 1609

In the meantime, he was developing new forms for his drama. *Pericles* marked a new departure for Shakespeare, a drama whose narrative spreads to and fro across the Mediterranean, with a chorus, the poet John Gower whose poem *Confessio amantis* is one of the play's sources, returned from the grave to tell the tale. From the finality of losing the beloved daughter at the end of *King Lear* to the possibility of a family being reunited at the end of *Pericles* is an enormous distance. *Pericles* was the only play largely written by Shakespeare not to be included in the 1623 first folio but it appeared in a quarto edition in 1608. Its immediate popularity may be indicated by the presence of the French and Venetian ambassadors at a performance in 1608.

If the play marked the start of a new phase in Shakespeare's writing, he made a last exploration of tragedy: *Coriolanus*, once again derived from Plutarch, is his fiercest study of the politics of the state and its citizens, spurred on by the immediate threat of the midlands uprising of 1607–8, a series of outbreaks of popular unrest caused by bad harvests and inflationary food prices. The riots occurred close to Stratford and William Combe, from whom Shakespeare had bought the land in Old Stratford in 1602, warned Lord Salisbury of the risk of sedition.

SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS

By 1609 about half of Shakespeare's plays had appeared in print. His long narrative poems continued to be reprinted. In 1609 Thomas Thorpe published *Shake-Speares Sonnets*, printed by George Eld who printed the first quarto of *Troilus and Cressida* in the same year. The foregrounding of Shakespeare's name in the very title of the volume suggests that it may well have been authorized by Shakespeare, who could have sold the sequence to Thorpe for publication; the frequent closures of the theatres yet again because of plague in 1607–9 could have encouraged him to find another source of income. Thomas Heywood indicated in 1612 that Shakespeare's annoyance with the earlier unauthorized publication of some of the sonnets in *The Passionate Pilgrim* had made him take action: 'hee to doe himselfe right, hath since published them in his owne name' (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 219).

The *Sonnets* were prefaced by an enigmatic dedication (with each word followed by a period) signed with Thorpe's initials, mimicking the form of Ben Jonson's dedication of *Volpone* to the universities (published by Thorpe in 1607): 'To the onlie begetter of these ensuing sonnets Mr W.H. all happinesse and that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth.' Thorpe included 154 sonnets, following them with the long poem '*A Lover's Complaint*'. One of the sonnets may date back to his courtship of Anne Hathaway in 1582; Meres had spoken of his 'sugred Sonnets' circulating in manuscript in 1598; a few had been printed in 1599. But when the bulk of them and '*A Lover's Complaint*' were written is a matter for argument. So too are the identities of Mr W. H., who may or may not be the young man to whom most of the sonnets are directed, of the 'dark lady' to whom others are aimed, and of the rival poet who appears in the sequence. Shakespeare, the consummate dramatist, may of course be constructing a drama set

out in sonnets without any real figures behind it, but if the poems do tell of events in Shakespeare's life the identities of the participants come to matter greatly.

None of the many attempts at identifying the dark lady or the rival poet are finally convincing. But the case for the young man's being William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke, is more thorough and effective, even if there is a strong counter-claim that 'Mr W. H.' deliberately reverses the initials of Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton, who was Shakespeare's patron in the early 1590s. Shakespeare had little known contact with Herbert, though Herbert and his brother were the dedicatees of the first folio in 1623 and praised there for having 'prosequuted both [Shakespeare's plays], and their Authour living, with so much favour' (sig. π A2r).

The sonnet sequence begins with a group of seventeen poems, apparently commissioned by the young man's family, that attempt to persuade him to marry and leave versions of himself behind in his children; Herbert had repeatedly refused proposed marriages and it is tempting to date these poems to his seventeenth birthday in 1597, perhaps the ones to which Meres referred. Equally well, if this part of the sequence is earlier than 1597, they could have been written to Southampton. In the absence of any significant external evidence, tests of vocabulary tend to suggest that some of the sonnets belong to the mid-1590s, while other internal indications, including possible allusions to the death of Elizabeth, suggest a date about 1603, when '*A Lover's Complaint*' is most likely to have been written as a deliberate coda to the sequence. There is no reason to assume that the sequence was written at one time, nor that its differing segments were originally intended to belong together. Most of the poems, with their account of homoerotic desire between the older poet and a younger and unfaithful man (sonnets 1–126), the counter-attractions of heterosexual desire (127–152), and a continual return to self-humiliation, self-loathing, and sexual disgust, may well have been revised. All one can be sure of is that the poems could not have reached their final form as a sequence, ending with the '*Complaint*', until at least 1603 and it is just as likely that they were finally revised shortly before publication. Perhaps the two periods of plague and closure provided Shakespeare with opportunities and reasons to work on his sonnets.

In the whole outpouring of sonnets in England in the period, only Richard Barnfield, in *Cynthia* (1595), wrote poems directed to a man. The *Sonnets* in their repeated punning on Shakespeare's first name make the embedding of the poet himself into the sequence plain. Their explicit homoeroticism suggests that Shakespeare's sexuality was consciously bisexual in its desires, though the modern concept of bisexuality and one appropriate to Shakespeare's lifetime may be significantly different. Whether Shakespeare's homoerotic desires led to or were connected with sexual acts with the young man or indeed any other man is far from clear. Read as biographical, they also make plain that fidelity to Anne was not something Shakespeare was much concerned about, though adulterous sex with the 'dark lady' induced deep shame. Whatever their biographical secrets, the poems have an emotional intensity and poetic complexity that make them among Shakespeare's greatest achievements.

THE LAST YEAR

In 1613, at the very end of his playwriting career, Shakespeare made a substantial investment in property in London, buying the gatehouse of the old Dominican priory in Blackfriars, where the Blackfriars Theatre was located, for £140. Burbage had also bought property in the area and Shakespeare's purchase may have been simply an investment, since one John Robinson was a tenant there in 1616. But the gatehouse was large enough for Shakespeare to have let part of it and used the rest himself. Wherever he was living in London after leaving the Mountjoys, he could have been in the Blackfriars gatehouse from 1613. Shakespeare paid £80 of the purchase immediately and mortgaged the remainder.

Though he was the purchaser, the property was held by him with three others as trustees: John Heminges of the King's Men, William Johnson, the landlord of the Mermaid Tavern, and John Jackson, possibly the husband of the sister-in-law of Elias James the brewer. The effect may well have been, whether by Shakespeare's design or not, to exclude Anne Shakespeare from having a widow's claim on a third share of the property for her life, her dower right, unless Shakespeare survived the other trustees.

The King's Men remained successful: at the celebrations for the marriage of James I's daughter to the elector palatine in February 1613 they performed fourteen plays, four of which were by Shakespeare (including the not exactly propitious *Othello*). But in June 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, the Globe Theatre burnt down after some of the stuff shot out of a small cannon, for a sound effect, lodged in the thatch. The sharers decided to rebuild at the cost of over £1400, each sharer contributing between £50 and £60. Shakespeare had certainly sold his share in the company by the time he made his will in 1616; this may have been a good moment to get out.

In 1709 Nicholas Rowe suggested that Shakespeare spent his last years 'in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends ... and is said to have spent some Years before his Death at his native *Stratford*' (*Works*, ed. Rowe, 1.xxxv). But, though the story has taken permanent hold, there is no evidence for Shakespeare's having retired to Stratford. In November 1614 Thomas Greene, Stratford's town clerk from 1603 to 1617, who repeatedly refers to Shakespeare as his cousin, was in London and noted that, Shakespeare 'commying yesterday to towne I went to see him howe he did' (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 231). Where Shakespeare came from he does not say—it might well have been Stratford—but Shakespeare still came to London. Greene had been at Middle Temple when *Twelfth Night* was performed there and, with his wife and his children, Anne and William (perhaps the Shakespeares had stood godparents to them), were living in New Place in 1609.

Events in Stratford continued to involve Shakespeare, whether he was there or not. He was one of seventy-one Stratford citizens who subscribed to contribute to the cost of promoting a bill in parliament for the repair of roads, being named first, added in the margin, after the town's officials. A visiting preacher was entertained at New Place in 1614, though it is not clear whether Shakespeare was there at the time. There were family sadnesses too: two of his

brothers died, Gilbert in February 1612 and Richard in February 1613, leaving only William and his sister Joan alive in that generation. In July 1613 his daughter Susanna brought a case in the bishop's consistory court that John Lane, a wild young man, had slandered her with an accusation of adultery with Rafe Smith and of having gonorrhoea; she won.

There was a local crisis too that affected Shakespeare. William Combe was the son of the William Combe from whom Shakespeare had bought the land in Old Stratford, and cousin of John Combe who left Shakespeare £5 in his will in 1614. Combe and Arthur Mainwaring, steward to Lord Ellesmere, wanted to enclose land at Welcombe from which Shakespeare and Thomas Greene had tithe income. The Stratford corporation opposed the enclosure. Shakespeare covenanted with Mainwaring's agent to be compensated, along with Greene, 'for all such losse detriment & hinderance' consequent on the enclosure (Schoenbaum, *Documentary Life*, 231). Greene's notes on his conversation with Shakespeare in London in November 1614 showed that Shakespeare knew how much land was intended to be enclosed and that compensation would be fixed the following April. Neither Shakespeare nor his son-in-law, John Hall, believed that the enclosure would go ahead. In December the corporation wrote to Shakespeare and Mainwaring to explain their opposition, not least because a fire in July 1613 had left many residents homeless. Combe's men began enclosing in the same month, but the ditch was filled in by women and children. Combe tried bribing Greene unsuccessfully. The struggle dragged on for years until Combe more or less abandoned his plans. Shakespeare's position in all this seems consistent: he was far more concerned to safeguard his income than to protect the townspeople's rights

III. ELIZABETHAN THEATRES

THE RED LION THEATRE

The Red Lion was an Elizabethan playhouse located in Mile End (part of the modern Borough of Tower Hamlets), just outside the City of London. Built in 1567, by John Brayne, formerly a grocer, this theatre was a short lived attempt to provide a purpose built playhouse for the many Tudor touring theatrical companies.



The Red Lion had been a farm, but a single gallery multi-sided theatre, with a fixed stage 40 feet by 30 feet, standing 5 feet above the audience, was built in the garden of the farmhouse. The stage was equipped with trapdoors, and an attached turret, or fly tower - for aerial stunts and to advertise its presence. The construction cost £20, and while it appears to have been a commercial success, the Red Lion offered little that the prior tradition of playing in inns had not offered, and it was too far from its audiences to be attractive (at the time, the area was open farmland) for visiting in the winter. There is little documentary evidence that it survived beyond the summer season of 1567.

Little is known of the Red Lion, principally, from a lawsuit between Brayne and Edward Stowers, a blacksmith of Averstone, Essex (the modern Althamstone). Brayne was married to Stowers sister Margaret. The suit concerned six acres of land straddling the Essex-Suffolk border, and alleged that Brayne raised a mortgage on the land, by trickery, in order to build the Red Lion.

The venture was soon replaced by a more successful collaboration between Brayne and another brother-in-law, the actor-manager James Burbage at Shoreditch, known as The Theatre. The Red Lion was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas The Theatre accepted long term engagements, essentially in repertory, with companies being based there. The former was a continuation of the tradition of touring groups, performing at inns and grand houses, the later a radically new form of theatrical engagement.

THE THEATRE

The Theatre was an Elizabethan playhouse located in Shoreditch (part of the modern Borough of Hackney), just outside the City of London. Built by actor-manager James Burbage, near the family home in Holywell Street, The Theatre is considered the first theatre built in London for the sole purpose of theatrical productions. The Theatre's history includes a number of important acting troupes including the Lord Chamberlain's Men which employed Shakespeare as actor and playwright. After a dispute with the landlord, the theatre was dismantled and the timbers used in the construction of the Globe Theatre on Bankside.

Construction

The Theatre was constructed in 1576 by James Burbage in partnership with his brother-in-law John Brayne on property that had originally been the grounds of the dissolved priory of Halliwell (or Holywell). The location of The Theatre was in Shoreditch, beyond the northern boundary of the City of London and thus outside the jurisdiction of civil authorities who were often opposed to the theatre. This area in the "suburbs of sin" was notorious for licentious behaviour, brothels and gaming houses, and a year later another theatre called The Curtain was built nearby, making the area London's first theatrical and entertainment district.

"This wooden O"

The design of The Theatre was possibly adapted from the inn-yards that had served as playing spaces for actors and/or bear baiting pits. The building was a polygonal wooden building with three galleries that surrounded an open yard. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the chorus' speech describes the theatre as, "This wooden O." From one side of the polygon extended a thrust stage. The Theatre is said to have cost £700 to construct, a considerable sum for the age.

The open yard in front of the stage was cobbled and provided standing room for those paying a penny. For another penny, the audience were allowed into the galleries where they either stood or, for a third penny, could procure a stool. One of the galleries, though sources do not state which, was divided into small compartments that could be used by the wealthy and aristocrats.

History

The Theatre opened in the autumn of 1576, possibly as a venue for Leicester's Men, the acting company of Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester of which James Burbage was a member. In the 1580s the Admiral's Men, of which James Burbage's son, Richard was a member, took up residence. After a disagreement between the company and young Burbage broke out, most of the company left for the Rose Theatre which was under the management of Philip Henslowe.

In 1594, Richard Burbage became the leading actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men which performed here until 1597. Poet, playwright and actor William Shakespeare was also in the

employ of the Company here and some of his his early plays, possibly including an early version of Hamlet (the so-called Ur-Hamlet) were premiered here.

Foundation of the Globe

Towards the end of 1596, problems arose with the property's landlord, one Giles Allen. In consequence, in 1597, the Lord Chamberlain's Men were forced to stop playing at the Theatre and moved to the nearby Curtain. The lease, which had been granted to Richard Burbage and his brother Cuthbert Burbage upon the death of their father, expired the following year. The sight of the deserted Theatre prompted these lines from a minor satirist of the day:

*But see yonder,
One like the unfrequented Theatre
Walks in dark silence and vast solitude.*

This state of affairs forced the Burbage brothers to take drastic action to save their investment. In defiance of the landlord and with the help of their friend and financial backer William Smith, chief carpenter Peter Street and ten or twelve workman, they dismantled the theatre on the night of the 28th December 1598 and moved the structure piecemeal across the Thames. The pieces of The Theatre were then used in the construction of the Globe Theatre.

No remains of The Theatre survive. Its former site is marked by a plaque at 88-86 Curtain Road, Shoreditch.

The Red Lion

John Brayne, originally a grocer and one of the partners in The Theatre, had built an earlier playhouse in Mile End, called the Red Lion, in 1567. It appears to have been a success, but scant information about it survives.

The Red Lion was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas The Theatre accepted long term engagements, essentially in repertory. The former was considered a continuation of the tradition of playing at inns, the later a radically new form of theatrical engagement. There is no evidence that the Red Lion continued beyond the summer of 1567, although the law suit, from which we know much of the little we know of it, dragged on until 1578.

THE SWAN THEATRE



The Swan was a theatre in Southwark, London, England, built between 1594 and 1596, during the first half of William Shakespeare's career. It was the fourth in the series of large public playhouses of London, after James Burbage's The Theatre (1576) and Curtain (1577), and Philip Henslowe's Rose (1587-8).

The Swan was located on the west end of the Bankside district of Southwark, across the River Thames from the City of London. It was at the northeast corner of the Paris Garden estate that Francis Langley had purchased in May 1589, east of the manor house, and 150 yards south of the Paris Garden stairs at the river's edge. Langley had the theatre built almost certainly in 1595-6. When it was new, the Swan was the most visually impressive of the existing London theatres. Johannes De Witt, a Dutchman who visited London around 1596, left a description of the Swan in his *Observationes Londiniensis*. Translated from the Latin, his description identifies the Swan as the "finest and biggest of the London theatres," with a capacity for 3000 spectators. It was built of flint concrete, and its wooden supporting columns were so cleverly painted that "they would deceive the most acute observer into thinking that they were marble," giving the Swan a "Roman" appearance. (De Witt also drew a sketch of the theatre. The original is lost, but a copy by Arendt van Buchell survives, and is the only sketch of an Elizabethan playhouse known to exist. If the Lord Chamberlain's Men acted at the Swan in the summer of 1596—which is possible, though far from certain—they would be the actors shown in the Swan sketch.) When Henslowe built the new Hope Theatre in 1613, he had his carpenter copy the Swan, rather than his own original theatre the Rose, which must have appeared dated and out of style in comparison.

In 1597 the Swan housed the acting company Pembroke's Men, who staged the infamous play *The Isle of Dogs*, by Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson, the content of which gave offense for unknown reasons. Jonson was imprisoned, along with Gabriel Spenser (an actor) in the play, and others. Langley, already in trouble with the Privy Council over matters unrelated to theater, may have exacerbated his danger by allowing his company to stage the play after a royal order that all playing stop and all theaters be demolished. This order may have been

directed at Langley alone; the other companies, the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men, had been authorized to return to the stage by October.

Because both court and city were interested in limiting the number of acting troupes in London, and because there was, consequently, a glut of large open-roof venues in the city, the Swan was only intermittently home to drama. Along with *The Isle of Dogs*, the most famous play to premiere there was Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, performed by the newly-merged Lady Elizabeth's Men and Children of the Queen's Revels (the troupe that had been associated with the Blackfriars Theatre before 1608) in 1613. The theater offered other popular entertainments, such as swashbuckling competitions and bear-baiting, and by 1632 it had been pulled down.

THE ROSE THEATRE



The Rose was an Elizabethan theatre. It was the fourth of the public theatres to be built, after The Theatre (1576), the Curtain (1577), and the theatre at Newington Butts (c. 1580?) — and the first of several playhouses to be situated in Bankside, Southwark, in a liberty outside the jurisdiction of the City of London's civic authorities.

The Rose was built in 1587 by Philip Henslowe and by a grocer named John Cholmley. The theatre was built on a messuage called the "Little Rose," which Henslowe had leased from the parish of St. Mildred in 1585. It contained substantial rose gardens and two buildings; Cholmley used one as a storehouse, while Henslowe appears to have leased the other as a brothel. The building was of timber, with a lath and plaster exterior and thatch roof. It was polygonal in shape, about 21 meters in diameter. City records indicate that it was in use by late 1587; however, it is not mentioned in Henslowe's accounts between its construction and 1592, and it is possible that he leased it to an acting company with which he was not otherwise concerned.

In 1592 Edward Alleyn was acting with a combination of personnel from Lord Strange's Men and the Admiral's Men; this group moved into the Rose in February of 1592. Henslowe

enlarged the theatre for the new troupe, moving the stage further back (six feet six inches, or two meters) to make room for perhaps 500 extra spectators. The original Rose was smaller than other theatres, only about two-thirds the size of the original Theatre built eleven years earlier, and its stage was also unusually small; the enlargement addressed both matters. Henslowe paid all the costs himself, indicating that Cholmley was no longer involved — either deceased or bought out. The work was done by the builder John Grigg. The renovation gave the theatre, formerly a regular polygon (with perhaps 14 sides), a distorted egg shape, a "bulging tulip" or "distorted ovoid" floor plan.

The 1592–4 period was difficult for the acting companies of London; a severe outbreak of bubonic plague meant that the London theatres were closed almost continuously from June 1592 to May 1594. The companies were forced to tour to survive, and some, like Pembroke's Men, fell on hard times. By the summer of 1594 the plague had abated, and the companies re-organized themselves, principally into the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men. The latter troupe, still led by Alleyn, resumed residence at the Rose.

The Rose appears to have differed from other theatres of the era in its ability to stage large scenes on two levels. It is thought that all Elizabethan theatres had a limited capability to stage scenes "aloft," on an upper level at the back of the stage — as with Juliet on her balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii. A minority of Elizabethan plays, however, call for larger assemblies of actors on the higher second level — as with the Roman Senators looking down upon Titus in the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus*. An unusual concentration of plays with the latter sort of staging requirement can be associated with the Rose, indicating that the Rose had an enhanced capacity for this particularity of stagecraft.

The Rose was home to the Admiral's Men for several years. When the Lord Chamberlain's Men built the Globe Theatre on the Bankside in 1599, however, the Rose was put into a difficult position. Prompted by complaints from city officials, the Privy Council decreed in June 1600 that only two theatres would be allowed for stage plays: the Globe in Bankside, and the Fortune Theatre in Middlesex — specifically, Shoreditch. Henslowe and Alleyn had already built the Fortune, apparently to fill the vacuum created when the Chamberlain's Men left Shoreditch. The Rose was used briefly by Worcester's Men in 1602 and 1603; when the lease ran out on The Rose in 1605 it was abandoned. The playhouse may have been pulled down as early as 1606.

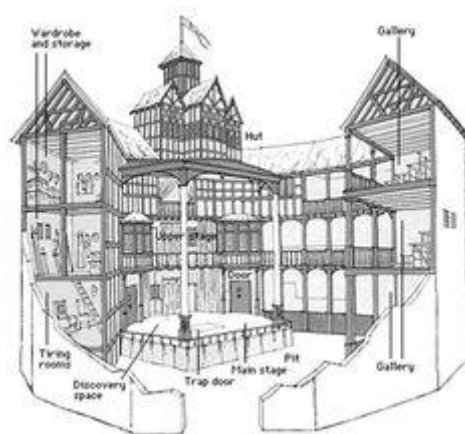
In 1989, the remains of the Rose were threatened with destruction by building development. A campaign to save the site was launched by several well-known theatrical figures, including Peggy Ashcroft and Laurence Olivier. It was eventually decided to build over the top of the theatre's remains, leaving them conserved beneath.

The handling of the Rose Theatre by government, archaeologists and the developer provided impetus for the legitimisation of archaeology in the development process and led the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher to introduce PPG 16 in an attempt to manage archaeology in the face of development threat.

The foundations of the Rose are covered in a few inches of water to keep the ground from developing major cracks, but it is used for performances with actors performing around the perimeter of the site. When the Museum of London carried out the excavation work, the staff found many objects which are now stored in the museum itself. (Portions of the theatre's foundations were deeply littered with hazelnut shells — apparently, hazel nuts were the popcorn of English Renaissance drama.)

In 1999, the site was re-opened to the public, underneath the controversial new development. Work continues to excavate this historic site further and to secure its future.

THE GLOBE THEATRE



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

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

The Globe was built in 1599 using timber from an earlier theatre, The Theatre, that had been

built by Richard Burbage's father, James Burbage, in Shoreditch in 1576. The Burbages originally had a 20-year lease of the site on which the Theatre was built. When the lease ran out, they dismantled The Theatre beam by beam and transported it over the Thames to reconstruct it as The Globe.

On June 29, 1613, the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of Henry the Eighth. A theatrical cannon, set off during the performance, misfired, igniting the wooden beams and thatching. According to one of the few surviving documents of the event, no one was hurt except a man who put out his burning breeches with a bottle of ale.

Like all the other theatres in London, the Globe was closed down by the Puritans in 1642. It was destroyed in 1644 to make room for tenements. Its exact location remained unknown until remnants of its foundations were discovered in 1989 beneath the car park of Anchor Terrace on Park Street (the shape of the foundations are replicated in the surface of the car park). There may be further remains beneath Anchor Terrace, but the 18th century terrace is listed and therefore cannot be disturbed by archaeologists.

Layout of the Globe

The Globe's actual dimensions are unknown, but its shape and size can be approximated from scholarly inquiry over the last two centuries. The evidence suggests that it was a three-story, open-air amphitheatre between 97 and 102 feet (29.6 - 31.1m) in diameter that could house up to 3,000 spectators. The Globe is shown as round on Wenceslas Hollar's sketch of the building, later incorporated into his engraved "Long View" of London in 1647. However, in 1997-98, the uncovering of a small part of the Globe's foundation suggested that it was a polygon of 20 (or possibly 18) sides.

At the base of the stage, there was an area called the pit, (or, harking back to the old inn-yards, yard) where, for a penny, people (the "groundlings") would stand to watch the performance. Groundlings would eat hazelnuts during performances — during the excavation of the Globe nutshells were found preserved in the dirt — or oranges. Around the yard were three levels of stadium-style seats, which were more expensive than standing room

A rectangular stage platform, also known as an 'apron stage', thrust out into the middle of the open-air yard. The stage measured approximately 43 feet (13.1m) in width, 27 feet (8.2m) in depth and was raised about 5 feet (1.52m) off the ground. On this stage, there was a trap door for use by performers to enter from the "cellarage" area beneath the stage. There may have been other trap doors around the stage.

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

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

THE MODERN GLOBE

At the instigation of American actor and director Sam Wanamaker, a new Globe theatre was built according to an Elizabethan plan. The design team comprised Theo Crosby of Pentagram as the architect, Buro Happold as structural and services engineers and Boyden & Co as quantity surveyors. It opened in 1997 under the name "Shakespeare's Globe Theatre" and now stages plays every summer (May to October). Mark Rylance was appointed as the first artistic director of the modern Globe in 1995. In 2006, Dominic Dromgoole took over.

The new theatre on Bankside is approximately 225 yards (205m) from the original site, centre to centre, and was the first thatched roof building permitted in London since the Great Fire of London in 1666.

As in the original Globe, the theatre is open to the sky and has a thrust stage that projects into a large circular yard surrounded by three tiers of steeply raked seating. 700 tickets to stand (and you must stand, no sitting allowed) in the yard are available for every performance at 5 pounds each. The only covered parts of the amphitheatre are the stage and the (more expensive) seated areas. Plays are put on during the summer, usually between May and the first week of October. In the winter the theatre is used for educational purposes. Tours are available all year round.

The reconstruction was carefully researched so that the new building would be as faithful a replica as possible. This was aided by the discovery as final plans were being made of the site of the original Globe itself. Modernisations include the addition of sprinklers on the roof to protect against fire, and the fact that the theatre is partly joined onto a modern lobby, visitors centre and additional backstage support areas. Due to modern Health and Safety regulations 1,300 people can be housed during a show, under half the estimated 3,000 of Shakespeare's time.

THE FORTUNE PLAYHOUSE

The Fortune Playhouse is the name of an historic theatre in London. It was located between Whitecross Street and the modern Golden Lane, just outside the City of London. It was founded about 1600, and suppressed by the Puritan Parliament in 1642

History

Origins

The Fortune Theatre was contemporary with Shakespeare's Globe, the Swan theatre and others; it stood in the parish of St Giles-without-Cripplegate, to the west of the Shoreditch locations of The Theatre and the Curtain Theatre, between Whitecross Street and Golding

Lane just outside the City of London. Between 1600 and 1642, it was among the chief venues for drama in London.

The Fortune was erected as the second half of a substantial realignment of London's chief acting companies. In 1597, the Lord Chamberlain's Men had left, or rather been ejected, from The Theatre; they abandoned Shoreditch and in 1599 constructed a new theatre, the Globe, in Southwark. The Admiral's Men, then playing in the nearby and aging Rose Theatre, suddenly faced stiff competition for Bankside audiences.

At this point, the Admiral's manager Philip Henslowe and his stepson-in-law, the leading actor Edward Alleyn, made plans to move to Shoreditch; Alleyn appears to have funded the new theatre, later selling half-interest to his father-in-law. They paid £240 for a thirty-year lease on a plot of land between tenements on Golding and Whitecross Lane. They hired Peter Street, who had just finished building the Globe, to make them a playhouse. Street was paid £440 for the construction job; with another £80 spent for painting and incidental expenses, the cost of the physical building was £520. The total expenses for the project, including the securing of property rights and clearances of previous leases, came to £1,320. Maintaining the theatre cost about £120 per year in the first decade of its existence.

Because the contract for the construction was preserved among Alleyn's papers, a good deal more is known about the Fortune than about the other outdoor theatres. The document also casts some light on the features of the Globe, since Henslowe and Alleyn planned their theatre with an eye on their rival's venue; many of the details in the contract are for sizes equal to or bigger than the Globe's equivalent

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DESIGN

The plot of land on which the theatre sat was approximately square, 127 feet across and 129 feet deep. The theatre was built on a foundation of lime and brick; square-shaped (uniquely among the period's amphitheatres), each wall measured eighty feet outside and fifty-five within. The building was three stories tall; the first-floor galleries were twelve feet high, those on the second floor eleven; those on the third, nine. Each row of galleries was twelve feet deep. Henslowe and Alleyn specified that the Fortune outdo the Globe "in every point for scantlings"; they also provided, in accordance with common practice, for two-penny rooms and gentlemen's rooms. The building was constructed of lath and plaster, with wood floors in the galleries.

The stage, and tiring-house, were thrust forward into the middle of the square. The tiring-house had glazed windows; the manner of its attachment to the stage is unknown but presumably similar to that of the Swan. The stage was forty-three feet across; it was covered with tile.

FIRST THEATRE

Henslowe and Alleyn's plans met with considerable opposition from the neighbourhood and city officials. With the aid of their patron, Charles Howard, the Lord Admiral, they secured

permission from the Privy Council for the venture. Henslowe seems also to have soothed his neighbors' worries by pledging substantial amounts to charity in the parish.

The theatre housed the Admiral's Men by late 1600, as revealed by correspondence of the Venetian ambassador in London. This troupe remained as tenants for more than two decades, surviving the deaths of both Henslowe and Alleyn, and remaining fairly stable under the successive patronage of Prince Henry and Lord Palsgrave. Upon Henslowe's death, Alleyn assumed full control of the property.

Originally described as the "fairest play-house in the town," the Fortune suffered a slow decline in reputation over the decades. In 1605, notorious roisterer Mary Frith may have appeared on the boards, singing and playing a lute; it is not clear from the consistory court records in which this event is described if the players were a party to her antics. In 1612, the theatre was mentioned by name in a city order suppressing the post-performance jigs, which authorities believed led to fist-fights and thefts. That this belief had some merit is suggested by a case the next year, in which a country farmer stabbed a city gentleman. In 1614, Thomas Tomkiss's academic play *Albumazar* linked the Fortune and the Red Bull Theatre as raucous places to see old-fashioned fare such as *The Spanish Tragedy*. The aspersion stuck, as did the conjunction of north-side theatres.

Yet the conventional view should not be exaggerated; on one and perhaps two occasions, ambassadors visited the theatre. On the first and less certain occasion, a member of the Venetian delegation, Orazio Busino, describes a visit in December 1617 to a theatre that may have been the Fortune. On the second, the notorious Gondomar certainly visited Alleyn and the others there in 1621; after the performance the players held a banquet in his honour.

SECOND THEATRE

On 9 December 1621, the Fortune burned to the ground, taking with it the company's stock of plays and properties. To meet the £1000 cost of rebuilding, Alleyn formed a partnership of twelve sharers, each paying an initial amount of £83 6s. 8d. By then aged and busy with Dulwich College, he took only one share for himself, and leased the property to the company's sharers for £128 per year. (The shareholders paid Alleyn £10 13s. 10d. each annually, and in return split the profits of the theatre, and the expenses of running it, twelve ways.) The theatre re-opened in March 1623. When Alleyn died in 1626, the College assumed control of the lease; the actor Richard Gunnell became its manager. Yet this change does not appear to have changed operations at the theatre. The new theatre appears to have been made of brick, with a lead and tile roof as fire-proofing measure. It also seems to have been round, abandoning its unconventional square shape.

The reputation of the theatre did not improve after its reconstruction. In 1626, it was the scene of a riot involving sailors, in the course of which a constable was assaulted. In 1628, a protege of Buckingham was assaulted by a mob after leaving a performance there.

In 1631, Palsgrave's Men moved to the playhouse at Salisbury Court; they were replaced at the Fortune by the actors of the King's Revels. The only play definitely associated with this period is a comedy, now lost, by William Heminges, son of John Heminges. In 1635, a

company that had been at the Red Bull Theatre occupied the theatre, only to meet a notable run of bad fortune: plague closed the theatres for more than a year, from May 1636 to October 1637. Since they had no income from the theatre, the twelve shareholders in the theatre fell seriously arrear in their payments to Dulwich College, by more than £165.

In 1639, the actors were fined £1000 for depicting a religious ceremony on stage—this depiction was taken as anti-Catholic, but in the late 1630s, almost any reference to religion was risky. This group returned to the Red Bull at Easter 1640, and the remnants of Palsgrave's company, now under the patronage of the young Prince Charles and therefore called Prince Charles's Men, returned to the Fortune.

When Parliament ordered all theatres closed in 1642, the Fortune entered a slow but irreversible decline. The actors at least occasionally violated the order, for they were raided and their property seized during a performance almost a year after the closure; between the expiration of the original order and the enactment of new, more stringent orders in 1649, the players returned to the theatre. In 1649, soldiers pulled down the stage and the gallery seats. By the Restoration, it had partially collapsed, and the masters of Dulwich sold what remained as scrap.

The 1599 contract for building the Fortune Theatre was found in the papers of theatrical manager Philip Henslowe at Dulwich College. The contract gives some overall dimensions of the Fortune but there are no plans or elevations.

The Elizabethan Stage at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, designed by Richard L. Hay, uses the dimensions from the contract but the stage's appearance and arrangements are speculation, as the original plans have never been found.

A further replica is located at the University of Western Australia.

THE CURTAIN THEATRE



The Curtain Theatre was an Elizabethan playhouse located in Curtain Close, Shoreditch (part of the modern Borough of Hackney), just outside the City of London. It opened in 1577, and continued staging plays until 1622.

The Curtain was built some 200 yards south of London's first playhouse, The Theatre, which had opened a year before, in 1576. (It was called the "Curtain" because it was located near a plot of land called Curtain Close, not because it had the sort of front curtain associated with modern theatres. Elizabethan theatres had small curtained enclosures at the back of their stages; but the large front-curtained Proscenium stage did not appear in England till after the Restoration.)

Little is known of the plays performed at the Curtain or of the playing companies that performed there. Its proprietor seems to have been one Henry Lanman, who is described as a "gentleman." In 1585 Lanman made an agreement with the proprietor of the Theatre, James Burbage, to use the Curtain as a supplementary house, or "easer," to the more prestigious older playhouse.

From 1597 to 1599 it became the premiere venue of Shakespeare's Company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who had been forced to leave their former playing space at The Theatre after the latter closed in 1596. It was the venue of several of Shakespeare's plays, including *Romeo and Juliet* (which gained "Curtain plaudits") and *Henry V*. In this latter play the somewhat undistinguished Curtain gains immortal fame by being described by Shakespeare as "this wooden O." The Lord Chamberlain's Men also performed Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* here in 1598, with Shakespeare in the cast. Later that same year Jonson gained a certain notoriety by killing actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel in nearby Hoxton Fields. The Lord Chamberlain's Men departed the Curtain when the Globe, which they built to replace the Theatre, was ready for use (1599).

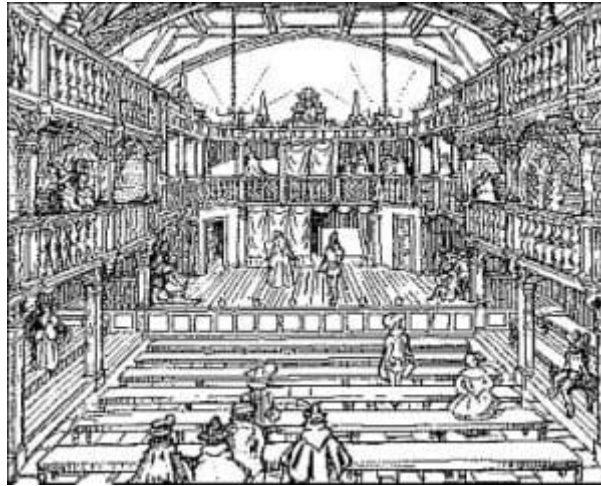
As far as is known, Lanman ran the Curtain as a private concern for the first phase of its existence; yet at some point the theatre was re-organized into a shareholders' enterprise. Thomas Pope, one of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, owned a share in the Curtain and left it to his heirs in his last will and testament in 1603. King's Men member John Underwood did the same in 1624. The fact that both of these shareholders belonged to Shakespeare's company may indicate that the re-organization of the Curtain occurred when the Lord Chamberlain's Men were acting there.

In 1603 the Curtain became the playhouse of Queen Anne's Men (formerly known as Worcester's Men, and formerly at the Rose Theatre, where they'd played Heywood's *A Woman Kill'd With Kindness* in February of that year). In 1607 *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, by Rowley, Day, and Wilkins, was performed at the Curtain.

The ultimate fate of the Curtain is obscure. There is no record of it after 1627.

A modern plaque marks its site today, in Hewett Street off Curtain Road.

THE BLACKFRIARS THEATRE



Blackfriars Theatre was the name of two separate theatres in the Blackfriars district of the City of London during the Renaissance. Both theatres began as venues for child actors associated with the Queen's chapel choirs; in this function, the theatres hosted some of the most innovative drama of Elizabeth and James's reigns, from the euphuism of John Lyly to the stinging satire of Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston. The second theatre eventually passed into the control of the King's Men, who used it as their winter playhouse until the theatres were closed in 1642.

First Theatre

The Blackfriars Theatres were built on the grounds of the former Dominican monastery; the black robes worn by members of this order lent the neighbourhood, and theatres, their name. In the pre-Reformation Tudor years, the site was used not only for religious but also for political functions--perhaps most notably, the divorce trial of Catherine and Henry VIII which would, more than a century later, be reenacted in the same room by Shakespeare's company. After Henry's expropriation of monastic property, the monastery became the property of the crown; control of the property was granted to Thomas Cawarden, Master of the Revels. Cawarden used part of the monastery as Revels offices; other parts he sold or leased to the neighbourhood's wealthy residents, including Lord Cobham and John Cheke. After Cawarden's death, the property passed to Sir William More. In 1576, Richard Farrant, then Master of Windsor Chapel leased part of the former buttery from More in order to stage plays. As often in the theatrical practice of the time, this commercial enterprise was justified by the convenient fiction of royal necessity; Farrant claimed to need the space for his child choristers to practice plays for the Queen, but he also staged plays for paying audiences. The theatre was small, perhaps 46 feet long and 25 feet wide (14 by 8 metres), and admission, compared to public theatres, expensive (apparently fourpence); both these factors limited attendance at the theatre to a fairly select group of well-to-do gentry and nobles.

For his playing company, Farrant combined his Windsor children with the Children of the Chapel Royal, then directed by William Hunnis. Relatively little is known of their repertoire, except that it presumably included works by Farrant and perhaps Hunnis. The landlord More appears to have remained patient with this use of his property until shortly before Farrant's death in 1580, when More attempted to prove that his tenant had broken the lease. This

attempt came to nothing; supported by a letter from Robert Dudley, the widow Ann Farrant was allowed to lease the theater to Hunnis. Hunnis continued to produce plays at the site until 1583, when he sold his lease to Henry Evans. There followed a confused period of legal actions involving Hunnis, Ann Farrant, Evans, and More. The result, apparently orchestrated by Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, placed the theater under the control of Hunnis and de Vere's secretary, playwright John Lyly. Lyly's plays and others were, for a year or two, performed at the theatre before production at court. In 1585, however, More obtained a legal judgement voiding the original lease. The theatre was shut down after this judgement for more than a decade.

Second Theatre

The second Blackfriars was an indoor theatre built elsewhere on the property at the instigation of James Burbage, father of Richard Burbage, and impresario of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In 1596, Burbage purchased, for £600, the frater of the former priory and rooms below. This large space, perhaps 100 feet long and 50 wide (30 by 15 metres), with high ceilings allowed Burbage to construct two galleries, substantially increasing potential attendance. As Burbage built, however, a petition from the residents of the wealthy neighbourhood persuaded the Privy Council to forbid playing there; the letter was signed even by Lord Hunsdon, patron of Burbage's company. The company was absolutely forbidden to perform there.

Three years later, Richard Burbage was able to lease the property to Henry Evans, the lawyer who had been among those ejected more fifteen years earlier. Evans entered a partnership with Nathaniel Giles, Hunnis's successor at the Chapel Royal. They used the theatre for a commercial enterprise with a group called the Children of the Chapel, which combined the choristers of the chapel with other boys, many taken up from local grammar schools under colour of Giles's warrant to provide entertainment for the Queen. The dubious legality of these dramatic impressments led to a challenge from a father in 1600; however, this method brought the company some of its most famous actors, including Nathaniel Field and Salmon Pavy. The residents did not protest this use, probably because of perceived social differences between the adult and child companies.

While it housed this company, Blackfriars was the site of an explosion of innovative drama and staging. Together with its competitor, Paul's Children, the Blackfriars company produced plays by a number of the most talented young dramatists of Jacobean literature, among them Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston. Chapman and Jonson wrote almost exclusively for Blackfriars in this period, while Marston began with Paul's but switched to Blackfriars, in which he appears to have been a sharer, by around 1605. In the latter half of the decade, the company at Blackfriars premiered plays by Francis Beaumont (*The Knight of the Burning Pestle*) and John Fletcher (*The Faithful Shepherdess*) that, although failures in their first production, marked the first significant appearance of these two dramatists, whose work would profoundly affect early Stuart drama. The new plays of all these playwrights deliberately pushed the accepted boundaries of personal and social satire, of violence on stage, and of sexual frankness. These plays appear to have attracted members of a higher social class than was the norm at the Bankside and Shoreditch theatres, and the

admission price (sixpence for a cheap seat) probably excluded the poorer patrons of the amphitheatres. Prefaces and internal references speak of gallants and Inns of Court men, who came not only to see a play but also, of course, to be seen; the private theatres sold seats on the stage itself.

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

In the years around the turn of the century, the children's companies were something of a phenomenon; a reference in *Hamlet* to "little eyasses" suggests that even the adult companies felt threatened by them. By the later half of that decade, the fashion had changed somewhat. In 1608, Burbage's company (by this time, the King's Men) took possession of the theatre, which they still owned, this time without objections from the neighbourhood. There were originally seven sharers in the reorganised theatre: Richard Burbage, William Shakespeare, Henry Condell, John Heminges, and William Sly, all members of the King's Men, plus Cuthbert Burbage and Thomas Evans, agent for the theatre manager Henry Evans. Sly, however, died soon after the arrangement was made, and his share was divided among the other six.

After renovations, the King's Men began using the theatre for performances in 1609. Thereafter the King's Men played in Blackfriars for the seven months in winter, and at the Globe during the summer. Blackfriars appears to have brought in a little over twice the revenue of the Globe; the shareholders could earn as much as £13 from a single performance, apart from what went to the actors.

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

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

Structure of the second theatre

The nature of Burbage's modifications to his purchase is not clear, and the many contemporary references to the theatre do not offer a precise picture of its design. Once fitted for playing, the space may have been about 66 feet long and 46 feet wide (20 by 14 metres), including tiring areas. There were at least two and possibly three galleries, and perhaps a number of stage boxes adjacent to the stage. Estimates of its capacity have varied from below 600 to almost 1000, depending on the number of galleries and boxes. Perhaps as many as ten spectators would have encumbered the stage.

UNIT – II - SHAKESPEARE – I (SHS1208)

HISTORICAL PLAYS

I. JULIUS CAESAR

JULIUS CAESAR

In 1599, when William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was performed at the new Globe Theatre, Elizabeth I was an aged monarch with no legitimate heir — neither a child of her own nor a named heir. The people of England worried about succession, fully aware of the power struggles that could take place when men vied for the throne of England. They were also aware of the realities of the violence of civil strife.

It is no surprise, then, that the subject matter of this play was relevant to their concerns, even as the content of this play drew on and adapted ancient history. In 44 BC, Rome was at the center of a large and expanding empire. The city was governed by senators but their politics were plagued by in-fighting, and the real glory and strength belonged to generals like Caesar and Antony. In addition, a new group, the Tribunes, had entered the political field. After a hard-won battle, the plebeians, the working class of Rome, had elected these men as their representatives and protectors (as represented by Flavius and Marullus in Act I). The return of the triumphant Caesar and his desire to centralize power went against the grain of the decentralizing that was taking place. Such a setting was fraught with the makings of dramatic conflict.

Shakespeare took this potential for upheaval and used it to examine a leadership theme. Concentrating on the responsibilities of the ruling class, he looked at what could happen if that class no longer had a unified vision and had lost sight of what it meant to be Roman. In fact, the characters of the play lose touch with the tradition, glory, integrity, and stoicism of their past. As you read the play, note the way that Cassius uses the memory of that glorious past to persuade men to become conspirators, and the way that the actions of the conspirators do or do not return Rome to its golden age.

Persuasion, too, is a concept at the center of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowning (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself (see his soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1). This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience. Portia is, in some ways, a stronger character than Brutus and yet, because of her position as a woman in an overwhelmingly male-dominated world, her role is minimal.

If gender is not a central issue to this play, questions of masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness — his effeminacy — makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the

incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy for them. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue see "A World Without Women" in the Critical Essays section of this Note.)

Finally, it is important to have a look at the end of this play and consider what kind of resolution it actually brings. In fact, this approach helps analyze any of Shakespeare's plays. Near the end of *Julius Caesar*, lessons appear to have been learned and Brutus seems to have received his proper due, but audience must not forget that the final speakers, Antony and Octavius, have not always been truthful men and may not be in the future. The ambiguity of the ending of this play is characteristic of Shakespeare's work. The more neatly things seem to be resolved, the more likely it is that the action has just begun.

PLAY SUMMARY

The action begins in February 44 BC. Julius Caesar has just reentered Rome in triumph after a victory in Spain over the sons of his old enemy, Pompey the Great. A spontaneous celebration has interrupted and been broken up by Flavius and Marullus, two political enemies of Caesar. It soon becomes apparent from their words that powerful and secret forces are working against Caesar.

Caesar appears, attended by a train of friends and supporters, and is warned by a soothsayer to "beware the ides of March," but he ignores the warning and leaves for the games and races marking the celebration of the feast of Lupercal.

After Caesar's departure, only two men remain behind — Marcus Brutus, a close personal friend of Caesar, and Cassius, a long time political foe of Caesar's. Both men are of aristocratic origin and see the end of their ancient privilege in Caesar's political reforms and conquests. Envious of Caesar's power and prestige, Cassius cleverly probes to discover where Brutus' deepest sympathies lie. As a man of highest personal integrity, Brutus opposes Caesar on principle, despite his friendship with him. Cassius cautiously inquires about Brutus' feelings if a conspiracy were to unseat Caesar; he finds Brutus not altogether against the notion; that is, Brutus shares "some aim" with Cassius but does not wish "to be any further moved." The two men part, promising to meet again for further discussions.

In the next scene, it is revealed that the conspiracy Cassius spoke of in veiled terms is already a reality. He has gathered together a group of disgruntled and discredited aristocrats who are only too willing to assassinate Caesar. Partly to gain the support of the respectable element of Roman society, Cassius persuades Brutus to head the conspiracy, and Brutus agrees to do so. Shortly afterward, plans are made at a secret meeting in Brutus' orchard. The date is set: It will be on the day known as the ides of March, the fifteenth day of the month. Caesar is to be murdered in the Senate chambers by the concealed daggers and swords of the assembled conspirators.

After the meeting is ended, Brutus' wife, Portia, suspecting something and fearing for her husband's safety, questions him. Touched by her love and devotion, Brutus promises to reveal his secret to her later.

The next scene takes place in Caesar's house. The time is the early morning; the date, the fateful ides of March. The preceding night has been a strange one — wild, stormy, and full of strange and unexplainable sights and happenings throughout the city of Rome. Caesar's wife, Calphurnia, terrified by horrible nightmares, persuades Caesar not to go to the Capitol, convinced that her dreams are portents of disaster. By prearrangement, Brutus and the other conspirators arrive to accompany Caesar, hoping to fend off any possible warnings until they have him totally in their power at the Senate. Unaware that he is surrounded by assassins and shrugging off Calphurnia's exhortations, Caesar goes with them.

Despite the conspirators' best efforts, a warning is pressed into Caesar's hand on the very steps of the Capitol, but he refuses to read it. Wasting no further time, the conspirators move into action. Purposely asking Caesar for a favor they know he will refuse, they move closer, as if begging a favor, and then, reaching for their hidden weapons, they kill him before the shocked eyes of the senators and spectators.

Hearing of Caesar's murder, Mark Antony, Caesar's closest friend, begs permission to speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus grants this permission over the objections of Cassius and delivers his own speech first, confident that his words will convince the populace of the necessity for Caesar's death. After Brutus leaves, Antony begins to speak. The crowd has been swayed by Brutus' words, and it is an unsympathetic crowd that Antony addresses. Using every oratorical device known, however, Antony turns the audience into a howling mob, screaming for the blood of Caesar's murderers. Alarmed by the furor caused by Antony's speech, the conspirators and their supporters are forced to flee from Rome and finally, from Italy. At this point, Antony, together with Caesar's young grandnephew and adopted son, Octavius, and a wealthy banker, Lepidus, gathers an army to pursue and destroy Caesar's killers. These three men, known as *triumvirs*, have formed a group called the *Second Triumvirate* to pursue the common goal of gaining control of the Roman Empire.

Months pass, during which the conspirators and their armies are pursued relentlessly into the far reaches of Asia Minor. When finally they decide to stop at the town of Sardis, Cassius and Brutus quarrel bitterly over finances. Their differences are resolved, however, and plans are made to meet the forces of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus in one final battle. Against his own better judgment, Cassius allows Brutus to overrule him: Instead of holding to their well-prepared defensive positions, Brutus orders an attack on Antony's camp on the plains of Philippi. Just before the battle, Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar. "I shall see thee at Philippi," the spirit warns him, but Brutus' courage is unshaken and he goes on.

The battle rages hotly. At first, the conspirators appear to have the advantage, but in the confusion, Cassius is mistakenly convinced that all is lost, and he kills himself. Leaderless, his forces are quickly defeated, and Brutus finds himself fighting a hopeless battle. Unable to

face the prospect of humiliation and shame as a captive (who would be chained to the wheels of Antony's chariot and dragged through the streets of Rome), he too takes his own life.

As the play ends, Antony delivers a eulogy over Brutus' body, calling him "the noblest Roman of them all." Caesar's murder has been avenged, order has been restored, and, most important, the Roman Empire has been preserved.

CRITICAL ESSAYS:

Major Themes:

Explore the different themes within William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Julius Caesar*. Themes are central to understanding *Julius Caesar* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

Persuasion

Persuasion is a concept at the center of this play. Everyone seems to be trying to convince someone else of something: Caesar tries to create an image in the public's mind of his crowing (an ancient form of spin doctoring); Cassius finds the best way to manipulate each man he seeks to bring to his side; and Brutus, whom the reader hopes will refuse to participate, takes longer than the others to respond to Cassius' manipulations, but eventually does respond and even finishes the job for him by persuading himself (see his soliloquy in Act II, Scene I). This pivotal scene, when Brutus joins the conspirators, is also interesting because Portia, Brutus' wife, serves as the voice of Brutus' conscience.

Leadership

Shakespeare took the potential for upheaval in *Julius Caesar* and used it to examine a leadership theme. Concentrating on the responsibilities of the ruling class, he looked at what could happen if that class no longer had a unified vision and had lost sight of what it meant to be Roman. In fact, the characters of the play lose touch with the tradition, glory, integrity, and stoicism of their past. As you read the play, note the way that Cassius uses the memory of that glorious past to persuade men to become conspirators, and the way the actions of the conspirators do or do not return Rome to its golden age.

Defining Masculinity

While gender itself is not a central issue to this play, questions of Masculinity and effeminacy are. Caesar's weakness — his effeminacy — makes him vulnerable. On the other hand, the incorporation of the so-called feminine traits of compassion and love into the friendship between Brutus and Cassius paradoxically allows the men to show greater strength and allows the audience to have greater sympathy for them.

Weather as a Major Symbol

On the eve of the Ides of March a storm is raging in Rome (Act I, Scene 3). It's a storm unlike any other. Fire falls from the skies, bodies spontaneously combust, lions roam the capital, ghostly women walk the streets, and the night owl was seen shrieking in the daylight. Shakespeare uses storms to create a mood of darkness and foreboding, but here he takes it one step further. The turmoil of the heavens is directly representative of the turmoil present in the state and in the minds of men. The raging storm, coupled with the eerie sights that Casca describes, are signs of disharmony in heaven and on earth.

The Question of Leadership

Who's in charge, who ought to be in charge, and how well are those in charge doing? These are central questions in *Julius Caesar*. The Elizabethan expectation would be that the ruling class ought to rule and that they ought to rule in the best interests of the people. Such is not the case in the Rome of this play. Barely controlled chaos has come to Rome, and this unsettled state is personified in the first scene of *Julius Caesar* through the characters of the cobbler and the carpenter. These characters give readers a sense that the people themselves are a sort of amorphous mass, potentially dangerous and, at the same time, absolutely essential to the success of the ruling class. Throughout the play, they are addressed: Caesar must give them entertainment and seeks their approbation for his crowning, Brutus recognizes that he must explain his actions to them, and Antony uses them for his own purposes. Yet, despite the plebeians' surging power, real chaos actually lies in the failure of the ruling class to exercise their authority properly and to live by the accepted rules of hierarchy and order.

These same threats and concerns resonated to an Elizabethan audience. At the time this play was performed in 1599, civil strife was within living memory. Henry VIII's reformation of the Church of England had brought violence and unrest to the country. In addition, despite all of his efforts, Henry had not provided a living and legitimate male heir for England. At his death, his daughter Mary returned the church to the bosom of Rome, demanding that her subjects align themselves with Catholicism. When Mary, too, died without heir, her sister, Elizabeth, took the throne. What followed was a long period, from 1548 to her death in 1603, of relative peace and prosperity. However, Elizabeth's subjects experienced unease during her reign. She was, after all, a woman, and according to the Elizabethan understanding of order, men ruled women, not the other way around.

Her subjects wished for Elizabeth to marry for a number of reasons. They would have felt much more secure knowing that a man was in charge, but further, they were tired of worries over succession. A legitimate heir was necessary. The Queen, on the other hand, over the period of her fertility refused the suits of a number of appropriate men, knowing that once married, she would no longer rule the realm. By the time this play was performed Elizabeth was an old woman, well beyond the age of childbearing. Even then, she refused to name an heir and the country worried that they would face another period of unrest at her death.

But even without this historical context, Elizabethans would have been interested in questions of order and hierarchy — questions raised by the political upheaval of *Julius Caesar*. The Elizabethan worldview was one in which everyone had their place. In many ways, they understood the world in terms of the family unit. God was the head of the heavenly family, with Jesus as his son. The monarch was subservient only to God, receiving power to head the English family from Him. The monarch's subjects maintained their kingdoms through the various levels of society and finally into their own homes, with men ruling their wives and wives ruling their children. Elizabethan thinking went so far as to order all living things in a hierarchy known as the *Great Chain of Being*, from God and the various levels of angels right through to the lowliest animal. In such a rigidly structured society it is entirely understandable that its members would be interested in exploring and examining the potentials of and the excitement that would be provided by an inversion of that order.

On the other hand, while it would have been acceptable to examine this relatively objective philosophical issue in the public theater, it would have been much less acceptable (to say the least) to set it within the context of the history of their own period. No direct questioning of England's state or monarch would have been possible. Playwrights of the time were aware of the dilemma and crafted their plays so that they would not offend. The setting of this play, therefore, in ancient Rome was the perfect answer. The story, taken from the Roman historian, Plutarch's, work called *Lives*, was well known to Shakespeare's audience, full of drama and conflict, and was sufficiently distant in time to allow both Shakespeare and his audience to operate in safety.

Now, on to the play itself. At the point in ancient history in which *Julius Caesar* is set, Rome was becoming slightly more democratic — well, democratic in their terms, not in modern ones. Tribunes, meant as representatives of the people, were being elected in order to protect them from the rigors of tyranny. Thus, to have a man like Caesar, charismatic and fresh from military triumph, come into the city and begin to establish himself as a supreme ruler was a dangerous trend. It is not surprising, then, that Flavius and Marullus behave as they do at the beginning of the play. They are, in effect, doing their job properly and to an Elizabethan audience their behavior, despite its autocratic tone to a modern reader's ears, would have been perfectly acceptable and should have been met with obedience and respect. The carpenter and cobbler, however, are barely under control and show little respect, although they do ultimately obey.

But it is not the masses who are the problem in this play. The real failure is that the ruling class does not rule properly. Instead of uniting for the good of the people as they ought to, they imagine themselves as individuals forming small splinter groups that, in the end undermine genuine authority. By disabling themselves in this way, the aristocratic class can still manipulate unruly plebeians but cannot keep them in check.

As a member of that class, Brutus is as much at fault as anyone else. It is, in fact, tempting to think of Brutus as an entirely sympathetic character. At the end of the play, the audience hears extravagant words of praise: "This was the noblest Roman of them all" and "This was a

man." By this point, however, readers ought to mistrust their reactions to such praise. Antony and Octavius have shown themselves to be perfectly capable of using and misusing language in order to establish their own positions, and the play has given ample evidence of a tendency to objectify the dead rather than to remember them as they actually were.

To be fair, there are gradations of character fault in this play and Brutus is more sympathetic than other characters. He does indeed believe that what he has done by murdering Caesar was necessary, and believes that anyone who hears his rationale will side with him. His very naïveté suggests innocence. On the other hand, upon examining his soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1, note that Brutus must do a fair amount to convince himself that Caesar must die: He has to admit that Caesar has not yet done anything wrong and so decides that his violent act will be preemptory, heading off the inevitable results of Caesar's ambition. Brutus' dilemma is that he has bought into the belief that if one lives life entirely by a philosophy — in his case one of logic and reason — everyone will be all right. He denies any other viewpoint and so is as blinded as Caesar is deaf. Before praising Brutus as Antony does after his death, remember that Brutus brought himself and the state of Rome to a point of such instability.

Antony, another member of that ruling class, is also one of the more sympathetic characters of the play. But is he a good ruler? The audience may like him for his emotion. His outrage at the murder of Caesar and his tears over Caesar's corpse are undoubtedly genuine. His revenge is partly fuelled by the horror and anger he feels at the outrage, and the reader is drawn to such loyalty. In addition, the skill that he exhibits in his manipulation of theatrical effects and language during his funeral oration is powerful and attractive. Yet, Antony is culpable too. While his emotional response is undoubtedly justified, it, too, contributes to unrest and political instability. While he, Octavius, and Lepidus ultimately form a triumvirate to return the state to stability, in fact, that it is a ruling structure fraught with problems. Lepidus is weak and a power struggle is on the horizon for Antony and Octavius. (In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavius is the ultimate winner of that struggle.)

Theater within a Theater

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!

Cassius speaks these words in Act 3, Scene 1 just as he convinces the exultant conspirators to smear their hands with Caesar's blood. At this moment of highest drama, one of the chief actors of this piece draws attention to its theatricality. Why?

It is a common trope of Elizabethan thinking to draw attention to life's fictions. Queen Elizabeth staged many public processions and scenes and created and lived the role of the Virgin Queen. Her subjects were both her fellow actors and her audience. Playwrights of the time, and Shakespeare in particular, made use of this metaphor in a number of ways (for an interesting example, take a look at *Hamlet* and the play within a play, *The Mousetrap*).

In *Julius Caesar*, theatricality is both an example of one of the major themes of the play, persuasion, and a comment on the deterioration of the state of Rome. A number of characters use theater in an attempt to persuade.

During the first meeting of Cassius and Brutus, (Act I, Scene 2), they hear a number of shouts. Later in the scene, Casca enters and reports on the offstage theater that has taken place. Caesar has staged a mock refusal of the crown, thinking that he will build a desire in his audience (the plebeians) that he eventually accept it. Think of this as someone refusing an award, saying, "Oh no, I couldn't possibly . . . oh no . . . well, if you insist." (For another example of this dramatic effect, one which works more successfully for the protagonist, see Shakespeare's *Richard III*.) Caesar's stage managing backfires though, and instead of acclaiming him, the people behave like a real audience passing judgement on the quality of the spectacle. "If the tag-rag people did not clap him and hiss him / according as he pleased and displeased them, as they use to / do the players in the theatre." Caesar's performance isn't good enough. It proves his superficiality. The people perceive this and refuse to accept him as their ruler.

Antony is much more successful with his theatrics. Unfortunately, Brutus does not recognize what Antony is up to when he asks to give Caesar's funeral oration in Act III, Scene 2. The opportunity to stage a scene is evident to the reader and to at least one of the conspirators, Cassius, who tries to dissuade Brutus, but to no avail. Imagine the power of Antony's entrance as he bears Caesar's body in his arms. This is a exhibition meant to move an audience — and it works. Antony's persuasive rhetoric that follows allows him to realize his objective: to incite the mob to revolt against the conspirators, with another showy scene. When Antony gradually uncovers Caesar's body and exposes its wounds, the first Plebeian responds with "O piteous spectacle" and that is precisely what it is. By means of the theatrical, then, the people have been convinced to act, not in their own best interests but in the interests of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus. Theater's power has been to continue the strife rather than to resolve it. To an Elizabethan audience, such dramatic tension would have been both threatening and seductive.

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Describe the changes that occur in the friendship between Cassius and Brutus.
2. The characters in this play are very concerned with what it was and is to be Roman. What role does tradition play in *Julius Caesar*?
3. Does Caesar have any real impact on the action of the play? Before his death? After his death?
4. What role does the supernatural play?

II. CORIOLANUS

SUMMARY

In ancient Rome, in the aftermath of a famine, the common people, or plebeians, demand the right to set their own price for the city's grain supply. In response to their protests, the ruling aristocracy, or patricians, grant the plebeians five representatives, or tribunes--a decision that provokes the ire of the proud patrician soldier Caius Martius, who has nothing but contempt for the lower classes. At this time, war breaks out with a neighboring Italian tribe, the Volscians, who are led by Martius' great rival, Tullus Aufidius. In the campaign that follows, the Volscians are defeated, and the Rome takes the Italian city of Corioles, thanks to the heroism of Martius. In recognition of his great deeds, he is granted the name Coriolanus.

Upon his return to Rome, Coriolanus is given a hero's welcome, and the Senate offers to make him consul. In order to gain this office, however, he must go out and plead for the votes of the plebeians, a task that he undertakes reluctantly. At first, the common people agree to give him their votes, but they later reverse their decision at the prodding of two clever tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, who consider Coriolanus an enemy of the people. This drives the proud Coriolanus into a fury, and he speaks out intemperately against the very idea of popular rule; Brutus and Sicinius, seizing on his words, declare him a traitor to the Roman state and drive him into exile.

Desiring revenge against Rome, Coriolanus goes to his Volscian enemy, Aufidius, in the city of Antium, and makes peace with him. Aufidius is planning a new campaign against the Romans, and he welcomes Coriolanus's assistance, although he soon feels himself to be falling into his new ally's shadow. Their army proceeds to march on Rome, throwing the city into a panic--Rome's armies are helpless to stop the advance, and soon Aufidius and Coriolanus are encamped outside the city walls. Two of his oldest friends come pleading for mercy, but Coriolanus refuses to hear him. However, when his mother, Volumnia, to whom he is devoted, begs him to make peace, he relents, and the Romans hail Volumnia the savior of the city. Meanwhile, Coriolanus and the Volscians return to Antium, where the residents hail Coriolanus as a hero. Aufidius, feeling slighted, declares that Coriolanus's failure to take Rome amounts to treachery; in the ensuing argument, some of Aufidius' men assassinate Coriolanus.

Act I, scene i

The play begins in the city of Rome, where the common people, or plebeians, are rioting against their rulers, the patrician class, whom they accuse of hoarding grain while the common people starve. The plebeians demand the right to set the price of grain, rather than accept a price imposed by the Senate (the governing body, run by the patricians), and they single out Caius Martius, a patrician general and war hero, as the "chief enemy to the people"(I.i.7-8). As they make their way to the Capitol, they are intercepted by Menenius, a patrician and a friend of Martius, who tells the mob that the patricians have their best

interests at heart. He compares the role of the Senate in Rome to the role of the stomach in the human body: The stomach serves as a storehouse and collecting-place for all the nutrients and then dispenses them throughout the rest of the body; similarly, the patricians collect and dispense grain to the entire city.

As Menenius and the rioters argue, Caius Martius himself comes in, and delivers a general curse to the mob, calling them dogs and cowards. He then tells Menenius that the Senate has agreed to allow the plebeians to elect five "tribunes," or representatives, to advocate for their interests in the Roman state. At that moment, a messenger dashes in, bringing word that the Volscies, one of Rome's enemies among the Italian tribes, are arming for war. Martius declares that the war will be good for their city and notes that the Volscies are led by a great general, Tullus Aufidius, whom he respects as a worthy adversary. A group of Senators has come in, and they now order Cominius (who is the consul, or chief magistrate of Rome for the year) and Titus Lartius (another patrician) to command the impending war--Martius will act as a lieutenant under Cominius. The crowd disperses, and the Senators return to the Capitol to prepare for the campaign.

Meanwhile, the plebeians have already elected their tribunes. Two of these, Sicinius and Brutus, have been watching Martius's behavior, and now they both comment on how proud and domineering he is. Sicinius wonders how he will bear being under the command of Cominius, but Brutus points out that by being second-in-command, Martius will escape blame if things go badly, yet he will receive all the credit if things go well.

Act I, scenes ii-x

The action now shifts to the Volscian city of Corioles, where Tullus Aufidius, about to depart for his attack on Rome, tells the Senators of Corioles that the Romans are already prepared for his offensive. But, the Senators are skeptical of the Romans' readiness; they advise Aufidius to take his army into the field as planned and to return to Corioles only if the Romans arrive and besiege the city.

In Rome, meanwhile, Volumnia and Virgilia, Caius Martius's mother and wife, sit sewing together. Volumnia tells her daughter-in-law how she raised Martius to be a great soldier, and takes more enjoyment from his victories than she would from a husband's embrace. She expresses the hope that he will crush the Volscians and Tullus Aufidius in the coming war and insists upon the beauty of bloody wounds. The two women are visited by Valeria, another Roman noblewoman, and the three discuss Virgilia and Martius's son, who takes after his father in his appetite for physical activity and fighting. Then, Valeria tells them the news from the battlefield--while Cominius has taken part of the Roman army to meet Aufidius's forces in the field, Titus Lartius and Martius are leading the rest of the army in a siege against Corioles.

At Corioles, the Volscian Senators come to the walls to parley with Martius and Lartius. Warning the Romans that Aufidius's army will soon return to rescue their city, they send out what troops have stayed behind in a sortie against the besiegers. The Volscians drive the

Romans back to their trenches before Martius, cursing his men for their cowardice, leads them back all the way up to gates of the city. However, in the course of the battle, he is cut off from his troops and trapped within the walls of Corioles; Lartius assumes that he is dead. However, Martius single-handedly holds off the Volscians, forces the gate open again, and allows the Roman army to surge in and seize the city.

The ravaging of Corioles begins, while Martius, wounded and bleeding, takes part of the army to join up with Cominius's forces, who are fighting with Aufidius's men. Cominius, whose army is retreating, has not yet heard the news of Corioles's fall, and so he is surprised at the appearance of the bloody Martius and wonders if the Romans have been defeated. Martius assures him that Corioles is in Roman hands, and then he leads Cominius's forces against Aufidius' men, seeking out Aufidius to engage him in one-on-one combat. The two generals meet briefly during the battle, and Martius drives Aufidius and several other Volscians back while the Roman forces pursue their triumph. He has now led the victory over both the city and the battlefield, but Martius selflessly refuses any share of the spoils, leaving them all to his men, who cheer him. He asks them to stop, but Cominius insists that he deserves a new name, Coriolanus, for his valor in the taking of Corioles, and so he is acclaimed as Caius Martius Coriolanus. Meanwhile, the beaten Aufidius curses his Roman nemesis, who has now defeated him five times, and sends messengers to lobby for peace.

Act II, scenes i-ii

In Rome, Brutus and Sicinius converse with Menenius as they await news from the battlefield. The two tribunes criticize Caius Martius, calling him overly proud and an enemy to the common people of Rome; in reply, Menenius tells them that they should look to their own faults before they criticize others, since they are "unmeriting, proud, violent, testy, magistrates, alias fools, as any in Rome (II.i.41-43)." While he attacks them, Brutus and Sicinius point out that he is hardly a perfect public servant either; indeed, he is better known as a wit and a gossip than as a great politician.

The two tribunes stand aside as Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria arrive with news of Martius' victory. While Volumnia describes the wounds her son received in this campaign, Menenius gives thanks, both that his friend is alive and that Rome is victorious over the Volscians.

Surrounded by his soldiers, Martius--now Coriolanus--enters Rome and greets his wife and mother. Then, accompanied by Cominius, Titus Lartius, and Menenius, he makes his way to the Capitol to greet the Senate. Left alone, Brutus and Sicinius worry that Coriolanus will be made consul in gratitude for his victories; they fear that, once in power, he will eliminate their office. However, they comfort themselves with the knowledge that the proud general is unlikely to go out in the marketplace and gain the votes of the common people-- votes that he must have in order to be consul. Indeed, his contempt for the lower classes will likely destroy the popularity that his battlefield exploits have won him.

With these thoughts in mind, the two tribunes make their way to the Capitol, where two officers are setting down cushions for the Senators and discussing the likelihood of Coriolanus becoming consul. The Senators come in and seat themselves, and Cominius rises to recount Coriolanus's exploits against the Volscians; the subject of his praise, embarrassed by the adulation, leaves the chamber while Cominius describes the battle and Coriolanus's great feats. Amazed by the account of his valor, the Senators recall the war hero and declare that they are eager to make him consul. They advise him to dress himself in the toga of candidacy and go at once to the marketplace, where he must describe his exploits and show his scars to the people and thereby gain their votes. Coriolanus begs to be allowed to avoid this custom, since he finds the entire practice demeaning, but they insist that he must do it. Observing his reluctance and disdain for the common people, Brutus and Sicinius plot to stir up resentment against him.

Act II, scene iii; Act III, scene i

In the marketplace, a collection of citizens discusses Coriolanus's candidacy, saying that if he uses the scars of battle in his appeal to them, they will probably make him consul. Then, Coriolanus himself comes in, accompanied by Menenius, who offers encouragement and then leaves his friend alone with the crowds, which come to him in small groups. Coriolanus struggles and cannot conceal his customary arrogance, but by calling attention to his military service, he manages to convince a large body of the citizens to vote for him. Brutus and Sicinius reluctantly acknowledge that he has passed the test, and Menenius leads him back to the Capitol to be invested with the robes of office.

When Coriolanus has gone, the plebeians remark on his arrogance, and the two tribunes demand to know why they voted for such an arrogant patrician. The plebeians decide to retract their approval and deny Coriolanus the consulship; elated, Brutus and Sicinius tell the crowds to gather their friends and go to the Capitol. Covering their own backs, the two tribunes advise the crowds to say that they only voted for Coriolanus because the tribunes told them to and that now they have come to their senses and want to have the vote rendered invalid.

Meanwhile, on the Capitol, Titus Lartius tells Coriolanus that Tullus Aufidius has raised a new army. Coriolanus worries that the Volscians will attack Rome despite the newly signed peace treaty, but Lartius assures him that they have been broken and will not fight again. At that moment, the two tribunes arrive and tell the assembled Senators that the people of Rome will not accept Coriolanus as consul. Furious, Coriolanus accuses Brutus and Sicinius of rallying the plebeians against him and then begins to denigrate the common people, warning his fellow patricians that allowing the rabble to hold power, to have tribunes, will ultimately lead to the downfall of the Senate. Menenius urges him to return to the market and beg the people's pardon, but Coriolanus refuses and continues to denounce the plebeians--and the patricians, for having ever agreed to allow them a share in Rome's governance. Brutus and Sicinius accuse him of treason and call in a crowd of plebeians to seize him. He raves at them, and the two tribunes declare that he must be executed; in response, Coriolanus draws

his sword, and the Senators come to his aid. Coriolanus and the Senators drive away the mob of plebeians, along with the two tribunes, and Coriolanus flees to a Senator's house. The mob returns in renewed strength, but Menenius convinces the people to allow him to reason with Coriolanus and to bring the great soldier to the market place for a public airing of all the grievances.

Act III, scenes ii-iii; Act IV, scenes i-iv

Coriolanus tells a group of Roman nobles that he has no intention of changing his character to suit the desires of the mob. Volumnia comes in and berates him for his intransigence, and then Menenius arrives with the Senators and advises him to go the marketplace and make peace with the people: he must recant what he has said about the plebeians and their tribunes, and then perhaps they will allow him to be consul. Coriolanus refuses, preferring to keep his honor, but his mother advises him to act humbly, even if his humility is dishonest, and ask for pardon, even if he does not mean this. He remains obdurate for a long while but eventually relents and agrees to make peace with the plebeians.

In the marketplace, Brutus and Sicinius prepare for Coriolanus's arrival, planning to bait him into losing his temper. The war hero enters, accompanied by Menenius and Cominius, and declares that he will submit to the will of the people. However, when Sicinius accuses him of planning to tyrannize the Roman state, he immediately becomes furious and again launches into a tirade against the tribunes and plebeians. As his friends watch helplessly, Sicinius and Brutus, supported by the entire populace, and over the protests of Cominius, declare that he must be banished from Rome forever. Coriolanus replies that he will go gladly, and he prepares to leave the city, pausing only to bid farewell to his wife, Virgilia, and to his mother and friends. Volumnia weeps and curses the city for casting him out, while Cominius offers to accompany him for a time, but Coriolanus refuses these offers and departs.

Brutus and Sicinius dismiss the people, and then try to avoid encountering Volumnia, Virgilia, and Menenius, who are returning from bidding farewell to Coriolanus. Volumnia spots the two tribunes, however, and denounces them, saying that they have exiled the best man in Rome. Brutus and Sicinius accuse her of having lost her wits, and they depart, leaving the friends of Coriolanus to their grief.

Meanwhile, a Roman in the pay of the Volscians meets up with another Volscian spy and reports that Coriolanus has been banished. The two men agree that this will give Tullus Aufidius an excellent chance to gain some revenge against Rome for the defeats he has suffered. At the same time, Coriolanus himself comes to the city of Antium, where Aufidius is staying. He informs the audience that he plans to ally himself with Aufidius against his native city and become Rome's greatest enemy.

Act IV, scenes v-vii; Act V, scene i

In Antium, Coriolanus asks for admission to the house of Tullus Aufidius. Aufidius' servants refuse to allow him in, as he is dressed in humble clothing, but one of them fetches his master. The Volscian general does not recognize Coriolanus either, so the Roman identifies himself and says that he has come to offer his friendship to Aufidius and support to the Volscian cause, or to be killed--it matters little to him. Aufidius, overcome with emotion, embraces him as a friend and welcomes him in, promising him the opportunity to exact revenge on the Romans for his banishment. The two generals dine together, and one of the servants brings word to his fellows that there will soon be war with Rome.

Back in Rome all is quiet, and Brutus and Sicinius congratulate each other on the ease with which they disposed of the troublesome Coriolanus. There has been no news from the exile for some time, and they tell Menenius that the city is better off without him. Just then, a messenger brings word that Aufidius and the Volscians are preparing to make war on Rome again. Brutus refuses to believe the news, but a second messenger brings even worse news--not only is the army indeed marching on Rome, but it is led by Coriolanus himself. Menenius is joined by Cominius, and the two friends tell the tribunes that this catastrophe is their fault--that their folly will bring down destruction on Rome. Brutus and Sicinius protest, but now the plebeians come in, panicked by the tidings, and begin to say that they were wrong to banish Coriolanus. The two tribunes, fearing for their own position, depart for the Capitol.

Meanwhile, Aufidius is beginning to have second thoughts about his alliance with his former adversary, as his soldiers have begun to show more devotion to Coriolanus than to him. He assumes that Rome will fall to her exiled general, and he begins to plot a way to dispose of Coriolanus once the city has been taken.

Coriolanus arrives on the borders of the city with his army, and Cominius goes out to plead with his old friend for mercy. Coriolanus turns him away, however, to the great despair of the inhabitants of Rome. Brutus and Sicinius plead with Menenius to make his own attempt, and the old patrician reluctantly agrees. However, as he departs, Cominius tells the tribunes that there is no hope-- Coriolanus is immovable.

Act V, scenes ii-vi

At the Volscian camp, Menenius is halted by the sentries, who refuse to allow him to see their generals. Eventually Coriolanus and Tullus Aufidius emerge, but Menenius' pleas fall on deaf ears, and he is sent away, after enduring the mockery of the guards. When he is gone, Aufidius remarks that he is impressed with Coriolanus's fortitude in ignoring the pleas of his oldest friends; the exiled soldier replies that henceforth he will accept no more embassies from Rome.

At that moment, however, a shout is raised, and Virgilia, Volumnia, Valeria, and Young Martius, Coriolanus's son, arrive from Rome. Coriolanus vows to steel his heart against them.

but allows them to approach, and his mother kneels before him and begs him to make peace. She tells him that she will block his path to Rome: "thou shalt no sooner / March to assault thy country than to tread... on they mother's womb that brought thee to this world (V.iii.122-25)." Meanwhile, his son pledges that when he has grown older, he will fight against his father. Coriolanus, moved, starts to leave, but his mother stops him and asks him again to make an honorable peace, one that rewards Romans and Volscians alike, rather than destroy his native city. When he does not reply, she makes ready to return to Rome and "die among our neighbors (V.iii.73)." But Coriolanus has been won over; he pledges to make peace immediately. Seeing this, Aufidius tells the audience that he now has an opportunity to eliminate the Roman general.

In Rome, a resigned Menenius, unaware of what has just happened, tells Sicinius that all is lost and that the tribunes have doomed their city with their folly. Just then a messenger arrives, with news that the women have succeeded in their mission and that Rome is saved. The Romans burst into celebration and welcome Volumnia home as the savior of her city.

In the Volscian city of Antium, meanwhile, Aufidius and a band of conspirators prepare to dispose of the returning Coriolanus, who is being given a hero's welcome by the people of the city. When the general arrives and is greeted by Antium's Senators, Aufidius denounces him, accusing him of betraying the Volscian army by giving in to the Roman women and failing to take Rome. Coriolanus, predictably, loses his temper and curses Aufidius, whose conspirators are now stirring up the people against the Roman, reminding them of how he once led Roman armies against them. As Aufidius shouts at him and the Senators try to intervene, the conspirators stab Coriolanus, and he falls dead. Declaring that he was a great and noble man, the Senate orders a hero's burial. Now remorseful, Aufidius joins his men in carrying the body through the city.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

One of Shakespeare's final tragedies, *Coriolanus* cannot be considered one of his greatest plays, and it has never been one of his more popular. It lacks depth, both metaphysical and psychological; though structurally sound, its characters are not multi-dimensional, and it lacks both the great poetic strength and the capacity to surprise that the best of the tragedies possess. It is, nevertheless, a solid play, united in structure and theme--the playwright is very much in command of his characters, one feels, although this sense of control may actually weaken the play: The *dramatis personae* never seem able to escape the iron structure that the plot imposes.

Perhaps Shakespeare's most overtly political play, more so even than the histories, *Coriolanus* takes as its hero a man completely lacking in political gifts--a stubborn soldier, brought down by an overweening pride and an inability to compromise with the forces that seek his downfall. A representative of the patrician class of Rome, Coriolanus' prowess in battle would seem to make him an ideal hero for the masses; however, he utterly lacks the common touch, and his fear of popular rule allows him to be construed as an enemy

of the people. Set in the immediate aftermath of Rome's transition from monarchy to republic (indeed, we are told that Coriolanus played a part in the expulsion of the last king, Tarquin), the play portrays its hero as trapped between two worlds--he is a kingly figure, born to command; yet, at the same time he finds himself inhabiting a republican political reality that--though he himself has helped to create it--he cannot endure. Thus, his fate of exile is appropriate; he truly has no place in the new political life of his city.

Though Coriolanus is himself unsubtle, preferring to express himself directly (indeed, this contributes to his downfall), he is surrounded by craftier, more manipulative characters. His close friend, Menenius, serves as the perfect foil; for though he shares Coriolanus's aristocratic sensibilities and suspicion of the plebeian class, Menenius's smooth tongue and talent for compromise enable him to skate through the difficulties that debilitate Coriolanus. Menenius's counterparts on the plebeian side are the two tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, whose talent for demagoguery and manipulation of the masses enable them to turn the people of Rome against Coriolanus--an easy task, given the hero's propensity for violent outbursts. Meanwhile, his Volscian counterpart, the great general Tullus Aufidius, is similar to Coriolanus in temperament but has a resentful streak that leads him to betray Coriolanus when he feels himself to be eclipsed in glory.

The most significant figure in Coriolanus's life, however, is his domineering mother, Volumnia. As a woman, she lacks the ability to achieve power on her own in the male-dominated Roman society; she also lacks a husband through whom she might indirectly enjoy public clout. Thus, Volumnia raises her son to be a great soldier, and it is her ambition, more than his, that puts him on the disastrous track toward the consulship. Moreover, Volumnia's controlling nature constitutes a major cause of Coriolanus's fatal childishness; and while his legendary stubbornness holds sway in every other situation, she alone can overcome it and convince Coriolanus to spare Rome--and, thus, unwittingly set his doom in motion.

Structurally, the play falls into three main divisions, which overlap the five acts. The first shows Coriolanus at his heroic best, in the Volscian war, and culminates in his triumphant return to Rome. The second portion traces his failed attempt at the consulship, his fall from grace and his banishment. The third witnesses Coriolanus's return to Rome at the head of the Volscian army, reaches its climax when Volumnia convinces him to spare Rome, and then follows the great soldier to his death in Antium at the hands of the jealous Aufidius.

III. RICHARD II

PLAY SUMMARY

The play opens with a dispute between Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. Bolingbroke has accused Mowbray of treason, and the two of them exchange insults in the presence of King Richard. After attempts to reconcile them fail, Richard orders them to take part in a traditional chivalric trial by combat. On the field of combat, the king changes his mind and banishes the two men — Bolingbroke for ten years (commuted to six) and Mowbray for life. Then the king makes plans to leave for the wars in Ireland.

Before departing, Richard visits the ailing father of Bolingbroke, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Gaunt warns Richard with his dying words that he is flirting with danger and doing great harm to the country by allowing himself to be influenced by his sycophantic courtiers. When he dies, Richard takes possession of all of Gaunt's wealth and leaves for Ireland.

Unhappy with Richard's incompetence as a ruler and worried by his seizure of the Duke of Lancaster's wealth, a number of nobles rally support for Henry Bolingbroke. When Bolingbroke and his army decide to return from exile in France, the rebel forces prepare to confront Richard on his return from Ireland.

The rebel noblemen force the king to abdicate, and Bolingbroke is crowned as Henry IV. Richard is imprisoned in Pomfret Castle, where he faces his death alone, philosophically contemplating the meaning of his fall from grandeur. Sir Pierce of Exton decides solely on his own to execute the deposed king, and then, as a result, he is banished by King Henry. The play ends with Henry IV planning a penitential pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

CHARACTERS

King Richard Historically, he is said to be the handsomest man of his time; in the play, he has great charm and a love for beautiful things. His court is characterized outwardly by its luxury and refinement, but Richard's own particular favorites are greedy men who are interested primarily in the profits made from usurping land, excessive taxation, and fraud. Richard allows himself to be used by these men and, as a result, is deposed by one of his noblemen, whom he sent unfairly into exile.

Bolingbroke Henry, Duke of Hereford and Lancaster; he takes revenge on Richard after the king unfairly banishes him from England and, moreover, claims all of Henry's family lands and wealth after Henry's father, John of Gaunt, dies. Bolingbroke is a "model" Englishman and, for that reason, is not entirely convinced that he has the right to usurp the crown from a man who *seems* corrupt even though he is supposed to be God's deputy on earth.

York He is Richard's most powerful supporter; when Richard leaves with his forces to fight in Ireland, he leaves York in charge of England. York is honest and good throughout the play, and because of these qualities, he finally cannot condone Richard's unprincipled actions; thus he changes his allegiance to Bolingbroke and his supporters.

Aumerle York's headstrong son remains loyal to Richard throughout the play despite the fact that this loyalty threatens his relationship with his father. He even becomes involved in a plot to assassinate Bolingbroke, but at the pleading of his mother, he confesses his deed and is pardoned by Bolingbroke.

Queen Isabella She appears four times in the play and, each time, is characterized by her gentleness and her devotion to Richard. Moreover, there is a feeling of helplessness about her. Her grief becomes despair when she realizes that her husband has been deposed. She tries, however, to goad him into at least a *show* of valor and resistance when she speaks with him on his way to prison.

Mowbray Clearly, he had a hand in the murder of Gloucester even though he denies it. Richard exiles him for life, probably in order to remove this hand-chosen assassin from the country. Mowbray dies abroad during one of the Crusades.

Northumberland A powerful and aggressive character; his allegiance is early aligned with Bolingbroke. He fights alongside Bolingbroke and arranges for Richard's surrender. It is he who breaks up the last of Richard's conspirators.

Percy Northumberland's son. He is an eager soldier, chivalrous, and an active supporter of Bolingbroke.

Duchess of Gloucester It was the murder of her husband that caused Bolingbroke to accuse Mowbray of assassination and treason. She begs old Gaunt to take revenge on Richard; her anger is fiery and passionate. She dies of grief for her husband.

Duchess of York Her loyalty is, foremost, to her son, who is loyal to Richard. Her whole character revolves around Aumerle's safety. She herself is fearless before Bolingbroke, but she fears the latter's power to silence her son's seemingly treasonous words and deeds.

Surrey He is sympathetic with Aumerle and refutes Fitzwater's claim that Aumerle, in Fitzwater's presence, did take credit for Gloucester's death.

Carlisle He is ever-loyal to Richard because he sees Richard's role as one that was heaven-ordained. He rails against Bolingbroke but, importantly, also chides Richard for the kind of king he has been. In the end, Bolingbroke pardons him because of his unusually high character.

Abbot of Westminster He hears Aumerle's wish to revenge himself on Bolingbroke and, therefore, invites Aumerle home so that the two of them can make further plans.

Ross and Willoughby Representatives of the followers of Bolingbroke.

Fitzwater He swears that he heard Aumerle take full credit for Gloucester's murder. Surrey takes issue with this statement, and Fitzwater challenges him to a duel.

Exton Believing that Bolingbroke wishes him to kill Richard, he does so; immediately afterward, however, he is sure that he acted rashly. Bolingbroke banishes him.

Salisbury Richard leaves him in charge of the military forces while he fights in Ireland. He is upset when he discovers that he has no Welsh support for Richard when he knows that Bolingbroke and his supporters are ready to attack Richard.

Scroop He announces to Richard that the common people have championed Bolingbroke as their favorite. He appears only in Act III, Scenes 2 and 3.

Berkeley In charge of the troops guarding Bristol Castle, he is rebuked when Bolingbroke confronts him, and he refers to Bolingbroke as Hereford — and not as Lancaster.

Bushy and Green They are followers of Richard, but they are neither heroic nor staunch in their loyalty. They plot, connive, and flee at the approach of danger. Bolingbroke corners them finally and has them killed. They are representative of the low-class flatterers whom Richard surrounds himself with.

Bagot He has a part only slightly larger than Bushy and Green; otherwise, he is not distinguishable from them.

ANALYSIS - ACT WISE

Analysis Act I

As is the case with Shakespeare's other history plays, this play has as its central concern a civil strife that threatens a country with a weak government. Thus, *Richard II* opens with a scene that graphically illustrates the point: Two nobles are locked in bitter argument over who is most loyal to the crown, and the only logical outcome would seem to be a physical struggle, even to the death. The best that the king can do is agree to let them fight.

The character of old Gaunt is important here because he is referred to several times as an "old" man and is therefore supposed to be a "sage" man. Richard appeals to Gaunt to help settle the argument but with no success; neither the ruler nor he who possesses the wisdom of age can calm the troubled waters in Scene 1; only a decision based on formal violence will decide the issue.

Note in particular the chivalric atmosphere of Scene 1. When the challengers speak to the king and to each other, they use a very formal style of address. For example, Bolingbroke first speaks to his king:

In the devotion of a subject's love,
Tend'ring the precious safety of my prince,
And free from other misbegotten hate,
Come I appellant to this princely presence. (31-34)

And Mowbray, when he accepts the challenge, also speaks in a formal manner:

I take it up; and by that sword I swear
Which gently laid my knighthood on my shoulder,
I'll answer then in any fair degree
Or chivalrous design of knightly trial. (78-81)

The formal speech patterns and the chivalric code of behavior in Scene 1 act as metaphors for order and control. These men are preparing to kill each other, but they are going about it in a gentlemanly way. Such formal patterns exist, according to Shakespeare's orthodox belief, in the world of government too. There is always an attempt — even when it becomes a struggle — to keep the most violent passions regulated within a pattern.

Speaking of formal patterns, we must not ignore the real passion and invective in some of the remarks that the opponents hurl at each other. Take, for example, Bolingbroke's promise to tear out his own tongue and "spit it bleeding" in Mowbray's face rather than withdraw from the fight. This is naked, unbridled passion. But it is spoken within the formal context of a verbal tournament, prelude to the tournament at Coventry. And, in reference to passion, there is an important, implicit clue as to the murderer of Gloucester. Mowbray has indeed had a hand in killing him (and that's what Bolingbroke accuses him of), but Mowbray did it at Richard's request. When Bolingbroke utters the words "the death," Mowbray says, "I slew him not; but, to my own disgrace / Neglected my sworn duty in that case." Mowbray swore, without a doubt, to Richard to see to it that Gloucester was either killed by his hand or by Mowbray's order.

One more matter that should not be neglected in any discussion of language in Scene 1 includes the fact that the language, besides being mostly chivalrous and formal, suggests a religious theme in several places: Such words as "miscreant," "innocent souls," "rites of knighthood," and "our sacred blood" occur frequently. This language will be of even more importance later in the play.

Shakespeare's plays were written for performance without any breaks between the scenes or the acts. The flow of the scenes, their placement, and the effect that was created by contrasting elements in the scene constitutes his chief technical resource. In Scene 1, for example, Richard tries to arbitrate a dispute between two peers of his realm. The issue is one of state — loyalty to the king — and also a personal matter of honor between two men of arms. The tone of the opening scene tells us that something is wrong in the state of England. Scene 2, appropriately, personalizes this wrongness, this grief, by showing us a woman lamenting aloud both the loss of her husband and the fact that she is likely not to see proper

vengeance done. That she is suffering personally is certain, and her confusion is clear in her last speech, for she finds it difficult to say farewell to old Gaunt:

Commend me to thy brother, Edmund York.
Lo! this is all: nay, yet depart not so;
Though this be all, do not so quickly go.
I shall remember more. Bid him . . . Ah! What?
With all good speed at Plashy visit me. (62-65)

The phrasing — "Lo! . . . nay, yet depart not. . . . Bid him . . . Ah! What?" — tells more about her distraught state of mind than the words themselves.

At the beginning of Scene 2, when the duchess tries to play on Gaunt's feelings for his murdered brother, her language echoes Christian and biblical phrases. She refers to the patriarch:

Edward's seven sons, whereof thyself art one,
Were as seven vials of his sacred blood,
Or seven fair branches springing from one root. (11-13)

As she continues, her emotion wells up:

But Thomas, my dear lord, my life, my Gloucester,
One vial full of Edward's sacred blood is hacked down.
Ah! Gaunt, his blood was thine! (16-22)

The effect of this speech is to reinforce her feelings of loss by emphasizing the "sacredness" of their common father's blood. The irony, and a serious religious and political problem for Shakespeare's age, is that another father-figure, one who is also "sacred," is Richard II, the king, and he has had a hand in perpetrating the crime. Gaunt has relatively few lines in this scene, and for good reason. He, like others around him, feels impotent before this impossible dilemma. This old and sage Gaunt, in his helplessness in the face of personal and public grief, is an important early theatrical image in the play. He can only lamely repeat the formula:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death. (37-39)

Notice the progression of Scene 3. It begins as a highly formal, almost ritualistic display in the chivalric tradition. The accused and the accusing parties are announced; they state their cases, make their farewells, and prepare to fight. It ends with a father and a son, Gaunt and Bolingbroke, saying goodbye for six years, or, considering Gaunt's age, maybe for the last time in their lives. The scene moves from the affairs of state in a public ceremony to the intimate details of personal, familial relationships. That very pattern, you will recall, was the

pattern of Scenes 1 and 2. Here it is repeated with continuous focus on the principals in the drama.

When Richard pronounces the words "orderly proceed" at the start of Scene 3, he is, of course, sounding the keynote to all of Shakespeare's history plays again. The ritual of this hand-to-hand combat, though it is enacted to resolve a passionate dispute and may end in bloodshed, will be carried out according to mutually acknowledged rules. One must imagine the start of this scene as being filled with suggestions of the spectacle of a medieval tournament. Representatives of the opposing camps march in, present themselves to the king, speak their pieces, and take up positions on an elaborate stage tableau. The picture onstage and the accompanying regular trumpet blasts are clear metaphors for a kind of order. And at the center of this ordered world is, of course, King Richard, who is stationed upstage to observe the proceedings. When he descends from his raised platform (which was traditional) and walks downstage to stop the proceedings later in the scene, he travels quite a distance (the depth of Shakespeare's stage was about 25 feet), reinforcing his pivotal place on the stage and in the political picture.

The language of Bolingbroke, describing himself and Mowbray as two men who "vow [to take] a long and weary pilgrimage," continues the religious imagery that is germane to the subject of this play. Bolingbroke wants to take a long farewell with his father because it may be their last farewell. But before he launches into his private farewell, he is embraced by the king, a poignant moment when one considers the scene later in the play when the two of them meet again — when Richard renounces his throne to Bolingbroke. Richard hands him the crown then. Here, the father of the nation, as it were, embraces one of his "sons"; later, that "son" will depose him. Bolingbroke bids farewell to his faithful followers, then to his actual father, Gaunt.

Notice, too, the way that Shakespeare contrasts the characters of these opponents by suggesting a difference in their bearing in these scenes. When they first encountered one another in the first scene of this act, Mowbray made a point of contrasting his own response to the situation with Bolingbroke's. Implicitly, he is claiming that Bolingbroke is somewhat hot-headed and, therefore, less creditable than himself. There he said:

Let not my cold words here accuse my zeal.
'Tis not the trial of a woman's war,
The bitter clamour of two eager tongues,
Can arbitrate this cause betwixt us twain;
The blood is hot that must be cooled for this. (I. i. 47-51)

He has apparently listened to Bolingbroke's enraged words and has decided to respond with a posture of perfect reasonableness. In Scene 3, he strikes the same theme when he says, "Truth hath a quiet breast." The reason for this relatively calm bearing might be his quiet confidence that the king is on his side, and, therefore, he shall come to no harm. Whatever the reason, the posture of one combatant being more feverish than the other is important for dramatic

reasons. Besides adding variety in characterization, this contrast prepares for a similar contrast later during the deposition scene (IV. i.). Notice there how quietly Bolingbroke endures the lengthy diatribes of King Richard II.

An important dramatic facet in Scene 3 is Richard's decision to stop the combat and to exile the opponents. All of the spectacle and verbal exchange in the scene is leading up to a violent combat that never takes place. Why does Shakespeare have Richard stop the fight? For one thing, Richard is, in fact, indebted to Mowbray for being instrumental in eliminating a potential enemy (Gloucester). For another, to allow the combat to go forward and risk the life of the apparently popular Bolingbroke would be a poor political move. It seems best to appear the wise and kind ruler by preventing any civil bloodshed at all. Notice that Richard also manages to banish Mowbray, the one who has evidence against him, for life, while commuting the sentence of Bolingbroke from ten years to six years, further mollifying his potential political opponents. Rulers in Shakespeare's age would have been familiar with Machiavelli's famous *Prince*, a popular and rather cynical manual for rulers, and would have known that it is always wiser to appear harsher at first, making severe punishments all at once, and then to soften one's stance with mercy. The mercy, however, is not received quite as Richard had expected, and this irritates him.

There is a serious undertone of antagonism between Richard, on the one hand, and Gaunt and his son, on the other. Richard knows very well what he is doing in commuting the sentence as he does, and he is hoping that Gaunt will receive this lordly gesture appropriately. When Gaunt takes up his son's cue on the words "such is the breath of kings" and tells the king that though he can easily send a man into exile or even cut a man's life short, he *still* does not have the power to add one minute to a man's life, he is raising a very sensitive issue and one very important to a central theme of this play. In a play in which the deposition of God's appointed minister, the king, is a central action, it is a highly charged dramatic moment when the matter of the limitation of the power of the king is raised. None of this by-play is openly acknowledged by the speakers, but their words are certainly spoken with an awareness of all connotations. What Gaunt is saying, in effect, is that although Richard may be God's anointed and appointed deputy, he is certainly *not* God Himself. One wonders if the conversation that he had with his sister-in-law in the previous scene, coupled with the present sorrow of saying goodbye to his son, has given him some of the courage that the Duchess of Gloucester found wanting. That Gaunt's remarks have the desired effect on Richard is clear from the way in which the king exits, with two clipped lines reiterating the sentence just meted out:

Cousin, farewell, and uncle bid him so;
Six years we banish him, and he shall go. (247-48)

The last moments of Scene 3 are especially important for their emotional tone. There is speed in the delivery of the lines between Gaunt and his son, Bolingbroke, that belies the feelings underneath. Bolingbroke is silent at first, until his father urges him to speak.

Gaunt: O, to what purpose dost thou hoard thy words,
That thou return'st no greeting to thy friends?
Bolingbroke: I have too few to take my leave of you,
When the tongue's office should be prodigal
To breathe the abundant dolour of the heart.
Gaunt: Thy grief is but thy absence for a time.
Bolingbroke: Joy absent, grief is present for that time.
Gaunt: What is six winters? They are quickly gone.
Bolingbroke: To men in joy; but grief makes one hour ten.
Gaunt: Call it a travel that thou tak'st for pleasure. (255-64)

This seems a very genuine scene, psychologically. Gaunt's distress is shown by the fact that he is using "arguments" to make his son feel better, which he had, just a few minutes before, rebuked the king for using — that is, that the exile really won't be so long, that it really is only a temporary absence. In addition, it is as if the rush of words they exchange is a way of covering up feelings they would rather not have to cope with. There is an irony in the remark that Gaunt makes to his son, telling him that his absence will serve as a foil to his coming home and make the coming home that much more joyous. In a way, this is true, for Bolingbroke's return will eventually lead to his becoming king, albeit reluctantly. His return *will* seem greater because of the absence. Also, Richard's behavior, by comparison, will make Bolingbroke seem greater. Interestingly, this metaphor of a *foil* carries on into the *Henry IV* plays. There, we find Bolingbroke an older and a wearier man, now the king himself, having to deal with a recalcitrant son, Prince Hal. Throughout the play, Hal's escapades with the lower orders of society are described in such a way that they can be seen as setting his "true" (princely) self off as a jewel is set off by the less precious metal leaf which serves as backing for it in a setting.

There is superb humaneness in old Gaunt as he gives his son some conventional fatherly advice at the end of Scene 3. He is trying to be perfectly reasonable and allay his son's fears: Don't think that the king has banished you, but rather think that you have banished the king; try to think that a foul pestilence sits in the land and you are better off out of the country. In a sense, there *is* a truth in this, in that there is a less-than-perfect king on the throne, but Bolingbroke can answer only from his heart, and none of his father's arguments makes him feel any better. Who can "wallow naked in December snow / By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?" he asks. The reality of banishment will be so painful that he won't be able to delude himself for a minute into believing otherwise. At the very last, however, Bolingbroke exits with an important, manly, and patriotic flourish:

Where'er I wander, boast of this I can,
Though banish'd, yet a trueborn Englishman. (308-309)

These, undoubtedly, are the words of a hero.

In Scene 4, we see Richard in close-ups; he is a man who is accustomed to exploiting his countrymen, and in this scene he is a marked contrast to the "true-born Englishman" who bade us farewell in the previous scene. Shakespeare shows Richard quite openly preparing to take his country's wealth to spend on a foreign war and also hoping for an early death for the venerable old Gaunt. This is rather bold characterization, somewhat melodramatic, and more typical of Shakespeare's early plays than his later ones. There is no question at this point where an audience's sympathies lie.

Note also the character of Aumerle in this scene. He is a young man, the son of the Duke of York, and naturally enough he shows loyalty to his king. He is proud of having successfully feigned grief at Bolingbroke's departure, and he happily joins Bagot and Green at the king's side. Shakespeare will later sound this note of feigned grief when Richard gives up the crown. There, it will be Bolingbroke who sarcastically commends Richard for putting on a good show of suffering. The matter of loyalty to the king is important with regard to Aumerle because of his actions later in the play when he is chided by his father for behavior disloyal to the new king, Bolingbroke. In the end, of course, Bolingbroke pardons Aumerle, but that pardon will seem all the more magnanimous because of the memory of this early scene in which Aumerle is quite clearly a loyal ally of Richard's and a foe of Bolingbroke's.

Consider the dramatic effect when Richard sarcastically bids his followers to come with him to the dying Gaunt's bedside: "Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him; / Pray God we may make haste and come too late!" And they reply, to a man: "Amen!" The contrast with the closing of the previous scene is a powerful one.

Analysis Act II

Scene 1 begins with the individual rage of an esteemed old man who is soon to breathe his last, and it ends with the suggestion that the rage has spread to large numbers of people who are prepared to do something about it. The situation is a potentially revolutionary one, and Shakespeare traces the development of political turmoil by first allowing one man to speak his frustration and bear the insults of a capricious ruler, and then showing the effect of this scene of humiliation on those who have witnessed it. When Northumberland, Ross, and Willoughby conspire at the very end of the scene to join forces with the rebellious army of Bolingbroke, we have a feeling that there is a rightness to their decision. We not only hear about Richard's ill-treatment of deserving countrymen, but we witness that ill-treatment. Shakespeare's dramatic strategy is at its most effective here.

In the first conversation between York and Gaunt in Scene 1, Gaunt is perhaps a symbol for the sickly state of the nation, for there is the suggestion that what is symbolically best about the nation is languishing at the moment. Then after York prepares the ground with references to corrupt foreign influences and herds of flatterers, it is Gaunt who delivers the rousing patriotic speech that is the emotional center of the entire scene. By the end of the speech, it is as though Gaunt is identified with all that is good and noble and blessed about England. The scene gains further dramatic significance by the fact that these are the words of a dying man.

Point for point, the features of England that Gaunt mentions in his rousing speech are those features that are being misshapen by the actions of the king and his court. "This seat of Mars" — England — a proud, warring nation, we are soon to learn, has become so craven that it gains more and spends more from its cleverly concluded truces than it does from the actual spoils of war. And when Northumberland and his friends speak at the end of the scene, it is clear that they loath the new set of priorities that Richard has set for the nation. Even the war fought in Ireland is fought on borrowed, extorted, and stolen money, and it is fought for a purely imperialistic purpose — that is, to fill the coffers of the profligate king. Gaunt's charges are keen and forceful: "This fortress built by nature for herself," "this precious stone set in the silver sea," has become instead a prison "bound in with shame" and an object to be pawned, "now leased out." Gaunt is responding to the corruption of his England in the interests of the private indulgence of a bad king, and Shakespeare, for his part, like many of his contemporaries, is here making unhappy reference to changes in the economic system that were taking place in Elizabethan England. The new order for England would be the order of a profit-oriented world. Shakespeare also sounds the religious note of the play anew in this scene when he makes reference to the "Christian service and true chivalry" of the former "royal kings" of England. At the end of Gaunt's speech, one can imagine the old man being somewhat exhausted, especially when he utters the lines,

Ah! would the scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death! (67-68)

His own strength is diminishing in strong contrast with the swift and lively entry of Richard and his queen and courtiers. Richard, true to his reputation, always travels "in style," as it were. Whenever he comes onto the scene, it is always with a verbal flourish and an entourage. He is a man who likes "entrances," a man with a special penchant for acting. Consider the situation when Gaunt utters his last tired breath at the end of his patriotic tirade, and Richard bursts onto the scene. Notice the way in which Richard speaks to the old man. His speech is short and clipped, and his treatment of Gaunt is disrespectful, to say the least. First, there is the exchange between them on the subject of Gaunt's punning comment on the state of his health and the meaning of his name — gaunt, sickly, and thin. Richard's words are, at first, questions, one after the other — "What comfort, man? How is it with aged Gaunt?"; "Can sick men play so nicely with their names?"; "Should dying men flatter . . . those that live?" But when Gaunt loses patience, as an old man deprived of the comfort of having a son near him as he himself nears death, he launches a direct attack on the king and his court. The king, in turn, responds viciously. Gaunt's reference to the "thousand flatterers [who] sit within thy crown" and more specifically to the fact that Richard is dangerously close to deposing himself strikes a raw nerve within Richard. Earlier, he entered the scene self-assured and confident that Gaunt was no threat to him because of his illness; he has come to Ely House in the first place to collect the old man's wealth, but now he loses his composure at these words and suddenly attacks the old man:

A lunatic, lean-witted fool,
Presuming on an ague's privilege,

Dar'st with thy frozen admonition
Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood
With fury from his native residence. (115-19)

This attack adds cowardice and foolhardiness to the list of Richard's faults. One should remember, however, that Richard's response to any attack on himself is, in orthodox terms, justified; he *is* the king and, therefore, an entity apart from ordinary mortals. The complication in this scene, and indeed in the play as a whole, is that this king seems unworthy of the divine office he occupies. His attacker, old Gaunt, especially after the emotional "this other Eden" speech, is much more the "kingly" figure to be identified with England's virtues than the actual king himself.

Before Gaunt exits, he virtually accuses the king of the murder of Gloucester, and he warns him that these words will later haunt him:

Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee!
These words hereafter thy tormentors be! (135-36)

The words will haunt him, and we should recall them when we witness the last scenes of the play, when the king faces death and despondency — as old Gaunt now does.

One reason for Shakespeare's writing the next part of Scene 1, between Richard and York, is that it offers a point of contrast between the two "old" men (York and Gaunt) in their responses to the king. We have already witnessed the conversation between York and Gaunt, and we know that York is unhappy with the state of England, though he is less likely to become infuriated and risk any treasonous act or statement. He tried to conciliate old Gaunt, tried to calm him in the face of the king, and now he uses the words of a diplomat to quell the king's anger toward Gaunt:

I do beseech your Majesty, impute his words
To wayward sickliness and age in him. (141-42)

York has a careful nature here; clearly, he knows just how explosive the situation is and doesn't want anyone to risk upsetting whatever equilibrium prevails. He will retain this role throughout the entire play, even after the rebels prove successful in deposing Richard.

It is significant that this "normative" figure, York, has his patience tried when Gaunt's death is announced, and the king, without the least trace of remorse, makes plans to immediately collect the booty he came for in the first place. The king's words, ironically, point to his own future situation: "The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he; / His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be. So much for that" (153-55). The king himself is "ripest" in the sense that he is most nearly "rotten"; and the king will indeed follow Gaunt on a "pilgrim-age" — to humiliation and death. Richard breaks off these thoughts in mid-sentence and turns his mind to Gaunt's "plate, coins, and revenues." It is here that York approaches exasperation: "How long shall I be patient?" he asks and begins a lengthy discourse on the falseness of Richard's conduct.

One must imagine Richard's demeanor through all this long speech of York's. His interrupting words are: "Why, uncle, what's the matter?" The tone is almost certainly sarcastic because it couldn't fail to be clear to anyone exactly *what* the matter is. York continues his desperate argument, completely unaware that, at best, the king is merely tolerating his words. York concludes his argument about succession: Since Richard is violating rights of inheritance and succession by seizing Gaunt's goods, he is putting the very idea of succession in jeopardy:

Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time
His charters and his customary rights;
Let not tomorrow then ensue today;
Be not thyself. (195-98)

Indeed, in being a bad king, Richard is *not* being himself, kingship being by definition divine and therefore good. Richard is totally unmoved by this speech and, single-mindedly, repeats his intentions:

Think what you will, we seize into our hands
His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands. (209-10)

York departs in despair, a mood that will change to hope in the rebellious persons of Northumberland, Willoughby, and Ross.

Remember that these three men have been present for most of the foregoing scene and have witnessed the behavior of the king — both to Gaunt and to York. At first, their plight seems to be the same as York's. They dare not open their mouths for fear of the repercussions. That foul injustice has been done to Gaunt and to his son Bolingbroke is without doubt, but they must tread lightly when considering what action to take. The dialogue is written in such a fashion as to emphasize the volume of wrongs that the king has done. One after another of his deeds is catalogued, all those things we have already heard Gaunt and York accuse him of. The reason for the repetition is to indicate just how widespread the discontent with the king is; in addition, it serves as a way of allowing these individual nobles to garner the courage to decide to commit what will be, after all, treasonable acts. They list all the wrongs, then they pause to consider their weight, and Northumberland speaks for them all when he expresses fear at his own thoughts: He "dares not say" what they can do to set things right in England. It is important to realize that there is something conspiratorial about this scene in that the three nobles are aware of the gravity of the situation. But when they decide at the end to join forces with Bolingbroke's forces, they do so with conviction:

. . . we shall shake off our slavish yoke,
Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,
Redeem from broking pawn the blemish'd crown [and]
Wipe off the dust that hides our scepter's gilt. (291-94)

Note in these words of Northumberland's the reference to Richard's financial dealings ("redeem from broking pawn") and the pun on the word "gilt," which refers to both the golden scepter, the symbol of the crown that has become besmirched by the king's behavior, and the actual "guilt" which lay on Richard's head, presumably for the murder of Gloucester. The irony is heavy with significance.

The dramatic strategy of Scene 2 is similar to that which Shakespeare uses elsewhere and which he will bring to its most perfect execution in *Macbeth*. He builds suspense and tension by having a figure of some importance in the play, here the queen, articulate her premonition of evil things to come, then after a suitable interval in which another character, Bushy, tries to dissuade her from her gloomy thoughts, he has the news announced that her intuition was correct; shortly thereafter, woe upon woe is to be visited upon all present. It is interesting to note that in the queen's immediate response to Green's information about the rebel forces, she even uses a form of imagery that Shakespeare will later have Lady Macbeth use to great effect:

So, Green, thou art the midwife to my woe,
And Bolingbroke my sorrow's dismal heir;
Now hath my soul brought forth her prodigy,
And I, a gasping, new-delivered mother,
Have woe to woe, sorrow to sorrow, joined. (62-66)

The image of giving birth in the context of sorrow and political intrigue (birth given to a monster-prodigy) and all as if first conceived in the imagination (the soul brought forth the monster) is of special importance to this play. First, there is the general theme of legitimacy and inheritance to consider: The play is about a deposition and an unlawful succession to the throne, and for all of its consideration of the inadequacy of the king in question, the process shall bring forth misery as its heir. Another motif, which Shakespeare makes much of in the last acts of the play, is that of the relationship between one's experience of suffering and the imagination. Later, Richard is isolated in his prison cell and will meditate on the "populous" world of his thoughts and how they breed:

My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father; and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts. (V. v. 6-8)

After Bushy's advice to "despair not," the queen continues with her theme and uses phrases that relate the current state of sorrow to their immediate causes:

Who shall hinder me?
I will despair and be at enmity
With cozening hope. He is a flatterer,
A parasite, a keeper-back of death,

Who would gently dissolve the bands of life,
Which false hope lingers in extremity. (67-72)

Hope, she says, is a flatterer and a parasite and keeps even death at bay; she is speaking these lines to the very characters in the play who have been identified (by most of the sympathetic characters) with the flattery and corruption that will drag Richard down to his doom.

When Bushy is first speaking to the queen, before Green enters with the news about the rebels, he also uses language that prepares us for several later scenes in the play when Richard will become more of a central focus. In a later scene, Richard has an important moment in which he asks for a mirror and then, gazing at his image, meditates publicly on his situation as king and as an ordinary mortal. Here in Scene 2, Bushy uses a metaphor that obliquely prepares us for that important dramatic moment:

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so;
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives, which rightly gazed upon
Show nothing but confusion. (14-19)

Again, the key idea is that there is a difference between what you *think* you perceive and what is *actually* there, and beyond that, there is the natural distortion that a confused emotional state will bring to one's perceptions. Here the idea is graphically expressed in the image of an eye filled with tears through which one's experience is refracted. As this might be true of the queen in this scene, it is also true to a certain extent of Richard in a later scene. There it will be Bolingbroke who comments sarcastically about the difference between true emotion and "shadows." This idea is one that fascinated Shakespeare throughout his life, perhaps because he was so closely associated with the stage, where it is the business of a good actor to convey the *substance* of true emotions through mere *shadows* (acting) of those emotions. As a concluding note on this idea, consider the following two brief passages:

Howe'er it be, I cannot but be sad-
As, though on thinking on no thought I think,
Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink. (30-32)

This is spoken by Richard's queen here in Scene 2. And the following is spoken by another of Shakespeare's mentally tortured heroes, Prince Hamlet, speaking of Denmark.

. . . for there is nothing either good
Or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison. (II. ii. 255-56)

With the announcement of the arrival of the rebel forces and the death of the Duchess of Gloucester, all talk of imaginary worries ceases. It would be foolhardy to ignore the signs of things to come. An important figure in Scene 2 is the Duke of York, for he has lost a sister-

in-law and is dissatisfied with the king, yet he has been appointed to be the guardian of the realm in the king's absence. His feelings are divided:

Both are my kinsmen.
Th' one is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend; t' other again
Is my kinsman, whom the king hath wronged,
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right. (111-15)

His last words of confusion make it absolutely clear that there is no hope of any real resistance to Bolingbroke, but because he is duty-bound, the Duke of York will, for now, fight for the king.

The last moments of Scene 2 are given over to the three representatives of Richard's court still remaining — Bushy, Bagot, and Green. They present a picture of expedience and cowardice, Bagot being the only one who will go to join the king in Ireland. There is no question concerning whether or not they will join the Duke of York in his battle against Bolingbroke's army. These men are like rats, leaving a sinking ship; here, the ship is England, the ship of state.

Bushy, Bagot, and Green had the last words in Scene 2 as they prepared to escape to Ireland, in Bagot's case, or to ensconce themselves in Bristol Castle, as Green and Bushy decided to do. By the end of Scene 3, the forces of Bolingbroke will be preparing to go to Bristol themselves to clear the land of these "caterpillars of the commonwealth." Scene 3 itself is almost melodramatically opposed to the one that precedes it, setting off the forces of good against their evil opponents.

The way in which Bushy, Bagot, and Green disport themselves is in striking contrast to the behavior of the Bolingbroke faction. Even their lines are overdressed, somewhat genteel and effete, in comparison with the speeches of Bolingbroke and his men. For example, the soldiers have been on their feet for some time. They speak of the hard road they have traveled and the distance they have yet to go, but as befits their heroic status, they do not complain too loudly. Of particular importance here is the implied reason for their forbearance in these hard times. Notice the way, for example, in which Northumberland speaks to Bolingbroke. It is as though Shakespeare wants to prepare us in advance for Bolingbroke's ascent to the throne. Explaining his renewed energy despite the physical hardships, Northumberland claims that the "noble company" of Bolingbroke has been its chief source. This way of speaking about someone is usually closely associated with a *royal* personage; the impression given is that the very presence of royalty — in this case, Bolingbroke — emanates some life-giving source. When Henry Percy comes onto the scene and tenders his service to Bolingbroke, one almost imagines him bending his knee and pledging himself as one would to a king. With the arrival of Willoughby and Ross, the effect is redoubled: Shakespeare has these various entrances strung out in this way to give the dramatic illusion of great numbers of people supporting the king-to-be. It is as though Bolingbroke will almost *have* to become the new ruler by popular

acclaim. Though no admirer of democracy himself, Shakespeare's idea here is that there is a will of the people (albeit the nobility) that might, in some cases, supercede the divine right of kingship.

When Bolingbroke, in mid-sentence, decides to use his new title of Lancaster, we get the feeling that the popular support *might* have had some effect on this leader of men. But at this point, Bolingbroke still feels uneasy about his position, and he is never too actively in pursuit of power, as, for example, Richard III is in Shakespeare's play of that name. There is a feeling in this scene that circumstances are mounting that are likely to force certain kinds of commitments from the nobility and, specifically, from Bolingbroke. One should be alert to various shades of indecisiveness and commitment in this scene. This element is used as dramatic material throughout the play.

With all of these "royal indications" in mind, imagine the dramatic effect when Bolingbroke kneels to the Duke of York and calls him "my gracious uncle." It is clear that the duke is the king's representative, but it would be unlikely that Bolingbroke would at this point be thereby showing obeisance to the *king*. Bolingbroke is testing both himself and his uncle with the irony and the seriousness of their situation, and the ensuing conversation between the duke and Bolingbroke is quite serious. Treating issues of importance to the country, Bolingbroke argues soundly that he has been wronged, and in so arguing, he uses language that strikes the central theme of rights of inheritance:

Will you permit that I shall stand condemned,
A wandering vagabond, my rights and royalties
Plucked from my arms perforce, and given away
To upstart unthrifths?

.....

I lay my claim
To my inheritance of free descent. (119-36)

The last lines of Scene 3 voice the central dilemma in the words of Bolingbroke and York: Bolingbroke speaks of "weeding" the country of what is choking it, and York grapples with his own conscience over what this weeding entails:

It may be I will go with you, but yet I'll pause,
For I am loath to break our country's laws.
Nor friends, nor foes, to me welcome you are.
Things past redress are now with me past care. (168-71)

Scene 4 serves in place of a stage battle to tell us that Richard's cause has been lost. The language used by Richard's allies is conventional in its reference to the natural elements being somehow in harmony with the momentousness of the occasion. When great men fall, so goes the popular belief, the echoes of that fall are heard in the earth's crust itself. The tradition can be traced back at least to the time of the crucifixion of Christ, at which time

earthquakes and natural calamities were witness to the event. Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, uses this idea fairly frequently; it is an important motif in all of his history plays. Salisbury's comment on the fall of Richard being "like a shooting star" makes reference to the particular image of Richard in the play as someone who does possess, however one may judge it, a kind of style or romantic glory. This is how he is known and how he knows himself. It is also a conventional metaphor for the "tragic" fall from greatness by a heroic or noble figure.

Analysis Act III

In order for Bolingbroke's character to assume sufficient dramatic stature, he must be seen to grow into the role of king. Although the entire play is not devoted to the "education of a king," as it is in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, it is an important element here for the proper sympathies must be aroused. Two simple things, therefore, take place in Scene 1, both involving Bolingbroke in something of a public role. We first see him as a dispenser of justice, and it is right that we discern some righteous indignation in his manner of dispatching Bushy and Green. He has good cause to be angered by these corrupters of the king. Note that this is where the emphasis is — on the tempters and not on the tempted. In *Henry IV, Part I*, Shakespeare returns to this idea in much more complex form. The play involves some of the same characters as this one. Bolingbroke is there the aging King Henry IV, and it is his son, Prince Hal, who must learn to be the next king. The great worry of King Henry is that his son is being led astray by the low company he is keeping, chief among them being Jack Falstaff.

As benefits the good ruler, the last item that Bolingbroke attends to shows him to be a compassionate man: "For God's sake, fairly let her be entreated," he instructs his companions regarding the queen. He can dispense harsh justice when necessary, but he also has an expansive heart. Compare Bolingbroke's behavior here with the cunning of Richard's public dealings earlier in the play. Shakespeare is writing some rather effective propaganda for Henry Bolingbroke and his successors.

Richard has been absent from the stage for quite some time by the beginning of Scene 2, so it is necessary for Shakespeare to use bold strokes in re-establishing the character of the king. The number of times that Richard vacillates in his mood and apparently changes his mind in this scene is a clear indication that he is *not* what one would conventionally think of as a solid and inspiring leader. Throughout, he is cajoled and rather babied by his companions. There is sorely lacking in him a sense of manly resolve and rightness.

His first long speech seems promising, however; it is patriotic and rather cock-sure, but too often Richard is fond of "poeticizing." There is something slightly absurd in his entreaty to the *elements* to do his fighting for him. "But let thy spiders," he tells his England, "that suck up thy venom, / And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way, / Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet / Which with usurping steps do trample thee; / Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies." The king is supposed to be divine, according to conventional wisdom, but he is also meant to be a natural warrior and a leader. The problem with this theory is that the mortal king who fills the role isn't always up to the standard of the idea, and here, Shakespeare does seem to be indicating the weakness of this theory.

The other men around Richard are good, strong soldiers and are ill at ease when their sovereign indulges in his romantic ecstasies. This is especially clear as the scene progresses, and they must repeatedly insist that he stop acting the weakling.

This would be very simple characterization indeed if it weren't for the fact that Shakespeare gives to Richard, here and elsewhere, such grand lines of poetry that it is difficult to dismiss him as "just" a whining incompetent. This man, who is also a king, deeply feels his inadequacy, and perhaps the absurdity of his situation, but, more importantly, he seems to observe himself perform. This, at times, renders him virtually immobile. He seems childishly subject to the passing change in fortunes, exchanging phrases like "Have I not reason to look pale and sad?" for "Awake, thou coward majesty! . . . / Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?" It is true that he indulges himself and cries his woes aloud, and often the tone seems self-indulgent, but on many occasions, he does reach majestic poetic stature:

Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth. . . . For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been deposed, some slain in war;
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives; some sleeping killed;
All murdered: for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing at his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize. (145-65)

Richard is guilty of "monarchizing" but, one might say, with *style*. Richard is quick, however, to attack the friends he thinks have turned on him — "O, villains, vipers, damned without redemption" — although when he learns that he has misjudged them and that they have been executed as his allies, he doesn't show the remotest sign of remorse. This leaves a strong impression on us, and most likely such actions do not pass unnoticed by his present associates. Richard's fickleness, they would note, can have dangerous consequences for themselves. This, combined with the almost-certain victory of the armies of Bolingbroke, who have the entire nation in their sympathy, leaves the king a pitiful figure by the end of Scene 2.

The most striking detail in Scene 3 is the appearance of Richard on the castle walls. There must be something majestic about Richard's entrance for the scene to have any power. That Shakespeare wanted it that way can be seen in the reactions that he ascribes to the first two people who see the king. They both see him in a *glorious* aspect, perhaps seemingly more glorious because he is seen from above and from afar. His position above, high above the others, on the castle wall, says as much as the words he speaks. Notice that he presents a strong position to those below him when he speaks to them as the king but that he weakens visibly in his indecisive aside to Aumerle towards the end of the scene.

After the strong buildup of Bolingbroke as a natural leader, it comes as somewhat of a reversal to see the king back in a position of power even if it is largely a symbolic position. But the emphasis here is on the fact that Bolingbroke, unlike Richard, is *not* an ambitious

man, and he is still rather awed by the idea of majesty and its present physical manifestation. He remains apart throughout most of this scene, as if to emphasize the fact that he does not feel entirely legitimate in his present role. Remember, it is to be characteristic of Bolingbroke that he feels uneasy about his stewardship of the nation. Thus, it is a stroke of dramatic genius to have him appear hesitant about confronting the king, who has just appeared high on a castle wall. Richard's strong warning that the crown will not rest easily on a usurper's head is not lost on Bolingbroke. This theme of ill-fitting royal garments is one that Shakespeare will use again and again in the great tragedies, especially in *Macbeth*.

In this regard, it is important to note that before Richard makes his appearance, we witness a conversation between the Duke of York and Bolingbroke in which the duke reminds him of the importance of what is about to transpire, and that there was a time when had Bolingbroke dared to act as he now is, the king would have wasted no time in having him executed. Bolingbroke's answer, tellingly, is rather ambiguous:

York: Take not, good cousin, further than you should,
Lest you mistake: the heavens are over our heads.

Bolingbroke: I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
Against their will. (16-19)

"Oppose not myself / Against their will" is the key phrase here. If Bolingbroke emphasizes "oppose not myself," the meaning would be that he is acting in his own self-interest, as he perhaps has the right to do. But there are other shades of meaning apparent if one pauses between "myself," and "Against their will." In that case, his reply could be taken to mean that the heavens themselves would favor Bolingbroke's cause; all it needs is an emphasis on the "against."

When Richard does appear above, Bolingbroke's confidence obviously seems to weaken. His words express a certain awe before the majesty of the king:

See, see King Richard doth himself appear,
As doth the blushing discontented sun
From out the fiery portal of the east,
When he perceives the envious clouds are bent
To dim his glory, and to stain the track
Of his bright passage to the occident. (62-67)

The phrase "envious clouds" could, of course, refer to Bolingbroke himself, intentionally on his part or not, but that doesn't remove from the passage itself the feeling that we are in the presence of some glorious being, far above us. Earlier, Gaunt made a similar reference to Richard in a negative sense — as one who would expend himself in a "fierce blaze of riot." Here, coming out of "the fiery portal of the east," the context makes him seem heroic.

In Richard's two long speeches in Scene 3, one finds reason for the awed responses of the spectators. There is an authority and dignity with which he speaks to them at first, upbraiding them for their failure to show proper respect for the office of king. When Richard continues, however, his characteristic self-pity begins to take over. What prevents it from descending into mawkishness is a sarcasm in his tone of voice. When Bolingbroke bends his knee to the king, Richard greets him with these words:

Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee
To make the bare earth proud with kissing it.
Me rather had my heart might feel your love,
Than my unpleased eye see your courtesy.
Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know,
Thus high at least, although your knee be low. (190-95)

Here, stage directions are inserted after "Thus high at least." The actor playing Richard is instructed to point to the crown on his head. Bolingbroke, reminded of who addresses him, is rather tight-lipped during this scene, as he usually is in the presence of the king. Thus his awkwardness in the situation leaves him no option but to allow the king to do the speaking. The king, at the very end of the scene, plays on Bolingbroke's reticence and more or less *forces* him to give an order:

Richard: Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?

Bolingbroke: Yea, my good Lord.

Richard: Then I must not say no.

Scenes like Scene 4 in Shakespeare's plays have a very special function: There is something contemplative about them, as if Shakespeare wants the audience to have sufficient time to consider some of the issues — political and individually human — that are at stake. That is not to say that there is no emotion in Scene 4, for we witness the queen's distraught state of mind and her forced silence while the representatives of the common people discuss the demise of Richard; there is clearly an emotional strain in her bearing and in the delivery of her lines in this scene. Also, it is not to be assumed that the gardeners are without feeling, either to the queen or to the nation's desperate condition. The core of the scene, nevertheless, is the long discourse on the sort of care needed to keep a garden at its most productive, a clear and very common metaphor for the kind of governance necessary to keep the nation functioning at its most productive. There is a definite solemnity with which the gardener gives the instructions:

Go thou, and like an executioner,

Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,

That look too lofty in our commonwealth;

All must be even in our government.

You thus employed, I will go root away

The noisome weeds, which without profit suck

The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers. (33-39)

The gardener is by no means advocating democracy in any form when he says "all must be even in our government"; he is referring to those members of the nobility who have gained excessive favor with the king and who therefore have too much power. To bring things back to "normal," with the proper hierarchy assuming its natural function, these excessive "weeds" and "caterpillars" (an image already referred to) must be removed. Richard is accused only in that he was wasteful and because he did not aid nature in this political pruning operation. The common people, or at least the artisan class as here represented, are perfectly orthodox in their beliefs, recommendations, and wishes:

Superfluous branches

We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours bath quite thrown down. (63-66)

Scene 4 began, remember, with the queen's attending ladies trying to divert her with various trifling games and songs, but these delights are ineffectual in her present state. It is interesting that one feature of Richard's reign was his delight in courtly entertainments and glamorous display. Starting this scene with oblique reference to "entertainments," inappropriate entertainments at that, it is a subtle variation on one of the themes of this play. The gardener refers to "some few vanities" that will be the only things to weigh in the balance with Richard against Bolingbroke. The vanities are also references to his frivolous entertainment-filled lifestyle.

When the queen speaks of "old Adam's likeness" in referring to the gardener and later asks, "What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee / To make a second fall of cursed man?" she is continuing the religious thread that runs throughout the play. As well as describing England as a garden, Shakespeare has her invoke the idea of the Garden of Eden to make it clear that more is at stake than just the *ordinary* affairs of an *ordinary* man. The very act of pruning the garden, if it involves also pruning the king of his power, is an act against God's divine will. The queen reminds us of this point. The gardener would probably agree, but he is really just a powerless man reporting what has happened. Yet the gardener remains a sympathetic character. Even though he is from a lower order of society, he responds to events very much like old Gaunt and perhaps York in his better moments. At the very end of Scene 4, it is significant that Shakespeare has the queen curse the gardener — "Pray God the plants thou graft'st may never grow" — but the gardener feels no spite; rather, he feels pity for her. This pity that Shakespeare evokes for the queen acts as a prelude and a cue to our response to her husband when we see him in his fallen state later in the play. The gardener's last words understandably evoke sympathy from us:

Poor queen! so that thy state might be no worse, I would my skill were subject to thy curse.
Here did she fall a tear; here in this place
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace.
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
In the remembrance of a weeping queen. (103-108)

Analysis Act IV

Shakespeare sets up a parallel here with the opening scenes of the play. This simple scene, you should note, comprises the entire fourth act. You will recall that the first words of the play were Richard's: He asked Gaunt to bring forth his son, Bolingbroke, to explain charges of treason that he leveled against Mowbray. The situation has virtually reversed itself by Act IV. Here it is Bolingbroke who is doing the ordering and the judging of the cases. He asks Bagot what he knows about the death of Gloucester, significantly the same issue that preoccupied Richard and the nobles in the first scene of the play. The fact is, Richard was conducting something of a sham inquiry in the earlier scene — that is, he was only trying to keep the facts of the matter under cover while not allowing his nobility to become embroiled in too open a dispute. Bolingbroke accused Mowbray — and justifiably so — of treason, and

later we find out that it was indeed Mowbray who had a hand in the assassination of Gloucester. Yet the upshot of that first dispute was the exiling of Bolingbroke and Mowbray — on Richard's orders. Years have passed since then, and it is only after suffering the loss of his father, old Gaunt, and the humiliation of having his property unlawfully seized that Bolingbroke now finds himself in the position of one who can see the full truth revealed concerning what Richard has done and what kind of a man and a king he truly is. Bolingbroke is a victim of grave injustice. Politically it is important for Bolingbroke to raise this issue of Gloucester again so that it be publicly known that he has been wronged — he did not deserve banishment — and that the king and his henchmen have been involved in shady actions.

The main accusation in this act is against Aumerle, York's son, who allegedly had involved himself in the plot against Gloucester. Shakespeare constructs the scene in such a way as to emphasize the heated feelings and potentially anarchic situation of the nobles. Aumerle defends himself against first one, Bagot, and then another, Fitzwater, and then yet another, a nameless lord. The repeated attacks on Aumerle and his challenge to fight all of them for his honor are a graphic representation in miniature of the chaos that has been predicted in the event that the anointed king might be deposed. Surrey and Aumerle are pitted against Fitzwater, Bagot, and a nameless lord.

Bolingbroke is silent through much of this bickering, waiting for the opportunity to quell the stormy atmosphere. This he does by seizing on a detail of Fitzwater's report — "I heard the banished Norfolk [Mowbray] say / That thou, Aumerle, did'st send two of thy men / To execute the noble Duke" — and announcing that all previous disputes and challenges are now concealed until the noble Mowbray returns from abroad. Bolingbroke's cleverness as an arbitrator is obvious here. One way of forcing all those present to cease their arguments is to make the outcome of the argument hinge on the words of someone who is absent and who won't be able to return for some time.

The Bishop of Carlisle's report that Mowbray died in Italy after spending some time abroad fighting the "black pagans, Turks, and Saracens" changes the tone yet again. All in the company are made to consider the fact that he is buried on foreign soil; this should bring them back to an awareness of the wrongs done to many nobles like him who were forced into exile by King Richard. With the question of Gloucester's assassin conveniently put aside for the moment, Bolingbroke utters a prayer-like commendation of the late Duke of Norfolk; he also ends the dispute for the time being: Sweet Peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom

Of good old Abraham! Lords appellants,
Your differences shall all rest under gage,
Till we assign you to your days of trial. (103-106)

The next lines in the text announce Bolingbroke as the new king, Henry IV, but before he can gracefully accept York's bid to ascend the throne, the Bishop of Carlisle delivers a long speech warning of the consequences. Remember, here, that it was York in the earlier scenes

who delivered this sort of warning. Here it is someone else, a clergyman, warning Bolingbroke and the rest that what they are doing goes against God's will:

O, if you raise this house against this house,
It will the woofullest division prove
That ever fell upon this cursed earth!
Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
Lest child, child's children, cry against you "woe!" (145-49)

The heated exchanges and challenges to armed combat that opened this scene are almost a case in point, proving the credibility of the bishop's prophecy.

This speech is an important one because of where Shakespeare positions it in the play. At this point, we have to wonder how Bolingbroke will respond to it. He is aware of the gravity of consequences, and he is not wholly convinced of the rightness of what he is doing. Remember, he is not characterized as an overly ambitious man. He remains quiet throughout Carlisle's speech, and it is Northumberland who orders the bishop arrested for treason. Bolingbroke doesn't respond in words to the speech, but his first words after it are firm:

Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender. (156-57)

Foremost here, we should note Bolingbroke's attentiveness to the bishop's words.

The second part of this act belongs to Richard, with Bolingbroke staying largely in the background. Now one should profitably think of Richard in three ways: first, as a king, one who is aware of the behavior appropriate to the office; next, as a man who is suffering the humiliation of defeat; and, finally, as an actor, as a performer with an awareness of situations and specific audiences. It is exactly where these three "roles," as it were, overlap that Shakespeare is at his finest as a dramatist. During Richard's speeches in this act, we should always consider where the "performing" and the "reality" become interchangeable. Since we know that Richard is intensely introspective, we need to be aware of clues in his speeches that suggest that we are hearing the "real" Richard, as well as the one who is "putting on a show" and, finally, the Richard who is aware of himself as such. This is a complicated matter but one that deserves attention.

When thinking of Richard as an "actor," we should recall the two central props that Richard uses in this scene: the crown itself and a mirror that he asks to have brought on especially for him. These are the props of a practiced performer, and he uses them well.

After the first fifteen lines, in which Richard describes himself as a Christ who has more treacherous "apostles" than Jesus did, he asks to hold the crown. During these fifteen lines, he pointedly reminds everyone present that they have, not too long ago, all responded to him as king. In former times, the gathered multitude would utter an "Amen" or a "God save the king" after Richard declared his "God save the king." Here, however, there is no response,

and Richard has made his point dramatically: "Will no man say 'Amen?'" he asks sarcastically of the silent nobles.

He takes the crown in his hands and bids Bolingbroke take it from him. They hold the crown on either side while Richard teases his successor with the moment:

Give me the crown.

Here, cousin, seize the crown. Here, cousin,

On this side my hand, and on that side yours.

Now is this golden crown like a deep well

That owes two buckets, filling one another,

The emptier ever dancing in the air,

The other down, unseen, and full of water.

That bucket down and full of tears am I,

Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high. (181-89)

Here, Richard holds the crown on one side, with both hands, and Bolingbroke on the other, also with both hands. These two possessors of the crown look at each other in all of their manifestations: one on the way up, the other on the way down; one virtually a king, one virtually an ex-king. Here, one might profitably jot down the ways in which they are alike, the ways in which they are dissimilar, and the ways in which this crown (used in this way) is like a mirror into which each looks into his soul and into the soul of his counterpart.

In cataloguing the process of his deposition, Richard is no doubt forcing his audience of nobles to be clearly aware of what they are doing, and he also seems to be working his way up to an emotional outburst. The formality of the repetition makes the speech seem less spontaneous than some of his outbursts, but it prepares the way for something else in the next speech.

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,

With mine own hands I give away my crown,

With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,

With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.

All pomp and majesty I do forswear;

My manors, rents, revenues I forgo;

My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny. (207-13)

Here, Richard is the king stripping himself of all the trappings of his office. In the next speech, he is an ordinary man who is embarrassed that he is to be forced to read an account of his transgressions in public:

Must I do so? and must I ravel out

My weaved-up follies?

Gentle Northumberland,

If thy offences were upon record,
Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop
To read a lecture of them? (228-32)

When Carlisle was defending the king's divine right of rule in the first part of this scene, he used a word that is associated with the pattern of natural imagery running throughout the play. One thinks of the gardener's speech when Carlisle describes the king as God's "captain, steward, deputy elect, / Anointed, crowned, planted many years." Now that Richard is being forced to step down, he describes himself in relation to Bolingbroke in natural imagery that was conventionally associated with royalty:

O, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water drops! (260-62)

The command to see his own face in a mirror that he may better contemplate himself is perhaps Richard's greatest historical posture. His language is highly poetical, even at one point reminiscent of the famous "face that launched a thousand ships" speech from Marlowe's popular tragedy *Dr. Faustus*. Richard says:

Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
That, like the sun, did make beholders wink?
Is this the face which faced so many follies,
That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?
A brittle glory shineth in this face;
As brittle as the glory is the face,
For there it is, cracked in a hundred shivers. (281-89)

Just before the last line, stage instructions indicate that the actor playing Richard should fling the mirror to the floor. Clearly, Richard is suffering here, but one wonders if he doesn't relish this opportunity for his self-pitying display. Note Bolingbroke's response to the display and Richard's response to that response: "The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face," says Bolingbroke, after remaining silent through all of Richard's soliloquy. This is a biting remark, for it accuses Richard of play-acting, dealing with "shadows" and pretence instead of showing real emotion. This remark is the more effective because of Bolingbroke's previous long silence. Notice the clipped few words with which Richard responds to this accusation. He is obviously caught off guard:

Say that again.
The shadow of my sorrow! Ha! let's see.
'Tis very true, my grief lies all within;
And these external manners of laments

Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul. (291-96)

This witty answer comes only after Richard has bought himself time to recover with "Ha! let's see."

The last exchanges between Richard and Bolingbroke are in the form of short sentences. Richard's rhetorical flourishes are at an end; he wants to bring the whole sordid business to a conclusion. His lines are the last ironic gasps of a defeated, once-lordly sovereign:

Richard: Being so great, I have no need to beg.

Bolingbroke: Yet ask.

Richard: And shall I have?

Bolingbroke: You shall.

Richard: Then give me leave to go.

Bolingbroke: Whither?

Richard: Whither you will, so I were from your sights. (309-15)

Richard puns on the word "conveyors" in his exit line, calling them all thieves who "rise thus nimbly by a true king's fall."

The scene and the act do not end, however, with the exit of the deposed Richard and the man who has just announced his own coronation date. Shakespeare presses the point that civil strife is in the air after the deposition by having the last people on stage act and sound like conspirators. The Abbot of Westminster, the Bishop of Carlisle, and Aumerle remain behind. The Abbot's last line is: "I'll lay / A plot shall show us all a merry day." The play is not yet over. Richard's spirit of greed and power has infected even a man of the church.

Analysis Act V

In Scene 1, we see Richard in a close-up portrait with his wife, and the emotional quality of the scene balances that of the one that preceded it. Then, he was a man of display before his former subjects; here he is a private man saying goodbye to his wife. The queen's lines, in which she describes him, at the beginning of the scene set the tone. Richard is a man to be pitied, a shadow of his former self, a "withering rose." When she compares him to Bolingbroke, she uses a metaphor that characterizes Richard as something elegant and special, while Bolingbroke is common. There is an irony here, of course, as it is Bolingbroke's very "commonness" that accounts in part for his transition to the throne. Earlier in the play, Richard commented on Bolingbroke's popularity with the common people. This will be picked up again in the *Henry* plays, in which Bolingbroke's son, Hal, is noted for having "the common touch," in the best meaning of the phrase.

A curious thing happens in Scene 1. Not only does the queen's pity set the tone in general for this scene, but the fact that her pity finally becomes annoyance is also significant. She becomes angered by what seems to her to be Richard's too-easy compliance with his fate.

Although it is a piteous sight to gaze on greatness fallen low, to her it is also loathsome to see that former greatness going to its slaughter like a lamb. She uses the conventional symbol of the proud lion to make her point: Richard should act like the king of beasts and continue to struggle to the end. This is not the first time that Shakespeare presents Richard within the framework of this metaphor, but one should resist the temptation to label him too quickly; the author's characterization of Richard is a complex one, and Shakespeare doesn't allow a simple progression of responses to the king.

While we can sympathize with Richard in his private suffering, it is a fact that this private suffering occasionally degenerates into self-pity. It seems as though Richard almost enjoys the fantasy of imagining weeping, aged women sitting around a fire during a deep winter's night and telling the woeful and lamentable story of poor King Richard.

With relief, we finally see Richard seem to spring to life during his verbal attack on Northumberland in the next part of Scene 1. His first two lines, calling Northumberland a mere "ladder" that Bolingbroke used to climb to the throne, opens an attack upon Northumberland and expresses a warning to him and those like him: Treason and distrust will breed more of the same, and none of those involved will see a happy end to this business. This is really the first time in the play where Shakespeare has Richard sound this theme so forcefully and explicitly, and Northumberland's easy dismissal of the advice — "My guilt be on my head, and there an end" — betrays a suspiciously cocky and over-confident attitude.

An important point about the conclusion to Scene 1 is the physical action that Shakespeare adds to it. Where it may be difficult to sympathize unqualifiedly with Richard, especially when he is dramatizing his own situation, it is easy to imagine him kissing his wife farewell, then kissing her farewell again, as if to delay the inevitable parting. The farewell is poignant, the tone much like that when Gaunt parted for the last time from Bolingbroke.

One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part;
Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart. (95-96)

There is something oddly farcical about Scene 2 in an otherwise humorless play: We get a glimpse into the household of one of the minors actors in the political drama where the strife of the outside arena is seen in miniature.

Earlier, York was a defender of Richard and the divine right of kingship. When the situation became intolerable, he switched his allegiance to Bolingbroke. This was an important switch because it was not done capriciously. York had difficulty in coming to his decision, and although one might be tempted to see York as a political time-server, it doesn't seem that Shakespeare wanted him to be judged too harshly. York's heart seems to be in the right place, and the interests of the nation at large seem to have motivated him to do what he did. In this scene, we see that his son, Aumerle, has remained faithful to the previous ruler. Why not? His father's sympathies had been there too at one time. Aumerle's personal loyalty supersedes his questionable duty to the new king. Questionable, in fact, is the only word we can use

concerning loyalty in this case because one must remember the new king's legitimacy as a monarch is in doubt.

The struggle between the father and son seems serious enough because finally Aumerle's mother has to break in and try to make her husband leave the matter alone and put all thoughts of their turning their only child over to the authorities completely out of his head. They struggle over his boots, most likely (this is not completely clear from the text); she tries to keep them from him, and he tries to put them on so that he can ride to inform Bolingbroke of the plot against his life. Her lines are those of a distracted mother: "Strike him, Aumerle. Poor boy, thou art amazed." His are those of a perhaps over-zealous patriot: ". . . were he twenty times my son, / I would appeach him."

The purpose of Scene 2 is twofold: First, it shows the results of the political uncertainty and impending chaos at the local level, where most ordinary humans would experience it. (A family spat is a civil war in miniature.) And second, it presents the odd games that fortune plays with political loyalties and political necessities. Who is correct in his loyalty? The father's loyalty to the newly crowned king, or the son's loyalty to the man whom he has served? Shakespeare raises the question without answering it. Aumerle's part in the plot and the outcome of his mother's appeal will feature importantly in the next scene.

One final note on Scene 2 should be made concerning the description of Richard, again the performer. This is important as a prelude to Richard's final scene and his now-famous soliloquy. York describes him thus:

As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious;
Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard. (23-28)

One thing this speech does is identify Bolingbroke as the next "actor" in the role of king. The two men gazed into each other's faces through the hollow crown in an earlier scene; we shall see that in more ways than one they will prove to be "mirror images" of one another.

Bolingbroke is now the leader of the nation. What does that mean? For one thing, as Richard predicted, he will never be fully secure for the rest of his days. There is a conspiracy afoot, the first of many, one supposes. And, to make matters worse, as is brought out in the first part of the scene, the king has an unregenerate son, Prince Hal, who whiles away his time with Jack Falstaff (particularly in the *Henry IV* plays of the tetralogy).

Another errant son, York's, breaks onto the scene as the agent of the conspiracy. One must imagine Bolingbroke taking the threat when it is revealed to him by York quite seriously. There is a real danger to the throne. But when the duchess enters the scene, a bit of the farce

of the previous scene spills over into this one. Bolingbroke is now involved in a petty domestic dispute, or what seems like such. There is a pronounced difference between the glamour associated with rulers and ruling and the tedious reality of this sort of administration and arbitration on a daily basis. This does seem to be Shakespeare's point, or at least one of them, because this scene is in such marked contrast with the rather philosophical heaviness of the entire play up until now. Our last view of Richard was a philosophical one; Shakespeare focused primarily on the idea of kingship and what it was. Here, the reality is exposed, with all its boring, melodramatic features. Richard was aloof. That was one reason for his downfall. Henry is not aloof; for that reason, one can easily imagine (from Scene 3) the price that he will pay for keeping himself caught up in petty embroilments.

The vehemence with which York denounces his son seems odd, as if Shakespeare wanted to discredit an over-zealous patriotism. York's words, echoing the theme of civil strife, are harsh:

If thou do pardon, whosoever pray,
More sins for this forgiveness prosper may.
This festered joint cut off, the rest rest sound;
This let alone will all the rest confound. (83-86)

The wisdom is politically sound perhaps, but in reference to his own son, it is certainly extreme. Bolingbroke pardons the son as an act of mercy, showing himself the good ruler in this, but he also dispatches the other conspirators without hesitation: "Destruction straight shall dog them at the heels." He seems to believe firmly in justice and mercy — as a good ruler must — and Shakespeare *did* want to show him as a good ruler.

Scene 4's action is short and straightforward: Sir Pierce Exton interprets Bolingbroke's words "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear" to mean that he wants someone to kill Richard and put an end to all thoughts of a counter-coup in the country. He explains this to another man and they go to kill Richard. Because of this information, our reception of Richard's final soliloquy will be that much more acute.

In Scene 5, we see Richard at his most naked and honest. His thoughts, he says, could fill this little world in place of people. During his reign, he needed people as audiences and companions; this explains the flatterers in his court, those who contributed to his downfall. But even the world of thoughts, like the world of people, has a falling out with itself: There is not one single thought that enters his head that cannot be immediately countered with its contrary. Even the Bible is not immune to this fact of contradiction. "Come, little ones," says the word of God, but the same book also says that it is as hard to "come" as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The association between contrary thoughts, opposing ideas, and the topsy-turvy turn of events in England and in Richard's life is apparent here:

Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves,

Nor shall not be the last; like silly beggars
Who, sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame,
That many have and others must sit there;
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
Of such as have before endured the like. (23-30)

Optimistic or rationalizing thoughts, then, are false flatterers to themselves and serve no useful purpose in the end. Richard recapitulates his experiences succinctly: "Thus play I in one person many people." He has played many people and many roles throughout the course of this play, and now in his imagination, he re-runs the gamut of the types. He has played the king, and he quakes from fear of treason; he has played the beggar, and he feels crushed by penury into thinking he was better off as king. The end result of this "logic" is that he *would* be better off dead:

But whate'er I be,
Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
With being nothing. (38-41)

The chords of music heard from outside the cell have a marked effect on Richard. Scene 5 is the most contemplative in the play, and its "philosophy" speaks of a different kind of concern to Shakespeare in this part of the play from what has gone before. Compare the tone of this scene with the "petty squabbling" found in the two preceding ones. In evoking this difference, the music serves the function of being a mood setter. As an art form, music seems able to "articulate" things that cannot be expressed in any other way. Richard's melancholy is thus underscored. Also, the perfect measure and construction of the phrases of music jar on Richard's ear because it unhappily reminds him of his own discordant state of mind:

And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth Time waste me. (45-49)

The play on words — "time" in music, in the sense of measured duration, and "Father Time" — leads to Richard's observation on his own demise:

So sighs, and tears, and groans
Show minutes, times, and hours. (57-58)

At the end of the speech, Richard seems to grow energetic in his anger, shouting, "This music mads me." As he is not so predisposed, music cannot exercise its calming effect on him.

Shakespeare presents the interlude with the groom as a way of reminding Richard of former, better times, and therefore redoubling the pain of his present state. The groom also serves to show that among some of the common people, there is still respect and feeling for Richard. In addition, the groom has secret thoughts that are perhaps rebellious in nature: "What my tongue dares not, that my heart shall say."

To impress us with the villainy of murdering the king, Shakespeare has Exton recoil in horror from his own accomplishment:

As full of valor as of royal blood!
Both have I spilled. O, would the deed were good!
For now the devil that told me I did well
Says that his deed is chronicled in hell. (114-17)

The tradition that regicide originates in hell is here repeated.

The last scene of the play swells with details of civil horror: a razed town, six beheadings, one life imprisonment, one banishment, and the corpse of a murdered king. The prophecies of doom seem to be fulfilling themselves. Bolingbroke thanks "gentle Percy" for his part in fighting the rebels. (In *Henry IV, Part 1*, Shakespeare shows Henry Bolingbroke's armies in pitched battle against this same Percy.) The mercy that Bolingbroke shows Carlisle, in sparing his life, attests to the general misery of the scene momentarily, but no sooner is the sentence of life imprisonment offered than Exton arrives with Richard's coffin. The note of damnation and possible regeneration through penance that Bolingbroke's last speech contains concludes the play in the religious imagery that has been threaded throughout.

CRITICAL ESSAY - Sixteenth-Century Political Theory

Since *Richard II* and the *Henry IV* plays are basically political ones, it is necessary to understand the political doctrine behind them if one is to do justice to Shakespeare's intentions. Elizabeth I, the fifth Tudor to rule England, had come to a throne which was in many ways insecure because of rival claims. Henry VIII, her father, had found it especially necessary to inculcate the doctrine of absolute obedience to the Crown after the break with Rome in 1536. During his reign, he had experienced the Pilgrimage of Grace, a rebellion in northern England, and, later, the Exeter Conspiracy, an alleged attempt to depose Henry and place a Yorkist on the throne of England. After Henry VIII's death, England endured the Western Rebellion of 1549; during Elizabeth's reign, there occurred the Rebellion of 1569, as well as plots against the queen's life, notably the Babington Plot, which led to the trial, conviction, and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Throughout the century and beyond, England had reason to fear an invasion and the uprising of native Catholics. The danger was by no means restricted to the year 1588, when Philip II of Spain sent his Armada to subdue England.

In view of such challenges to Tudor supremacy, there was a need for a political philosophy which would prevent challenges to royal authority and prevent devastating civil war. The

basic arguments were developed during the reign of Henry VIII and augmented as new crises arose during the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. It found expression in officially approved pamphlets and tracts, and also in drama and non-dramatic poetry. Especially it was emphasized in official sermons, the first group of which was introduced in the year 1549. These included strongly worded instructions on the subject of obedience. They were augmented in 1570, following the Rebellion of 1569 and the papal decree of excommunication of Queen Elizabeth I. Every Englishman was required to hear the sermons on obedience three times during the year. The gist of the doctrine was this: The ruler was God's lieutenant on earth; no subject, however exalted, had the right to actively oppose him. To do so was a sin against religion, punishable by suffering here and now and by eternal damnation after death. Even if the ruler were a tyrant, the subject had no right to oppose him, for the head of state ruled with God's sufferance. In support of this doctrine, appeals were made primarily to biblical authority. Texts such as Romans 13 and Proverbs 8, as well as ones in Matthew, were cited repeatedly. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, summed up the doctrine accurately and concisely in his response to his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Gloucester, who reminded him that the reigning king, Richard II, had been responsible for the death of her husband and Gaunt's brother:

God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully,
Let Heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. (I. ii. 37-41)

That Henry IV should so suffer is to be explained by the fact that he, son of John of Gaunt, did "lift an angry arm against [God's] minister." He endures rebellion; he sees the apparent waywardness of Prince Hal as part of his punishment; he is not permitted to lead a crusade against the foes of Christianity and do penance for his grievous sins. But, according to Tudor political theory, he wore the crown by God's authority; no subject had the right to oppose him. All this should make understandable the Percys' position and make unacceptable the view that Henry IV is a hypocrite

Revision Questions

1. How do the political themes and private themes in the play interconnect?
2. In what ways can Richard be considered a tragic figure?
3. Discuss the imagery of gardens and gardening in the play.
4. Contrast Richard and Henry as rulers.
5. Is this play humorless?

- 6.** How do the minor characters such as Mowbray, Aumerle, Bushy, Bagot, and Green function in the play?
- 7.** What is the particular function of the women in this play?
- 8.** To what extent does the death of Gloucester affect Richard's deposition?
- 9.** Defend York's change of allegiance to Bolingbroke.
- 10.** Richard is often said to be an "unkingly" ruler. Discuss.

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/richard-ii/character-analysis/richard-ii>

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/coriolanus/section7/>

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/j/julius-caesar/play-summary>

UNIT – III - SHAKESPEARE (SHS1208)

TRAGEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

IV. MACBETH

INTRODUCTION

In *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare's tragedy about power, ambition, deceit, and murder, the Three Witches foretell Macbeth's rise to King of Scotland but also prophesy that future kings will descend from Banquo, a fellow army captain. Prodded by his ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, he murders King Duncan, becomes king, and sends mercenaries to kill Banquo and his sons. His attempts to defy the prophesy fail, however; Macduff kills Macbeth, and Duncan's son Malcolm becomes king.

Written by: William Shakespeare

Type of Work: play

Genres: drama; tragedy

First Published: probably around 1605-1606

Setting: Scotland

Main Characters: Macbeth; Lady Macbeth; Duncan; Macduff; Banquo; Malcolm

Major Thematic Topics : fall of man; gender roles ; fortune; fate; free will; kingship/natural order; ambition; love of self

Motifs: revenge; sanity; prophecy

Major Symbols: hands; the Three Witches; ghosts

Movie Versions: *Macbeth* (1948); *A Performance of Macbeth* (1979); *Scotland, Pa.* (2001)

The three most important aspects of *Macbeth*:

- Lady Macbeth is one of the most famous female characters in all of literature. Macbeth's wife is smart, ambitious, and brave. She is undone, however, by her ambition, and by her utter ruthlessness.
- The most famous speech in this play full of famous lines and speeches is Macbeth's soliloquy that begins "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/Creeps in this petty pace from day to day/to the last syllable of recorded time" These lines express

Macbeth's utter hopelessness near the tragedy's end about not only his life, but life in general.

- It is a widely held superstition in the world of theatre that saying the play's name aloud brings bad luck. Instead, actors, directors, and other theatre people refer to *Macbeth* as "the Scottish play."

MACBETH

Background

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* remains one of his most popular plays, both for classroom study and performance, and with good reason. Here we have the playwright's shortest play, but arguably his most intense, in terms both of its action and its portrayal of human relationships. The "butcher and his fiend-like queen" are among the most attractive villains in stage history, and the profound psychology with which Shakespeare imbues them is deliciously pleasurable for theater audience and student alike.

Macbeth was a real king of eleventh-century Scotland, whose history Shakespeare had read in several sources, principally the *Chronicles* of Holinshed, to which he referred for many of his other historical dramas. In Holinshed's account, Banquo and Macbeth combine to kill King Duncan after winning his favor in a battle against the Danes. The original story is full of wonderful details that show the cunning of the Scots and Macbeth, who slaughtered an entire Danish army not by brute force, but by cunning: first mixing a sleeping potion and sending it, like the Trojan horse, as a gift to the enemy army. Once they were asleep, Macbeth was able to kill them easily. Presumably from this incident, Shakespeare derived his idea of having Lady Macbeth administer a sleeping potion to the guards of King Duncan's chamber.

In Holinshed's account, however, although we learn that Macbeth's wife is ambitious to become queen, Lady Macbeth does not feature as an accomplice. Instead, Banquo joins forces with Macbeth in killing Duncan. As we shall see later, this particular confederacy of murderers presented Shakespeare with a problem.

Holinshed did not simply provide Shakespeare with a good story; *Macbeth* contains many examples of imagery and language that Shakespeare borrowed directly from his source, a practice common to all writers. For example, compare these words of Holinshed with Shakespeare's words.

Holinshed:

"What manner of women (saith he) are you, that seeme so little favourable unto me, whereas to my fellow heere, besides high offices, ye assign also the kingdom?" Banquo "My noble partner / You greet with present grace, and great prediction / Of noble having, and of royal hope . . . to me you speak not." Banquo

Shakespeare:

Macbeth is afraid "lest he should be served of the same cup, as he had ministered to his predecessor." Macbeth knows that, all too often, " . . . even-handed Justice / Commends th'ingredience of our poison'd chalice /To our own lips"

There are many more such examples. What does Shakespeare *add*, then? Primarily, the dialogue form of a play allows Shakespeare to examine the emotional relationships *between* characters with much greater realism. An audience going to Shakespeare's play would see ambition, accusation, fear, grief, courage, anger, and madness at first hand instead of via a narrator.

Secondly, as in his other plays, Shakespeare's genius lies in the human treatment that each character receives. The audience is made to feel that this awful tragedy could actually happen precisely because the characters are so three-dimensional. Lady Macbeth cannot sustain her mask of cruelty; Macbeth is racked with a tormented conscience. Banquo, in Shakespeare's version a good man, is nevertheless ambitious, too.

Thirdly, drama allows events to be linked and patterned in ironic ways. The idea of sleeplessness, for example, the punishment of a guilty mind, is shown literally in Act V, when Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and confesses her involvement with the murder of Duncan.

Finally, Shakespeare's mastery of the *soliloquy*, or solo speech, gives the audience the opportunity to see inside a character's mind, to witness, with some psychological accuracy, the intentions, hopes, and fears of these historical characters, something that a chronicler of history cannot do.

Stage History

One of Shakespeare's main interests in writing *Macbeth* was to examine the nature of kingship, as he had already done in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, written only a few years previously. In order to understand why he was so interested in this topic, we must examine briefly the fascinating early stage history of this play.

Probably written in 1605-1606, *Macbeth* was first performed for King James I of England less than a year after the infamous Gunpowder plot in which a group of Catholics attempted to blow up the king and the English parliament. A play that concerned treachery and regicide — the killing of a king — was bound to be topical and politically significant. There can be no real question of Shakespeare's wish to flatter a king whose interest in both the supernatural and the nature of kingship are all referred to so strongly in this play. Moreover, James I was descended from Scottish ancestors, the Stuarts, so a play concerning the early kings of Scotland was bound to appeal to him. Shakespeare's only problem was that the Stuarts were descended from Banquo who, as Holinshed's *Chronicle* makes clear, helped Macbeth murder

the king. This explains why, in Shakespeare's play, Banquo cannot be the accomplice, a role that instead passes to Macbeth's wife.

So fascinated was James I in the notion of what makes a good king that he himself had written (in 1599) a handbook on good government, the *Basilikon Doron*. Some of these ideas of good kingship are listed by Malcolm as "the king-becoming graces" in Act IV, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*: "Justice, Verity, Temp'rance, Stableness, Bounty, Perseverance, Mercy, Lowliness, Devotion, Patience, Courage, Fortitude." Macbeth lacks all these kingly virtues, but his greatest vice is his impulse to lie — even to his own conscience — in his pursuit of power.

The Audience

Like all tragic heroes before him, Macbeth's greatest lie is to himself. He becomes blinded to his own ambition. His overbearing pride (or *hubris*) is so great that he fails to see as he stumbles toward his destiny. Perhaps only when Lady Macbeth commits her off-stage suicide does he begin to acknowledge the truth. "She should have died hereafter," he comments, and then adds "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time"

These lines apply to us, not just as readers and playgoers, but as humans. We may not have committed murder, we may not have ambitions for power, but we all know how it feels to watch time passing. At this point in the play, we see a man emotionally raw, stripped momentarily of all his power, admitting — with self-awareness and, perhaps, with bitter self-irony — his share in the common human experience. This moment is only one of the few moments in the play when Macbeth does so. Immediately afterwards, he strides into battle with all his former arrogance, to his tragic end. Without these lines, we could not, perhaps, feel the tragedy in the same way.

We may not *be* Macbeth, but as playgoers and readers, we encounter what he does: We, too, experience visions of the supernatural. We, too, ask "Is it a dagger?" "Is it a ghost?" "Are they real?" The answer to all these questions is equivocal; they are real, in a way, and in another way, they are false, only tricks "paltering with us in a double sense." Even Macbeth is and is not real. He's an actor playing an actor, deeply aware of his twofold existence.

The play is peppered with references to the world of the theater, from the very beginning when we are seduced into a magic ritual by three characters who chant and dance around *their* stage. The banquet in Act III is a magnificent piece of staging, in which the director (Macbeth) is not allowed to direct as he wishes. Even the murder is an act, as distinct from the thought or intention of an act, as Lady Macbeth reminds her husband "Art thou afeard / To be the same in thine own act and valour / As thou art in desire?"

And so when we look at this man, we see an actor, directed by Fate, his wife, and himself, capable yet incapable, suffering from stage fright, yet knowing that he must go on if the play

is to succeed. Looked at in this way, we begin to sympathize with Macbeth, and we suddenly recognize what is the truly great achievement of this play.

As in all good theatre, we're put on the spot just as Macbeth is: "*If it were done . . .*," but *will* it be done? If it *is* done, what will be its effect? And what would *we* do? At the same time, while we recognize that Macbeth *should* not act in the way he does, we must, nevertheless, ask ourselves why his acts in that way. The answers are far from simple.

Language, Imagery and Technique

English of this period can be quite difficult to understand at first, but remember that one reason for Shakespeare's popularity is that much of his language is actually very bold and clear. For instance, Macbeth famously says that there is sufficient blood on his hands to make the "green" of the ocean "red." Later, he uses the same metaphor, remarking that he must "wade" through an ocean of blood.

The trouble with *Macbeth* is that, as a psychological drama, the characters in the play (accidentally or on purpose) do *not* see things so clearly: This play is full of shadows, foreshadowings, and shadowy meanings. So Shakespeare has to inform his audience, while allowing the characters to remain mystified, or "in the dark." This is one reason why the play is full of questions, most famously "Is this a dagger?" The answer, for both Macbeth and the audience, is unclear.

Most scholars agree that one of the most effective ways in which Shakespeare's writing communicates is through the combination (or clusters) of images: In this play, images of strength and weakness, as well as ability and inability, are played off one another constantly. A good example is the image of the "milk of human kindness" which resurfaces later in Lady Macbeth's assertion that she would have murdered her own child while breast-feeding it — a contrast to Macbeth's weakness. The color of milk, white, is also used by both Macbeth and his wife, as an image of cowardice, while red — the color of blood — represents not only courage and the energy of life but also terror and the curtailment of life.

Another image contrast that is used repeatedly throughout the play is that of sleep and sleeplessness. Not only is Duncan murdered while he sleeps, but also Macbeth, Banquo, and Lady Macbeth have their rest disturbed by dreams. When Macbeth remarks "Duncan is in his grave; after life's fitful fever he sleeps well" (Act III, Scene 2), he is recalling the words with which his conscience (or Fate) spoke to him immediately after the murder: "Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (II:2,41-42)

CHARACTERS

Macbeth A captain in Duncan's army, later the Thane (Lord) of Glamis and Cawdor. When Three Witches predict that he will one day be king of Scotland, he takes his fate into his own

hands, allowing his ambition and that of his wife to overcome his better judgement. His bloody reign culminates in a battle against Malcolm and the English forces.

Lady Macbeth The devilish wife of Macbeth, whose ambition helps to drive her husband toward the desperate act of murder. Subsequently, her husband's cruelty and her own guilt recoil on her, sending her into a madness from which she never recovers.

Banquo A fellow-captain and companion of Macbeth, who also receives a prophecy from the Witches: that his children will one day succeed to the throne of Scotland. This information is sufficient to spell his death at the hands of the resentful Macbeth, who is later haunted by Banquo's ghost.

Duncan King of Scotland. His victories against rebellious kinsmen and the Norwegians have made him a popular and honored king. His decision to pass the kingdom to his son Malcolm provokes his untimely death at the hands of Macbeth.

Fleance Banquo's son, who, by escaping Macbeth's plot on his life, will go on to be father to a line of kings.

Donalbain and Malcolm Duncan's two sons. Fearful of implication in their father's murder, they flee Scotland, Donalbain to Ireland and Malcolm to England, where he raises a large army with the intention of toppling the tyrant Macbeth.

Macduff A thane (nobleman) of Scotland who discovers the murdered King Duncan. Suspecting Macbeth and eventually turning against him, Macduff later flees to England to join Malcolm. When Macbeth arranges the murder of his wife and children, Macduff swears personal revenge.

Lennox, Ross, Menteth, Angus, Caithness Thanes of Scotland, all of whom eventually turn against the tyrannical Macbeth.

The Porter, the Old Man, the Doctors Three commentators on events, all of whom have a certain degree of wisdom and foresight. The Porter hints at the Hell-like nature of Macbeth's castle; the Old Man associates the murder of King Duncan with the instability of the natural world; the Doctors recognize disease and disorder even though they cannot cure it.

The Witches Three agents of Fate who reveal the truth (or part of it) to Macbeth and Banquo and who later appear to confirm the downfall and tragic destiny of the tyrannical Macbeth.

SUMMARY

Set in medieval Scotland and partly based on a true historical account, *Macbeth* charts the bloody rise to power and tragic downfall of the warrior Macbeth. Already a successful soldier in the army of King Duncan, Macbeth is informed by Three Witches that he is to become king. As part of the same prophecy, the Witches predict that future Scottish kings will be descended not from Macbeth but from his fellow army captain, Banquo. Although initially prepared to wait for Fate to take its course, Macbeth is stung by ambition and confusion when King Duncan nominates his son Malcolm as his heir.

Returning to his castle, Macbeth allows himself to be persuaded and directed by his ambitious wife, who realizes that regicide — the murder of the king — is the quickest way to achieve the destiny that her husband has been promised. A perfect opportunity presents itself when King Duncan pays a royal visit to Macbeth's castle. At first Macbeth is loth to commit a crime that he knows will invite judgment, if not on earth then in heaven. Once more, however, his wife prevails upon him. Following an evening of revelry, Lady Macbeth drugs the guards of the king's bedchamber; then, at a given signal, Macbeth, although filled with misgivings, ascends to the king's room and murders him while he sleeps. Haunted by what he has done, Macbeth is once more reprimanded by his wife, whose inner strength seems only to have been increased by the treacherous killing. Suddenly, both are alarmed by a loud knocking at the castle door.

When the drunken porter of Macbeth's castle finally responds to the noise, he opens the door to Macduff, a loyal follower of the king, who has been asked to awake Duncan in preparation for the return journey. Macbeth indicates the location of the king's room, and Macduff discovers the body. When the murder is revealed, Macbeth swiftly kills the prime witnesses, the sleepy guards of the king's bedchamber, and Lady Macbeth faints. The assembled lords of Scotland, including Macbeth, swear to avenge the murder. With suspicion heavy in the air, the king's two sons flee the country: Donalbain to Ireland and Malcolm to raise an army in England.

Macbeth is duly proclaimed the new king of Scotland, but recalling the Witches' second prophecy, he arranges the murder of his fellow soldier Banquo and his son Fleance, both of whom represent a threat to his kingship according to the Witches' prophecy. The hired murderers kill Banquo but mistakenly allow Fleance to escape. At a celebratory banquet that night, Macbeth is thrown into a state of horror when the ghost of the murdered Banquo appears at the dining table. Again, his wife tries to strengthen Macbeth, but the strain is clearly beginning to show.

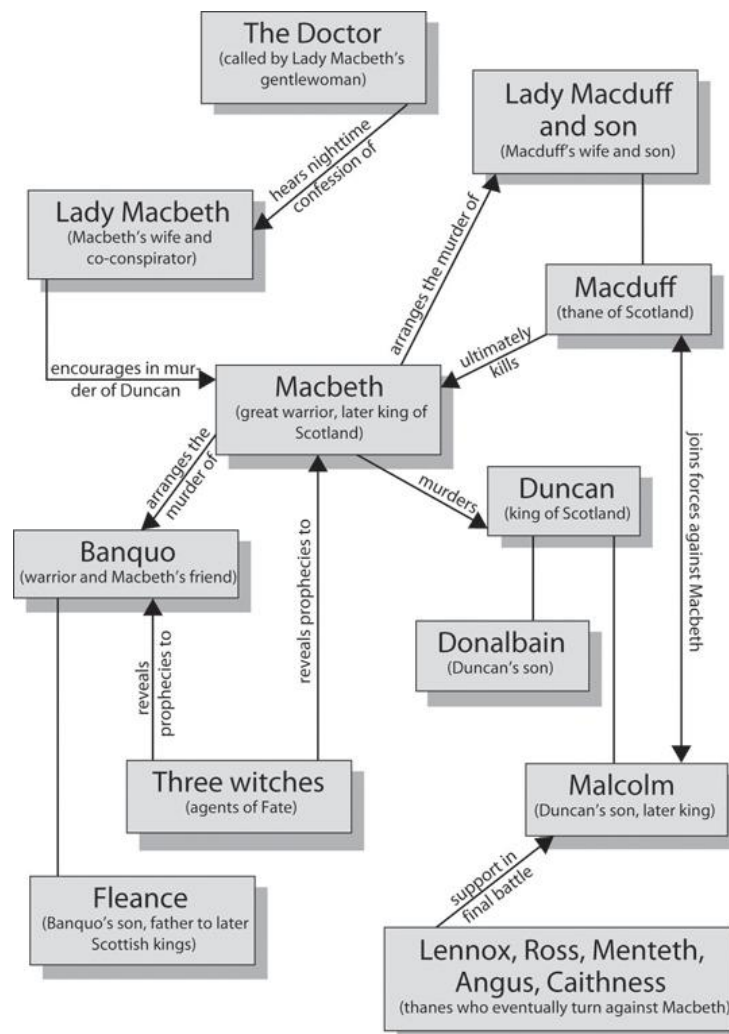
The following day, Macbeth returns to the same Witches who initially foretold his destiny. This time, the Witches not only confirm that the sons of Banquo will rule in Scotland, but they also add a new prophecy: Macbeth will be invincible in battle until the time when the forest of Birnam moves towards his stronghold at Dunsinane and until he meets an enemy "not born of woman." Dismissing both of these predictions as nonsense, Macbeth prepares for invasion.

When he is told that Macduff has deserted him, Macbeth begins the final stage of his tragic descent. His first move is the destruction of Macduff's wife and children. In England, Macduff receives the news at the very moment that he swears his allegiance to the young Malcolm. Malcolm persuades him that the murder of his family should act as the spur to revenge.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, Lady Macbeth has been taken ill: She walks in her sleep and seems to recall, in fragmentary memories, the details of the murder. Now, in a series of alternating

scenes, the action of the play moves rapidly between the advancing army of Malcolm and the defensive preparations of Macbeth. When Malcolm's army disguise themselves with sawn-off branches, Macbeth sees what appears to be a wood moving towards his stronghold at Dunsinane. And when he finally meets Macduff in single combat, his sworn enemy reveals that he came into the world by caesarean section; he was not, precisely speaking, "born of woman." On hearing this news, Macbeth rejects one final time the Witches' prophecy. With a loud cry, he launches himself at Macduff and is slain. In the final scene, Malcolm is crowned as the new king of Scotland, to the acclaim of all.

CHARACTER MAP



ANALYSIS

Act I: Scene 1

Macbeth begins in "an open place" — a place without any landmarks or buildings — with the appearance of the three "weird sisters," as they later call themselves. The Old English word "wyrd," or "weird" means "Fate," which is exactly the origin of these Witches: They are the

Fates of classical mythology, one of whom spun the thread of a person's life, one of whom measured it, and one of whom cut it. The bleakness of the scene is a dramatic representation both of the wild Scottish landscape in which the play is set and the more universal wilderness of man's existence.

The Three Witches' speech is written in short rhyming verse that imitates the casting of a spell. The women's language is also full of the imagery of witchcraft and of chaotic weather: thunder, lightning, rain, fog, and "filthy air." The lines "When the battle's lost and won" and "Fair is foul and foul is fair" are the most significant in the scene. On the one hand, these contradictory statements are the kind of riddles we would expect from witches; on the other, the lines suggest a paradox that runs throughout the play: Life frequently presents a confused picture of events in which discerning truth from falsehood is difficult.

Act I: Scene 2

A captain of Duncan's army makes the initial report of the battle. At first, he says, the outcome of the fighting was in doubt. To describe the inertia of the two armies, the captain uses a metaphor of two drowning men, who gain no advantage by clinging together but instead "choke their art." At this stage in the battle, it had appeared that Fortune, like a "smiling . . . whore" — a traditional personification of her fickleness — would support Macdonald. It was left to the brave warrior Macbeth, "disdaining Fortune," to reverse this situation.

The introduction of Macbeth as a warrior hero is crucial to the play, for tragedy depends on our witnessing the downfall of an already great man. Phrases such as "Valour's minion" (the servant of Courage) and "Bellona's bridegroom" (the husband of War) exemplify Macbeth's superheroism. His strength is underscored by the captain's graphic account of Macbeth's actions on the battlefield. Macbeth did not simply kill Macdonald; he "unseam'd him from the nave to the chops, / And fix'd his head upon our battlements" (22-23) — a reference that foreshadows Macbeth's death at the end of the play.

Macbeth's reputation on the battlefield is further enhanced by the similes of the Captain's second report, in which Macbeth and his fellow-captain, Banquo, are compared to "eagles" and "lions" unafraid of the timid Norwegians, who themselves are likened to "sparrows" or "a hare." Symbolically, the lion appears on the royal coat of arms of the kings of Scotland. Macbeth's and Banquo's fighting is compared to the action of artillery pieces (even though, historically, this battle would have been a sword fight). Finally, Macbeth is credited with nothing less than recreating "Golgotha," the scene of Christ's crucifixion.

The Thane of Ross enters the scene with a third report: Once more, the result of the battle is doubtful, and once more both combatants are seen on equal terms — "self-comparisons" — until the outcome is decided in Scotland's favor by Macbeth. The scene ends with two resolutions: First, the Norwegians "crave composition"; that is, they beg for a truce. Second, and more importantly for the story, the disloyal Thane of Cawdor is condemned to execution

and his title granted to Macbeth. The language in Scene 2 captures much of the activity, urgency, and gruesome realism of battle. Lines such as "the Norwegian banners flout the sky / And fan our people cold" give a cinematic feel to the scene and remind us that the play concerns a wider world and that its moral questions, when they come, do so as well.

Scene 2 establishes the opposing idea of order and the related theme of orderly or honorable behavior. Duncan himself is established as a figurehead of order who honors the valor of the bleeding captain and, in two grand rhyming couplets at the end of the scene, pronounces his favor of Macbeth.

Act I: Scene 3

The opening of Scene 3 does more than to simply recall us to the world of the supernatural of Act I, Scene 1: The Witches' curse of the sailor foreshadows what Fate has in store for Macbeth. The sailor is the captain of a ship, in the same way that Macbeth is to become "captain" of his land; like the sailor, Macbeth will be blown by the tempests of ill Fortune. Sleep will be denied to both. Famously, Macbeth later believes that, in murdering Duncan, he "has murder'd sleep," and both he and Lady Macbeth are denied "Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care." Finally, the metaphor of a storm at sea is traditionally used to refer to confusion and the unpredictability of events.

Macbeth's first words ("So foul and fair a day I have not seen") ironically recall the Witches' "foul is fair" in Scene 1, but Banquo is the first to spot the weird sisters, remarking on the Witches' ambiguous and confused appearance: They "look not like the inhabitants of the earth, / And yet are on it"; they seem to understand him, and yet he cannot be sure; they "should be women," and yet they are bearded. Later in the scene, Macbeth remarks that the Witches "seem'd corporal [physical]" and yet they vanish like bubbles "into the air."

No such ambiguity occurs in the response of the Witches to Macbeth: He is Thane of Glamis, he is Thane of Cawdor, and he shall be King. This contrast between what is uncertain and what is certain, or between what is confused and what is ordered or ordained by Fate, is one of the crucial structural components in the writing of this play, and it is clear that Shakespeare wants us to see it.

Banquo's reaction to this peculiar prophecy is understandable rather than an example of professional rivalry. He has been linked in name with Macbeth and, so far, enjoys equal merit with his friend. Why should he not also have his future predicted? But the Witches' answer to him is more riddling: "lesser . . . and greater," "not so happy . . . much happier," "get kings . . . be none" all suggest a more unpredictable future.

Noteworthy in this scene is the way in which Shakespeare registers the psychological response of both Macbeth and Banquo. The questions "Whither . . . ?", "Were . . . ?", "Have we . . . ?" and so on paint a picture of shared incomprehension. Shakespeare cleverly combines Macbeth's and Banquo's confusion at the Witches' vanishing with their disbelief at

what has been spoken. The reference to "the insane root that takes the reason prisoner" suggests the working of a powerful drug, and the clear impression is that they feel they have been dreaming.

Ross arrives and announces that Macbeth is to be the new Thane of Cawdor, thus confirming the first prophecy of the Witches. Banquo and Macbeth are struck dumb for the second time, but now Shakespeare contrasts their responses. Banquo is aware of the possibility that the prophecies may have been the work of supernatural dark forces, as exemplified in his lines "What? Can the Devil speak true?" (108) and "oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of Darkness tell us truths . . . — (only) to betray us" (123-125). Macbeth is more ambiguous. His speech is full of what will now become his trademark — questioning, doubting, weighing up, and seeking to justify: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill; cannot be good" (130-131).

Nevertheless, however much he reasons, Macbeth cannot reconcile the fact of the truth of the first prophecy with his intense and unnatural fear, or what he calls his "horrible imaginings." He admits to being so shaken by the news that he feels that his reason has been taken over by his imagination. The line "Nothing is, but what is not" is ambiguous. The expression could indicate confusion between the world we think of as real and the world of dreams, a neat summary of a confused mind. But how confused *is* Macbeth at this point? If he is capable of arguing that the prophecies are neither evil nor good, he is capable of accepting that nothing that exists has any existence or meaning. This interpretation could open Macbeth to dangerous and unjustifiable deeds. If he can make himself believe that "Nothing is, but what is not," then Macbeth's respect for order, for hierarchy, for the King, is also nullified. He can, literally, get away with murder.

Act I: Scene 4

The dramatic function of this short scene is twofold. First, it gives an opportunity to observe the relationship between Macbeth and Duncan; second, it provides Macbeth with further fuel for his ambitious claim on the kingdom.

Malcolm's report of the execution of the disloyal Thane of Cawdor emphasizes the dignity with which even a traitor can go to his death, but Duncan's reply is even more ironic. "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face" has a proverbial flavor to it — never judge a book by its cover — but it's also a sad admission that even Duncan was unable to predict the treachery of Cawdor. Such is the human side of kingship. Exactly at the moment that Duncan speaks the line, Shakespeare seals the irony by having Macbeth enter the court room.

Formal speeches are exchanged, both Macbeth and Banquo giving humble and loyal replies to their king. The imagery at this point in the scene largely refers to growth and fertility. The king clearly sees Macbeth as a potential successor: "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing" (28-29). The metaphor is continued by Banquo, who promises the king that, if he too is allowed to grow in the king's favor, he will dedicate "the

harvest" to Duncan. At this point, the scene recalls Banquo's earlier line when he asked the Witches if they could "look into the seeds of time / And say which one will grow, and which will not" (I:3,58-59). The irony of giving the earlier "seeds" line and now the "harvest" line to Banquo is that these expressions symbolize the seed, or children, of Banquo himself, who are to inherit the kingdom, according to the Witches' third prophecy.

Note the way in which Shakespeare plays with images such as these. Often he builds up a cluster of related images (as here, "plant," "growing," "grow," and "harvest") precisely in order to establish a sense of irony. In the next speeches, for example, the king first invests all those who deserve his thanks with "signs of nobleness, like stars." Only a few lines later, Macbeth, frustrated and angry at the news of Malcolm's investiture as Prince of Cumberland, breathes to himself the words "Stars! Hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires" (50-51).

Here, the juxtaposition of images of starlight and the cancellation of starlight emphasizes the great opposition between the king and Macbeth and between good and evil, an opposition that is ironically reinforced by the king's final lines to Banquo, once more praising Macbeth. The phrase "peerless kinsman" gives added poignancy: The historical Macbeth was the cousin of Duncan, and his crime will not simply be regicide, but the willful destruction of the head of a family.

Act I: Scene 5

The letter, read alone on stage by Lady Macbeth, reiterates the Witches' prophecy of Act I. Significantly, in his letter, Macbeth says nothing of their prophecy to Banquo; perhaps he is already afraid of its implications. Equally significantly, he sets up Lady Macbeth as his "dearest partner of greatness." She will indeed become his partner in crime, but much more than that: Apart from the fatal blow itself, she will be responsible for controlling Macbeth's passions and — to an extent — his actions.

Immediately after she finishes the letter, Lady Macbeth's mind goes to work. Her words "shalt be" uncannily reflect those of the Witches' prophecy. At this point, Lady Macbeth herself has virtually become an agent of Fate, just like the Weird Sisters. But immediately her thoughts turn to possible failings in her husband. He is "too full of the milk of human kindness" to commit murder; he *would* be great, he *would* have a high position, he *would* wrongly win that position, but in each case, some other aspect of his character *would not*. In this case, she says, there is only one solution. She must "pour [her] spirits in thine ear." Any member of Shakespeare's audience who had seen his play *Hamlet* four years previously would be more than aware of the significance of this line, for in that play the good King Claudius is murdered by poison administered through the ear. The scene is rapidly becoming darker.

Lady Macbeth is one of the most powerful female characters in literature. The fact that we meet her alone on stage means that we are privy to her innermost thoughts, which are filled

with the imagery of death and destruction. And when she speaks, in her next soliloquy, of her "fell purpose," her intentions are described in the most grotesque and frightening terms. First she bids the spirits to literally deprive her of her femininity, to thicken her blood, and to stop her ability to weep. Next, she prays that those same evil spirits should suckle her, converting what should be her nourishing mother's milk to "gall" (bitterness). Lastly, she calls upon the night itself to hide her actions in a "blanket" of darkness. It is no coincidence that these last words reflect those of Macbeth in the previous scene: Shakespeare is creating a strong verbal bond between husband and wife that will continue throughout the play.

When Macbeth enters his castle, his wife greets him in a way that again recalls the words of the Witches; in particular the words "all-hail" and "hereafter" chill the audience, for they are the exact words spoken to Macbeth by the Witches. The dialogue that follows their initial encounter is fast, urgent, and disturbing. Shakespeare uses half-line breaks to intensify the drama of the moment, each "partner in crime" picking up the rhythm of the other's speech:

M: My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

LM: And when goes hence?

M: Tomorrow, as he purposes.

LM: Oh, never
Shall sun that morrow see!

Shakespeare uses the same technique immediately after the murder.

In the lines that follow, Lady Macbeth uses several significant metaphors of concealment: Macbeth's face is like "a book, where men / May read strange matters" (63-64); then, in a brilliantly ironic reference to the Genesis story, "Look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under it" (66-67). The apparent paradise promised by the Witches is soon to become a hell. An important psychological point is also made: Lady Macbeth herself does not hide her feelings in the same way that Macbeth does. She is not rapt in wonderment, simply practical. The last line of the scene, "Leave all the rest to me," is quite modern in its tone. With this blunt and chilling imperative, Lady Macbeth completes her transformation from woman to man. From now on, she plays on the reversal of roles; she has adopted the role of "man of action," forcing her husband into the more passive role of accomplice.

Act I: Scene 6

Duncan's speech on his arrival at Inverness is heavy with dramatic irony: Not only is the "seat" (the surroundings) of the castle "pleasant," but even the air is sweeter than that to which the king is accustomed. The presence of the martlet (a summer bird) serves to heighten the irony. As far as the king is concerned, the castle, from the outside at least, appears to be a

paradise. Contrast this picture of delight with the imagery of hell that forms the substance of the Porter scene (Act II, Scene III).

The king's address to Lady Macbeth and her subsequent reply are full of the heightened language of formal introduction: "God 'ild you," "We rest your hermits (your servants) ever." Of course, her elaborate greeting contrasts her language of the previous scene and emphasizes her falsity.

The stage directions that frame this scene are full of the pomp and ceremony of a royal visit. To a musical accompaniment, food and drink are transported from one side of the stage to the other. Although the audience does not see the revelry on stage, Shakespeare intends us to understand that the king is to be well entertained.

Act I: Scene 7

The imagery of Macbeth's soliloquy reveals the intentions he would like to achieve ("assassination," "success"), but its construction shows the workings of a mind still very much in confusion. Notice the insistent repetition of individual words — *if*, *were*, *done*, *be*, *but*, and *here* — each repeated two or three times within the first few lines. Within the fluid construction of this soliloquy, words and sounds constantly attract and suggest each other, giving the impression of a train of thought. All this begs the question of whether Macbeth, able to rationalize and express his thoughts, is thereby revealed as an intelligent, poetic soul. And if that's the case, does he appear more human, more or less capable of sinning, and, worrisome for the audience, more or less capable of winning their sympathy?

It is the thought of something after death that puzzles Macbeth. Throughout the speech, his words recall those of Shakespeare's earlier tragic hero, Hamlet. In paraphrase, Macbeth wonders whether the act of murder itself must, by necessity, carry consequences in "the life to come" or whether judgment will await him in this life. Macbeth is simultaneously aware of the duplicity and imbalance of the proposed murder (he is Duncan's relative, subject, and host, yet he is to be his killer) and of the equality and balance of earthly and heavenly law: "this even-handed Justice / Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice / To our own lips" (11-12).

Of further concern to Macbeth is the disparity between his own reputation and the world's perception of Duncan as a good and virtuous king. The final section of the speech contains an apocalyptic vision in which he imagines Duncan's virtue and pity proclaimed as if by angels and cherubim from a storm-filled sky. This doom-laden vision, whose imagery (for example, "trumpet-tongued") reflects that of the biblical Day of Judgment, gives way in turn to a nagging self-doubt. Whereas he pictures the angels and cherubim "horsed upon the sightless couriers of the air," Macbeth admits that he himself has "no spur / to prick the sides of my intent but only / Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself / And falls on the other [side]" (25-28).

Lady Macbeth must immediately detect Macbeth's self-doubt. When Macbeth admits to her that his golden reputation might lose its "gloss," she sets out to strengthen his resolve by mocking his perceived weakness. Her questions drive further the wedge between daring and doing, between courage and action, between desire and fulfillment. To these, she adds a distinction between masculinity and femininity: In contrast to her own self-proclaimed manliness, she pours scorn upon her husband's lack of courage. She tells him he is "green," "a coward," and that he resembles the proverbial "poor cat" who wanted the fish but would not get its paws wet. Finally, and most damningly, she tells him that her own lack of pity would extend to murdering her own child as it suckled at her breast. With this one terrifying example, she confirms that "the milk of human kindness" is absent in her.

The next paragraph commences with a shift in tone — no less pragmatic but even more ruthlessly efficient — as Lady Macbeth switches her attention to the details of the murder itself. Her plan to drug the guards with alcohol is couched in metaphorical language derived from the ancient science of alchemy. The words "receipt," "fume," and "limbeck" specifically refer to this process, whose purpose was to turn base metal (such as lead) into gold. It is heavily ironic that, in the Macbeths' experiment, that which is gold — the king himself — will become base and doubly ironic that Macbeth's golden reputation will be reduced to worthlessness.

Macbeth has been convinced. In words that uncannily recall his wife's, he now puts on the mantle of murderer: the monosyllabic "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" has a certainty to it that completely overturns his earlier vacillation.

Act II: Scene 1

The opening dialogue sets the scene: It is past midnight, the moon has set, and the "candles" of heaven — the stars — cannot be seen. Symbolically, the airy lightness that greeted Duncan's arrival at the castle in Act I has completely vanished, to be replaced by brooding darkness.

In this opening scene of Act II, as in the later Porter scene, the audience feels momentarily suspended from the action but in no way removed from the intensity of emotion as the innocent Banquo and his son pass the time of night. The moment at which Banquo so very nearly draws his sword on a potential intruder (actually Macbeth) is a master-stroke of dramatic irony: Banquo has no idea of what the audience knows.

The dagger speech (32-65) is, deservedly, one of the most celebrated in Shakespeare. Like "If it were done" (Act I, Scene 7), this soliloquy is a fascinating piece of stage psychology. The structure of the lines precisely echoes the swings from lucidity to mental disturbance that characterize Macbeth throughout the play. There are three false alarms: "I see thee still . . . I see thee yet . . . I see thee still!" Between each of these alarms comes a moment of respite in which Macbeth appeals to the world of the physical senses: "Art thou not . . . sensible to

feeling?" "Mine eyes are made the fools of the other senses," and "It is the bloody business which informs thus to mine eyes."

Nevertheless, as in the earlier scene with his wife, Macbeth eventually capitulates. The urge to become king is now strong in him. In his final lines, as he ascends to the king's chamber, he imagines himself as the personification of Murder itself, stealthily making its way towards its victim. The change of tone to one of high rhetoric and classical allusion (Hecate, Tarquin) may seem out of place, but not if we imagine Macbeth putting on a "mask" of language in preparation for the murder. The distinction between word and deed in the last line is an idea that occurs frequently in Shakespeare. What we say and what we do are frequently very different matters. But in the final couplet, Macbeth seems to transfer his own doubts concerning the afterlife to Duncan: Whether the king will go to heaven or hell is now an academic matter; ironically, for Macbeth himself, the outcome is likely to be more certain.

Act II: Scene 2

Lady Macbeth's opening words introduce a new level of emotional intensity. Fear of failure has been replaced with fear of discovery, and even though she describes herself as drunk with boldness and on fire with passion, she is just as easily alarmed as her husband is by the tiniest noises and movements. Her swift changes of thought and speech foreshadow the language of her final lapse into madness in the sleepwalking scene (Act V, Scene 1), when she relives these same moments.

Yet, despite all this, Lady Macbeth appears to be sufficiently hardened to the deed to be able to make several horribly ironic comments, including the observation that she would have committed the murder herself, had she not been put off the idea by the resemblance of the sleeping king to her own father. Note the similarity of this line — by which she seems to excuse something lacking in herself — with her earlier taunt to Macbeth that she would have dashed out the brains of her own child had she sworn to do so. The fact is that what Lady Macbeth *would do* her husband has *actually done*. The total reversal of roles that she anticipated cannot now occur because, despite his stricken conscience, Macbeth has done what she could never do.

The quick-fire dialogue and fragmented line structure in this part of the scene denote a sense of frightened urgency in both characters. Macbeth's concern centers on two major areas. First, he believes he has "murder'd sleep." Sleep, he argues, ought to bring physical calm in the same way that prayer soothes the spirit. But in his case, the ability both to pray and to sleep has been cancelled. Macbeth is haunted by the knowledge that he will never again rest easy in his own bed: "Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (41-42). Lady Macbeth, refusing to accept such "brainsickly" thoughts, reminds Macbeth of the familiar comparison that "the sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures." Ironically, she is the one who will be kept from sleeping by the picture of death long after it has left Macbeth's mind.

The second area of Macbeth's concern is the bloodiness of the deed and specifically the fact that his own hands bear witness to the unnatural deed of murder. Again, for Lady Macbeth, blood is only like paint used to daub the picture of death and can be easily washed off. But Macbeth is aware of the deep stain beneath the surface. His capacity for recognizing the grand scale of his action, which foreshadows his later remark that he is "in blood stepped in so far," is missing in Lady Macbeth.

At this point, the knocking begins. Like the beating of the heart in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart," the noise is partly the knocking of their consciences and partly an actual exterior knocking. Symbolically, the knocking is the knocking of justice, or of vengeance.

Act II: Scene 3

This busy scene begins with a moment of light comedy, which serves to heighten the suspense. The porter of Macbeth's castle, drunk from the previous night's revels, complains that his job is worse than that of the porter of hell. In a private game with the audience, he engages in a piece of stand-up comedy in which he imagines himself as that beleaguered servant, opening and closing the gate on the damned. The first two examples he uses (that of a farmer and an equivocator) have specific religious and historical connotations. A few months before *Macbeth* was performed at court in front of the Protestant King James I, the infamous Gunpowder Plot (the aim of which was to murder the English king) took place. The conspirators, including Guy Fawkes, may have been encouraged by a Catholic convert called John Garnett, whose nickname was "farmer." The practice of lying in court about one's religion by employing confusing or ambiguous language was known as equivocation. Many examples of ambiguous language are heard throughout *Macbeth*, and of course the words of the Witches themselves are not entirely clear. So the porter's examples are not entirely without significance, even though they may be unintentional.

The humor continues when the porter unbolts the door to Macduff and Lennox and offers a series of bawdy jokes, momentarily distracting the audience from the fact that Macbeth must at this very moment be washing his hands of the blood of the previous scene. Then Macbeth enters, apparently at ease, to direct Macduff to the king's room.

While Macduff goes to wake the king, Lennox remarks upon the extraordinary weather of the previous night. His catalogue of unnatural events — high winds, screaming and wailing voices, the calling of birds, and tremors in the earth — is apocalyptic in character and suggests a direct connection between the events of the universe at large and the events within the castle. Macbeth's response — "'Twas a rough night" — is so anticlimactic as to provoke incredulity. Is Lennox's subsequent line — "My young remembrance cannot parallel / A fellow to it" (64-65) — intended to be spoken with puzzlement at Macbeth's reaction?

At this moment, the dam breaks. Note that the literal truth of Macduff's announcement — "Our royal master's murdered" — is preceded by several lines in which the murder is

depicted in a figurative or metaphorical fashion, almost as if Macduff dare not name the deed: "Murder hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed Temple," "destroy your sight / With a new Gorgon," and "see / The great doom's image!" It's interesting to compare these lines of Macduff's, spoken in all innocence, with those of the all-too-guilty Macbeth, who also approaches the matter metaphorically: "The wine of life is drawn . . . " and "The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp'd"

Excusing his own outburst of passion in killing the guards of the king's chamber, Macbeth explains that he could not act otherwise when he saw the king: "Here lay Duncan, / His silver skin laced with his golden blood; / And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature / For ruin's wasteful entrance" (113-116). That Macbeth cannot refrain from the use of metaphor may be an indication that he, too, cannot bear to consider the bloody truth. His words are at once highly poetic and, at the same time, enormously revealing of the deep ironies of which Macbeth must be aware. Not only has he "murdered sleep," but he has destroyed the actual fabric of nature.

For whatever reason — perhaps because Lady Macbeth thinks that Macbeth's powerfully rhetorical speech is the precursor to an admission of their combined guilt — she suddenly faints. Certainly, as soon as she is carried from the stage, the pace changes. There is no more time for speculation: Macbeth and the other thanes rapidly swear to meet "in manly readiness" to avenge this act of "treasonous malice." Malcolm and Donalbain alone remain to voice their understandable concerns: Their semi-proverbial sentences "To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy" (138-139) and "Where we are / There's daggers in men's smiles" (141-142) both uncomfortably recall the language of earlier scenes.

Act II: Scene 4

Like the Witches, the Old Man is a traditional figure in many works of literature. In contrast to the Witches' vision of what *will* be, the old man exemplifies the certainty of what *has* been: The notion of age, tradition and natural continuity, as well as wisdom are all bound up in this single figure. In words that recall those of the much younger Lennox in the previous scene, the old man describes how the world that he knows and trusts has been turned on its head. All the named events are not simply natural disasters; they are reversals of the expected natural order: Daylight has been replaced by night; a falcon (a bird of prey) has been killed by an owl, a much smaller creature; and the horses of the king's stables are said to have eaten each other.

The entry of Macduff allows Shakespeare to consolidate the first half of the play and to confirm that Macbeth has been named king and has already gone to Scone, the traditional place of coronation for Scottish kings, to be crowned. The imagery of this scene acts partly as a bridge between the first half of the play and the second. It recalls the first soliloquy of Lady Macbeth in Act I, Scene 5 ("Come, you Spirits"), and it foreshadows the language at the end of Act III, Scenes 2 and 3, concerning the murder of Banquo. The subplot of this second murder forms the basis of the whole of the next act.

Act III: Scene 1

Banquo's short soliloquy has two purposes: It reminds the audience of the details of the Witches' prophecy in Act I, and it reveals his own suspicion that Macbeth is Duncan's murderer. Ironically, his tone also recalls the ambitious tone of Macbeth in earlier scenes.

Macbeth and his wife make arrangements for the feast with all the confidence of their new rank. Note particularly Macbeth's adoption of the royal "we," The use of the plural in place of the singular pronoun is a traditional figure of speech by which the monarch expresses not only unity with his people but also his absolute authority over them. Banquo, once equal in status with Macbeth, acknowledges Macbeth's new position by addressing him throughout the scene as "my lord."

Other aspects of language confirm Macbeth's new status: strong verse rhythms, for example, appear in lines such as "Here's our chief guest" and "Fail not our feast." Macbeth's apparent disregard for time — of which he now has plenty — is clear in expressions such as "but we'll take tomorrow" and "But of that tomorrow." The word "tomorrow," like "hereafter," is full of irony in *Macbeth*. Tomorrow should be full of hope for the future, but the word comes back to haunt him later in the play. His use of the word here foreshadows the famous "Tomorrow and tomorrow" speech in Act V.

Even with his new title and robes of office, Macbeth does not feel entirely at ease: The security of his kingship rests partly on his own children's succession to the crown of Scotland. However, because he has no children of his own, his treacherous act of regicide — the murder of a king — appears pointless and has been committed on behalf of *Banquo's* promised successors. The soliloquy that Macbeth delivers is filled with the language of contrast. His split with Banquo is emphasized by opposing pronouns: "They hailed *him* father to a line of kings: / Upon *my* head they placed a *fruitless* crown, / And put a *barren* sceptre in *my* grip . . ." (60-62).

The line "To make *them* kings, *the seed of Banquo* kings!" (70) is almost incredulous, as if Macbeth is trying to convince himself that the Witches could not possibly have spoken the truth. Whereas Banquo still trusts in the fateful prophecy, Macbeth is all too ready to dismiss it. In Act I, Scene 2, the wounded captain reported that Macbeth the warrior-hero was prepared to disdain Fortune. Now Macbeth the murderer goes one step further by literally challenging Fate itself to a tournament (or "list"): "Rather than so, come, fate, into the list / And champion me to the utterance" (71-72). Note that the verb "to champion" here has its original meaning: to fight *against*, not *for*.

The entry of the hired murderers is a crucial element in the development of Macbeth's character. His use of others to do his dirty work presents him as politically powerful but morally weak. Long gone are the days when Macbeth would meet his enemy "front to front." Now he must commit murder with the seeming protection of distance — "something [distant]

from the palace" (133). Shakespeare also contrasts ironically the murderers' pragmatic reaction to the idea of murder with Macbeth's conscience-stricken one.

The dialogue of the first part of the scene reveals that Macbeth has met the murderers before. Both then and now, he must convince them to work on his behalf. Whether true or not (we have no evidence), he kindles, or re-kindles, in them, a hatred of Banquo: "Know that it was he . . . ," "This I made good to you in our last conference," "Do you find your patience so predominant in your nature that you can let this go?" The tone of these quotations is more than simply interrogative; Macbeth must ensure that the men are not persuaded by the slightest moral scruple, the slightest sympathy for Banquo, to betray the plan. Such a reaction would be entirely natural and human, but that humanity is precisely what Macbeth cannot now allow. Therefore, when the First Murderer replies, "We are men, my liege," Macbeth cuts off his speech and, in a sequence of powerful metaphors, reduces the humanity of these murderers to the level of beasts: "Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men, / As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs / . . . and demi-wolves are clept [called] / All by the name of dogs" (93-96).

Although Macbeth flatters the Murderers by suggesting that the business of Banquo's murder will elevate them above the common rank, his ironic tone reveals that he thinks of them as little more than beasts. Doubly ironic, then, is that this entire speech is admission to himself of his own inhumanity and imperfection: Macbeth himself is acting like a "demi-wolf." The lines are triply ironic when we see that indeed the murderers are, themselves, imperfect in carrying out his instructions for the "perfect" crime.

This notion of perfection is one that now comes to dominate Macbeth's thoughts. Banquo's death would make Macbeth's "health . . . perfect"; and the crime must be committed at "the perfect'st spy of the time" (the exact hour). Both of these quotations foreshadow Macbeth's line in Act III, Scene 4, when, hearing of the botched attempt to kill Fleance, he remarks "I had else been perfect." The tragic assumption that one can commit a perfect crime and escape the consequences is about to be tested.

As if to impress us with the connection between the killing of the king (the blame for which could, after all, be laid at the door of Fate) and the killing of Banquo (blame for which most definitely cannot), the final couplet ("It is concluded: Banquo, thy soul's flight, / If it find heaven, must find it out tonight") ironically recalls the words spoken by Macbeth immediately prior to his killing of King Duncan: "Hear it not Duncan, for it is a bell / That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell."

Act III: Scene 2

Dramatically and poetically, this scene precisely mirrors Act I, Scene 5. Then, Duncan's death was being plotted; now, the death is Banquo's (although Lady Macbeth is initially unaware of this). In the earlier murder, Lady Macbeth was most in command; in this murder, Macbeth is. Where formerly Macbeth was the one who needed convincing, now the weaker

role passes to his wife. Macbeth's line "make our faces vizards (visors) to our hearts" recalls Lady Macbeth's earlier words "[t]o beguile the time, look like the time." Similarly, Macbeth's injunction to the spirits of darkness "Come, seeling night . . . " is an echo of the speech of Lady Macbeth's beginning "Come, thick night"

Despite Macbeth's personal bravado, neither he nor his wife seems entirely at ease. Lady Macbeth talks of her "doubtful joy" and Macbeth of his "restless ecstasy." In the world that the Macbeths have created for themselves, total peace no longer exists, and what has been achieved is only a half-measure. Even the dead King Duncan is able to achieve more totally what Macbeth never can: a respite from "life's fitful fever."

While Lady Macbeth appears to be looking back at the previous murder, Macbeth looks forward, anticipating the *next* murder, of which Lady Macbeth is not yet fully aware. That distinction between their two states of knowledge allows Shakespeare to play once more on the power relationship between husband and wife. Here, then is yet another reversal of character, and it is shown in two major ways: first, by Lady Macbeth's innocent-sounding questions and, second, by Macbeth's adoption of animal imagery. In Act I, Scene 5, Lady Macbeth was the one who spoke of "the raven" and "the serpent." Now Macbeth takes on the same language of horror, imagining his mind to be "full of scorpions," and speaking of the "bat" and the "shard-born (dung-bred) beetle."

The most powerful moments of the scene are the final ones in which Macbeth calls for the cancellation of the bond between himself and the world. "Bond" is more than simply a simile from the world of legal jargon. Just as Lady Macbeth earlier wanted to lose her sex, Macbeth now desires to be rid of his humanity. His direct connection with the natural world into which he was born threatens to keep him "pale" or fearful. A final point to make about these lines is the way in which the rhythmical stress falls unusually on the first syllable of the word "cancel":

"And, *with thy bloody and invisible hand*
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond" (49-50)

Metrically, as well as dramatically, Macbeth is moving inexorably toward his tragic destiny. Meanwhile his wife, once so calm and collected, is losing that composure. Macbeth's line "Thou marvell'st at my words" suggests, like a stage direction, some moving response in her.

Act III: Scene 3

Appropriately, this scene takes place in the dark; the murderers carry lanterns and fail in their duty only when the light is accidentally knocked out and the entire stage is plunged in blackness. But this moment is also highly symbolic, foreshadowed at the end of Act II, when Ross remarks to the old man "By the clock 'tis day; / And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp." In *Macbeth*, the forces of darkness seem constantly at odds with those of light.

In contrast to the dark, grisly nature of their job, the murderers' poetic speech is also comparatively light, particularly in the depiction of a traveler reaching the inn at sunset: "The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day; / Now spurs the lated traveller apace / To gain the timely inn" (5-7). One function of such poetry is to contrast the nature of word and deed. We have seen the same hypocrisy in Macbeth himself; he, too, is capable of poetry as well as murder.

Another function is to remind the audience of the existence of natural order and the possibility of salvation. In an ideal world, a belated traveler may hope to find "timely" accommodation, however late the hour. But in a world where the natural order of things has been inverted and in which light is extinguished, as it is symbolically in this scene, that hope is also extinguished. Banquo is riding not toward hospitable welcome but toward his own extinction.

The escape of Fleance is the turning point or *peripeteia* in Macbeth's tragedy. Banquo's dying words, ordering Fleance to "revenge," remind the audience of the Witches' prophecy to Banquo: that he will be father to a line of kings, even though he himself will not attain the throne.

Act III: Scene 4

Macbeth's words and phrases to the thanes, such as "You know your own degrees" and "Both sides are even: here I'll sit i'th'midst" suggest a renewal of order and symmetry in Scotland, yet the audience knows that this is not the case. Both sides are not even, because Banquo is missing. Degree, or rank order, has been effectively perverted by Macbeth by his killing of the king and his usurpation of the throne. As in Act I, Scene 6, Lady Macbeth's words of introduction disguise her true feelings. Once again, the Macbeths act with suspicious confidence. This confidence is about to desert Macbeth, however, as his dark secret comes back to greet him in the form of the First Murderer.

At first, Macbeth is pleased with the murderer, telling him he is "the best," "the nonpareil" (without equal); moreover, Macbeth's own supposed invincibility is shown when he says that he feels "as broad and general as the casing air," but on hearing the unwelcome news that Fleance escaped his treachery, Macbeth's language abruptly changes: "But now I am cabin'd, cribbed, confin'd, bound in / To saucy doubts and fears" (25-26). The alliteration of the hard *c* sounds reveals Macbeth's sense of constraint, in contrast to the freedom which he claims to have enjoyed previously.

The imagery of confinement and constraint plays an increasing part in his language from now on. For example, these words foreshadow the point in Act V, Scene 7 when, recognizing that he is physically trapped by the advancing English army, Macbeth cries out, "They have tied me to a stake, I cannot fly" (flee). Now, though, something altogether more terrifying holds him down and prevents him from moving: In the very place reserved for him at the table, Macbeth sees, or thinks he sees, the spirit of the assassinated Banquo.

The rich banquet, a symbol of great orderliness and generosity, now becomes a hellish parody of itself. Instead of Macbeth sitting "in the midst," dispensing his largesse as he would wish, his throne has been usurped by the bloody apparition of his former friend. Macbeth's language reflects this change. The ghost, so hideous that it would "appall the devil," appears to have risen from a grave or a "charnel-house." Macbeth cannot understand why what is dead should "be alive again," when its bones should "be marrowless" and its blood "cold." Finally, he challenges the all-too-real apparition to "dare me to the desert with thy sword."

In contrast to the urgent horror of Macbeth's addresses to the gruesome apparition are moments of comparative calm. Each time the ghost vanishes, Macbeth's relief is recorded in softer, more lyrical expression: "Can such things be / And overcome us like a summer's cloud, / Without our special wonder?" (112-114). Indeed, the entire structure of this scene shows a man swinging from one state of mind to another, recalling the structure of the earlier dagger speech. Three times Macbeth sees the ghost, and three times he appears to recover his senses. This alternating structure adds strongly to the impression of Macbeth's loss of control.

Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, remains constant in her judgement. Unlike Macbeth, she cannot see the ghost, and her tone is typically pragmatic and down-to-earth: "When all's done, / You look but on a stool." She appears to want to calm his rages, but anger simmers beneath her conciliatory words. Once more she upbraids her husband for his apparent lack of manhood. A specific parallel with the murder scene occurs when Macbeth accuses his wife of being able to "keep the natural ruby of your cheeks, / When mine is blanched (whitened) with fear" (116-117). Here, the words "ruby" and "blanched" clearly recall the distinction that Lady Macbeth made between the "red" hands of murder and the "white" heart of a coward (II: 2, 64).

With the departure of the guests, Macbeth appears to regain some of his earlier self-confidence. He announces his decision to visit the Weird Sisters once more, this time of his own accord. His language in this coda to the banquet scene is mysterious and prophetic: The short scene is dominated by the repeated word "blood" and by the idea that a tide of murder has now been initiated which Macbeth is powerless to stop.

Act III: Scene 5

Hecate's supernatural spite is intended to echo that of the human dimension. She is a vindictive female spirit, whose forceful instructions to the Witches reflect the language of Lady Macbeth to her husband. Although unnecessary dramatically, the scene reinforces the philosophical question: Is Macbeth entirely to blame for his own downfall? In Hecate's opinion, he is. She tells the Witches that Macbeth "loves for his own ends" and prophesies that Macbeth "shall spurn Fate," recalling the words "disdaining Fortune" from Act I. Without this line of argument, it would be easier to suggest that Macbeth is powerless to control his own destiny.

Act III: Scene 6

Some of the language of this scene is difficult. Its lines are full of pauses, half-spoken thoughts, and fragments of reported speech. Its function is twofold: first to convince the audience of Lennox's real thoughts about Macbeth. Even though Lennox appears loyal to Macbeth at the end of Act IV, Scene 1, here he divulges his concerns in lines such as "Men must not walk too late" and, more directly, the phrase "the tyrant's feast."

The primary function of the other lord is to confirm the news of Macduff's flight to England and to introduce the names of other rebel leaders, Northumberland and Siward, who will combine against Macbeth in the final act. But his words "That . . . we may again / Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights" (32-34) also recall, ironically, the words of Macbeth to his wife in Act III, Scene 2: "But let the frame of things disjoint . . . / Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep / In the affliction of these terrible dreams."

Act IV: Scene 1

This scene can be roughly divided into three: the Witches' casting of a spell; the supernatural answers to Macbeth's demands; and Macbeth's return to the cold world of political and social reality. The scene's structure deliberately recalls the opening scenes of the play. Once more, Macbeth's destiny is in question. Once more, he receives three prophecies. Once more, he is left on his own to decide how best to interpret those prophecies. And once more he fails to understand that Fate is inevitable, however he chooses to act.

The Witches' charm is fantastic: Its ingredients, thrown into a bubbling cauldron, are all poisonous. Moreover, these ingredients are all the entrails or body parts of loathed animals or human beings, which, taken together, can be interpreted as making a complete monster: tongue, leg, liver, lips, scales, teeth, and so on. The strong implication is that Macbeth himself is no longer a complete human being; he himself has become a half-man, half-monster, a kind of chimera.

Macbeth arrives at the Witches' lair with extraordinary boldness, knocking at the entrance in a way that ironically recalls the entry of Macduff into Macbeth's castle in Act II, Scene 3. When he "conjures" the Witches to answer him, his language is uncompromising: He matches their power with a powerful curse of his own, demanding to have an answer even if it requires the unleashing of all the elements of air, water, and earth; even if all the universe — natural or manmade — "tumble" into ruin. His most defiant act, by far, is to desire to hear the prophecy of his future not from the Witches, who are themselves only "mediums" of the supernatural, but from their "masters," that is, the controlling Fates.

Macbeth's demand is answered by a sequence of apparitions. Unlike the dagger and Banquo's ghost, these supernatural visions cannot be simply the workings of Macbeth's "heat-oppress'd brain." They are definitely summoned by the Witches. Once again, the audience is required to assess the extent to which Macbeth is responsible for his own actions. What is certain is

Macbeth's response to each prophetic apparition: He appears to be super-confident, even flippant, in his replies. There is little fear or respect, for example, in his reply to the First Apparition: "Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution, thanks." And his punning reply to the Second Apparition's "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth" — "Had I three ears, I'd hear thee" — displays a comic arrogance.

Apart from the first, all the apparitions, including the fourth and final one of a procession of future kings, contain children. The juxtaposition of children (pictures of innocence) and images of death, warfare, and blood, is dramatic and terrifying, but especially so for Macbeth: For a man who has no offspring, the image of children can only fill him with hatred and loathing.

Having rejected as impossible the second two prophecies, Macbeth asks for one last favor. The result appalls him, drawing all strength from him and reducing his earlier courage. The children who appear in this procession are the children of Fleance. The reflected light of their golden crowns "does sear (cut into) mine eye-balls" and causes his eyes to jump from their sockets. The climax to Macbeth's reaction occurs in the line "What! will the line (of inheritance) stretch out to the crack of doom?" in which he finally realizes the possibility of an entirely Macbethless future.

In a scene rich with special effects — thunder, ghosts and (possibly flying) Witches — Shakespeare adds a final visual stroke: The eighth child-king carries a mirror that reflects the faces of many more such kings. The effect of infinite regression can be achieved by looking at a mirror while holding a smaller mirror in your hand in which the reflection is reflected.

The Witches confirm the inevitability of what Macbeth has seen: "Ay sir, all this is so." There can be no equivocation, no argument, with Fate.

Emerging into the cold light of day, Macbeth seems immediately to forget the final prophecy, as he returns to the practicalities of what is increasingly a battle for his own political survival. On being informed that Macduff has fled to England, he announces his intention to wreak a terrible revenge on Macduff's wife and children.

Act IV: Scene 2

This scene and the next should be considered together, for both deal with the question of treachery and loyalty, and both consider the nature of genuine courage, as opposed to the arrogant bravado of Macbeth.

Here is a woman apparently abandoned by her husband. She has been left to fend for her children like a mother bird in the nest. Even the tiny wren would show more spirited defense of her own family against a predator than Macduff has done, she argues. Her conclusion can be only that her husband "wants the natural touch" — that is, he lacks human kindness. It's interesting to hear in this phrase an ironic echo of the words of Lady Macbeth, who accused her husband of having precisely *too much* of "the milk of human kindness."

Ross' speech diverts Lady Macduff's justifiable anger away from her husband, whom he calls "noble, wise, judicious," toward the cruelty of the circumstances in which the country as a whole finds itself. The terror of Macbeth's Scotland is that no one can be sure of another's loyalty or treachery "when we are traitors, / And do not know ourselves; when we hold rumour / From what we fear, yet know not what we fear" (18-20).

Left on their own, Lady Macduff and her son converse further on the subject of her husband's loyalty. To her, Macduff has acted dishonestly, but her son, however naïve his view of the world, comforts her by his practical statement that the world is full of dishonest men. The entry of another messenger increases the urgency of the scene. Left on her own once more, Lady Macduff reflects, as Ross did, on the unpredictability and topsy-turvy nature of human society where "to do harm" is praiseworthy and to do good is dangerous.

The audience should not be surprised, given the direct and courageous speech of the young boy in his conversation with his mother, at the spirited defense he puts up against the murderers. His words ("Thou liest, thou shag-haired villain") foreshadow those of the brave Young Siward to Macbeth in Act V, Scene 7 ("Thou liest, abhorred tyrant") and remind us of the indomitable spirit of honor and justice that must ultimately prevail.

Act IV: Scene 3

This scene develops further the important issues of loyalty and courage found in the preceding scene, and it is structured in two halves: the first concerns the testing of Macduff's loyalty by Malcolm; the second evokes the great passion of Macduff in the face of terrible grief and his sworn revenge on Macbeth.

It is helpful to think of this scene as a job interview. Malcolm begins by suggesting that Macduff may be prepared to betray him as "a sacrifice" to his previous leader, Macbeth. Macduff passes this stage of the interview by boldly announcing, "I am not treacherous." Still, Malcolm persists: Men may look as bright as angels on the outside but still harbor secret feelings within. Why, he asks, did Macduff desert his wife and children? At this point, Macduff nearly fails the test: He cannot believe that Malcolm is so short-sighted not to realize that his interests lie in defending not only his family but the whole nation of Scotland.

As in Ross' speech in Act IV, Scene 2, the context of this entire scene has been set in terms of the country as a whole: Macduff explains to Malcolm that "Each new morn . . . new sorrows / Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds / As if it felt with Scotland"(4-7). Later, Macduff cries out "O Scotland, Scotland . . . O nation miserable!" Macbeth's motivation in murdering Duncan may have been personal, but its effects have become very much public.

Malcolm's next move is a daring piece of reverse psychology: He claims that as a future king, he himself will be even more malicious and barbarous than Macbeth. To understand this scene, the audience must be aware from the start that Malcolm is lying when he suggests that he possesses no virtues, no nobility, no honor, and no qualities of kingship.

Macduff's response to this suggestion is at first cautious. His speech beginning with the words "Boundless intemperance in nature is a tyranny . . ." has a diplomatic tone. Macduff argues, probably against his better judgment, that certain human sins are forgivable, even in a king. Even avarice, the sinful desire for wealth, is "portable" when balanced against the good qualities of kingship. "But I have none," replies Malcolm, listing exactly those qualities which he *does* have and which, of course, Macbeth lacks. At this point, Macduff snaps. He cannot endure the thought that the country might have to undergo another reign even more vicious than Macbeth's. Seeing Macduff's clearly emotional response, Malcolm relents, revealing as fake the self-portrait he has previously given.

The next 20 lines may appear curious to a modern audience, for two reasons: first, because they were probably added as a flattering direct address to King James I, for whom the play was performed; and second because of what they reveal about the miraculous healing powers ascribed to his forebear, Edward the Confessor. According to legend, Edward had been able to cure scrofula, or the King's Evil, a glandular inflammation, simply by touching the diseased patient. But the passage is dramatically ironic as well: The king of England is shown to be a monarch of genuine goodness and to use the supernatural for beneficial purposes. Coming almost immediately after Macbeth's visit to the Witches, this contrast is made even more clear. Moreover, the speech introduces us to the choric (or commentating) figure of the Doctor, who speaks of disease but is powerless to cure the more severe, mental affliction of Lady Macbeth in the subsequent scene.

When Ross enters, his report consolidates this idea of disease. According to him, the entire country is "teeming" with illness: He reveals that "sighs, and groans, and shrieks . . . rent the air" and that "good men's lives expire before the flowers in their caps, / Dying or ere they sicken" (168-173). However, the worst news is for the ears of Macduff alone. In a piece of dialogue heavy with emotion, Ross relates the story of the murder of Lady Macduff and her little children. His speech wavers, as he tries to avoid telling Macduff the truth.

On hearing the news about his family, Macduff's reaction is understandable. Shakespeare gives him an implied stage direction in Malcolm's line "What man! ne'er pull your hat upon your brows," which suggests that Macduff must cover his face to prevent any unmanly show of grief. But Malcolm suggests that Macduff's tears should become "medicines . . . / To cure this deadly grief." Macduff, however, feels he can only blame himself. With ironic reference to his wife's words of the previous scene, he alludes to his "poor chickens," slaughtered by the "fell swoop" of a bird of prey. The emotional impact of this scene reaches its climax in Macduff's response when Malcolm tells him to "[d]ispute it like a man": "I shall do so / But I must also *feel* it as a man."

From this moment onwards, Macduff becomes the stereotypical avenging hero. It was he who first discovered the murder of Duncan, having arrived, Christ-like, at the gates of hell in Act II, Scene 3. Now he must take on himself the personal act of revenge. The scene is set for the final act.

Act V: Scene 1

The staging of this scene is made clear by the first ten lines of the scene. The gentlewoman's description of how Lady Macbeth has sleepwalked in the past acts as a stage direction for the actress playing Lady Macbeth. Her agitated reading of a letter is of course a visual reminder of her reading of the fateful letter in Act I, Scene 5. More than this, Lady Macbeth is seen to rub her hands in a washing action that recalls her line "A little water clears us of this deed" in Act II, Scene 2. If these words are not enough to arouse the Doctor's suspicions, those that follow must suggest to him not only that she is suffering but also the reason for that suffering.

Lady Macbeth's speech has become fragmented and broken by an enormous emotional pressure: the suave hostess and cool, domineering wife has been reduced to a gibbering creature whose speech (almost) signifies nothing. There are no logical connections between her memories or her sentences, and indeed, the devastation of her mind is so complete that she cannot recall events in their correct order. For example, "Out damned spot" is followed by "The Thane of Fife had a wife," referring to Lady Macduff. Later we hear the line "Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave," and finally she believes she hears Macduff knocking at the gate. It is as though all the individual murders have coalesced into one seamless pageant of blood. Perhaps the most ironic line is the one which near-perfectly echoes an earlier line of Macbeth's. When Lady Macbeth cries "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," we must not forget that she was not on stage to hear her husband's "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (Act II, Scene 2).

Lady Macbeth's line "What's done cannot be undone" not only reverses her earlier argument to her husband "what's done is done" (Act III, Scene 2); it also recalls the words of the general confession from the Prayer Book: "We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." The Doctor agrees: In his opinion, Lady Macbeth needs a "divine," — a priest — more than a doctor, reminding the audience of Macbeth's earliest doubts when he argues with himself before the murder of Duncan, "If it were done when 'tis done . . . we'd jump the life to come" (I:7,1-6).

Now, though, the promise of salvation has been all but abandoned. "Hell is murky," says Lady Macbeth, and that spiritual darkness is echoed by the fact that the scene is played entirely in the dark, with the exception of one candle, which Lady Macbeth insists on having next to her. She may be sleepless, but it is her soul's rest that really concerns her.

Act V: Scene 2

This short scene develops the drama of the preparation for battle. In language that recalls that of Act III, Scene 6 and Act IV, Scene 3, the characters remind the audience of the various military alliances between Malcolm, England, and the rebel Scots. In this sense, the scene is simply a plot-filler, but there are three points to note: First, the audience is introduced once

more to the fateful name of Birnam Wood, which the Third Apparition in Act IV, Scene 1 prophesied to be the downfall of Macbeth.

Second, Caithness' portrait of Macbeth comes close to the description of a warrior-hero given by the Captain in Act I, Scene 2, especially in the phrase "valiant fury," but now the anger is not righteous: It arises from a "distemper'd cause" which Macbeth can no longer "buckle . . . within the belt of rule." Again, in another metaphor of clothing, Caithness adds that Macbeth's royal title "Hangs loose about him, like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief." (It is likely that nearly three centuries later, Robert Louis Stevenson was thinking of this line when he described the malicious dwarf Edward Hyde wearing the outsize clothes of the respectable Mr. Jekyll.) In Act I, Scene 3, Banquo talked of Macbeth's honors as "strange garments" which "cleave" (conform) to the shape of the body only by constant use. The metaphor is exact: Macbeth's title no longer *fits* him.

Third, the tone of the rebel Scots is one of uncompromising courage. Once more Scotland is described as a sick patient, the only cure for which is "each drop" of their own blood spilled in their country's defense.

Act V: Scene 3

Macbeth's tone is typically brazen. The reports he has heard can have no consequence, given the prophecies of the three apparitions of Act IV, Scene 1. Throughout this scene, any doubts he may have are quelled by his bold imperatives: "Bring me no more reports," "Fly, false thanes," and more. We see a man completely self-assured, a "confident tyrant," as Siward calls him in the subsequent scene. These angry words do much to assert his own manhood, in contrast to the cowardice he perceives in others — not only his servant, whom he calls "cream-faced" and "lily-livered," but also the rebel soldiers, whom he insultingly refers to as "epicures" (that is, self-indulgent and lazy).

In the dialogue with the servant, Macbeth orders him to "prick his cheeks" in order to "put colour" back in his face, an ironic reminder of the earlier color symbolism when Macbeth was accused by his wife of having a white heart, as opposed to her own red hands. Another imperative — "Give me my armour" — has to be repeated when Macbeth's armourer, Seyton, initially refuses to do so. Similarly, when the Doctor confesses that he has been unable to cure Lady Macbeth's madness, Macbeth mocks his ability, challenging him to "Throw physic (medicine) to the dogs."

But there is also another Macbeth, who admits to being "sick at heart" and who feels he has entered the season of the "yellow leaf," that is, literally, the fall of his own reputation; and who, in a further moment of self-realization, recognizes the sickness of his own land: "If thou could'st, Doctor, cast / The water of my land, find *her* disease, / And purge it to a sound and pristine health / I would applaud thee to the very echo / That should applaud again" (50-54).

Earlier, referring to his wife's sickness, Macbeth has questioned the doctor's ability to remove from her those thoughts and feelings "Which weigh upon the heart." The Doctor's response: "Therein the patient must minister to himself" is particularly interesting. Where we expect "herself," Shakespeare instead uses the masculine pronoun, referring to a patient of either sex, particularly in proverbial statements such as this one. The suggestion is that Macbeth, too, must find the cure to his own disease. Macbeth's military preparation, which the Doctor says he has heard about, is unlikely to be any more effective than a medicinal preparation or remedy which *he* might prescribe for the sick nation of Scotland.

Act V: Scene 4

Malcolm's hope "That chambers (bedrooms) will be safe" in the future recalls both the location of King Duncan's murder and the motif of sleeplessness that runs through the play. Menteth's assured response — "We doubt it nothing" — is in heavy contrast to the "saucy doubts and fears" that have shaken Macbeth since even before the killing of Duncan and which will return to haunt him in subsequent scenes.

The order to each soldier to "hew . . . down a bough" as a leafy camouflage is taken direct from Holinshed's *Chronicles*; the aim is not to hide the advancing army but to confuse Macbeth as to the exact number of soldiers. Although Malcolm does not know it, his trick will not only fulfil the second of the prophecies of Act IV, Scene 1, but it will also play upon exactly the equivocation that has troubled Macbeth's mind since he first remarked (in Act I, Scene 3) that "nothing is but what is not."

In both Act V, Scene 2 and here, Macbeth's command over his few remaining followers is said to be based on constraint, not loyalty. His heartlessness is thus contrasted with the genuine feelings of loyalty which, it is implied, are felt towards Malcolm. In Act IV, Scene 3, Malcolm announced that Macbeth, like a rotten fruit, was "ripe for shaking"; now, according to Siward, "The time approaches," and in a final couplet adds "Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate / But certain issue strokes must arbitrate . . ." (19-20). Once more, the impression is that the time for guesswork is over; certainty, and the assurance of goodness, must inevitably triumph over Macbeth's lack of it.

Act V: Scene 5

This scene, like Scene 3, starts with a bold imperative: "Hang out our banners on the outward walls." Macbeth's speech is warlike and defiant, his strength mirrored in that of the castle and men who surround him; his curse on the enemy vivid and graphic in its use of metaphor: "Here let them lie / Till famine and the ague (disease) eat them up . . ." (3-5). But the curse is empty rhetoric: In his play *Troilus and Cressida*, written two or three years earlier, Shakespeare had written that man's ambitious appetite for power, once it has preyed on everything in its path, can eat up only itself. Power-seeking tyrants tend toward self-destruction; if this curse falls on anyone, it's likely to be the curser.

At this point, Macbeth hears a heart-stopping scream. While a servant is dispatched to find the cause, Macbeth confesses in a brief soliloquy that such noises no longer have the power to frighten him. The audience recalls other noises: the owl-shriek that Lady Macbeth heard during Duncan's murder; the voice that Macbeth heard crying "Macbeth shall sleep no more!" and the fateful knocking at the door, all in Act II, Scene 2. But in a phrase that calls to mind the banquet scene (Act III, Scene 4), Macbeth admits that he has "supp'd full with horrors" and that his familiarity with slaughter means that such sounds can no longer amaze him.

The report of Lady Macbeth's death perhaps comes as no surprise, either to Macbeth or to Shakespeare's audience. The word "hereafter" recalls the "hereafter" of the Witches' first prophecy; their "hereafter" was the future that Macbeth was to inherit as king. But the word also refers, ironically, to the heavenly "hereafter," which Macbeth seems intent on denying for himself. In the hands of a sensitive actor or director, this exact word is what triggers the poetic outpouring on the nature of Time, which follows it.

The famous lines "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" have a resigned, almost wistful tone to them, occasioned not only by the death of his wife but also by Macbeth's entire loss of purpose. Although there is perhaps an underlying bitterness at lost opportunity in the words "petty," "fools," "frets" and "idiot," for a man who has received such desperate news, this is not a desperate speech. In fact, compared with some of Macbeth's earlier "set pieces," its rhetoric is controlled, its metaphors precise: Time *is* like a path to "dusty death," and our lives *are* as "brief" as a candle. We *are* like shadows, or actors, on the stage of life. Again, the question occurs, as it did in Act I, Scene 7: How can a man who is capable of such poetic thought *act* as he does?

Macbeth's musings on this topic are cut dead by still another message, which reports what the audience already knows, the fulfillment of the second prophecy, the movement of the woods. Once again, Macbeth's response is both angry and reflective: "I . . . begin to doubt th'equivocation of the fiend — / That lies like truth . . ." (42-44).

To the servant, he must hotly deny the truth he has been told — to keep his public appearance and satisfy his own doubt — but he must also secretly accept the truth of the prophecy, even if logic persuades him that a moving wood is a lie. It is an understandably human reaction to such a paradoxical problem that Macbeth admits that he is literally stuck — "There is no flying hence, nor tarrying here" (48) — or, in his words from Act III, Scene 4, "Returning were as tedious as go o'er." On a psychological as well as a military level, Macbeth can neither move forward nor backward, neither advance nor retreat.

In this case, and with his gaze firmly fixed on the universe as a whole, Macbeth can only call, like King Lear, on the elements themselves: "Come wind, blow wrack!" he cries. It is the bold cry of a hopeless man.

Act V: Scene 6

The strong sense of movement and of impending threat is generated throughout Act V by the swift alternation of scenes. This, the briefest of all the scenes, at a mere ten lines in length, enables the audience to follow the advancing forces of Malcolm and England virtually to the walls of Dunsinane castle.

Two lines are worth commenting on: First, Malcolm announces that Siward, his "worthy uncle" shall lead the first battle, while Macduff and he complete the encounter "According to our order." The phrasing of this, with the implication that Siward is to be revered for his age and experience, establishes very strongly the idea of propriety and orderliness in Malcolm's army, in contrast with the comparative lawlessness and lovelessness of Macbeth's regime.

The second point occurs in the stirring final couplet, in which the trumpets sounding the advance are referred to as "harbingers of blood and death"; a *harbinger* is a sign of what is to come, a precursor of Destiny or Fate.

Act V: Scene 7

The image of paralysis that ended Scene 5 is picked up immediately in Macbeth's image of himself as a baited bear. He is like a captured wild animal, furious yet unable to move: "They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly." All he can do is to await his destiny. When a single figure enters, Macbeth must wonder, half-doubtful, whether his nemesis has arrived in the form of young Siward. The fight itself is preceded by a combat of words in which Siward appropriately taunts Macbeth with the words "devil" and "lie," words that have particular significance for his opponent. Macbeth's replies spur Siward into courageous but futile action. Before his exit, Macbeth gloats over the corpse of his assailant, with one final mockery: "Thou wast born of woman."

With ironic timing, the man who was *not* born of woman now takes Siward's place on the battlefield stage. The darkly vengeful figure of Macduff speaks of his obligation to the souls of his dead family: Revenge must be his and his alone if he is to escape his personal feelings of guilt at having abandoned his family.

Describing the surrender of Macbeth's castle, Old Siward (who at this point is ignorant of the heroic self-sacrifice of his son) explains that Macbeth's troops surrendered the castle with little resistance — "gently." Perhaps the audience recalls the "gentle" King Duncan, who, on his fateful visit to Macbeth's castle at Inverness in Act I, Scene 6, commented on the sweet air which surrounded it. Here, we feel that a weight has been lifted: the air will shortly "smell wooingly" once more.

Act V: Scene 8

As Macbeth ponders whether suicide, at this point, would be his better option, the avenging Macduff enters the scene with the bold challenge: "Turn, hell-hound, turn." Macduff's choice

of the epithet "Hell-hound," recalling his earlier description of Macbeth as a "Hell-kite" (Act IV, Scene 3), confirms the true nature of the tyrant king. But in an equally bold rhetorical flourish, Macbeth warns Macduff that he is invulnerable, as "intrenchant" (uncuttable) as the air itself. Here, he mistakenly imagines that the words of the apparitions are a protective charm, which can keep him from physical injury.

Macduff takes an opposite view. Words alone, whether those of a ghostly prophecy or those of Macbeth himself, are nothing compared to his own wordless anger: The true voice of revenge lies in action, not language. Furthermore, Macbeth should consider the circumstances of Macduff's birth. Macduff now reveals to Macbeth that he entered the world by being "untimely ripp'd" from his mother's womb: He was not, therefore, in the strict sense, "born" of woman. With the short but powerful sentence "Despair thy charm," Macbeth must know that his struggle for survival is over. The penultimate prophecy has come true.

Throughout the play, Macbeth has wondered about the veracity of the Witches' words: In Act I, Scene 3, he called them "imperfect speakers" because they had not told him all he desired to know; now he realizes that they spoke to him of his own imperfection. In the same scene, he admitted that their supernatural prophecy "Cannot be ill; cannot be good"; now he knows which was which. In Act IV, Scene 1, his opinion was that men were "damned . . . that trust them"; now he is damned by his own words. And in Act V, Scene 5, Macbeth spoke of his doubt concerning the predictions of "the Fiend / that lies like truth." Now he has no such doubt: "Be these juggling fiends no more believed / That palter with us in a double sense."

It is now Macduff's turn to mock Macbeth: He calls him "coward" and promises to have him publicly displayed — "baited with the rabble's curse" with a sign painted with the words "Here may you see the tyrant."

Act V: Scene 9

This joyous scene is offset by its poignancy. Malcolm's opening line concerning those friends whom "we miss" is not only a gracious acknowledgement of what true loyalty means but also an indication of how he will rule in future, with the graciousness and humility that was associated with his father, Duncan.

A greater acknowledgement of human self-sacrifice comes in the report of young Siward's death, made more tragic by the fact that he was young ("He only liv'd but till he was a man") and that he predeceased his father, Old Siward. Nevertheless, Old Siward's response is one of great courage and faith. Asking whether his son was killed by a stroke to the chest or the back (in other words, whether he was facing or running from his opponent), Siward is told that he died "like a man," with his wounds "on the front." This account is enough to satisfy Siward that his son was "God's soldier" — a fitting and dramatic contrast with Macbeth who embraced the powers of evil so thoroughly.

Macduff enters the castle with the tyrant's decapitated head — like Claudius in *Hamlet*, the victim of his own poisoned chalice. The weight of these sad times has been lifted, and all that remains is for Malcolm to be acclaimed, in stirring fashion, as "King of Scotland." In his acceptance speech, the soon-to-be-crowned Malcolm invites his immediate audience to see him crowned at Scone, the traditional home of Scottish kings. The actions he will undertake as king will be performed " . . . in measure, time and place." This sentence carries a deep sense of unity and completion, reinforced by the rhyming couplet structure of the final four lines. Moreover, Shakespeare leaves us with the strong impression that the defining feature of future rulers (including James I of England) will be an acceptance of God's grace.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

MAJOR THEMES

The Fall of Man

The ancient Greek notion of tragedy concerned the fall of a great man, such as a king, from a position of superiority to a position of humility on account of his ambitious pride, or *hubris*. To the Greeks, such arrogance in human behavior was punishable by terrible vengeance. The tragic hero was to be pitied in his fallen plight but not necessarily forgiven: Greek tragedy frequently has a bleak outcome. Christian drama, on the other hand, always offers a ray of hope; hence, *Macbeth* ends with the coronation of Malcolm, a new leader who exhibits all the correct virtues for a king.

Macbeth exhibits elements that reflect the greatest Christian tragedy of all: the Fall of Man. In the Genesis story, it is the weakness of Adam, persuaded by his wife (who has in turn been seduced by the devil) which leads him to the proud assumption that he can "play God." But both stories offer room for hope: Christ will come to save mankind precisely because mankind has made the wrong choice through his own free will. In Christian terms, although Macbeth has acted tyrannically, criminally, and sinfully, he is not entirely beyond redemption in heaven.

Fortune, Fate, and Free Will

Fortune is another word for chance. The ancient view of human affairs frequently referred to the "Wheel of Fortune," according to which human life was something of a lottery. One could rise to the top of the wheel and enjoy the benefits of superiority, but only for a while. With an unpredictable swing up or down, one could equally easily crash to the base of the wheel.

Fate, on the other hand, is fixed. In a fatalistic universe, the length and outcome of one's life (destiny) is predetermined by external forces. In *Macbeth*, the Witches represent this influence. The play makes an important distinction: Fate may dictate what will be, but how that destiny comes about is a matter of chance (and, in a Christian world such as Macbeth's) of man's *own choice* or free will.

Although Macbeth is told he will become king, he is not told how to achieve the position of king; that much is up to him. We cannot blame him for becoming king (it is his Destiny), but we can blame him for the way in which he chooses to get there (by his own free will).

Kingship and Natural Order

Macbeth is set in a society in which the notion of honor to one's word and loyalty to one's superiors is absolute. At the top of this hierarchy is the king, God's representative on Earth. Other relationships also depend on loyalty: comradeship in warfare, hospitality of host towards guest, and the loyalty between husband and wife. In this play, all these basic societal relationships are perverted or broken. Lady Macbeth's domination over her husband, Macbeth's treacherous act of regicide, and his destruction of comradeship and family bonds, all go against the natural order of things.

The medieval and renaissance view of the world saw a relationship between order on earth, the so-called *microcosm*, and order on the larger scale of the universe, or *macrocosm*. Thus, when Lennox and the Old Man talk of the terrifying alteration in the natural order of the universe — tempests, earthquakes, darkness at noon, and so on — these are all reflections of the breakage of the natural order that Macbeth has brought about in his own microcosmic world.

Disruption of Nature

Violent disruptions in nature — tempests, earthquakes, darkness at noon, and so on — parallel the unnatural and disruptive death of the monarch Duncan.

The medieval and renaissance view of the world saw a relationship between order on earth, the so-called microcosm, and order on the larger scale of the universe, or macrocosm. Thus, when Lennox and the Old Man talk of the terrifying alteration in the natural order of the universe (nature), these are all reflections of the breakage of the natural order that Macbeth has brought about in his own microcosmic world (society).

Many critics see the parallel between Duncan's death and disorder in nature as an affirmation of the divine right theory of kingship. As we witness in the play, Macbeth's murder of Duncan and his continued tyranny extends the disorder of the entire country.

Gender Roles

Lady Macbeth is the focus of much of the exploration of gender roles in the play. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward committing Duncan's murder, she indicates that she must take on masculine characteristics. Her most famous speech — located in Act I, Scene 5 — addresses this issue.

Clearly, gender is out of its traditional order. This disruption of gender roles is also presented through Lady Macbeth's usurpation of the dominate role in the Macbeth's marriage; on many occasions, she rules her husband and dictates his actions.

Reason Versus Passion

During their debates over which course of action to take, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth use different persuasive strategies. Their differences can easily be seen as part of a thematic study of gender roles. However, in truth, the difference in ways Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

rationalize their actions is essential to understanding the subtle nuances of the play as a whole.

Macbeth is very rational, contemplating the consequences and implications of his actions. He recognizes the political, ethical, and religious reason why he should not commit regicide. In addition to jeopardizing his afterlife, Macbeth notes that regicide is a violation of Duncan's "double trust" that stems from Macbeth's bonds as a kinsman and as a subject.

On the other hand, Lady Macbeth has a more passionate way of examining the pros and cons of killing Duncan. She is motivated by her feelings and uses emotional arguments to persuade her husband to commit the evil act.

MAJOR SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

Explore the different symbols within William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Macbeth*. Symbols are central to understanding *Macbeth* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

Nature

Throughout Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the weather plays an important role. The rebelling nature of wind and lightning indicates the disruption within the natural order of society. It makes it seem as if the weather is upset with Macbeth's actions. In many Shakespearean plays — including this one — rebelling nature shows a departure from accepted political and moral order.

Blood

Blood itself — the color, the smell, and importance — is vital to life and shocking to see. The constant presence of blood in *Macbeth* repeatedly reminds the audience about how serious the consequences of the characters' actions are. But almost surpassing the importance of physical blood is the imagined blood found throughout the play. Imaginary blood represents guilt for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It's not until after the murder of Duncan that their guilt begins to manifest. As their guilt grows, so does the importance of the blood.

What's more, the imaginary blood also shows how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth both lose a grasp on reality. Often quoted is the fact that Lady Macbeth cannot get the imagined blood off her hands nor can her husband. Their guilt is all consuming and inescapable. The imagined blood haunts both characters, following them until their death.

MACBETH ON THE STAGE

Shakespeare's Theatre

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's shortest and most intense dramas. Its straightforward plot and its strong characterization make it appealing for actors, directors, and audiences alike.

The following brief discussion looks at the various theatrical contexts of the play from Shakespeare's time to ours.

The theater in Elizabethan and Jacobean times was basically a courtyard, surrounded on three sides by tall raised balcony areas. Other buildings in London, specifically public houses (taverns) and bear-baiting pits, were similarly designed. In a famous contemporary engraving of London, the Globe theater — where *Macbeth* was performed in 1611 — is famously confused with the Bear-baiting pit. In this context, it is interesting to note Macbeth's lines (Act V, Scene 7) "They have tied me to a stake . . . but bear-like I must fight the course."

At the center and to the back of the courtyard was a raised stage, above which hung a depiction of the heavens — a blue roof, fretted with golden stars. The stage contained a trapdoor through which ghosts could appear and into which the souls of the damned could disappear. At the back of the stage was a curtain leading to the actors' dressing area — the *tiring room*.

The courtyard was open to the sky, so lighting was largely natural, but in some indoor theaters or palaces such as Hampton Court, where *Macbeth* was first performed in 1606 in front of King James I, candles were probably used to create an artistic tension between natural and "unnatural" (or artificial) light. Lady Macbeth has a candle "by her continually" in Act V, Scene 1, by which time natural light may well have already become gloomy. In fact, the numerous references to natural daylight and night-light in *Macbeth* make it a fascinating study for any historian of theater.

Shakespeare's play underwent several revisions during its lifetime. Specifically, the allusions to the Gunpowder Plot and the nature of kingship (Act IV, Scene 1) could have been added for the first performance in front of the king. What remains certain is that *Macbeth* has always been a highly visual and physical play: The apparitions, the references to parts of the body (hands, head), the fighting in Act V — all point to a play full of gesture and body language.

Modern Productions

As well as stage presentations, in recent years there have been a number of film adaptations, including *Macbeth* by Roman Polanski (1971) and *Throne of Blood* by Akira Kurosawa (1957). Despite the play's bold outline, there are specific difficulties which any director must confront. The first of these is the role and staging of the supernatural elements of the play, specifically the Witches, the dagger, and Banquo's ghost.

The Witches are a vital component of the play because their prophecies in Act I, Scene 3 and Act IV, Scene 1 provide Macbeth with motivation for his actions. Banquo gives a hint as to their appearance when he refers to their chapped fingers, skinny lips, and beards; they need not, however, be costumed in the traditional form of the Halloween hag. They must have the capability of vanishing. Complex stage machinery in the Elizabethan theatre could have

allowed them to "fly," but this is not necessary, because vanishing tricks can be performed in other ways, particularly by using a gauze curtain, which can be transparent or opaque depending on how it is lit. As an alternative, modern productions might also make use of visual projection or the voice-over.

The fact that the ghost of Banquo in Act III, Scene 4 has no lines means that it is frequently played in modern productions as simply a lighting effect, perhaps accompanied by a rushing of wind. This treatment reinforces Lady Macbeth's incredulity at her husband's reaction. She compares her husband's belief in Banquo's ghost with his faith in the earlier apparition of an "air-drawn dagger." A question therefore arises: Should *all* such effects be played invisibly to the audience?

To do so may increase the psychological realism of the play, but it forces the audience to see Macbeth as a victim of hallucination. Such an interpretation may be confusing: After all, the *Witches* are real enough, because Banquo also sees them. Perhaps we only see the apparitions we want to see. If that's the case, we can reasonably assume that Macbeth must actually see a ghostly dagger as well as a ghostly Banquo.

The apparitions that the Witches conjure in Act IV, Scene 1 also require careful thought: The original stage direction for the third of these refers to a king carrying a looking-glass, and modern directors have had fun with this, employing several mirrors to create an infinite regression effect, for example. A final staging problem occurs with the appearance of Birnam Wood. Merely adding leafy camouflage to helmets does run the risk of looking rather silly.

The relationship between Macbeth and his wife — in particular the degree of responsibility which she has for the events of the play — is most important. Does her line "Unsex me here" make her chillingly asexual, or is she a heatedly sexual being whose relationship with Macbeth is more physical than intellectual? One thing is certain: Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth must be able to move with ease between states of certainty and doubt. Her descent into madness and Macbeth's rapid swings between absolute self-knowledge and howling self-doubt are tests for any actor.

REVISION QUESTION

1. Agree or disagree with the following statement: "*Macbeth* is a play about courage, which asserts the triumph of good over evil." In answering this question, you should remember that courageous acts are not always motivated by virtue.
2. Examine to what extent Lady Macbeth is to blame for her husband's downfall. Discuss the relationship between the couple as the play develops.
3. Discuss whether Macbeth is truly a tragic figure.

4. Some people suggest that the porter scene is included only so that the actor playing Macbeth has time to wash the blood off his hands. Do you agree? Or do you think the scene serves other purposes? Explain your answer.

5. From your reading, explain what Shakespeare imagined to be the qualities of a good king. How do Duncan and Macbeth fit this role? How might Malcolm do so?

6. Consider the use that Shakespeare makes of supernatural elements in this play. Be sure to include the Witches, the dagger, Banquo's ghost, the apparitions, and the Old Man's observations in your assessment.

Went, Alex. *CliffsNotes on Macbeth*. 29 Mar 2021 </literature/m/macbeth/macbeth-at-a-glance>.

V. ROMEO AND JULIET

INTRODUCTION

Main Characters: Juliet; Romeo; The Nurse; Mercutio; Friar Laurence

Major Thematic Topics: love; revenge; fate; courtship; marriage; value/doubleness; meaning of gender

Motifs: fate; light and darkness

Major Symbols: poison; nighttime

Movie Versions: *Romeo and Juliet* (1968); *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)

The three most important aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*:

- The first half of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its bawdy jokes, masked ball, and love poetry, is more like a Shakespearean comedy than a tragedy. Only after Tybalt kills Mercutio near the play's midpoint do things become tragic.
- Near the start of Romeo and Juliet's famous balcony scene, Juliet asks "Wherefore art thou Romeo?" Because the word "wherefore" means "why," Juliet is wondering *why* the boy she loves is called what he's called — not *where* he is, as many readers believe.
- Juliet is a mere 13 years old, and Romeo is not much older.

CHARACTER

Juliet Capulet's daughter. She is presented as a young and innocent adolescent, not yet 14 years old. Her youthfulness is stressed throughout the play to illustrate her progression from adolescence to maturity and to emphasize her position as a tragic heroine. Juliet's love for Romeo gives her the strength and courage to defy her parents and face death twice.

Romeo Montague's son, who is loved and respected in Verona. He is initially presented as a comic lover, with his inflated declarations of love for Rosaline. After meeting Juliet, he abandons his tendency to be a traditional, fashionable lover, and his language becomes intense, reflecting his genuine passion for Juliet. By avenging Mercutio's death, he sets in motion a chain of tragic events that culminate in suicide when he mistakenly believes Juliet to be dead.

Mercutio Kinsman to the prince and friend of Romeo. His name comes from the word *mercury*, the element which indicates his quick temper. Mercutio is bawdy, talkative, and tries to tease Romeo out of his melancholy frame of mind. He accepts Tybalt's challenge to defend Romeo's honor and is killed, thus precipitating Romeo's enraged reaction during which Romeo kills Tybalt.

Tybalt Lady Capulet's nephew and Juliet's cousin. Tybalt is violent and hot-tempered, with a strong sense of honor. He challenges Romeo to a duel in response to Romeo's attending a Capulet party. His challenge to Romeo is taken up by Mercutio, whom Tybalt kills. Romeo then kills Tybalt.

The Nurse Juliet's nursemaid, who acts as confidante and messenger for Romeo and Juliet. Like Mercutio, the Nurse loves to talk and reminisce, and her attitude toward love is bawdy. The Nurse is loving and affectionate toward Juliet, but compromises her position of trust when she advises Juliet to forget Romeo and comply with her parents' wishes and marry Paris.

Friar Laurence A brother of the Franciscan order and Romeo's confessor, who advises both Romeo and Juliet. The Friar agrees to marry the couple in secret in the hope that marriage will restore peace between their families. His plans to reunite Juliet with Romeo are thwarted by the influence of fate. The Friar concocts the potion plot through which Juliet appears dead for 42 hours in order to avoid marrying Paris. At the end of the play, the Prince recognizes the Friar's good intentions.

Capulet Juliet's father is quick-tempered and impetuous but is initially reluctant to consent to Juliet's marriage with Paris because Juliet is so young. Later, he changes his mind and angrily demands that Juliet obey his wishes. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet reconcile Capulet and Montague.

Paris A noble young kinsman to the Prince. Paris is well-mannered and attractive and hopes to marry Juliet. Romeo fights and kills Paris at the Capulet tomb when Paris thinks that Romeo has come to desecrate the bodes of Tybalt and Juliet.

Benvolio Montague's nephew and friend of Romeo and Mercutio. Benvolio is the peacemaker who attempts to keep peace between Tybalt and Mercutio. After the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, Benvolio acts as a Chorus, explaining how events took place.

Lady Capulet Lady Capulet is vengeful and she demands Romeo's death for killing Tybalt. In her relationship with Juliet, she is cold and distant, expecting Juliet to obey her father and marry Paris.

Montague Romeo's father, who is concerned by his son's melancholy behavior.

Balthasar Romeo's servant. He brings Romeo the news in Mantua that Juliet is dead.

An Apothecary A poverty-stricken chemist, who illegally sells poison to Romeo.

Escalus, Prince of Verona The symbol of law and order in Verona, but he fails to prevent further outbreaks of the violence between the Montagues and Capulets. Only the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, rather than the authority of the prince, restore peace.

Friar John A brother of the Franciscan order, sent by Friar Laurence to tell Romeo of his sleeping potion plan for Juliet. The Friar is prevented from getting to Mantua and the message does not reach Romeo.

Lady Montague In contrast with Lady Capulet, Lady Montague is peace-loving and dislikes the violence of the feud. Like her husband, she is concerned by her son's withdrawn and secretive behavior. The news of Romeo's banishment breaks her heart, and she dies of grief.

Peter A Capulet servant attending the Nurse.

Abram A servant to Montague.

Sampson Servant of the Capulet household.

Gregory Servant of the Capulet household.

SUMMARY

Day 1 — Sunday: Act I, Scene 1-Act II, Scene 2

As the play begins, a long-standing feud between the Montague and Capulet families continues to disrupt the peace of Verona, a city in northern Italy. A brawl between the

servants of the feuding households prompts the Prince to threaten both sides to keep the peace on pain of death.

Benvolio advises his lovesick friend Romeo, (son of Montague), to abandon his unrequited love for Rosaline and seek another.

That night, Capulet holds a masked ball to encourage a courtship between his daughter, Juliet, and Paris, a relative of the Prince. Concealing their identities behind masks, Romeo and Benvolio go to the ball, where Romeo and Juliet fall in love at first sight, but at the end of the evening discover their identities as members of the opposed families. On his way home from the feast, Romeo climbs into Capulet's orchard to glimpse Juliet again. Juliet appears at her balcony, and the couple exchange vows of love, agreeing to marry the next day.

Day 2 — Monday: Act II, Scene 3-Act III, Scene 4

Romeo asks Friar Laurence to perform the marriage ceremony. Though initially reluctant, he finally agrees, hoping to reconcile the families, and marries Romeo and Juliet that afternoon.

Meanwhile, Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, sends Romeo a challenge to a duel. Romeo refuses to fight when Tybalt confronts him because they're now related. However, Mercutio, Romeo's quick-tempered friend, intervenes and accepts the challenge. Romeo tries to part the other two as they fight, but Mercutio is fatally wounded under Romeo's arm. To avenge Mercutio's death, Romeo kills Tybalt and then flees.

The Prince announces Romeo's banishment for Tybalt's murder. Romeo, in hiding at the Friar's cell, becomes hysterical at the news of his sentence and tries to kill himself, but the Friar promises to make Romeo's marriage to Juliet public and gain the Prince's pardon. Romeo and Juliet celebrate their wedding night before he leaves at dawn for Mantua.

Day 3 — Tuesday: Act III, Scene 5-Act IV, Scene 3

That morning, Juliet discovers that her father has arranged for her to marry Paris on Thursday. The Capulets, unaware that Juliet is grieving for Romeo's exile rather than Tybalt's death, believe the wedding will distract her from mourning. Distressed at the prospect of a false marriage and isolated from her family, Juliet seeks advice from Friar Laurence, who offers her a sleeping potion to make her appear dead for 42 hours. During this time, the Friar will send a message to Romeo in Mantua so that Romeo can return to Verona in time for Juliet to awake.

Juliet returns home and agrees to marry Paris. In a moment of euphoria, Capulet brings the wedding forward from Thursday to Wednesday, thereby forcing Juliet to take the potion that night and reducing the time for the message to reach Romeo.

Day 4 — Wednesday: Act IV, Scene 4-Act V, Scene 2

Early on Wednesday morning, Juliet's seemingly lifeless body is discovered and she is placed in the family tomb. Because an outbreak of the plague prevents the Friar's messenger from leaving Verona, Romeo now receives news of Juliet's death instead. Desperate, Romeo buys poison from an apothecary and returns to Verona.

Late that night, Romeo enters the Capulet tomb, but is confronted by Paris, whom he fights and kills.

Still unaware that Juliet is in fact alive, Romeo takes the poison and dies. The Friar, arriving too late, discovers the bodies as Juliet begins to stir. He begs her to leave with him, but Juliet refuses, and then stabs herself with Romeo's dagger.

Day 5 — Thursday: Act V, Scene 3

As dawn breaks, the Watch arrives, closely followed by the Prince, who demands a full inquiry into what has happened. The two families then arrive, and the Friar comes forward to explain the tragic sequence of events. The deaths of Romeo and Juliet finally bring the feud to an end as Montague and Capulet join hands in peace.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

Major Themes

Explore the different themes within Shakespeare's tragic play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Themes are central to understanding *Romeo and Juliet* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

Fate

From the beginning, we know that the story of *Romeo and Juliet* will end in tragedy. We also know that their tragic ends will not result from their own personal defects but from fate, which has marked them for sorrow. Emphasizing fate's control over their destinies, the Prologue tells us these "star-cross'd lovers'" relationship is deathmark'd."

In Act I, Scene ii, as Lord Capulet's servant is searching for someone who can read the guest list to him, Benvolio and Romeo enter. Completely by chance, Capulet's servant meets Romeo and Benvolio, wondering if they know how to read. This accidental meeting emphasizes the importance of fate in the play. Romeo claims it is his "fortune" to read — indeed, "fortune" or chance has led Capulet's servant to him — and this scene prepares us for the tragic inevitability of the play.

The lovers will be punished not because of flaws within their personalities but because fate is against them. Ironically, the servant invites Romeo to the Capulet's house, as long as he is not

a Montague, to "crush a cup of wine." Only fate could manufacture this unlikely meeting with Capulet's illiterate servant, as only fate will allow Romeo to trespass into the Capulet's domain and meet Juliet.

Love

Love is another important thematic element in the play, which presents various types of love: the sensual, physical love advocated by the Nurse; the Proper or contractual love represented by Paris; and the passionate, romantic love of Romeo and Juliet. How do these various types of love relate to one another? Is physical attraction a necessary component of romantic love? Because words are slippery, Juliet worries that Romeo's protestation of love are merely lies. How can we know if love is true?

Value and Doubt

Another important theme is the idea of value and doubt. Just as language is ambiguous, so are value judgments. As the Friar reminds us, "virtue itself turns vice being misapplied, /And vice sometime's by action dignified" (II.iii.17-18). Within a flower, for example lies both poison and medicine. Similarly, the deaths of Romeo and Juliet are tragic but also bring new life to Verona. The Friar's own role in the play contains this ambiguity. Although he tries to help the lovers, his actions lead to their suffering. Shakespeare's message is that nothing is purely good or evil; everything contains elements of both. Ambiguity rules.

Meaning of Gender

A final theme to be considered is the meaning of gender. In particular, the play offers a variety of versions of masculinity. One example is Mercutio, the showy male bird, who enjoys quarreling, fencing and joking. Mercutio has definite ideas about what masculinity should look like. He criticizes Tybalt for being too interested in his clothes and for speaking with a fake accent. Similarly, he suggests that Romeo's love-melancholy is effeminate, while his more sociable self is properly masculine. Therefore, he is happiest when Romeo rejoins his witty, crazy group of male friends: "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou art, by art as well as by nature" (II.iv.89-90).

Romeo's masculinity is constantly questioned. Following Mercutio's death, for example, Romeo fears that his love of Juliet has effeminized him: "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate/And in my temper soften'd valour's steel" (III.i.116-117) so that his reputation as a man is "stain'd" (III.i.1113). In addition, the Friar accuses Romeo of being an "[u]nseemly woman in a seeming man" and says that his tears are "womanish" (III.iii.109-111).

What is the proper role for a man? The play seems to suggest that violence is not the way. Mediating between Mercutio's violent temper and Romeo's passivity, the Prince is possibly the best model of masculine behavior in the play: impartial and fair, he also opposes civil violence.

Major Symbols and Motifs

Explore the different symbols and motifs within Shakespeare's tragic play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Symbols and motifs are key to understanding *Romeo and Juliet* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

Light and Darkness

One of the most often repeated image patterns in the play involves the interplay of light and darkness. The integration of the language indicates an important motif overall. Romeo compares Juliet to light throughout the play. Upon first sight of her, Romeo exclaims that she teaches "the torches to burn bright" (I.v.43). She is also "the sun" who can "kill the envious moon" (II.ii.3), and later in this scene, Shakespeare says that her eyes are like "[t]wo of the fairest stars in all the heaven" (II.ii.15). But hers is a light that shows best against the darkness; she "hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (I.v.44-45).

Romeo is also compared with a light that illuminates the darkness; if Juliet dies, she wants Romeo cut "in little stars/And he will make the face of heaven so fine/That all the world will be in love with night/? And pay no worship to the garish sun" (III.ii.22-25). This quote reminds us that their light shines most brightly in the dark — that it is a muted glow associated primarily with stars, torches, and the dawn, rather than with sunlight, which is almost obscenely bright.

Like their love, darkness is associated with mystery, emotion, and imagination. In fact, the day works against them. At the end of their honeymoon night, Romeo says, "More light and light: more dark and dark our woes" (III.v.36); they must part before the light arrived so that he is not caught and killed.

Nighttime

The combination of light and dark makes an interesting motif in *Romeo and Juliet*. But for our young lovers, the nighttime itself is an important motif as well. The evening hours holds all of the significant moments for Romeo and Juliet. They meet; they pledge their love; they elope; they commit suicide.

Nighttime represents a time when a person can let go of their inhibitions. The same hold true for our title characters. They have a boldness at night that doesn't always show up in the day; this is especially true for Romeo. The night provides privacy and place away from the public's prying eyes, where Romeo and Juliet's love can blossom.

Poison

Poison, both sleep inducing and lethal, is the instrument of Romeo and Juliet's deaths. (Technically Juliet stabbed herself, but that never would have happened if not for the sleeping

potion.) While poison has a literal purpose in the play, it's also a symbol. The poison symbolizes the Capulet and Montague feud. Not only is the feud deadly in itself, — recall Mercutio's death — it's also the catalyst for Romeo and Juliet's double suicide

The Role of Comic Characters in a Tragedy

Shakespeare uses Mercutio and the Nurse to explore the relationship between comedy and tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*. These characters, in their comic roles, serve as foils for Romeo and Juliet by highlighting the couple's youth and innocence as well as the pure and vulnerable quality of their love.

Mercutio, Romeo's quick-tempered, witty friend, links the comic and violent action of the play. He is initially presented as a playful rogue who possesses both a brilliant comic capacity and an opportunistic, galvanized approach to love. Later, Mercutio's death functions as a turning point for the action of the play. In death, he becomes a tragic figure, shifting the play's direction from comedy to tragedy.

Mercutio's first appearance in Act I, Scene 4, shows Romeo and his friend to be of quite opposite characters. Mercutio mocks Romeo as a helpless victim of an overzealous, undersatisfied love. Romeo describes his love for Rosaline using the clichéd image of the rose with thorns to stress the pain of his unrequited love.

Mercutio ridicules Romeo as a fashionable, Petrarchan lover for his use of conventional poetic imagery. He puns lewdly, "If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking and you beat love down." Whereas the naïve Romeo is in love with the idea of being in love and devoted to the distant Rosaline, Mercutio is a predatory lover, hunting for objectified, female prey. His bawdy wit thus sets up Romeo to take the role of the innocent tragic hero.

When Mercutio delivers his Queen Mab speech (also in Act I, Scene 4), he again characterizes Romeo as a clueless romantic for believing that dreams portend future events. Dismissing Romeo's Petrarchan outlook, Mercutio presents his vision of a fantasy world in which dreams are the products of people's fleshly desires. The speech reflects both Mercutio's eloquent wit and his aggressive disposition. In his speech, the comic activities of the mischievous fairies are juxtaposed with the violent images of a soldier's dream:

**Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscados, Spanish blades
(I.4.82-84)**

After falling in love with Juliet, Romeo cannot confide in his anti-romantic friend, so Mercutio never discovers Romeo's love for Juliet. Mercutio's ignorance of Romeo's new love, although potentially comical, propels him to the fatal fight with Tybalt in Act III, Scene 1.

Mercutio's death enables Shakespeare to develop him as a tragic figure and alter the trajectory of the play from a comic to a tragic course.

Mercutio's final speech employs dark comedy to illustrate the tragic significance of the latest violence. After being stabbed by Tybalt, he admits his wound is fatal. Mercutio puns, "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man." Mercutio dies frustrated and angry — shocked and in disbelief that his fate is upon him. Until and even in the midst of that moment, his ignorance of the underlying forces that brought him to such an untimely end provides much of the ironic humor for the play.

In Act II, Scene 1, Mercutio and Benvolio's search for Romeo after the feast provides a comic interlude between Romeo and Juliet's first meeting and the famous balcony scene in Act II, Scene 2, juxtaposing two very different and conflicting attitudes to love. Mercutio and Benvolio call to Romeo, who has climbed into Capulet's orchard in the hope of seeing Juliet again. Mercutio's teasing is ironic because he is unaware that Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet and mistakenly invokes images of Rosaline to call him:

**I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie.
(II.1.17-21)**

Mercutio's coarse physical imagery and sexual jokes contrast sharply with Romeo's religious imagery for love. Romeo describes Juliet as "bright angel" and "dear saint." Shakespeare uses Mercutio's cynical attitude to distinguish Romeo and Juliet's love as innocent, spiritual, and intense. Because the audience is aware that Mercutio's speech falls on deaf ears, Mercutio's speech illustrates that the Romeo, the lovestruck youth, has begun to mature in his outlook on life and love.

Like Mercutio, Juliet's Nurse views love as a purely sexual and temporary relationship, as opposed to Romeo and Juliet's love which is presented as fragile and eternal. The Nurse's bawdy humor is less sophisticated than Mercutio's. Her comedy comes from the Nurse's misunderstanding of language and her habit of repeating herself, rather than clever wordplay. For example, in Act I, Scene 3, the Nurse exasperates Lady Capulet, who has come to talk to Juliet of the proposed marriage to Paris, with her repeated and unrelated assertions that Juliet is only 13 years old.

Likewise, when the Nurse laughingly recounts the lewd joke her husband made when Juliet fell over learning to walk — "Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit" — her earthy humor contrasts with Juliet's adolescent innocence, while simultaneously pointing to Juliet's sexual development from a girl to a woman. Reflecting on the sensual pleasures that await Juliet on her wedding night, the Nurse puns about the likely consequence of pregnancy

for her young charge: "I am the drudge, and toil in your delight, / But you shall bear the burden soon at night."

The Nurse's preoccupation with sexual love prevents her from understanding the nature of Juliet's love for Romeo. Even though she fully understands that Juliet is being bartered like livestock, she cannot see that any other social fate could exist for women. So, in Act III, Scene 5, the Nurse advises Juliet to forget Romeo and marry Paris when Capulet demands it. This development of her character further isolates the couple and fuels the tragic consequences of their elevated love. Thus, while the Nurse drives some of the most comedic scenes in the play, within her comic commentaries are woven the subtler threads of tragedy created by enslavement to social conventions.

Shakespeare uses the comic roles of Mercutio and the Nurse to develop the roles of Romeo and Juliet as young tragic lovers. Prior to Tybalt and Mercutio's deaths, the Nurse had served primarily as comic relief. After Mercutio dies, the Nurse's comic role changes to a less sympathetic one — helping to shift the focus to the tragic plight of Romeo and Juliet. Both comic characters' rejection of the ideal of love shared by Romeo and Juliet emphasizes the vulnerable quality of that love and its inability to survive in the world of the play.

IMPORTANT QUOTES - ANNOTE

"A plague o' both your houses!" (3.1.104)

What does it mean? Tension between the Montague and Capulet families has been mounting until a fight erupts in the streets. Romeo's best friend, Mercutio, goads Tybalt Capulet into a duel. Mercutio is stabbed by Tybalt, who runs away. Mercutio curses both families in his final words, wishing a plague on both families. Mercutio's words foreshadows the loss that both families will soon feel.

"O! I am Fortune's fool!" (3.1.133)

What does it mean? After Tybalt and Mercutio die, Benvolio tells Romeo that Prince Paris will probably doom him to death if he's caught. Romeo calls himself Fortune's fool. Romeo is discreetly referencing the prologue, where the audience learns that Romeo and Juliet are fated for misfortune. But Romeo also feels Fortune is being especially cruel; he just got married, and he might be put to death. His words bring the idea of fate and destiny back into the audience's mind.

"For never was a story of more woe [t]han this of Juliet and her Romeo." (5.3.317-318)

What does it mean? In the last two lines of the play, Prince Escalus remarks on the lives of Juliet and Romeo. He's saying that no other tale has been this sad. While Escalus is right, his words also allow for the enduring quality of Romeo and Juliet's love. Their classic love story has been told and retold to every generation since first hitting the stage in 1594.

The following quotes are part of the famous balcony scene — Act II, Scene II — when Romeo and Juliet agree to elope. Some of the most quoted lines from Shakespeare are from this scene

"But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" (2.2.2-3)

What does it mean? Romeo, our young hero, already loves Juliet. In his words of adoration, he compares Juliet to a sunrise. Juliet hasn't seen Romeo below her window; she has no idea Romeo is even on her family's grounds. The important thing to take away is Romeo's use of language. Throughout the play, Romeo associates Juliet with 'light' imagery. He finds her love to be bright, sunny, and warm.

"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" (2.2.33)

What does it mean? Juliet is thinking about Romeo and his family ties. In Shakespearean times, "wherefore" meant "why". Juliet is asking why Romeo is a Montague. Although Juliet is unaware that Romeo is in the orchard below, she accurately points out a primary conflict in their relationship; their families probably won't accept or approve of their marriage.

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, By any other word would smell as sweet." (2.2.43-44)

What does it mean? Still thinking about names, Juliet expresses a very modern idea. Your name does not define you. In her world, your name — or the family that you come from — sets out how people view you. The idea that you should be judged solely on your own merit is a progressive idea for the setting that showcases Juliet's rebellious and modern streak.

"Good Night, Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow." (2.2.185-186)

What does it mean? In her farewell, Juliet expresses her sorrow about being away from her love, Romeo. But their parting is sweet, because the next time they meet, their wedding will take place.

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Love manifests itself in a multitude of ways in the play. Compare and contrast Romeo's love for Rosaline with Romeo's love for Juliet. Consider love as it exists in the Capulet household. How does love operate between Lord and Lady Capulet, Juliet, the Nurse, and Tybalt?

2. Some readers consider the final scene in which both Romeo and Juliet die to be triumphant. In addition to the families being reconciled, how is the final scene triumphant?

3. Consider Lord Capulet's personality. How do his moods change and why? How does these mood swings affect Juliet, and how do they affect the course of the play?
4. Compare and contrast Romeo's reaction to the news of his banishment with Juliet's reaction.
5. Examine the role of Escalus, the Prince, as the play's figure of authority. How far is he to blame for what happens?
6. Some critics have said that Shakespeare had to kill Mercutio as he was becoming such a compelling characters that he detracted from Romeo and Juliet. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Light in its various forms recurs throughout the play. How does light mirror the action? How does the author use light to describe the characters and the changes they undergo?
8. As the Friar picks his herbs, he tells us that nature's tomb is also her womb and that what dies gives birth to new life. How do the Friar's words anticipate upcoming events? Do you think that the Friar proactively creates events that follow, or does he react to situations that are beyond his control? Explain.
9. Juliet is a very young girl; however, she shoulders a great deal of responsibility and manages a series of very difficult situations. Discuss Juliet's maturity level and compare it to Romeo's. Compare Juliet early in the play with Juliet later in the play. How has she changed? When did she change? Why did those changes occur?
10. The first Prologue describes Romeo and Juliet as, "A pair of star-cross'd lovers." Examine the way Shakespeare uses cosmic imagery in the play to emphasize the connection between Romeo and Juliet and their tragic deaths.
11. Shakespeare makes the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* rely on the delivery of crucial messages. Explain the importance of these various messages and the problems with the messengers.
12. Dreams often play an important part in Shakespearean dramas. At several points in the play, the characters have dreams. Sometimes they interpret them correctly, and other times they don't. Discuss these instances and how the characters' reactions to those dreams affect the action in the play. How do the characters interpret or misinterpret their dreams?
13. The feud between the families seems to be an ever-present concern for the characters. How does the feud drive the action of the play. How do the various characters manifest the feud?

VI. OTHELLO

INTRODUCTION

The Original Story

Shakespeare used existing stories as the basis for many of the plots of his plays. He took some from history (*Macbeth*, for example is based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*) and some from stories that were circulating in books at the time. Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, written and performed in 1604 and first printed in 1622, is based on a tale in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565), "Un Capitano Moro." What's interesting to modern readers is how Shakespeare adapted these stories, turning bare narratives into gripping drama.

The original tale, "Un Capitano Moro," concerns an unnamed Moor who marries a beautiful lady, Desdemona, despite her parents' opposition. The Moor and Desdemona live happily in Venice, and the Moor is appointed commander of troops sent to the garrison at Cyprus. He takes his wife with him.

The Moor's wicked ensign falls in love with his commander's wife, Desdemona. The ensign is afraid he will be killed if the Moor discovers his secret, and all his efforts to impress Desdemona go unnoticed because she only thinks of her husband. The ensign imagines that she loves someone else, a handsome young captain who is also in Venice, and his love turns to bitter hatred. He plots to kill the captain and revenge himself on Desdemona.

The ensign bides his time. He sees his opportunity when the Moor degrades the captain for wounding a soldier and Desdemona tries to make peace between her husband and the captain. The ensign hints that Desdemona has her own reason to want the captain reinstated. When his wife claims that the demotion was an overreaction, the Moor becomes very angry and suspects that his ensign had spoken truthfully. When the ensign tells the Moor that the captain told him of the affair, the Moor demands to see proof of it.

The ensign and his wife have a daughter aged about three, and one day when Desdemona visits their house, he puts the child on her lap. As Desdemona and the child play, the ensign steals one of her handkerchiefs. The ensign then leaves the handkerchief on the bed of the young captain, who recognizes it and goes to return it to Desdemona. When the Moor answers his knock at the door, the captain runs away, but not before the Moor recognizes him.

Later, the ensign laughs and jokes with the captain where the Moor can see them; he then tells the Moor him that he and the captain were talking about the captain's love affair with Desdemona and a handkerchief that she had given him. The Moor, believing that the handkerchief constitutes proof of his wife's infidelity, demands it of his wife, who, of course, cannot produce it. The Moor decides that he must kill his wife and plots with the ensign to kill both his wife and the captain.

The ensign, after a large payment, waylays the captain, attacks him with his sword, and manages to wound him on the leg. Desdemona is tearful to see the captain in pain, and the Moor and the ensign beat her to death with a sand filled stocking. Then they pulled down the rotten timber ceiling on her, making it appear that the falling roof had killed her. The Moor, distracted with grief for his dead wife, turns against the ensign and cashiers him.

The ensign now plots to ruin the Moor. He goes back to Venice with the captain, now one-legged, and they accuse the Moor of injuring him and murdering Desdemona. The Moor is arrested, refuses to speak under torture, and is banished and later killed by Desdemona's family. The ensign pursues his career of villainy with other victims, but in the end is arrested and dies under torture.

For a complete retelling of this story, see *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, edited by M. R. Ridley. London: Methuen, 1965.

Shakespeare's Version

In creating his tragedy *Othello*, Shakespeare tightened and dramatized the original story in several ways. The plot is concentrated in time and space, other characters are introduced to give, in several places, a double motive for an action. Iago now plots to destroy Othello, for a variety of motives, rather than Desdemona. Roderigo provides Iago with a useful dupe; his existence allows Iago to outline his wicked plans in conversation rather than soliloquy and to demonstrate his capacity for ruthless manipulation. Emilia provides a running commentary on Iago and his character, which she ascribes to all men. She innocently picks up the handkerchief, allowing the elimination of the daughter from the plot, and is a quick source of the information that finally condemns Iago.

Shakespeare also significantly altered the story's ending, concentrating revenge, love, and despair in the final dramatic scene of the play: murder in the marriage bed, followed immediately by revelation and grief. Shakespeare's Othello murders his wife alone, face to face, by strangulation, struggling with his love for her to the end.

By concentrating the action and developing the characters into fully realized human beings, with their own names, personalities, and ways of looking at the world, Shakespeare created a tragedy whose beauty and pathos is universal.

CHARACTERS

Othello A Moor (an African), a general in the defense forces of the city state of Venice. His successful profession brings him high status in Venice, but his foreign origins and color separate him from those with whom he lives and works. He is a military man, with a reputation for courage in battle and good judgment in military matters. Othello falls in love and marries Desdemona, but during the campaign against the Turks, Othello is tricked by Iago into believing that his wife has been unfaithful with his lieutenant, Cassio. Iago works

on Othello's personal and social insecurity until Othello believes the combination of Iago's lies and flimsy circumstantial evidence. Inflamed with jealousy, he smothers Desdemona in her bed, only to find out too late that he has been misled and has killed the woman who loved him faithfully. In despair, he kills himself.

Iago Othello's *ancient* (captain) in the Venetian defense forces. He had hoped for promotion, but Othello passed over him in favor of Cassio, and Iago works revenge on them both. He exploits Roderigo as a source of money and an unwitting accomplice in his plot to bring down Othello. When finally cornered and charged with his wickedness, Iago refuses to speak or to repent or explain his actions, and he goes to his punishment still surrounded by mystery.

Desdemona A noble Venetian lady, daughter of Brabantio. She organizes her life intelligently and shows courage, love, and loyalty in following her husband into danger. She accompanies Othello to Cyprus on the campaign against the Turks but finds him becoming distant and making wild accusations against her. She firmly believes that he will see that she is true to him, but when she realizes he is about to kill her, she can only feel despair and grief. She dies declaring her love for him.

Brabantio A Venetian Senator, Desdemona's father. He is angry at his daughter's choice of husband but can do nothing once the marriage has taken place, and the Venetian Senate has accepted it. He warns Othello that Desdemona is a clever deceiver.

Roderigo A Venetian nobleman in love with Desdemona. He has more money than sense and pays Iago to court Desdemona on his behalf. Iago, playing on Roderigo's hopes and gullibility, continues to help himself to Roderigo's money, and Roderigo never gets his heart's desire. Iago involves Roderigo in an attack on Cassio, for which Roderigo pays with his life, as Iago kills him to ensure his silence.

Cassio Othello's lieutenant in the Venetian defense forces. Cassio accompanied Othello as his friend when he was courting Desdemona. He is popular, he speaks well, and he is lively and trusting. Iago eventually convinces Othello that Cassio is Desdemona's paramour. Cassio is appointed governor of Cyprus after Othello's death.

Bianca A courtesan (prostitute), in love with Cassio. She is skilled in needlework and agrees to copy the handkerchief that Cassio gives her; then she throws it back at him, believing it is the token of his new love.

Emilia Desdemona's lady-in-waiting and Iago's wife. She knows Iago better than anybody else and is suspicious of his actions and motives. She does not realize until too late that the wicked person who has poisoned Othello against Desdemona is Iago, her own husband.

The Duke of Venice The leader of the governing body of the city state of Venice. The Duke appoints Othello to lead the forces defending Venice against the Turkish attack on Cyprus; he also urges Brabantio to accept his daughter's marriage.

Gratiano Brabantio's brother. He and Lodovico find Cassio wounded after Roderigo stabs him in the drunken brawl.

Lodovico Desdemona's cousin. After the death of Desdemona, Lodovico questions Othello and Cassio together, thus revealing the truth.

Montano Othello's predecessor as the governor of Cyprus. He is Othello's friend and loyal supporter.

SUMMARY

Act I: Scene 1

On a street in Venice, there is an argument between Roderigo, a nobleman, and Iago, an *ancient* (captain) in the defense forces. Roderigo, in love with the noble lady Desdemona, has paid large sums of money to Iago, on the understanding that Iago would give her gifts from him and praise him to her. Roderigo hopes to win Desdemona's love and marry her. However, they now have news that Desdemona has left the house of her father, Brabantio, a Senator, and eloped with Othello, a Moor (an African) who is a General in the defense forces.

Roderigo fears he has lost both his lady and his money. Iago reveals to Roderigo that it is in his (Iago's) nature to plot and tell lies to get what he wants and that he has a plan. He hates Othello for promoting Cassio to the position of lieutenant, a position that Iago wanted for himself. Iago plans to bring about Othello's downfall, and Roderigo will have Desdemona. First, they must wake Brabantio and cause an outcry. They bang and shout until Brabantio comes out onto the balcony. Iago tells him in inflammatory words that Desdemona has run away with Othello, and Brabantio, enraged, joins Roderigo to wake the neighbors and organize a search party.

Act I: Scene 2

Iago warns Othello that there may be a legal attempt to break the marriage, but Othello knows his military worth to Venice and meets the Duke and Senators with confidence. Cassio has been sent to fetch him to an urgent meeting about the situation in Cyprus. Iago tells Cassio of Othello's marriage. Brabantio's party arrives; Brabantio threatens Othello with violence and accuses him of using sorcery to seduce Desdemona, his reasoning being that she would never marry Othello voluntarily. Brabantio calls for Othello's arrest and imprisonment but cedes precedence to the Duke's summons to the emergency meeting.

Act I: Scene 3

Several reports have come in from Cyprus, all calling attention to a Turkish fleet that is expected to attack. The reports differ in the size of the fleet, but all speak of the danger as the combined force has turned back toward Cyprus. Othello enters the meeting with Cassio,

Brabantio, Iago, and others, and the Duke immediately appoints Othello to lead the forces to defend Cyprus.

At this point, the Duke notices Brabantio, who believes that his daughter has been corrupted with magic potions because, according to him, she would never willingly marry such a man as she did. Initially, the Duke promises him support in a prosecution for witchcraft, a capital crime, against the man who has seduced his daughter, but when the Duke realizes the seducer is Othello, he calls on the general to defend himself.

Othello describes his courtship of Desdemona in a dignified and persuasive speech (76-93 and 127-169) and asks the Duke to send for Desdemona so that she may speak. Iago leads the group that goes to fetch her. When Othello finishes speaking, the Duke declares in favor of Othello: "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (170). Desdemona then speaks, gently outlining an argument so strong that it finishes the whole debate: She owes obedience and thanks to her father for her upbringing, but now that she is married, her loyalty is to her husband, just as her mother's loyalty was to Brabantio. Fathers must give way to husbands.

Othello must go immediately to Cyprus to command its defense, and Desdemona requests to go as well. The Duke grants her wish, and Othello, who must leave that night, delegates Iago to follow later in another ship, bringing Desdemona and whatever else is needed. Iago's wife, Emilia, will look after Desdemona as her maid. As Othello leaves, Brabantio warns Othello, "She has deceived her father, and may thee" (289), but Othello is certain of Desdemona's faithfulness.

Iago and Roderigo are left on stage. Roderigo is downcast and talks of drowning himself. Iago replies with scorn that such misery is silliness and convinces Roderigo to go to Cyprus and wait for Desdemona to come to him, as she will surely soon become bored with Othello. Iago, because he hates Othello, says he will help Roderigo have Desdemona and reminds Roderigo to bring plenty of money.

Iago, alone on stage, considers the situation: He has consolidated his source of money, and he has heard a rumor that Othello has had sex with his wife, Emilia. Although he does not believe the rumor, he will act as though he does to feed his hatred. Also Iago will aim to get Cassio's position of lieutenant, which he thinks should have come to him.

Act II: Scene 1

Act II and all subsequent acts take place in Cyprus, in the Venetian fortifications. Montano, Governor of Cyprus, awaits the arrival of the Venetian forces, delayed by a violent storm at sea. A messenger arrives with news that the Turkish fleet has been so damaged by the storm that it no longer threatens Cyprus. Cassio's ship, followed by Desdemona's ship, is the first Venetian ship to arrive. Desdemona's first question is for news of Othello. The two pass the time, waiting for news, and Iago watches, planning to catch Cassio in his own courtesies.

Othello finally arrives, triumphant, and he, Desdemona, and the others go into the fortress. Iago stays behind to tell Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio and convince him to pick a fight with Cassio to cause mutiny and have him removed. Iago, in his second soliloquy, speaks again of his hatred for Othello. The details are not yet clear, but Iago plans to drive Othello mad.

Act II: Scene 2

The herald reads a proclamation declaring a night of general festivities to celebrate both the destruction of the Turkish fleet and Othello's recent marriage.

Act II: Scene 3

Cassio, commanding the night watch during the time of feasting and drinking, takes his orders from Othello, who directs the soldiers to drink with moderation and keep the peace. Cassio and Iago, his second in command, will see to this. Then Othello and Desdemona retire to bed, the first night they will spend together since their marriage.

Alone, Iago makes suggestive remarks about Desdemona to Cassio, which Cassio turns aside; then Iago invites him to drink. Cassio declines, but Iago wheedles and urges him, until Cassio finally relents. Iago spurs Roderigo into a fight with Cassio; others join in and Iago sends Roderigo to ring the alarm bell, waking Othello and bringing him and his armed men to the spot. Othello demands to know who started the fight, and feigning reluctance, Iago names Cassio. Othello relieves Cassio of his post on the spot. Then he and Desdemona return to bed.

Iago advises Cassio to ask Desdemona to speak on his behalf with her husband. Cassio agrees, and Iago uses his wife, Emilia, to arrange a private meeting between Cassio and Desdemona.

Act III: Scene 1

Cassio meets with a group of musicians and a clown (a countryman) whom he sends to find Emilia. Iago sends Emilia out to speak with him, and she reports that Desdemona and Othello are discussing the events of last night. Desdemona has spoken up for Cassio, and Othello, who likes him, has undertaken to bring him back into favor when the right moment comes.

Act III: Scene 2

Othello sends a letter back to Venice by ship and makes an inspection of the fortifications.

Act III: Scene 3

Cassio speaks to Desdemona, asking her to intercede with Othello on his behalf. Desdemona willingly agrees, knowing that Cassio is an old friend of Othello's. She promises to speak of him with her husband repeatedly until the quarrel is patched up and Cassio is recalled.

When Othello and Iago enter, Cassio, who is embarrassed because of his antics the previous night, embraces Desdemona and departs. Iago seizes the opportunity to make an undermining comment — "Ha, I like not that" — that rankles in Othello's mind. Desdemona speaks of Cassio, and Othello, to please her, agrees to see him, but he is distracted by his private thoughts.

In a conversation with Iago, in which Iago continues to imply that he knows something that he refuses to divulge, Othello denies that he would give himself over to jealousy. In his denial, he shows himself most vulnerable. He is consumed with doubt and suspicion. Othello voices his old fears that Brabantio was right, that it was unnatural for Desdemona to love him, that he was too horrible to be loved, and that it could not last. Iago leaves, and Othello

contemplates his situation: He could be tricked, married to a woman who is already looking at other men, and he fears that he must wipe her out of his heart. He tries to tell himself that it is not true.

When Desdemona re-enters, Othello's aspect is changed; he watches her intently, looking for signs, and brushes away her handkerchief when she seeks to sooth him. They go in to dinner, and Emilia picks up the fallen handkerchief, one that her husband, Iago, often urged her to steal from Desdemona. Emilia decides to have a copy made to give to Iago, but he enters, sees the handkerchief, and snatches it from her.

When Othello enters, Iago sees that Othello cannot regain his peace of mind. His speech is fevered, sweeping and frantic; he believes that his wife has been unfaithful to him. Othello then turns on Iago with savage intensity and demands to see the proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Cornered, Iago produces the dream story: Cassio spoke in his sleep, embraced him, called him Desdemona, and cursed the Moor. Iago tells Othello that he has seen Cassio wipe his brow with a handkerchief embroidered with strawberries; Othello recognizes this handkerchief as the one he gave to Desdemona.

Othello dismisses love and calls for vengeance. Certainty has freed his mind from doubt and confusion. Now he swears action, and Iago swears to help him. Othello wants Cassio dead, Iago agrees to do it, and then Othello wonders how to kill Desdemona.

Act III: Scene 4

Desdemona sends for Cassio to tell him that she has spoken with Othello; she is also worried that she has lost her handkerchief. When Othello enters, he claims a headache and asks her for a handkerchief to bind his head, but he will have only the embroidered strawberry handkerchief. In vain, Desdemona tries to deflect his questions about the handkerchief, speaking again of Cassio. Othello walks out in fury.

Cassio gives Bianca Desdemona's handkerchief, which he found in his lodgings (Iago had placed it there) and asks her to make a copy of it for him, as he will have to return the original when he finds the owner. Bianca immediately recognizes it as belonging to a woman and berates Cassio for having another mistress.

Act IV: Scene 1

In a conversation with Othello, Iago says that Cassio has confessed to sex with Desdemona. This revelation is too much for Othello, who becomes incoherent and faints. When Cassio enters, Iago claims that Othello has epilepsy and has had seizures before. Rather than revive him, they must let the fit take its course. Iago sends Cassio away, telling him to come back later. Othello, regaining consciousness, talks of himself as one among many cuckolds, but Iago tells him to hide and observe Cassio, who is returning. Iago says he will draw Cassio out to tell of his amorous adventures with Desdemona.

Othello withdraws, too emotionally involved to understand that Iago is manipulating him, and Iago talks with Cassio about Bianca. Othello sees his smiles and laughter but cannot hear the details and believes he is joking about how much Desdemona loves him. Then Bianca herself enters, with Desdemona's handkerchief, which she throws back at Cassio. Seeing his wife's handkerchief in the hands of Cassio's mistress is, for Othello, the "ocular proof" he sought.

He is now convinced of Desdemona's infidelity and knows he must kill both Cassio and Desdemona that very night.

Act IV: Scene 2

Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona, but she assures him that nothing immodest has taken place between her mistress and Cassio. Othello, rather than abandon his suspicions, believes Desdemona is so cunning that she has managed to deceive even her maid. Othello speaks with Desdemona in private, threatening to banish her and calling her "whore" and "strumpet" — charges that she immediately denies.

Emilia comes in, and Othello leaves. Exhausted, Desdemona knows that she is being punished, but she does not know what for. Emilia suspects that some villain has turned Othello against his wife and stirred up his jealousy. When Desdemona asks Iago's advice, he says that it is only the business of the state that makes Othello angry.

Later, in a conversation with Iago, Roderigo confesses that he has had enough of his romantic quest and plans to withdraw. Iago makes a bold move, linking his two plots together: He urges Roderigo to kill Cassio, explaining that Cassio's death will prevent Othello being sent elsewhere and, therefore, keep Desdemona in Cyprus. Roderigo allows himself to be persuaded.

Act IV: Scene 3

After the supper, Othello orders Desdemona to go to bed and to dismiss her attendant. Desdemona and Emilia discuss the situation; Emilia sees the marriage with Othello as a mistake, but Desdemona regrets nothing. She has a premonition of death and requests Emilia, if she should die, to wrap her body in one of her wedding sheets, which are now on the bed. Desdemona sings the "Willow Song," remembering the maid Barbary whose lover went mad and abandoned her, and she died singing this song.

Act V: Scene 1

In the street at night, Iago directs Roderigo to ambush Cassio. When Cassio approaches, Roderigo attacks unsuccessfully and is wounded by Cassio. Iago, from behind, stabs Cassio in the leg and runs away while Cassio cries murder. Othello, hearing Cassio's cry, believes that Iago has done the job he has undertaken. Following Iago's lead, Othello must harden his heart against the charms of his wife and spill her blood in the bed where she has betrayed him.

Act V: Scene 2

Desdemona lies asleep in bed, and Othello enters, dreadfully calm and sure in what he must do. Desdemona awakens and calls him to bed, but he tells her to pray at once, repenting anything she needs to repent, and he will wait while she prays because he does not want to kill her soul. Suddenly, Desdemona realizes that Othello intends to kill her. She is afraid, although she knows she is not guilty. Knowing that she cannot convince him of her fidelity,

Desdemona weeps and begs him to banish her rather than kill her, or let her live just a little more, but he stifles her, presumably with a pillow.

When Emilia knocks on the door, Othello draws the bed-curtain across, hiding the bed, and opens the door to hear the news. What Emilia reports is not what Othello expected. She says that Cassio has killed Roderigo. Then Desdemona's voice is heard from the bed, saying "falsely murdered" and Emilia calls for help. Desdemona says that she is innocent, denies that anyone has killed her, and dies.

Emilia and Othello confront each other. Emilia sees herself as a witness and will tell what she has seen, and Othello declares that he has killed Desdemona because of her infidelity. Emilia insists that Desdemona was faithful; Othello replies that Cassio had been with her, and Iago knew all about it. Now Emilia has the key idea. She says "my husband" over and over, while Othello pours out his heart on justice and how he loved her and how Iago is honest. Emilia curses Iago, calls him a liar, and cries murder to waken everyone.

Montano, Gratiano, Iago, and others rush into the bedchamber where Emilia is shouting, and she challenges Iago to defend himself, giving him one last chance to retrieve himself in her estimation. Iago says that Desdemona was indeed unfaithful with Cassio, but Emilia knows this is untrue. She tells how she found the handkerchief, which her husband had asked her to steal, and gave it to him. Iago stabs Emilia and runs out. As she dies, Emilia tells Othello that Desdemona loved him. Othello realizes, too late, that he had been tricked and manipulated.

Iago is caught and brought back. Othello and Cassio demand to know why he did it, but Iago refuses to explain and says he will never speak again. Othello, watching his world unravel, asks the men to remember him clearly, his good points and his bad, as "one that lov'd not wisely, but too well." Then he stabs himself, falls onto the bed, and dies.

Lodovico takes charge, giving Othello's house and property to Gratiano, his next of kin by marriage. Cassio will be commander and have the power to sentence Iago, and Lodovico will return to Venice with the sad news.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

Major Themes

Explore the different themes within William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Othello*. Themes are central to understanding *Othello* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary. In *Othello*, the major themes reflect the values and the motivations of characters.

Love

In *Othello*, love is a force that overcomes large obstacles and is tripped up by small ones. It is eternal, yet derail-able. It provides Othello with intensity but not direction and gives Desdemona access to his heart but not his mind. Types of love and what that means are different between different characters.

Othello finds that love in marriage needs time to build trust, and his enemy works too quickly for him to take that time. The immediate attraction between the couple works on passion, and

Desdemona builds on that passion a steadfast devotion whose speed and strength Othello cannot equal.

Iago often falsely professes love in friendship for Roderigo and Cassio and betrays them both. For Iago, love is leverage. Desdemona's love in friendship for Cassio is real but is misinterpreted by the jealous Othello as adulterous love. The true friendship was Emilia's for Desdemona, shown when she stood up witness for the honor of her dead mistress, against Iago, her lying husband, and was killed for it.

Appearance and Reality

Appearance and reality are important aspects in *Othello*. For Othello, seeing is believing, and proof of the truth is visual. To "prove" something is to investigate it to the point where its true nature is revealed. Othello demands of Iago "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore, be sure of it, give me the ocular proof" (Act 3, Scene 3).

What Iago gives him instead is imaginary pictures of Cassio and Desdemona to feed his jealousy. As Othello loses control of his mind, these pictures dominate his thoughts. He looks at Desdemona's whiteness and is swept up in the traditional symbolism of white for purity and black for evil. Whenever he is in doubt, that symbolism returns to haunt him and despite his experience, he cannot help but believe it.

Jealousy

Jealousy is what appears to destroy Othello. It is the emotion suggested to him by Iago in Act 3, Scene 3. Iago thinks he knows jealousy, having rehearsed it in his relationship with Emilia to the extent that Emilia believes jealousy is part of the personality of men, but Iago's jealousy is a poor, weak thought compared to the storm of jealousy he stirs up in Othello.

Iago has noticed Othello's tendency to insecurity and overreaction, but not even Iago imagined Othello would go as far into jealousy as he did. Jealousy forces Othello's mind so tightly on one idea, the idea that Desdemona has betrayed him with Cassio, that no other assurance or explanation can penetrate. Such an obsession eclipses Othello's reason, his common sense, and his respect for justice.

Up to the moment he kills Desdemona, Othello's growing jealousy maddens him past the recall of reason. Upon seeing that she was innocent and that he killed her unjustly, Othello recovers. He can again see his life in proportion and grieve at the terrible thing he has done. Once again, he speaks with calm rationality, judging and condemning and finally executing himself.

Prejudice

Iago's scheme would not have worked without the underlying atmosphere of racial prejudice in Venetian society, a prejudice of which both Desdemona and Othello are very aware. Shakespeare's Desdemona copes with prejudice by denying it access to her own life. Her relationship with Othello is one of love, and she is deliberately loyal only to her marriage.

Othello, however, is not aware how deeply prejudice has penetrated into his own personality. This absorbed prejudice undermines him with thoughts akin to "I am not attractive," "I am

not worthy of Desdemona," "It cannot be true that she really loves me," and "If she loves me, then there must be something wrong with her."

These thoughts, inflamed by Iago's hints and lies, prevent Othello from discussing his concerns and fears directly with Desdemona, and so he acts on panicked assumption. In order to survive the combined onslaught of internalized prejudice and the directed venom of Iago, Othello would have had to be near perfect in strength and self-knowledge, and that is not fair demand for anyone.

Major Symbols and Motifs

Explore the different symbols within William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Othello*. Symbols are central to understanding *Othello* as a play and identifying Shakespeare's social and political commentary.

Handkerchief

The significance of red is love, red strawberries like red hearts on the love token handkerchief, and like the red stains from Othello and Desdemona's first night of love on the marriage sheets. Such red on white is private and dear to the heart of Othello, and he expects it to be similarly dear to his wife. It is the belief that Desdemona gave away his handkerchief, and the sexually implications of the gift, that drives him to kill her.

Candle

The candle Othello blows out just before he murders Desdemona symbolizes him extinguishing her life.

Animals

Beginning in Act 1, Scene 1, Iago introduces the animalistic imagery. According to Iago, there is something bestial and animalistic about Othello ("The old black ram"); he's base and beastly, somehow beneath everyone else in Venice because of his North African heritage. The animal imagery permeates the play, often referring to Othello's "otherness."

Location

Shakespeare often uses different locations to represent mindsets. In *Othello*, Venice represents civilization, while Cyprus symbolizes the wilderness. The idea is that what happened in the Cyprus never would happen in the civilized city of Venice.

Shakespeare's Tragedy

Unity, Time, and Place

The dramatic form of classical tragedy derives from the tragic plays of ancient Athens, which depicted the downfall of a hero or famous character of Greek legend. The hero would struggle against overwhelming fate, and his defeat would be so noble that he wins the moral victory over the forces that destroy him. A tragedy evoked pity and terror in the audience; it was a catharsis, or washing clean of the soul, which left the spectator trembling but purified.

Aristotle proposed the tragic unities of Place, Time, and Action, that is, the whole tragedy would take place in a single location, for example a house or a city square (this included messengers who came in from elsewhere), it would happen during the course of one day (including speeches about events which had happened in the past), and it would be a single story, without sub-plots.

Compared with these strict rules, Shakespeare's tragedy is a more relaxed genre, but *Othello* much more than, for example, the sprawling *Hamlet*, observes the spirit of Aristotle. *Othello*, apart from Act I in Venice, is located entirely within the fortress at Cyprus. Although logically the play covers an unspecified time lapse of, we presume, two or three weeks, it proceeds, more or less, by major scenes through the hours of the day, starting in Venice with the elopement after midnight, the Senate meeting at dawn, then at Cyprus with the morning storm and afternoon landings and developments, the fateful drinking party in the early evening and the murder at bed time. This is not to say that everything happens in the same day; it obviously cannot, but the impression is of an abstract day unfolding.

The plot is fairly unified, focusing on Othello and his fate, and dealing with other people and events only in so far as they are relevant to this focus. *Othello* is about as near as Shakespeare gets to classical tragedy.

The Tragic Flaw

A. C. Bradley saw Shakespearean tragedy characterized by the "tragic flaw," the internal imperfection in the hero that brings him down. His downfall becomes his own doing, and he is no longer, as in classical tragedy, the helpless victim of fate. Some say that Othello's tragic flaw was jealousy which flared at suspicion and rushed into action unchecked by calm common sense. A more modern interpretation would say that Othello's tragic flaw was that he had internalized, that is taken into himself, the prejudices of those who surrounded him. In his heart he had come to believe what they believed: that a black man is an unattractive creature, not quite human, unworthy of love. Thinking this, he could not believe that Desdemona could truly love him for himself. Her love must be a pretense, or a flawed and corrupted emotion. Iago hinted at these ideas, and Othello rushed to accept them, because they echoed his deepest fears and insecurities.

The Play's Structure

Shakespearean tragedy usually works on a five-part structure, corresponding to the five acts: Part One, the exposition, outlines the situation, introduces the main characters, and begins the action. Part Two, the development, continues the action and introduces complications. Part Three, the crisis (or climax), brings everything to a head. In this part, a change of direction occurs or understanding is precipitated. Part Four includes further developments leading inevitably to Part Five, in which the final crisis of action or revelation and resolution are explained. *Othello* follows this pattern.

REVISION QUESTION

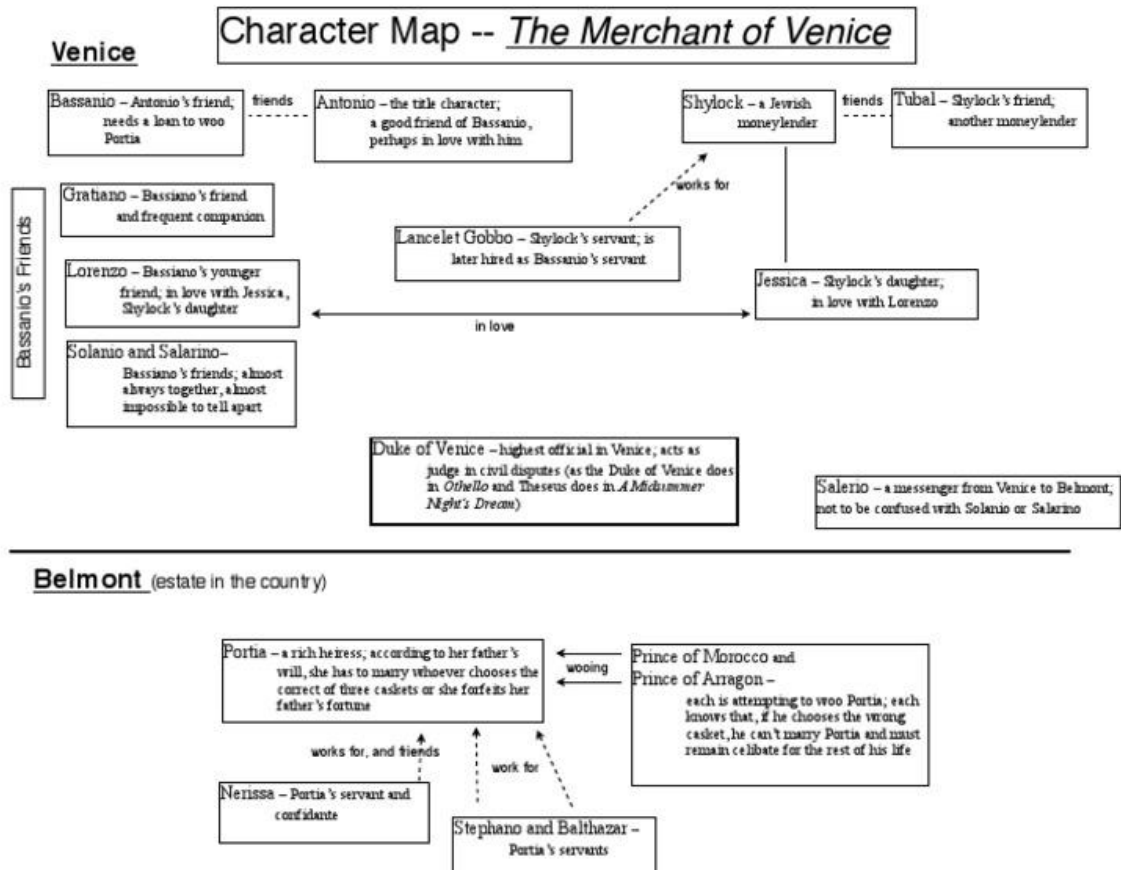
1. Describe the course of Iago's deception of Othello, showing which incidents were planned and which were opportunistic. Does Iago succeed by skill or by luck?
2. Discuss how age, social position, and race impact the relationship between Othello and Desdemona.
3. A tragedy concerns the fall of a great man due to some flaw in his character. What is Othello's flaw, and explain how he is truly a tragic hero.
4. What are possible motives for Iago's hatred of Othello? Consider both the motives he states and the motives implied in his speech and behavior.
5. In addition to exposing the prejudices of Venetians, discuss how the play also exposes the prejudices of the audience.

UNIT – IV - SHAKESPEARE – I (SHS1208)

COMEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

VII. MERCHANT OF VENICE

CHARACTER



PLOT

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, complains to his friends of a melancholy that he cannot explain. His friend Bassanio is desperately in need of money to court Portia, a wealthy heiress who lives in the city of Belmont. Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan in order to travel in style to Portia's estate. Antonio agrees, but is unable to make the loan himself because his own money is all invested in a number of trade ships that are still at sea. Antonio suggests that Bassanio secure the loan from one of the city's moneylenders and name Antonio as the loan's guarantor. In Belmont, Portia expresses sadness over the terms of her father's will, which stipulates that she must marry the man who correctly chooses one of three caskets. None of Portia's current suitors are to her liking, and she and her lady-in-waiting, Nerissa, fondly remember a visit paid some time before by Bassanio.

In Venice, Antonio and Bassanio approach Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan. Shylock nurses a long-standing grudge against Antonio, who has made a habit of berating Shylock and other Jews for their usury, the practice of loaning money at exorbitant rates of

interest, and who undermines their business by offering interest-free loans. Although Antonio refuses to apologize for his behavior, Shylock acts agreeably and offers to lend Bassanio three thousand ducats with no interest. Shylock adds, however, that should the loan go unpaid, Shylock will be entitled to a pound of Antonio's own flesh. Despite Bassanio's warnings, Antonio agrees. In Shylock's own household, his servant Launcelot decides to leave Shylock's service to work for Bassanio, and Shylock's daughter Jessica schemes to elope with Antonio's friend Lorenzo. That night, the streets of Venice fill up with revelers, and Jessica escapes with Lorenzo by dressing as his page. After a night of celebration, Bassanio and his friend Gratiano leave for Belmont, where Bassanio intends to win Portia's hand.

In Belmont, Portia welcomes the prince of Morocco, who has come in an attempt to choose the right casket to marry her. The prince studies the inscriptions on the three caskets and chooses the gold one, which proves to be an incorrect choice. In Venice, Shylock is furious to find that his daughter has run away, but rejoices in the fact that Antonio's ships are rumored to have been wrecked and that he will soon be able to claim his debt. In Belmont, the prince of Arragon also visits Portia. He, too, studies the caskets carefully, but he picks the silver one, which is also incorrect. Bassanio arrives at Portia's estate, and they declare their love for one another. Despite Portia's request that he wait before choosing, Bassanio immediately picks the correct casket, which is made of lead. He and Portia rejoice, and Gratiano confesses that he has fallen in love with Nerissa. The couples decide on a double wedding. Portia gives Bassanio a ring as a token of love, and makes him swear that under no circumstances will he part with it. They are joined, unexpectedly, by Lorenzo and Jessica. The celebration, however, is cut short by the news that Antonio has indeed lost his ships, and that he has forfeited his bond to Shylock. Bassanio and Gratiano immediately travel to Venice to try and save Antonio's life. After they leave, Portia tells Nerissa that they will go to Venice disguised as men.

Shylock ignores the many pleas to spare Antonio's life, and a trial is called to decide the matter. The duke of Venice, who presides over the trial, announces that he has sent for a legal expert, who turns out to be Portia disguised as a young man of law. Portia asks Shylock to show mercy, but he remains inflexible and insists the pound of flesh is rightfully his. Bassanio offers Shylock twice the money due him, but Shylock insists on collecting the bond as it is written. Portia examines the contract and, finding it legally binding, declares that Shylock is entitled to the merchant's flesh. Shylock ecstatically praises her wisdom, but as he is on the verge of collecting his due, Portia reminds him that he must do so without causing Antonio to bleed, as the contract does not entitle him to any blood. Trapped by this logic, Shylock hastily agrees to take Bassanio's money instead, but Portia insists that Shylock take his bond as written, or nothing at all. Portia informs Shylock that he is guilty of conspiring against the life of a Venetian citizen, which means he must turn over half of his property to the state and the other half to Antonio. The duke spares Shylock's life and takes a fine instead of Shylock's property. Antonio also forgoes his half of Shylock's wealth on two conditions: first, Shylock must convert to Christianity, and second, he must will the entirety of his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica upon his death. Shylock agrees and takes his leave.

Bassanio, who does not see through Portia's disguise, showers the young law clerk with thanks, and is eventually pressured into giving Portia the ring with which he promised never to part. Gratiano gives Nerissa, who is disguised as Portia's clerk, his ring. The two women return to Belmont, where they find Lorenzo and Jessica declaring their love to each other under the moonlight. When Bassanio and Gratiano arrive the next day, their wives accuse them of faithlessly giving their rings to other women. Before the deception goes too far, however, Portia reveals that she was, in fact, the law clerk, and both she and Nerissa reconcile with their husbands. Lorenzo and Jessica are pleased to learn of their inheritance from Shylock, and the joyful news arrives that Antonio's ships have in fact made it back safely. The group celebrates its good fortune.

Summary: Act I, scene i

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, complains to his friends, Salarino and Solanio, that a sadness has overtaken him and dulled his faculties, although he is at a loss to explain why. Salarino and Solanio suggest that his sadness must be due to his commercial investments, for Antonio has dispatched several trade ships to various ports. Salarino says it is impossible for Antonio not to feel sad at the thought of the perilous ocean sinking his entire investment, but Antonio assures his friends that his business ventures do not depend on the safe passage of any one ship. Solanio then declares that Antonio must be in love, but Antonio dismisses the suggestion.

The three men encounter Bassanio, Antonio's kinsman, walking with two friends named Lorenzo and Gratiano. Salarino and Solanio bid Antonio farewell and depart. When Gratiano notices Antonio's unhappiness and suggests that the merchant worries too much about business, Antonio responds that he is but a player on a stage, destined to play a sad part. Gratiano warns Antonio against becoming the type of man who affects a solemn demeanor in order to gain a wise reputation, then he takes his leave with Lorenzo. Bassanio jokes that Gratiano has terribly little to say, claiming that his friend's wise remarks prove as elusive as "two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff" (I.i.115–116). Antonio asks Bassanio to tell him about the clandestine love that Bassanio is harboring. In reply, Bassanio admits that although he already owes Antonio a substantial sum of money from his earlier, more extravagant days, he has fallen in love with Portia, a rich heiress from Belmont, and hopes to win her heart by holding his own with her other wealthy and powerful suitors. In order to woo Portia, however, Bassanio says he needs to borrow more money from Antonio. Antonio replies that he cannot give Bassanio another loan, as all his money is tied up in his present business ventures, but offers to guarantee any loan Bassanio can round up.

Summary: Act I, scene ii

At Belmont, Portia complains to her lady-in-waiting, Nerissa, that she is weary of the world because, as her dead father's will stipulates, she cannot decide for herself whether to take a husband. Instead, Portia's various suitors must choose between three chests, one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead, in the hopes of selecting the one that contains her portrait. The man who guesses correctly will win Portia's hand in marriage, but those who guess incorrectly

must swear never to marry anyone. Nerissa lists the suitors who have come to guess—a Neapolitan prince, a Palatine count, a French nobleman, an English baron, a Scottish lord, and the nephew of the duke of Saxony—and Portia criticizes their many hilarious faults. For instance, she describes the Neapolitan prince as being too fond of his horse, the Palatine count as being too serious, the Englishman as lacking any knowledge of Italian or any of the other languages Portia speaks, and the German suitor of drunkenness. Each of these suitors has left without even attempting a guess for fear of the penalty for guessing wrong. This fact relieves Portia, and both she and Nerissa remember Bassanio, who has visited once before, as the suitor most deserving and worthy of praise. A servant enters to tell Portia that the prince of Morocco will arrive soon, news that Portia is not at all happy to hear.

Analysis: Act I, scenes i–ii

The first scene of the play introduces us to a world of wealthy, upper-class Christian men living in Venice. Their conversation reveals that they are men of business who take great risks with money and are careful to avoid seeming overly concerned about their investments. For example, Antonio calmly denies his associates' suggestion that he is worried about his ships, and Salarino's description of a shipwreck, with silks enrobing the roaring waters and spices scattered upon the stream, is lyrical and poetic rather than practical or business-minded. Significantly, the conversation throughout this opening scene is not really about business, but rather Antonio's emotional state—his friends see it as their duty to cheer him up. We may infer that money is very important to these men, but the code of manners that they share requires them to act as though friendship, camaraderie, and good cheer matter more than money. For example, Salarino excuses himself by asserting that his only concern is to make Antonio merry and that he is leaving because better friends have arrived, but Antonio knows that Salarino is leaving to attend to his own business affairs. The Christian men of the play share a certain set of values, but these values are not always entirely consistent or self-evident.

However, if the professions of affection between Antonio and the other merchants simply seem like good manners, Antonio's loyalty toward his friend Bassanio is obviously quite sincere. Where Bassanio is concerned, love and friendship really are more important to Antonio than money. When Bassanio asks for help, Antonio promptly offers all of his money and credit, insisting that they go straightaway to a lender so he can stand as security for Bassanio. Antonio's defining characteristic is his willingness to do anything for his friend Bassanio, even lay down his life. Beyond this willingness to sacrifice himself for Bassanio, Antonio is a relatively passive character. He begins the play in a dreamy melancholy that he does not know how to cure, and throughout the play he never takes decisive action in the way that Bassanio, Portia, and various other characters do. He approaches life with a pensive, resigned, wait-and-see attitude, like a merchant waiting for his ships to return.

One possible explanation for Antonio's melancholy is that he is hopelessly in love with Bassanio. Although he never admits it, the evidence suggests that he is in love with *somebody*. His friends think he is in love, and while he denies the suggestion that he is

worried about his ships with a calm, well-reasoned argument, he responds to the suggestion that he is in love with a simple “[f]ie, fie” (I.i.46). Moreover, melancholy was traditionally regarded as a symptom of lovesickness in Shakespeare’s time, yet no female lover for Antonio is alluded to in the play. Antonio is extravagant in his professions of love for Bassanio, and while extravagant protestations of love between upper-class men were not considered abnormal at the time, we may hear a double entendre in his assurance that “[m]y purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions” (I.i.138–139). The explicit sense of this statement is that Antonio will make himself and his physical person available to help Bassanio, but it could be construed to mean that his body, or person, is available for Bassanio’s pleasure. The idea that Antonio is in love with Bassanio would explain his motivation for risking his life, as well as lend his character a certain poignancy, as Antonio puts his own life and wealth in jeopardy to help Bassanio woo someone else.

Act I, scene ii introduces Portia, the heroine of the play, and establishes the casket test through which she will find a husband. After we see more of Portia, her compliance with her dead father’s instructions may seem odd, as she proves to be an extremely independent and strong-willed character. However, her adherence to her father’s will establishes an important aspect of her character: she plays by the rules. Her strict adherence to laws and other strictures makes her an interesting counterpoint to Shylock, the play’s villain, whom we meet in the next scene.

Because Portia is such a fabulously wealthy heiress, the only men eligible to court her are from the highest end of the social strata. As a result, the competition between her suitors is international, including noblemen from various parts of Europe and even Africa. Portia’s description of her previous suitors serves as a vehicle for Shakespeare to satirize the nobleman of France, Scotland, Germany, and England for the amusement of his English audience. At the end of the scene, the arrival of the prince of Morocco is announced, introducing a suitor who is racially and culturally more distant from Portia than her previous suitors. The casket test seems designed to give an equal chance to all of these different noblemen, so the competition for Portia’s hand and wealth in Belmont parallels the financial community of Venice, which is also organized to include men of many nations, Christian and non-Christian alike. Portia’s remarks about the prince of Morocco’s devilish skin color, however, show that she is rooting for a husband who is culturally and racially similar to her. In fact, she hopes to marry Bassanio, the suitor with the background closest to hers.

Summary: Act I, scene iii

Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, agrees to loan Bassanio three thousand ducats for a term of three months. Bassanio assures Shylock that Antonio will guarantee the loan, but Shylock is doubtful because Antonio’s wealth is currently invested in business ventures that may fail. In the end, however, Shylock decides that Antonio’s guarantee of the loan will be sufficient assurance, and asks to speak with him. When Antonio arrives, Shylock, in an aside, confesses his hatred for the man. Antonio, Shylock says, is a Christian who lends money without interest, which makes more difficult the practice of usury, in which money is lent out at

exorbitant interest rates. Shylock is also incensed by Antonio's frequent public denunciations of Shylock. Antonio makes it clear to Shylock that he is not in the habit of borrowing or lending money, but has decided to make an exception on behalf of his friend Bassanio. Their conversation leads Antonio to chastise the business of usury, which Shylock defends as a way to thrive.

As he calculates the interest on Bassanio's loan, Shylock remembers the many times that Antonio has cursed him, calling him a "misbeliever, cut-throat, dog / And spit upon [his] Jewish gaberdine" (I.iii.107–108). Antonio responds that he is likely to do so again, and insists that Shylock lend him the money as an enemy. Such an arrangement, Antonio claims, will make it easier for Shylock to exact a harsh penalty if the loan is not repaid. Assuring Antonio that he means to be friends, Shylock offers to make the loan without interest. Instead, he suggests, seemingly in jest, that Antonio forfeit a pound of his own flesh should the loan not be repaid in due time. Bassanio warns Antonio against entering such an agreement, but Antonio assures him that he will have no trouble repaying the debt, as his ships will soon bring him wealth that far exceeds the value of the loan. Shylock attempts to dismiss Bassanio's suspicions, asking what profit he stands to make by procuring a pound of Antonio's flesh. As Shylock heads off to the notary's office to sign the bond, Antonio remarks on Shylock's newfound generosity: "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" (I.iii.174). Bassanio remains suspicious of the arrangement, but Antonio reminds him that his ships will arrive within the next two months.

Analysis

Shylock is an arresting presence on the stage, and although Antonio may be the character for whom the play is named, it is Shylock who has come to dominate the imaginations of critics and audiences alike. Shylock's physical presence in the play is actually not so large, as he speaks fewer lines than other characters and does not even appear in the play's final act. However, in many ways, the play belongs to Shylock. The use of a Jew as the central villain was not unknown to Renaissance comedy, as evidenced by *The Jew of Malta*, a wildly popular play by Shakespeare's contemporary Christopher Marlowe, which revolves around a malevolent, bloodthirsty Jewish character named Barabas. Shylock, however, differs in that his malice seems to stem, at least in part, from the unkindness of his Christian colleagues. Exactly how to read Shylock has been a matter of some debate, and even the most persuasive scholars would be hard-pressed to call him a flattering portrait of a Jew. One could certainly argue, however, that Shylock receives far less of a stock portrayal than what was common in Shakespeare's time, and that, given the constant degradation he endures, we can even feel something akin to sympathy for him.

At the heart of any sympathy we might feel for Shylock lies the fact that the bonhomie and good nature that so mark Antonio's appearance with Bassanio disappear, and his treatment of Shylock is unexpectedly harsh and brutal. Even though Bassanio and Antonio require a favor from Shylock, Antonio's is still a tone of imperious command, and his past, present, and future attitude toward Shylock is one of exceptional contempt. Shylock vividly illustrates the

depth of this contempt, wondering aloud why he should lend Antonio money when Antonio has voided his “rheum,” or spit, on Shylock’s beard, and he kicked Shylock as he would a stray dog (I.iii.113–114). The repeated mention of spittle here sharply differentiates Antonio’s Venice, where even shipwrecks seem like spice-laden dreams, from Shylock’s, where the city is a place of blows, kicks, and bodily functions. Without these details, Antonio’s haughty attitude toward Shylock could easily be forgiven, but the very visceral details of spit and kicks show a violent, less romantic side to Antonio, and our sympathies for him cannot help but lessen.

Shylock is noticeably different from Shakespeare’s other great villains, such as Richard III or Iago, in several ways. In the first place, these other villains see themselves as evil, and while they may try to justify their own villainy, they also revel in it, making asides to the audience and self-consciously comparing themselves to the Vice character of medieval morality plays. Marlowe’s Jew, Barabas, is a similarly self-conscious villain. Though the Christian characters of *The Merchant of Venice* may view Jews as evil, Shylock does not see himself in that way. His views of himself and others are rational, articulate, and consistent. Also, Shakespeare’s other villains are generally more deceitful, passing themselves off as loving and virtuous Christians while plotting malevolently against those around them. Shylock, on the other hand, is an outcast even before the play begins, vilified and spat upon by the Christian characters. Shylock’s actions are relatively open, although the other characters misunderstand his intentions because they do not understand him.

Indeed, Shylock understands the Christians and their culture much better than they understand him. The Christian characters only interact with Shylock within a framework of finance and law—he is not part of the friendship network portrayed in Act I, scene i. Though Bassanio asks him to dine with them, Shylock says in an aside that he will not break bread with Christians, nor will he forgive Antonio, thereby signaling his rejection of one of the fundamental Christian values, forgiveness. Shylock is able to cite the New Testament as readily as Jewish scripture, as he shows in his remark about the pig being the animal into which Christ drove the devil. Antonio notes Shylock’s facility with the Bible, but he uses this ability to compare Shylock to the devil, who, proverbially, is also adept at quoting scripture. As we see more of Shylock, he does not become a hero or a fully sympathetic character, but he is an unsettling figure insofar as he exposes the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the Christian characters. Shylock never quite fits their descriptions or expectations of him. Most significantly, they think he is motivated solely by money, when in fact his resentment against Antonio and the other Christians outweighs his desire for monetary gain.

Summary: Act II, scene i

In Belmont, the prince of Morocco arrives to attempt to win Portia’s hand in marriage. The prince asks Portia not to judge him by his dark complexion, assuring her that he is as valorous as any European man. Portia reminds the prince that her own tastes do not matter, since the process of picking chests, stipulated in her father’s will, makes the prince as worthy as any other suitor. With a lengthy proclamation of his own bravery and heroism, the prince asks Portia to lead him to the caskets, where he may venture his guess. She reminds him that the

penalty for guessing incorrectly is that he must remain unmarried forever. The prince accepts this stipulation, and Portia leads him off to dinner.

Summary: Act II, scene ii

Launcelot Gobbo, a servant of Shylock's, struggles to decide whether or not he should run away from his master. Part of him, which he calls "[t]he fiend . . . at mine elbow," wants to leave, while his conscience reminds him of his honest nature and urges him to stay (II.ii.2). Although Launcelot has no specific complaints, he seems troubled by the fact that his master is Jewish, or, as Launcelot puts it, "a kind of devil" (II.ii.19). Just when Launcelot determines to run away, his father, Old Gobbo, enters. The old man is blind, and he asks how to get to Shylock's house, where he hopes to find young Launcelot. Because his father does not recognize him, Launcelot decides to play a prank on him—he gives the old man confusing directions and reports that Launcelot is dead. When Launcelot reveals the deception, Old Gobbo doubts that the man before him is his son, but Launcelot soon convinces his father of his identity. Launcelot confesses to his father that he is leaving Shylock's employment in the hopes of serving Bassanio. Just then, Bassanio enters and the two plead with him to accept Launcelot as his servant. Bassanio takes several moments to understand their bumbling proposition, but he accepts the offer. Bassanio then meets Gratiano, who asks to accompany him to Belmont, and agrees on the condition that Gratiano tame his characteristically wild behavior. Gratiano promises to be on his best behavior, and the two men plan a night of merriment to celebrate their departure.

Summary: Act II, scene iii

Shylock's daughter Jessica bids good-bye to Launcelot. She tells him that his presence made life with her father more bearable. Jessica gives Launcelot a letter to carry to Bassanio's friend Lorenzo, and Launcelot leaves, almost too tearful to say good-bye. Jessica, left alone, confesses that although she feels guilty for being ashamed of her father, she is only his daughter by blood, and not by actions. Still, she hopes to escape her damning relationship to Shylock by marrying Lorenzo and converting to Christianity.

Summary: Act II, scene iv

On a street in Venice, Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Solanio discuss the plan to unite Lorenzo with Jessica. Gratiano frets that they are not well prepared, but Lorenzo assures the men that they have enough time to gather the necessary disguises and torchbearers. As they talk, Launcelot enters bearing Jessica's letter. Lorenzo recognizes the writing, lovingly exclaiming that the hand that penned the message is "whiter than the paper it writ on" (II.iv.13). Lorenzo bids Launcelot to return to Shylock's house in order to assure Jessica, secretly, that Lorenzo will not let her down. Launcelot departs, and Lorenzo orders his friends to prepare for the night's festivities. Salarino and Solanio leave, and Lorenzo relates to Gratiano that Jessica will escape from Shylock's house by disguising herself as Lorenzo's torchbearer. Lorenzo gives Gratiano the letter and asks Gratiano to read it, then leaves, excited for the evening's outcome.

Analysis: Act II, scenes i–iv

The elaborate excuse the prince of Morocco makes for his dark coloring serves to call attention to it and to his cultural difference from Portia and from Shakespeare's audience. His extravagant praise of his own valor also makes him seem both less well-mannered and less attractive. Moreover, his assertion that the best virgins of his clime have loved him seems calculated to make him less, rather than more, attractive to Portia. Her response to his protestations is polite, even courtly, showing her good breeding and her virtuous acquiescence to her dead father's wishes. But her words also clearly convey that she does not want to marry him.

The scene between the Gobbos is typical of Shakespeare, who frequently employs servants and members of the working class to provide slapstick interludes in both his comedies and tragedies. *The Merchant of Venice* does not derive all of its comic moments from the malapropisms and double entendres of this odd father-son pair, but the humor here is more crass and vulgar—so simple that it is hard to overlook and mistake. Seen in this light, we forgive things that might otherwise seem cruel to us, like Launcelot's shabby treatment of his blind and doting father. This humor is comedy at its simplest, where laughs are derived not from quick wit but from confusion and foolery.

Although Shylock does not appear in these scenes, our view of him is further shaped by the opinions of those closest to him. Even though his servant and daughter do not like him, their descriptions of him inadvertently make him a more sympathetic figure in our eyes. Launcelot, we learn, is not abandoning his post because Shylock has proved to be a cruel or harsh master, but because he seems to fear contamination from being so close to a Jew. Interestingly, although he calls Shylock a devil, Launcelot points out that his desire to leave is a temptation more devilish still, and says his desire to stay is a product of his conscience, which is generally a guide of what is right. Jessica, too, voices no real complaint about her father, other than the tedium of life with him, but she seems eager to escape her Jewish heritage, which she sees as a stain on her honor. Jessica even brings the morality of her own actions into question when she calls her shame at being Shylock's daughter a sin, and she feels enormous guilt at her own sentiments. Her desire to convert would undoubtedly have been applauded by Elizabethan audiences, but here it is expressed as a kind of young recklessness that borders on selfishness. The negative impression that Shylock has given us with his first appearance is somewhat counteracted by the words of those closest to him, who feel guilty even as they speak ill of him.

Summary: Act II, scene v

Shylock warns Launcelot that Bassanio will not be as lenient a master as Shylock himself has been, and that Launcelot will no longer be at liberty to overeat and oversleep. Shylock calls for Jessica and tells her that he has been summoned for dinner. Worried by a premonition that trouble is brewing, Shylock asks Jessica to keep the doors locked and not look out at the revelry taking place in the streets. Launcelot whispers to Jessica that she must disobey her father and look out the window for the Christian who "will be worth a Jew's eye" (II.v.41).

Shylock asks Jessica about her furtive conversation with Launcelot, and says that, though Launcelot is kind, he eats and sleeps too much to be an efficient, worthwhile servant. After Shylock has left to see Bassanio, Jessica bids him farewell, thinking that, if nothing goes wrong, Shylock will soon have lost a daughter, and she, a father.

Summary: Act II, scene vi

As planned, Gratiano and Salarino meet in front of Shylock's house. They are especially anxious because Lorenzo is late, and they think that lovers tend always to be early. The garrulous Gratiano expounds on Salarino's theory that love is at its best when the lover chases the object of his affection, and that once the lover captures his lady and consummates the relationship, he tends to tire and lose interest. Lorenzo joins them, apologizes for his tardiness, and calls up to Jessica, who appears on the balcony dressed as a page. Jessica tosses him a casket of gold and jewels. Jessica descends and exits with Lorenzo and Salarino. Just then, Antonio enters to report that Bassanio is sailing for Belmont immediately. Gratiano is obliged to leave the festivities and join Bassanio at once.

Summary: Act II, scene vii

Back in Belmont, Portia shows the prince of Morocco to the caskets, where he will attempt to win her hand by guessing which chest contains her portrait. The first casket, made of gold, is inscribed with the words, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" (II.vii.37). The second, made of silver, reads, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" (II.vii.23). The third, a heavy leaden casket, declares, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (II.vii.16). After much pondering, the prince chooses the gold casket, reasoning that only the most precious metal could house the picture of such a beautiful woman. He opens the chest to reveal a skull with a scroll in its eye socket. After reading a short poem chastising him for the folly of his choice, the prince makes a hasty departure. Portia is glad to see him go and hopes that "[a]ll of his complexion choose me so" (II.viii.79).

Summary: Act II, scene viii

Having witnessed Shylock's rage upon learning of Jessica's elopement, Solanio describes the scene to Salarino. Shylock, he reports, railed against the loss of his daughter and his ducats, and he shouted a loud, urgent appeal for justice and the law to prevail. Solanio hopes that Antonio is able to pay his debt, but Salarino reminds him of rumors that the long-awaited ships have capsized in the English Channel. The two men warmly remember Bassanio's departure from Antonio, wherein the merchant insisted that his young friend not allow thoughts of debt or danger to interfere with his courtship of Portia.

Summary: Act II, scene ix

The prince of Arragon is in Belmont to try his luck at winning Portia's hand in marriage. When brought to the caskets, he selects the silver one, confident that he "shall get as much as he deserves" (II.ix.35). Inside, he finds a portrait of a blinking idiot, and a poem that condemns him as a fool. Soon after he departs, a messenger arrives to tell Portia that a promising young Venetian, who seems like the perfect suitor, has come to Belmont to try his

luck at the casket game. Hoping that it is Bassanio, Portia and Nerissa go out to greet the new suitor.

Analysis: Act II, scenes v–ix

In these scenes, Shylock is again portrayed as a penny-pinching, but not wicked, master. Indeed, he seems to think himself quite lenient, and when he calls Launcelot lazy, this jibe seems likely to be an accurate description of the buffoonish retainer. Shylock's fear for his daughter and his distaste for the Venetian revelry paint him as a puritanical figure who respects order and the rule of law above all else, and who refuses to have "shallow fopp'ry" in his "sober house" (II.v.34–35). Shylock's rhetoric is distinctive: he tends to repeat himself and avoids the digressions common to other characters. As more than one critic has pointed out, he is characterized by a one-track mind.

Happily, Jessica and Lorenzo's romantic love triumphs, but a number of critics have pointed out the ambiguity in the scene of their elopement. The couple's love for one another is not in doubt, but Jessica's determination to bring a hefty store of treasure reminds us that she is still an alien, a Jew among gentiles, who may be insecure about her reception. Indeed, her shame at her boy's costume may reflect a deeper concern for her place in her husband's Christian society. Later, at Belmont, she will be all but ignored by everyone save Lorenzo, suggesting that despite her husband and her conversion, she remains a Jew in others' eyes.

The prince of Morocco's choice of the caskets is wrong, but his mistake is understandable, and we sympathize with him. There is something casually cruel about Portia's unwillingness to spare even a moment's pity for the Moor. Portia is a willful character—while her independence is often appealing, at other times she can seem terribly self-centered. She wants Bassanio as a husband and seems to have no regrets in seeing other suitors sentenced to a life of celibacy.

Salarino and Solanio are the least interesting characters in the play. They are indistinguishable from one another and serve primarily to fill us in on events that take place offstage—in this case, Shylock's reaction to his daughter's flight and the parting of Antonio and Bassanio. Shylock's cries of "My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!" are meant to be comic—the moneylender is, after all, a *comic* villain (II.viii.15). He bemoans the loss of his money as much as his loss of Jessica, suggesting that greed is as important to him as familial love. However, we cannot be sure that Shylock really reacted in this way, since we hear the story secondhand. Salarino and Solanio are poking fun at the Jew, and their testimony must be balanced by the concern that Shylock expresses for his daughter in the earlier scenes.

Arragon, a Spanish prince, completes the parade of nationalities competing for Portia. He lacks the nobility of the prince of Morocco, and his arrogance almost makes us feel that he deserves his punishment. His quick dismissal from the scene clears the way for Bassanio.

Summary: Act III, scene i

Salarino and Solanio discuss the rumors that yet another of Antonio's ships has been wrecked. They are joined by Shylock, who accuses them of having helped Jessica escape. The two Venetians proudly take credit for their role in Jessica's elopement. Shylock curses his daughter's rebellion, to which Salarino responds, "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory" (III.i.32–33). Salarino then asks Shylock whether he can confirm the rumors of Antonio's lost vessels. Shylock replies that Antonio will soon be bankrupt and swears to collect his bond. Salarino doubts Shylock's resolve, wondering what the old man will do with a pound of flesh, to which Shylock chillingly replies that Antonio's flesh will at least feed his revenge. In a short monologue, Shylock says Antonio has mistreated him solely because Shylock is a Jew, but now Shylock is determined to apply the lessons of hatred and revenge that Christian intolerance has taught him so well.

Salarino and Solanio head off to meet with Antonio, just as Tubal, a friend of Shylock's and a Jew, enters. Tubal announces that he cannot find Jessica. Shylock rants against his daughter, and he wishes her dead as he bemoans his losses. He is especially embittered when Tubal reports that Jessica has taken a ring—given to Shylock in his bachelor days by a woman named Leah, presumably Jessica's mother—and has traded that ring for a monkey. Shylock's spirits brighten, however, when Tubal reports that Antonio's ships have run into trouble and that Antonio's creditors are certain Antonio is ruined.

Summary: Act III, scene ii

In Belmont, Portia begs Bassanio to delay choosing between the caskets for a day or two. If Bassanio chooses incorrectly, Portia reasons, she will lose his company. Bassanio insists that he make his choice now, to avoid prolonging the torment of living without Portia as his wife. Portia orders that music be played while her love makes his choice, and she compares Bassanio to the Greek hero and demigod Hercules. Like the suitors who have come before him, Bassanio carefully examines the three caskets and puzzles over their inscriptions. He rejects the gold casket, saying that "[t]he world is still deceived with ornament" (III.ii.74), while the silver he deems a "pale and common drudge / 'Tween man and man" (III.ii.103–104). After much debate, Bassanio picks the lead casket, which he opens to reveal Portia's portrait, along with a poem congratulating him on his choice and confirming that he has won Portia's hand.

The happy couple promises one another love and devotion, and Portia gives Bassanio a ring that he must never part with, as his removal of it will signify the end of his love for her. Nerissa and Gratiano congratulate them and confess that they too have fallen in love with one another. They suggest a double wedding. Lorenzo and Jessica arrive in the midst of this rejoicing, along with Salarino, who gives a letter to Bassanio. In the letter, Antonio writes that all of his ships are lost, and that Shylock plans to collect his pound of flesh. The news provokes a fit of guilt in Bassanio, which in turn prompts Portia to offer to pay twenty times the sum. Jessica, however, worries that her father is more interested in revenge than in

money. Bassanio reads out loud the letter from Antonio, who asks only for a brief reunion before he dies. Portia urges her husband to rush to his friend's aid, and Bassanio leaves for Venice.

Analysis: Act III, scenes i–ii

The passage of time in *The Merchant of Venice* is peculiar. In Venice, the three months that Antonio has to pay the debt go by quickly, while only days seem to pass in Belmont. Shakespeare juggles these differing chronologies by using Salarino and Solanio to fill in the missing Venetian weeks.

As Antonio's losses mount, Shylock's villainous plan becomes apparent. "[L]et him look to his bond," he repeats single-mindedly (III.i.39–40). Despite his mounting obsession with the pound of Antonio's flesh, however, he maintains his dramatic dignity. In his scene with the pair of Venetians, he delivers the celebrated speech in which he cries, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions . . . ? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die?" (III.i.49–55). We are not meant to sympathize entirely with Shylock: he may have been wronged, but he lacks both mercy and a sense of proportion. His refusal to take pity on Antonio is later contrasted with the mercy shown him by the Christians. But even as we recognize that Shylock's plans are terribly wrong, we can appreciate the angry logic of his speech. By asserting his own humanity, he lays waste to the pretensions of the Christian characters to value mercy, charity, and love above self-interest.

Shylock's dignity lapses in his scene with Tubal, who keeps his supposed friend in agony by alternating between good and bad news. Shylock lurches from glee to despair and back, one moment crying, "I thank God, I thank God!" (III.i.86), and the next saying, "Thou stick'st a dagger in me" (III.i.92). But even here he rouses our sympathy, because we hear that Jessica stole a ring given to him by his late wife and traded it for a monkey. "It was my turquoise," Shylock says. "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (III.i.100–103). Villain though he may be, we can still feel sorrow that Jessica—who is suddenly a much less sympathetic character—would be heartless enough to steal and sell a ring that her dead mother gave her father.

Bassanio's successful choice seems inevitable and brings the drama of the caskets to an end. Bassanio's excellence is made clear in his ability to select the correct casket, and his choice brings the separated strands of the plot together. Portia, who is the heroine of the play—she speaks far more lines than either Antonio or Shylock—is free to bring her will and intelligence to bear on the problem of Shylock's pound of flesh. Once Lorenzo and Jessica arrive, the three couples are together in Belmont, but the shadow of Shylock hangs over their happiness.

Critics have noticed that Jessica is ignored by Portia and the others at Belmont. Her testimony against her father may be an attempt to prove her loyalty to the Christian cause, but the coldness of Portia, Bassanio, and the others is an understandable reaction—after all, she is a Jew and the daughter of their antagonist. Lorenzo may love her, but she remains an object of suspicion for the others

Summary: Act III, scene iii

Shylock escorts the bankrupt Antonio to prison. Antonio pleads with Shylock to listen, but Shylock refuses. Remembering the many times Antonio condemned him as a dog, Shylock advises the merchant to beware of his bite. Assured that the duke will grant him justice, Shylock insists that he will have his bond and tells the jailer not to bother speaking to him of mercy. Solanio declares that Shylock is the worst of men, and Antonio reasons that the Jew hates him for bailing out many of Shylock's debtors. Solanio attempts to comfort Antonio by suggesting that the duke will never allow such a ridiculous contract to stand, but Antonio is not convinced. Venice, Antonio claims, is a wealthy trading city with a great reputation for upholding the law, and if the duke breaks that law, Venice's economy may suffer. As Solanio departs, Antonio prays desperately that Bassanio will arrive to "see me pay his debt, and then I care not" (III.iii.36).

Summary: Act III, scene iv

Lorenzo assures Portia that Antonio is worthy of all the help she is sending him, and that if Portia only knew the depths of Antonio's love and goodness, she would be proud of her efforts to save him. Portia replies that she has never regretted doing a good deed, and goes on to say that she could never deny help to anyone so close to her dear Bassanio. Indeed, Antonio and Bassanio are so inseparable that Portia believes saving her husband's friend is no different than saving her own husband. She has sworn to live in prayer and contemplation until Bassanio returns to her, and announces that she and Nerissa will retire to a nearby monastery. Lorenzo and Jessica, she declares, will rule the estate in her absence

Portia then sends her servant, Balthasar, to Padua, where he is to meet her cousin, Doctor Bellario, who will provide Balthasar with certain documents and clothing. From there, Balthasar will take the ferry to Venice, where Portia will await him. After Balthasar departs, Portia informs Nerissa that the two of them, dressed as young men, are going to pay an incognito visit to their new husbands. When Nerissa asks why, Portia dismisses the question, but promises to disclose the whole of her purpose on the coach ride to Venice.

Summary: Act III, scene v

Quoting the adage that the sins of the father shall be delivered upon the children, Launcelot says he fears for Jessica's soul. When Jessica claims that she will be saved by her marriage to Lorenzo, Launcelot complains that the conversion of the Jews, who do not eat pork, will have disastrous consequences on the price of bacon. Lorenzo enters and chastises Launcelot for impregnating a Moorish servant. Launcelot delivers a dazzling series of puns in reply and departs to prepare for dinner. When Lorenzo asks Jessica what she thinks of Portia, she responds that the woman is without match, nearly perfect in all respects. Lorenzo jokes that he is as good a spouse as Portia, and leads them off to dinner.

Analysis: Act III, scenes iii–v

Once the play reaches Act III, scene iii, it is difficult to sympathize with Shylock. Whatever humiliations he has suffered at Antonio's hands are repaid when he sees the Christian

merchant in shackles. Antonio may have treated the moneylender badly, but Shylock's pursuit of the pound of flesh is an exercise in naked cruelty. In this scene, Shylock's narrowly focused rhetoric becomes monomaniacal in its obsession with the bond. "I'll have my bond. Speak not against my bond," (III.iii.4) he insists, and denies attempts at reason when he says, "I'll have no speaking. I will have my bond" (III.iii.17). When Antonio tells Solanio that Shylock is getting revenge for his practice of lending money without interest, he seems to miss the bigger picture. Shylock's mind has been warped into obsession not by Antonio alone, but by the persecutions visited on him by all of Christian Venice. He has taken Antonio as the embodiment of all his persecutors so that, in his pound of flesh, he can avenge himself against *everyone*.

The institution of law comes to the forefront of the play in these scenes, and we may be tempted to view the law as a sort of necessary evil, a dogmatic set of rules that can be forced to serve the most absurd requests. In the thirty-six lines that make up Act III, scene iii, Shylock alludes to revenge in only the vaguest of terms, but repeats the word "bond" no less than six times. He also frequently invokes the concept of justice. Law is cast as the very backbone of the Venetian economy, as Antonio expresses when he makes the grim statement that "[t]he duke cannot deny the course of law. . . . / . . . / Since that the trade and profit of the city / Consisteth of all nations" (III.iii.26–31). Trade is the city's lifeblood, and an integral part of trade is ensuring that merchants of all religions and nationalities are extended the same protections as full-blooded Venetian citizens. In principle, the duke's inability to bend the law is sound, as the law upholds the economy that has allowed Antonio and his friends to thrive. However, Shylock's furious rants about justice and his bond make it seem as if his very law-abiding nature has perverted a bastion of Christian uprightness.

Shylock remains in control of events in Venice, but Portia, his antagonist, is now moving against him. Her cross-dressing is a device typical of women in Shakespeare's comedies. Indeed, the play has already shown Jessica dressed as a boy in her escape from Shylock's house. Dressing as a man is necessary since Portia is about to play a man's part, appearing as member of a male profession. The demands placed upon her by her father's will are gone, and she feels free to act and to prove herself more intelligent and capable than the men around her.

The conversation between Jessica and Launcelot in Act III, scene v, does little to advance the plot. It acts as comic relief and conveys the impression of time passing while the various characters converge on the Venetian courtroom. Jessica's subsequent description of Portia's perfection to her husband is odd, given how little attention Portia paid to her, but Jessica recognizes that Portia is the center of the social world that she hopes to join.

Summary: Act IV, scene i, lines 1–163

. . . *[A]ffection,*

Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood

Of what it likes or loathes.

...

*So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
A losing suit against him. Are you answered?*

In Venice, the Court convenes for Antonio's trial. The duke of Venice greets Antonio and expresses pity for him, calling Shylock an inhuman monster who can summon neither pity nor mercy. Antonio says he knows the duke has done all that he can to lawfully counter Shylock's malicious intentions, and that since nothing else can be done, Antonio will respond to Shylock's rage "with a quietness of spirit" (IV.i.11). The duke summons Shylock into the courtroom and addresses him, saying that he believes that Shylock means only to frighten Antonio by extending this drama to the brink of performance. No one, the duke says, believes that Shylock actually means to inflict such a horrible penalty on Antonio, who has already suffered the loss of his ships. Shylock reiterates his intentions and says that should the court deny him his right, the city's very laws and freedoms will be forfeit. Shylock offers no explanation for his insistence other than to say that certain hatreds, like certain passions, are lodged deep within a person's heart. Shylock hates Antonio, and for him that is reason enough.

Bassanio, who has arrived from Belmont, attempts to argue with Shylock, but Antonio tells him that his efforts are for naught. Hatred and predation, Antonio suggests, come as naturally to some men as they do to the wolf. Bassanio offers Shylock six thousand ducats, twice the amount of the original loan, but Shylock turns down the offer, saying he would not forfeit his bond for six times that sum. When the duke asks Shylock how he expects to receive mercy when he offers none, Shylock replies that he has no need for mercy, as he has done nothing wrong. Just as the slave-owning Christians of Venice would refuse to set their human property free, Shylock will not relinquish the pound of flesh that belongs to him.

The duke says that he has sent messages to the learned lawyer, Doctor Bellario, asking him to come and decide on the matter. News comes that a messenger has arrived from Bellario, and Salarino runs off to fetch him. Meanwhile, Bassanio tries, without much success, to cheer up the despairing Antonio. Nerissa enters, disguised as a lawyer's clerk, and gives the duke a letter from Bellario. Shylock whets his knife, anticipating a judgment in his favor, and Gratiano accuses him of having the soul of a wolf. Shylock ignores these slurs and states resolutely, "I stand here for law" (IV.i.141). The duke alludes to the fact that Bellario's letter mentions a learned young lawyer named Balthasar, and orders the disguised Nerissa to admit the young man to the court. The duke then reads the letter in its entirety. In it, Bellario writes that he is ill and cannot come to court, but that he has sent the learned young Balthasar to judge in his stead.

*You will answer 'The slaves are ours.' So do I answer you.
The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought. 'Tis mine, and I will have it.*

Analysis

The trial scene is the longest in the play and stands as one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Shakespeare. A number of critics have raised questions about the accuracy and fairness of the courtroom proceedings: the presiding duke is far from impartial; Portia appears as an unbiased legal authority, when in fact she is married to the defendant's best friend; and she appears in disguise, under a false name. These points would seem to stack the deck against Shylock, but if the trial is not just, then the play is not just, and it ceases to be a comedy. Thus, while Portia bends the rules of the court, her decision is nonetheless legally accurate. More important for the cause of justice, the original bond was made under false pretenses—Shylock lied when he told Antonio that he would never collect the pound of flesh. Therefore, Portia's actions restore justice instead of pervert it.

The portion of the scene that passes before Portia's entrance shows a triumphant and merciless Shylock. When asked to explain his reasons for wanting Antonio's flesh, he says, "I am not bound to please thee with my answers" (IV.i.64). The only answer that the court gets, ultimately, is that Shylock merely emulates Christian behavior. Just as some Christians hate cats, pigs, and rats, Shylock hates Antonio. Just as some Christians own slaves, Shylock owns a pound of Antonio's flesh. Shylock has the law on his side, and his chief emotion seems to be outrage that Christian Venice would deny him what is rightfully his. Shylock is not so much attacking the Venetian worldview as demanding that he be allowed to share in it. His speech about slavery is emphatically *not* an antislavery diatribe: he is in favor of owning people, as long as he can own Antonio. In spite of itself, Venetian society is made an accomplice to Shylock's murderous demands, and while this complicity certainly does not exonerate Shylock, it has the almost equally desirable effect of bringing everyone else down with him. Shylock's intention is not to condemn the institution of slavery, and certainly not to urge its eradication—it is to express that his urges simply mirror those already found among wealthy Venetians, and to demand that his desires be greeted with the same respect.

The trial is not modeled on the English legal system. The duke presides and sentences, but a legal expert—in this case, Portia—renders the actual decision. This absolute power is appropriate for her character because she alone has the strength to wield it. None of the men seem a match for Shylock: Gratiano shouts and curses with anti-Semitic energy, Bassanio pleads uselessly, and Antonio seems resigned to his fate. Indeed, Antonio seems almost eager for his execution, saying, "I am a tainted wether of the flock, / Meetest for death" (IV.i.113–114). Antonio has been melancholy from the play's beginning, and now he has found a cause to suit his unhappiness. He may be the focus of Shylock's hate, but he is less an antagonist than a victim. It is left to Portia to put a stop to the moneylender and to restore the comedy—something in short supply in Shylock's courtroom—to the play.

Summary: Act IV, scene i, lines 164–396

Therefore, Jew,

Though justice be thy plea, consider this:

*That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. . . .*

Portia enters, disguised as Balthasar. The duke greets her and asks whether she is familiar with the circumstances of the case. Portia answers that she knows the case well, and the duke calls Shylock and Antonio before her. Portia asks Antonio if he admits to owing Shylock money. When Antonio answers yes, Portia concludes that the Jew must be merciful. Shylock asks why he must show mercy, and, in one of the play's most famous speeches, Portia responds that "[t]he quality of mercy is not strained," but is a blessing to both those who provide and those who receive it (IV.i.179). Because mercy is an attribute of God, Portia reasons, humans approach the divine when they exercise it. Shylock brushes aside her pretty speech, however, by reiterating his demands for justice and revenge.

Portia asks whether Antonio is able to pay the money, and Bassanio offers Shylock twice the sum owed. If need be, Bassanio says, he is willing to pay the bond ten times over, or with his own life. Bassanio begs the court to bend the law slightly in order to exonerate Antonio, reasoning that such a small infraction is a little wrong for a great right. Portia replies, however, that the law shall not be broken—the decrees of Venice must stand. Shylock joyfully extols Portia's wisdom, and gives her the bond for inspection. She looks it over, declares it legal and binding, and bids Shylock to be merciful. Shylock remains deaf to reason, however, and Portia tells Antonio to prepare himself for the knife. She orders Shylock to have a surgeon on hand to prevent the merchant from bleeding to death, but Shylock refuses because the bond stipulates no such safeguard.

Antonio bids Bassanio farewell. He asks his friend not to grieve for him and tells Bassanio that he is happy to sacrifice his life, if only to prove his love. Both Bassanio and Gratiano say that, though they love their wives, they would give them up in order to save Antonio. In a pair of sarcastic asides, Portia and Nerissa mutter that Bassanio's and Gratiano's wives are unlikely to appreciate such sentiments. Shylock is on the verge of cutting into Antonio when Portia suddenly reminds him that the bond stipulates a pound of flesh only, and makes no allowances for blood. She urges Shylock to continue collecting his pound of flesh, but reminds him that if a drop of blood is spilled, then he will be guilty of conspiring against the life of a Venetian citizen and all his lands and goods will be confiscated by the state. Stunned, Shylock hastily backpedals, agreeing to accept three times the sum, but Portia is insistent, saying that Shylock must have the pound of flesh or nothing. When Shylock finds out that he cannot even take the original three thousand ducats in place of the pound of flesh, he drops the case, but Portia stops him, reminding him of the penalty that noncitizens face when they threaten the life of a Venetian. In such a case, Portia states, half of Shylock's property would go to the state, while the other half would go to the offended party—namely, Antonio. Portia orders Shylock to beg for the duke's mercy.

The duke declares that he will show mercy: he spares Shylock's life and demands only a fine, rather than half of the Jew's estate. Shylock claims that they may as well take his life, as it is worthless without his estate. Antonio offers to return his share of Shylock's estate, on the condition that Shylock convert to Christianity and bequeath all his goods to Jessica and Lorenzo upon his death. Shylock consents and departs, saying simply, "I am not well" (IV.i.392).

Analysis

In the course of this section of Act IV, scene i, Portia not only releases Antonio from his bond, but effectively strips Shylock of both his religion and his livelihood, rendering him unable to inflict, or even threaten, further damage. This outcome is little surprising given that the circumstances of the trial seem designed to ensure Shylock's defeat. The genre of comedy demands that Shakespeare dispatch his villain before ushering in a happy ending. Indeed, Shakespeare's sixteenth-century audience never doubts Shylock's fate. Neither the duke, who begins proceedings by declaring Shylock an "inhuman wretch," nor the disguised Portia are impartial judges (IV.i.3). Shylock must fall, and fall he certainly does, but our response to witnessing his fall may be mixed. Audiences in Elizabethan England most likely met Shylock's demise with something like Gratiano's cruel and ecstatic glee. In a society that not only craved cultural homogeneity but took drastic measures to attain it, few would have been troubled by the implications of Shylock's forced conversion. Shakespeare's contemporaries, the majority of whom assumed that eternal damnation was the fate of any non-Christian, would have witnessed Shylock's conversion as a vital contribution to the play's happy ending. By turning Shylock into a Christian, the Venetians satisfy themselves with their own kindness in saving the soul of a heathen. Audiences today find laughing at Shylock to be much harder.

Many readers find it difficult to rejoice in Portia's victory. Ultimately, Shylock's pursuit of a strict letter-of-the-law brand of justice, which makes no allowance for anything that even approaches compassion, undoes him. He proves blind to everything other than the stipulations of his bond, refusing even to summon a doctor to attend to Antonio's wounds. But we may feel that the punishment Portia exacts is too heavy. Perhaps the court's verdict fits Shylock's crimes, but the court indulges in an equally literal and severe reading of the law in order to effect the same vicious end: the utter annihilation of a human being. Before doling out Shylock's punishment, the duke assures him that he will "see the difference of our spirit," but the spirit of the Venetians proves to be as vindictive as the Jew's (IV.i.363). The duke spares Shylock's life, but takes away his ability to practice his profession and his religion. In the course of the play, Shylock has lost his servant, his daughter, his fortune, and a treasured ring given to him by his dead wife. He will forfeit his estate to the man responsible for stealing his daughter, and he will abandon his religion for one that forbids him from practicing the trade by which he earns his livelihood. Modern audiences cannot help but view Shylock as a victim. He has become a tragic figure in a comedy that has no place for a character so complex.

Summary: Act IV, scene i, lines 397–453

After Shylock leaves, the duke invites Portia, still in the disguise of a young lawyer, to dinner. Portia declines, saying that she must leave immediately for Padua. As she leaves, the duke tells Antonio to reward the young law clerk, since it was he who saved Antonio's life. Bassanio thanks Portia, though he does not see through her disguise, and offers her the money he brought with him in order to pay off Shylock. Portia declines the gift and says that having delivered Antonio from Shylock's clutches is payment enough. Bassanio insists that she take some token from him, and she eventually agrees. Portia asks Antonio for his gloves and Bassanio for his ring, which she herself gave Bassanio on the condition that he never part with it. Bassanio pulls his hand away, calling the ring a trifle and claiming that he will not dishonor the judge by giving him such a lowly gift. Instead, Bassanio offers to find the most valuable ring in Venice, but Portia remains firm, and demands the trifle or nothing. When Bassanio admits that the ring was a gift from his wife, who made him promise never to part with it, Portia claims that the excuse is convenient and used by many men to hold onto possessions they would rather not lose. With that, she takes her leave. Antonio urges Bassanio to let the law clerk have the ring, saying that he should value Antonio's love and the gentleman's worth more than his wife's orders. Bassanio gives in and sends Gratiano to run after Portia and present her with the ring. Antonio and Bassanio then leave for Antonio's house to plan their trip to Belmont.

Summary: Act IV, scene ii

Meanwhile, Portia sends Nerissa to Shylock's house to ensure that Shylock signs the deed that will leave his fortune to Lorenzo and Jessica. Portia observes that Lorenzo will be happy to have this document. Once they complete this task, the disguised women plan to leave for Belmont, which will ensure their arrival a full day before their husbands'. Gratiano enters, offers Bassanio's ring to Portia, and invites her to dinner. Portia accepts the ring, but declines the invitation. Portia asks Gratiano to show Nerissa to Shylock's house, and Nerissa, before leaving, tells Portia that she will likewise try to convince Gratiano to part with his ring. The plan satisfies Portia, who imagines how Gratiano and Bassanio will swear up and down that they gave their rings to men, and looks forward to embarrassing them. Nerissa turns to Gratiano and asks him to lead her to Shylock's house.

Analysis: Act IV, scene i, lines 397–453; scene ii

By the end of Act IV, Shakespeare has resolved the play's two primary plots: the casket game has delivered to Portia her rightful suitor, and the threat presented by Shylock has been eliminated. Structurally, this resolution makes *The Merchant of Venice* atypical of Shakespeare's comedies, which usually feature a wedding as a means of dispelling evils from and restoring rightness to the world. Here, however, the lovers are already wed, and the aftertaste of Shylock's trial is rather bitter, especially to modern audiences. In order to sweeten his story, returning us to the unmistakable province of comedy, Shakespeare launches a third plot involving the exchange of the rings. Perhaps Shakespeare recognized the ambivalence with which we would greet Shylock's demise and felt the need to reassert simple joy over the dark dramas of Venice. Life in blissful Belmont depends upon it.

Many critics have noted that the character of Shylock necessitates this rather forced return to the comedic. As one of Shakespeare's most powerful and memorable creations, Shylock looms large over the play, and though he is not seen again after exiting the court, he remains lodged in our memory. In order for the lovers to enjoy a typically unadulterated happy ending, the angry, potentially victimized specter of Shylock must first be exorcised from the stage. The ring game is Shakespeare's means of reasserting levity. Many critics consider Shylock a character who "ran away" from the playwright. Shylock may have started out as a familiar character: a two-dimensional villain in the red fright wig that European Jews were once required to wear. However, he emerges as an extremely intelligent man who has suffered profound mistreatment. Shakespeare provides Shylock with motivation for his malice, which raises Shylock above the level of evildoing bogeyman and makes his passions, no matter how terrible, at least comprehensible. For this reason, few modern audiences cheer when the Venetian court destroys Shylock. Our response to the Jew's demise is likely to be much more complicated and ambivalent. The lovers' exchange of the rings helps reposition the play as a comedy.

In devising the game in which Bassanio sacrifices his wedding ring, Portia once again proves herself cleverer and more competent than any of the men with whom she shares the stage. The ring game tests the boundaries of the homoerotic relationship between Antonio and Bassanio, for Antonio claims that his friend's love for him should "[b]e valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (IV.i.447). Bassanio's willingness to part with the ring might signal a form of infidelity to his wife, but we feel little anxiety over it. Once Shylock makes his way offstage, the mood of the play is decidedly light. In other words, boundaries are tested, but they are not crossed. As the comedy genre demands, whatever wrongs have been committed will be forgiven summarily. When, at the end of Act IV, scene ii, Portia tells Nerissa that "we shall have old swearing / That they did give the rings away to men. / But we'll outface them, and outswear them too," we anticipate a frolicsome display of Portia's wit, not an untimely and costly battle of irreconcilable differences (IV.ii.15–17).

Summary: Act V, scene i

*The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stategems, and spoils.
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.*

In moonlit Belmont, Jessica and Lorenzo compare themselves to famous lovers from classical literature, like Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Dido and Aeneas. The couple goes back and forth with endless declarations of love, when a messenger suddenly interrupts them. The messenger informs them that Portia will soon return from the monastery, and Lorenzo and Jessica prepare to greet the mistress of the house. Launcelot enters and announces that Bassanio will return to Belmont the next day. Lorenzo calls for music, and he

and Jessica sit on a grassy bank beneath the stars. Lorenzo contemplates the music made by the movement of heavenly orbs, which mortal humans cannot hear while alive. The musicians arrive and begin to play, and Lorenzo decides that anyone who is not moved by music deserves the worst cruelties and betrayals.

Portia and Nerissa enter and hear the music before they reach the estate. Portia believes that the music is made more beautiful by the night, and the flickering candles lighting up her estate enchant her. She decides that the worth of things is determined largely by the context in which they are experienced. Lorenzo greets Portia, and she requests that he not mention her absence to her husband. Trumpets sound as Bassanio, Antonio, and Gratiano arrive. Portia greets Bassanio, who introduces her to Antonio, who reports in turn that he has been acquitted in the courts of Venice. Gratiano and Nerissa begin to argue over the ring with which he promised never to part. Nerissa chastises her husband not for hurting her feelings, but for breaking his own promise. Gratiano insists that he gave the ring to a lawyer's clerk as a fee, and Portia criticizes him for parting with so precious a gift, saying that her own husband would never have parted with his ring. Gratiano corrects her and reveals that Bassanio has, in fact, given his ring to the lawyer who saved Antonio. Portia declares that her husband's heart is as empty as his finger, and she promises never to visit his bed until he produces the ring.

Bassanio pleads with Portia to understand that he gave the ring to a worthy man to whom he was indebted, but Portia dismisses his reasoning, saying it is more likely that Bassanio gave the ring to another woman. Portia vows to be equally unfaithful, threatening to offer the same worthy man anything she owns, including her body or her husband's bed. Antonio intercedes on behalf of Bassanio and Gratiano, asking the women to accept his soul should either Bassanio or Gratiano prove unfaithful again. Portia and Nerissa relent, giving each of their husbands a ring and suggesting that they exercise more care in keeping these rings. Bassanio and Gratiano recognize these as the same rings they gave to the lawyer and his clerk, and Portia and Nerissa claim that they lay with the gentlemen in order to get back the rings. Before either Bassanio or Gratiano can become too upset at being cuckolded, however, Portia reveals that she was the lawyer in Venice, and Nerissa her clerk. Antonio receives news that some of his ships have miraculously arrived in port, and Lorenzo is told that he will inherit Shylock's fortune. The company rejoices in its collective good fortune.

Analysis

In comparison to the preceding trial scene, Act V is decidedly lighter in tone. The play delivers the happy ending required of a comedy: the lovers are restored to their loving relationships, Antonio's supposedly lost ships arrive miraculously in port, and no threatening presence looms in the distance to suggest that this happiness is only temporary. The idyllic quality of life in Belmont has led some critics to declare that *The Merchant of Venice* is a "fairy story" into which the dark and dramatic figure of Shylock trespasses. Certainly the language of the play returns to the realm of comedic romance after Shylock's departure. Before Shylock shocks the play with his morbid reality, Salarino is free to envision a

shipwreck as a lovely scattering of “spices on the stream” (I.i.33). Now that Shylock has been banished, Lorenzo imagines that the each star in the sky produces music as it moves, “choiring to the young-eyed cherubins” (V.i.61). In describing the “sweet power of music” to Jessica, Lorenzo claims that such sounds have the ability to tame even the wildest beasts (V.i.78). Thus, as the music plays on the hills of Belmont, the characters seem confident that the forces requiring taming—Shylock and his bloodlust—have been suppressed, leaving them to enjoy the “concord of sweet sounds” (V.i.83).

But if the play’s end seems reminiscent of a fairy tale, it is also likely to evoke some of the same ambivalence with which we greet Shylock’s demise. For example, Jessica and Lorenzo begin Act V by comparing themselves to a catalogue of famous lovers. They mean to place themselves in a pantheon of romantic figures whose love was so great that it inspired praise from generations of poets, but all of the lovers named—Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, Medea and Jason—end tragically. Newlyweds should not necessarily hope to take their place in this lineup, as it promises misunderstanding, betrayal, and death.

Shakespeare spares us such tragedy, but he does load the ending with misunderstanding and betrayal, albeit in a comic form. Portia and Nerissa work their husbands into a frenzy, but they also know when to stop. As soon as Bassanio declares himself a cuckold, Portia begs him to “[s]peak not so grossly” and unveils the means by which she secured his ring (V.i.265). Thus, Bassanio and Gratiano are folded back into their wives’ good graces. The play ends with Gratiano asserting that “while I live I’ll fear no other thing / So sore as keeping safe Nerissa’s ring” (V.i.305–306). The line suggests that he will not only safeguard the band of gold his wife gave him, but will also strive to keep her sexually satisfied so that she has no reason to cuckold him. But here, too, a shadow steals over the finale of celebratory reconciliation, for we wonder if Bassanio and Gratiano have what it takes to keep up with their wives. Nowhere in the play—not even when Bassanio chooses the correct casket—do the men come close to matching Portia’s wit or cleverness. Although Shakespeare leaves these issues offstage, we cannot help but feel that dangers have not so much been expelled from the world as kept at bay. Happiness reigns in Belmont, if only for the time being. As Portia approaches her estate to find a candle burning brightly, she notes with surprise, “How far that little candle throws his beams— / So shines a good deed in a naughty world” (V.i.89–90). Here, she frames a glimmer of light, of happiness or hope, as a surprisingly beautiful but always temporary condition in a dark and dangerous world. As far as happy endings go, perhaps we can ask for little more.

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/summary/>

REVISION QUESTIONS

- 1) Why does Antonio agree to Shylock’s terms for the loan?
- 2) Why does Shylock demand Antonio’s flesh instead of money?
- 3) Who does Bassanio give Portia’s ring to?
- 4) How does Bassanio win the right to marry Portia?
- 5) Why can’t Antonio pay back his loan?

VIII. A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

THEMES

Love's Difficulty

"The course of true love never did run smooth," comments Lysander, articulating one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* most important themes—that of the difficulty of love (I.i.134). Though most of the conflict in the play stems from the troubles of romance, and though the play involves a number of romantic elements, it is not truly a love story; it distances the audience from the emotions of the characters in order to poke fun at the torments and afflictions that those in love suffer. The tone of the play is so lighthearted that the audience never doubts that things will end happily, and it is therefore free to enjoy the comedy without being caught up in the tension of an uncertain outcome.

The theme of love's difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—that is, romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman, leaving one woman with too many suitors and one with too few. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome, and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers' tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship between Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon's coveting of Titania's Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later, Titania's passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

Magic

The fairies' magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander's eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play's tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom's head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen's attempt to stage their play.

Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (I.i.7–8). The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters are involved: "I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what / dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream," Bottom says, unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected him as anything but the result of slumber.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama.

Jealousy

The theme of jealousy operates in both the human and fairy realms in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Jealousy plays out most obviously among the quartet of Athenian lovers, who find themselves in an increasingly tangled knot of misaligned desire. Helena begins the play feeling jealous of Hermia, who has managed to snag not one but two suitors. Helena loves Demetrius, who in turn feels jealous of his rival for Hermia's affections, Lysander. When misplaced fairy mischief leads Lysander into an amorous pursuit of Helena, the event drives Hermia into her own jealous rage. Jealousy also extends into the fairy realm, where it has caused a rift between the fairy king and queen. As we learn in Act II, King Oberon and Queen Titania both have eyes for their counterparts in the human realm, Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of stealing away with "the bouncing Amazon" (II.i.). Oberon accuses Titania of hypocrisy, since she also loves another: "How canst thou thus for shame, Titania, / Glance at my credit with Hippolyta, / Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?" (II.i.). This jealous rift incites Oberon to command Puck to fetch the magic flower that eventually causes so much chaos and confusion for the Athenian lovers.

Mischief

In *Midsummer*, mischief is primarily associated with the forest and the fairies who reside there. Accordingly, the fairies of traditional British folklore are master mischief makers. The trickster fairy Puck (also known as Robin Goodfellow) is the play's chief creator of mischief. Puck's reputation as a troublemaker precedes him, as suggested in the first scene of Act II, where an unnamed fairy recognizes Puck and rhapsodizes about all the tricks Puck has played on unsuspecting humans. Although in the play Puck only retrieves and uses the magical flower at Oberon's request, his mistakes in implementing Oberon's plan have the most

chaotic effects. Puck also makes mischief of his own accord, as when he transforms Bottom's head into that of ass. Puck is also the only character who explicitly talks about his love of mischief. When in Act III he declares that "those things do best please me / That befall prepost'rously" (III.ii.), he effectively announces a personal philosophy of mischief and an appreciation for turning things on their head.

Transformation

Many examples of emotional and physical transformation occur in *Midsummer*. These transformations contribute to the play's humorous chaos, and also make its happy ending possible. Most of the transformations that take place in the play derive from fairy magic, specifically the magic of Puck. Perhaps the most obvious example is when Puck assists Oberon in placing a charm on Titania and two of the Athenian lovers in order to transform their affections. Instead of helping the lovers, Puck's meddling amplifies the tensions that already existed among them. Puck wreaks further havoc when he physically transforms Bottom, "translating" his head into the head of a donkey. Bottom's transformation inspires terror among Bottom's companions, who fear that his change bears the marks of a devil. Although these transformations initially stimulate conflict and fear, they ultimately help to restore order. By the end of the night, the Athenian lovers all end up in their proper pairings and are able to return safely to Athens. Likewise, after Titania awakens from her bizarre coupling with Bottom, she and Oberon are able to settle their quarrel. The many transformations therefore enable the play's happy ending.

Unreason

The many transformations that take place in *Midsummer* give rise to a temporary suspension of reason. As night progresses in the forest, things cease to make sense. For example, Hermia falls asleep near Lysander but then wakes to find him gone. When she eventually finds him again, Lysander does the verbal equivalent of spitting in Hermia's face: "Could not this make thee know / The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?" (III.ii.). Completely floored by the sudden reversal of Lysander's former love, Hermia senses a failure of reason: "You speak not as you think" (III.ii.). A more humorous version of unreason occurs when Bottom, recently crowned with the head of a donkey, finds himself nestling with Titania in her bower. Even though Bottom doesn't know about his physical transformation, he's self-aware enough to see the absurdity of the situation. When Titania professes her love for Bottom, he responds coolly: "Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that" (III.i.). By turns disturbing and amusing, these and other examples of unreason in the play function to amplify the chaos and confusion traditionally associated with fairies and the forest.

Reversal

Situations transform quickly into their opposites throughout the play. Most obviously, the charm Puck uses to transform the Athenian lovers' affections creates sudden reversals of love and hate, and these reversals result in a breakdown of reason. The sudden reversal of Lysander's affection for Hermia not only leaves his former lover stunned, but also shocks Helena, who suddenly finds herself being pursued by Lysander. All of the madcap foolery that plays out in the forest arises from Oberon's original idea to affect just one strategic

reversal. In Act II, when Oberon spies on Helena chasing after Demetrius, Helena comments that her pursuit reverses the natural order of things: “Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase. / The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind / Makes speed to catch the tiger.” (II.i.) According to Helena, this state of affairs creates “a scandal for my sex.” Hearing Helena, Oberon promises to reverse the reversal, thereby restoring order: “Ere he do leave this grove / Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love” (II.i.).

PLOT

Theseus, duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus’s court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia’s head if she flouts her father’s will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father’s wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander’s aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia’s friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince’s mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person’s eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania’s eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena’s love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in

the forest. When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

REFERENCE

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/msnd/summary/>

REVISION QUESTION

- 1) What is Egeus so upset about in the play's first scene?
- 2) Why do Peter Quince and his fellow craftsmen want to perform a play for Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding?
- 3) Why does Oberon order Puck to fetch the magic flower?
- 4) Why does Puck delight in causing chaos and confusion?
- 5) What causes the animosity between Hermia and Helena?

IX. AS YOU LIKE IT

SUMMARY

Sir Rowland de Bois has recently died, and, according to the custom of primogeniture, the vast majority of his estate has passed into the possession of his eldest son, Oliver. Although Sir Rowland has instructed Oliver to take good care of his brother, Orlando, Oliver refuses to do so. Out of pure spite, he denies Orlando the education, training, and property befitting a gentleman. Charles, a wrestler from the court of Duke Frederick, arrives to warn Oliver of a rumor that Orlando will challenge Charles to a fight on the following day. Fearing censure if he should beat a nobleman, Charles begs Oliver to intervene, but Oliver convinces the wrestler that Orlando is a dishonorable sportsman who will take whatever dastardly means necessary to win. Charles vows to pummel Orlando, which delights Oliver.

Duke Senior has been usurped of his throne by his brother, Duke Frederick, and has fled to the Forest of Ardenne, where he lives like Robin Hood with a band of loyal followers. Duke Frederick allows Senior's daughter, Rosalind, to remain at court because of her inseparable friendship with his own daughter, Celia. The day arrives when Orlando is scheduled to fight Charles, and the women witness Orlando's defeat of the court wrestler. Orlando and Rosalind

instantly fall in love with one another, though Rosalind keeps this fact a secret from everyone but Celia. Orlando returns home from the wrestling match, only to have his faithful servant Adam warn him about Oliver's plot against Orlando's life. Orlando decides to leave for the safety of Ardenne. Without warning, Duke Frederick has a change of heart regarding Rosalind and banishes her from court. She, too, decides to flee to the Forest of Ardenne and leaves with Celia, who cannot bear to be without Rosalind, and Touchstone, the court jester. To ensure the safety of their journey, Rosalind assumes the dress of a young man and takes the name Ganymede, while Celia dresses as a common shepherdess and calls herself Aliena.

Duke Frederick is furious at his daughter's disappearance. When he learns that the flight of his daughter and niece coincides with the disappearance of Orlando, the duke orders Oliver to lead the manhunt, threatening to confiscate Oliver's lands and property should he fail. Frederick also decides it is time to destroy his brother once and for all and begins to raise an army.

Duke Senior lives in the Forest of Ardenne with a band of lords who have gone into voluntary exile. He praises the simple life among the trees, happy to be absent from the machinations of court life. Orlando, exhausted by travel and desperate to find food for his starving companion, Adam, barges in on the duke's camp and rudely demands that they not eat until he is given food. Duke Senior calms Orlando and, when he learns that the young man is the son of his dear former friend, accepts him into his company. Meanwhile, Rosalind and Celia, disguised as Ganymede and Aliena, arrive in the forest and meet a lovesick young shepherd named Silvius who pines away for the disdainful Phoebe. The two women purchase a modest cottage, and soon enough Rosalind runs into the equally lovesick Orlando. Taking her to be a young man, Orlando confides in Rosalind that his affections are overpowering him. Rosalind, as Ganymede, claims to be an expert in exorcising such emotions and promises to cure Orlando of lovesickness if he agrees to pretend that Ganymede is Rosalind and promises to come woo her every day. Orlando agrees, and the love lessons begin.

Meanwhile, Phoebe becomes increasingly cruel in her rejection of Silvius. When Rosalind intervenes, disguised as Ganymede, Phoebe falls hopelessly in love with Ganymede. One day, Orlando fails to show up for his tutorial with Ganymede. Rosalind, reacting to her infatuation with Orlando, is distraught until Oliver appears. Oliver describes how Orlando stumbled upon him in the forest and saved him from being devoured by a hungry lioness. Oliver and Celia, still disguised as the shepherdess Aliena, fall instantly in love and agree to marry. As time passes, Phoebe becomes increasingly insistent in her pursuit of Ganymede, and Orlando grows tired of pretending that a boy is his dear Rosalind. Rosalind decides to end the charade. She promises that Ganymede will wed Phoebe, if Ganymede will ever marry a woman, and she makes everyone pledge to meet the next day at the wedding. They all agree.

The day of the wedding arrives, and Rosalind gathers the various couples: Phoebe and Silvius; Celia and Oliver; Touchstone and Audrey, a goatherd he intends to marry; and

Orlando. The group congregates before Duke Senior and his men. Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, reminds the lovers of their various vows, then secures a promise from Phoebe that if for some reason she refuses to marry Ganymede she will marry Silvius, and a promise from the duke that he would allow his daughter to marry Orlando if she were available. Rosalind leaves with the disguised Celia, and the two soon return as themselves, accompanied by Hymen, the god of marriage. Hymen officiates at the ceremony and marries Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Phoebe and Silvius, and Audrey and Touchstone. The festive wedding celebration is interrupted by even more festive news: while marching with his army to attack Duke Senior, Duke Frederick came upon a holy man who convinced him to put aside his worldly concerns and assume a monastic life. -Frederick changes his ways and returns the throne to Duke Senior. The guests continue dancing, happy in the knowledge that they will soon return to the royal court.

THEMES

The Delights of Love

As You Like It spoofs many of the conventions of poetry and literature dealing with love, such as the idea that love is a disease that brings suffering and torment to the lover, or the assumption that the male lover is the slave or servant of his mistress. These ideas are central features of the courtly love tradition, which greatly influenced European literature for hundreds of years before Shakespeare's time. In *As You Like It*, characters lament the suffering caused by their love, but these laments are all unconvincing and ridiculous. While Orlando's metrically incompetent poems conform to the notion that he should "live and die [Rosalind's] slave," these sentiments are roundly ridiculed (III.ii.142). Even Silvius, the untutored shepherd, assumes the role of the tortured lover, asking his beloved Phoebe to notice "the wounds invisible / That love's keen arrows make" (III.v.31-32). But Silvius's request for Phoebe's attention implies that the enslaved lover can loosen the chains of love and that all romantic wounds can be healed—otherwise, his request for notice would be pointless. In general, *As You Like It* breaks with the courtly love tradition by portraying love as a force for happiness and fulfillment and ridicules those who revel in their own suffering.

Celia speaks to the curative powers of love in her introductory scene with Rosalind, in which she implores her cousin to allow "the full weight" of her love to push aside Rosalind's unhappy thoughts (I.ii.6). As soon as Rosalind takes to Ardenne, she displays her own copious knowledge of the ways of love. Disguised as Ganymede, she tutors Orlando in how to be a more attentive and caring lover, counsels Silvius against prostrating himself for the sake of the all-too-human Phoebe, and scolds Phoebe for her arrogance in playing the shepherd's disdainful love object. When Rosalind famously insists that "[m]en have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love," she argues against the notion that love concerns the perfect, mythic, or unattainable (IV.i.91-92). Unlike Jaques and Touchstone, both of whom have keen eyes and biting tongues trained on the follies of romance, Rosalind does not mean to disparage love. On the contrary, she seeks to teach a version of love that not only can survive in the real world, but can bring delight as well. By the end of the play, having successfully orchestrated four marriages and ensured the happy

and peaceful return of a more just government, Rosalind proves that love is a source of incomparable delight.

The Malleability of the Human Experience

In Act II, scene vii, Jaques philosophizes on the stages of human life: man passes from infancy into boyhood; becomes a lover, a soldier, and a wise civic leader; and then, year by year, becomes a bit more foolish until he is returned to his “second childishness and mere oblivion” (II.vii.164). Jaques’s speech remains an eloquent commentary on how quickly and thoroughly human beings can change, and, indeed, *do* change in *As You Like It*. Whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually, those who enter the Forest of Ardenne are often remarkably different when they leave. The most dramatic and unmistakable change, of course, occurs when Rosalind assumes the disguise of Ganymede. As a young man, Rosalind demonstrates how vulnerable to change men and women truly are. Orlando, of course, is putty in her hands; more impressive, however, is her ability to manipulate Phoebe’s affections, which move from Ganymede to the once despised Silvius with amazing speed.

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare dispenses with the time--consuming and often hard-won processes involved in change. The characters do not struggle to become more pliant—their changes are instantaneous. Oliver, for instance, learns to love both his brother Orlando and a disguised Celia within moments of setting foot in the forest. Furthermore, the vengeful and ambitious Duke Frederick abandons all thoughts of fratricide after a single conversation with a religious old man. Certainly, these transformations have much to do with the restorative, almost magical effects of life in the forest, but the consequences of the changes also matter in the real world: the government that rules the French duchy, for example, will be more just under the rightful ruler Duke Senior, while the class structures inherent in court life promise to be somewhat less rigid after the courtiers sojourn in the forest. These social reforms are a clear improvement and result from the more private reforms of the play’s characters. *As You Like It* not only insists that people can and do change, but also celebrates their ability to change for the better.

City Life Versus Country Life

Pastoral literature thrives on the contrast between life in the city and life in the country. Often, it suggests that the oppressions of the city can be remedied by a trip into the country’s therapeutic woods and fields, and that a person’s sense of balance and rightness can be restored by conversations with uncorrupted shepherds and shepherdesses. This type of restoration, in turn, enables one to return to the city a better person, capable of making the most of urban life. Although Shakespeare tests the bounds of these conventions—his shepherdess Audrey, for instance, is neither articulate nor pure—he begins *As You Like It* by establishing the city/country dichotomy on which the pastoral mood depends. In Act I, scene i, Orlando rails against the injustices of life with Oliver and complains that he “know[s] no wise remedy how to avoid it” (I.i.20–21). Later in that scene, as Charles relates the whereabouts of Duke Senior and his followers, the remedy is clear: “in the forest of Ardenne . . . many young gentlemen . . . fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world” (I.i.99–103). Indeed, many are healed in the forest—the lovesick are coupled with their lovers

and the usurped duke returns to his throne—but Shakespeare reminds us that life in Ardenne is a temporary affair. As the characters prepare to return to life at court, the play does not laud country over city or vice versa, but instead suggests a delicate and necessary balance between the two. The simplicity of the forest provides shelter from the strains of the court, but it also creates the need for urban style and sophistication: one would not do, or even matter, without the other.

REFERENCE

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/asyoulikeit>

REVISION QUESTION

1. By putting on male clothes and adopting a masculine swagger, Rosalind easily passes as a man throughout the better part of the play. What does her behavior suggest about gender? Does the play imply that notions of gender are fixed or fluid? Explain
2. Discuss *As You Like It* as an example of pastoral literature. What features of the pastoral mode lend themselves to social criticism? What, if anything, does Shakespeare's play criticize?
3. Throughout the play, we find numerous allusions to cuckoldry. In a play that celebrates love and ends with four marriages, what purpose might these allusions serve?

UNIT – V - SHAKESPEARE – I (SHS1208)

X. THE TEMPEST

SUMMARY

A storm strikes a ship carrying Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are on their way to Italy after coming from the wedding of Alonso's daughter, Claribel, to the prince of Tunis in Africa. The royal party and the other mariners, with the exception of the unflappable Boatswain, begin to fear for their lives. Lightning cracks, and the mariners cry that the ship has been hit. Everyone prepares to sink.

The next scene begins much more quietly. Miranda and Prospero stand on the shore of their island, looking out to sea at the recent shipwreck. Miranda asks her father to do anything he can to help the poor souls in the ship. Prospero assures her that everything is all right and then informs her that it is time she learned more about herself and her past. He reveals to her that he orchestrated the shipwreck and tells her the lengthy story of her past, a story he has often started to tell her before but never finished. The story goes that Prospero was the Duke of Milan until his brother Antonio, conspiring with Alonso, the King of Naples, usurped his position. Kidnapped and left to die on a raft at sea, Prospero and his daughter survive because Gonzalo leaves them supplies and Prospero's books, which are the source of his magic and power. Prospero and his daughter arrived on the island where they remain now and have been for twelve years. Only now, Prospero says, has Fortune at last sent his enemies his way, and he has raised the tempest in order to make things right with them once and for all.

After telling this story, Prospero charms Miranda to sleep and then calls forth his familiar spirit Ariel, his chief magical agent. Prospero and Ariel's discussion reveals that Ariel brought the tempest upon the ship and set fire to the mast. He then made sure that everyone got safely to the island, though they are now separated from each other into small groups. Ariel, who is a captive servant to Prospero, reminds his master that he has promised Ariel freedom a year early if he performs tasks such as these without complaint. Prospero chastises Ariel for protesting and reminds him of the horrible fate from which he was rescued. Before Prospero came to the island, a witch named Sycorax imprisoned Ariel in a tree. Sycorax died, leaving Ariel trapped until Prospero arrived and freed him. After Ariel assures Prospero that he knows his place, Prospero orders Ariel to take the shape of a sea nymph and make himself invisible to all but Prospero.

Miranda awakens from her sleep, and she and Prospero go to visit Caliban, Prospero's servant and the son of the dead Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero, and Prospero and Miranda berate him for being ungrateful for what they have given and taught him. Prospero sends Caliban to fetch firewood. Ariel, invisible, enters playing music and leading in the awed Ferdinand. Miranda and Ferdinand are immediately smitten with each other. He is the only man Miranda has ever seen, besides Caliban and her father. Prospero is happy to see that his plan for his daughter's future marriage is working, but decides that he must upset things temporarily in order to prevent their relationship from developing too quickly. He accuses Ferdinand of merely pretending to be the Prince of Naples and threatens him with

imprisonment. When Ferdinand draws his sword, Prospero charms him and leads him off to prison, ignoring Miranda's cries for mercy. He then sends Ariel on another mysterious mission.

On another part of the island, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and other miscellaneous lords give thanks for their safety but worry about the fate of Ferdinand. Alonso says that he wishes he never had married his daughter to the prince of Tunis because if he had not made this journey, his son would still be alive. Gonzalo tries to maintain high spirits by discussing the beauty of the island, but his remarks are undercut by the sarcastic sourness of Antonio and Sebastian. Ariel appears, invisible, and plays music that puts all but Sebastian and Antonio to sleep. These two then begin to discuss the possible advantages of killing their sleeping companions. Antonio persuades Sebastian that the latter will become ruler of Naples if they kill Alonso. Claribel, who would be the next heir if Ferdinand were indeed dead, is too far away to be able to claim her right. Sebastian is convinced, and the two are about to stab the sleeping men when Ariel causes Gonzalo to wake with a shout. Everyone wakes up, and Antonio and Sebastian concoct a ridiculous story about having drawn their swords to protect the king from lions. Ariel goes back to Prospero while Alonso and his party continue to search for Ferdinand.

Caliban, meanwhile, is hauling wood for Prospero when he sees Trinculo and thinks he is a spirit sent by Prospero to torment him. He lies down and hides under his cloak. A storm is brewing, and Trinculo, curious about but undeterred by Caliban's strange appearance and smell, crawls under the cloak with him. Stephano, drunk and singing, comes along and stumbles upon the bizarre spectacle of Caliban and Trinculo huddled under the cloak. Caliban, hearing the singing, cries out that he will work faster so long as the "spirits" leave him alone. Stephano decides that this monster requires liquor and attempts to get Caliban to drink. Trinculo recognizes his friend Stephano and calls out to him. Soon the three are sitting up together and drinking. Caliban quickly becomes an enthusiastic drinker, and begins to sing.

Prospero puts Ferdinand to work hauling wood. Ferdinand finds his labor pleasant because it is for Miranda's sake. Miranda, thinking that her father is asleep, tells Ferdinand to take a break. The two flirt with one another. Miranda proposes marriage, and Ferdinand accepts. Prospero has been on stage most of the time, unseen, and he is pleased with this development.

Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban are now drunk and raucous and are made all the more so by Ariel, who comes to them invisibly and provokes them to fight with one another by impersonating their voices and taunting them. Caliban grows more and more fervent in his boasts that he knows how to kill Prospero. He even tells Stephano that he can bring him to where Prospero is sleeping. He proposes that they kill Prospero, take his daughter, and set Stephano up as king of the island. Stephano thinks this a good plan, and the three prepare to set off to find Prospero. They are distracted, however, by the sound of music that Ariel plays on his flute and tabor-drum, and they decide to follow this music before executing their plot.

Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio grow weary from traveling and pause to rest. Antonio and Sebastian secretly plot to take advantage of Alonso and Gonzalo's exhaustion, deciding to kill them in the evening. Prospero, probably on the balcony of the stage and invisible to the men, causes a banquet to be set out by strangely shaped spirits. As the men prepare to eat, Ariel appears like a harpy and causes the banquet to vanish. He then accuses the men of supplanting Prospero and says that it was for this sin that Alonso's son, Ferdinand, has been taken. He vanishes, leaving Alonso feeling vexed and guilty.

Prospero now softens toward Ferdinand and welcomes him into his family as the soon-to-be-husband of Miranda. He sternly reminds Ferdinand, however, that Miranda's "virgin-knot" (IV.i.15) is not to be broken until the wedding has been officially solemnized. Prospero then asks Ariel to call forth some spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. The spirits assume the shapes of Ceres, Juno, and Iris and perform a short masque celebrating the rites of marriage and the bounty of the earth. A dance of reapers and nymphs follows but is interrupted when Prospero suddenly remembers that he still must stop the plot against his life. He sends the spirits away and asks Ariel about Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban. Ariel tells his master of the three men's drunken plans. He also tells how he led the men with his music through prickly grass and briars and finally into a filthy pond near Prospero's cell. Ariel and Prospero then set a trap by hanging beautiful clothing in Prospero's cell. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban enter looking for Prospero and, finding the beautiful clothing, decide to steal it. They are immediately set upon by a pack of spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds, driven on by Prospero and Ariel.

Prospero uses Ariel to bring Alonso and the others before him. He then sends Ariel to bring the Boatswain and the mariners from where they sleep on the wrecked ship. Prospero confronts Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian with their treachery, but tells them that he forgives them. Alonso tells him of having lost Ferdinand in the tempest and Prospero says that he recently lost his own daughter. Clarifying his meaning, he draws aside a curtain to reveal Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. Alonso and his companions are amazed by the miracle of Ferdinand's survival, and Miranda is stunned by the sight of people unlike any she has seen before. Ferdinand tells his father about his marriage.

Ariel returns with the Boatswain and mariners. The Boatswain tells a story of having been awakened from a sleep that had apparently lasted since the tempest. At Prospero's bidding, Ariel releases Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano, who then enter wearing their stolen clothing. Prospero and Alonso command them to return it and to clean up Prospero's cell. Prospero invites Alonso and the others to stay for the night so that he can tell them the tale of his life in the past twelve years. After this, the group plans to return to Italy. Prospero, restored to his dukedom, will retire to Milan. Prospero gives Ariel one final task—to make sure the seas are calm for the return voyage—before setting him free. Finally, Prospero delivers an epilogue to the audience, asking them to forgive him for his wrongdoing and set him free by applauding.

Protagonist

Although *The Tempest* features many characters with their own plots and desires, Prospero is the main protagonist. Prospero sets the events of the play in motion by conjuring the terrible tempest that shipwrecks his enemies. The violence of the tempest indicates the magnitude of Prospero's rage. After setting things in motion with the tempest, Prospero goes on to orchestrate all of the characters' movements throughout the rest of the play. He starts by instructing his servant Ariel to place the castaways on three different parts of the island. Also with Ariel's help, Prospero disorients the different groups of men, making them feel lost and helpless. He keeps up his manipulations of the island's new inhabitants until the final act of the play, when he leads them all to the same place for the final scene of confrontation and reconciliation. The control he exerts over all other characters makes Prospero something even more than the play's protagonist; he's also a master manipulator, much like a puppeteer.

Prospero's desire for revenge drives his manipulation of others. He manipulates the stranded characters in numerous ways. In separating the castaways Prospero makes each group believe the others have perished. This mistaken belief makes several plot points possible. Ferdinand, who believes he alone survived, is ready to pledge himself to Prospero and fall in love with Miranda. Alonso, who believes his son has died, loses all hope, which inspires Antonio and Sebastian to plot his assassination. Prospero also subtly manipulates Miranda into falling in love with Ferdinand as a part of his grand plan to resolve his conflict with Alonso. He hopes the union of their children will help heal the wound between them. What Prospero wants more than anything else is reconciliation. And reconciliation is precisely what he gets in the final act. With peaceful relations restored with Alonso and his men, Prospero gives up on magic and prepares for his return to power in Milan. The play, which begins with a violent tempest and concludes with calm celebration, parallels the trajectory of Prospero's character arc. Whereas he starts off seething with rage and vengefulness, he eventually calms down and sets the stage for emotional appeasement.

What Does the Ending Mean?

The Tempest ends with a general sense of resolution and hope. After four acts in which Prospero uses magic to split up, disorient, and psychologically torture his enemies, in the final act he lures everyone to the same spot on the island and forgives Alonso and Antonio for their betrayal twelve years prior. The main event that heals the wounds of the past is the union between Miranda and Ferdinand. Alonso, who thought his son had died in the shipwreck, feels completely renewed when he sees that Ferdinand has, in fact, survived. Ferdinand's engagement to Miranda establishes a bond of kinship between Alonso and Prospero, further bridging that rift that separates them. Miranda and Ferdinand's union suggests the possibility for a new future, devoid of the kind of conflict that has driven the play. Miranda articulates this possibility for a new future when she expresses a sense of wonder at the "brave new world" (Vi.i) that has opened up for her. With the major conflict between Prospero and Alonso resolved, Prospero breaks his staff and gives up magic in preparation for his return to Milan.

Despite the resolution of the main conflict, the end of Shakespeare's play also plants the seeds for possible future conflict. Miranda and Ferdinand's engagement may help bring an end to the conflict of the previous generation, but a disagreement that arises during their game of chess in the final act suggests that new conflicts may hover on the horizon. First of all, the very fact that they are playing chess may bode ill. Chess is a game about regicide, meaning the assassination of a king. Given that the central conflict of *The Tempest* arose from the attempted assassination of Prospero while he was Duke of Milan, it seems striking that Miranda and Ferdinand would play a game that repeats the narrative of assassination—even if only metaphorically. Even more foreboding is Miranda's accusation that Ferdinand has cheated: "Sweet lord, you play me false" (V.i.). Cheating in a game is not as serious as political betrayal. Nevertheless, it remains disconcerting that the sense of a new beginning that arises at the end of the play should be tinged with dishonesty. Will the next generation repeat the sins of the past?

REFERENCE

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare>

REVISION QUESTION

- 1) Why was Prospero banished?
- 2) Who is Ariel and why does he work for Prospero?
- 3) Why does Caliban hate Prospero and Miranda?
- 4) How does Prospero manipulate Alonso and his company?
- 5) Why does Prospero give up magic?

XI. THE WINTER'S TALE

SUMMARY

King Leontes of Sicilia begs his childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, to extend his visit to Sicilia. Polixenes protests that he has been away from his kingdom for nine months, but after Leontes's pregnant wife, Hermione, pleads with him he relents and agrees to stay a little longer. Leontes, meanwhile, has become possessed with jealousy—convinced that Polixenes and Hermione are lovers, he orders his loyal retainer, Camillo, to poison the Bohemian king. Instead, Camillo warns Polixenes of what is afoot, and the two men flee Sicilia immediately.

Furious at their escape, Leontes now publicly accuses his wife of infidelity, and declares that the child she is bearing must be illegitimate. He throws her in prison, over the protests of his nobles, and sends to the Oracle of Delphi for what he is sure will be confirmation of his suspicions. Meanwhile, the queen gives birth to a girl, and her loyal friend Paulina brings the baby to the king, in the hopes that the sight of the child will soften his heart. He only grows

angrier, however, and orders Paulina's husband, Lord Antigonus, to take the child and abandon it in some desolate place. While Antigonus is gone, the answer comes from Delphi—Hermione and Polixenes are innocent, and Leontes will have no heir until his lost daughter is found. As this news is revealed, word comes that Leontes's son, Mamillius, has died of a wasting sickness brought on by the accusations against his mother. Hermione, meanwhile, falls in a swoon, and is carried away by Paulina, who subsequently reports the queen's death to her heartbroken and repentant husband.

Antigonus, meanwhile, abandons the baby on the Bohemian coast, reporting that Hermione appeared to him in a dream and bade him name the girl Perdita and leave gold and other tokens on her person. Shortly thereafter, Antigonus is killed by a bear, and Perdita is raised by a kindly Shepherd. Sixteen years pass, and the son of Polixenes, Prince Florizel, falls in love with Perdita. His father and Camillo attend a sheepshearing in disguise and watch as Florizel and Perdita are betrothed—then, tearing off the disguise, Polixenes intervenes and orders his son never to see the Shepherd's daughter again. With the aid of Camillo, however, who longs to see his native land again, Florizel and Perdita take ship for Sicilia, after using the clothes of a local rogue, Autolycus, as a disguise. They are joined in their voyage by the Shepherd and his son, a Clown, who are directed there by Autolycus.

In Sicilia, Leontes—still in mourning after all this time—greet the son of his old friend effusively. Florizel pretends to be on a diplomatic mission from his father, but his cover is blown when Polixenes and Camillo, too, arrive in Sicilia. What happens next is told to us by gentlemen of the Sicilian court: the Shepherd tells everyone his story of how Perdita was found, and Leontes realizes that she is his daughter, leading to general rejoicing. The entire company then goes to Paulina's house in the country, where a statue of Hermione has been recently finished. The sight of his wife's form makes Leontes distraught, but then, to everyone's amazement, the statue comes to life—it is Hermione, restored to life. As the play ends, Paulina and Camillo are engaged, and the whole company celebrates the miracle.

Analysis

The Winter's Tale is a perfect tragicomedy. Set in an imaginary world where Bohemia has a seacoast, and where ancient Greek oracles coexist with Renaissance sculptors, it offers three acts of unrelenting tragedy, followed by two acts of restorative comedy. In between, sixteen years pass hastily, a lapse which many critics have taken as a structural flaw, but which actually only serves to highlight the disparity of theme, setting, and action between the two halves of the play. The one is set amid gloomy winter, and illuminates the destructive power that mistaken jealousy exercises over the family of Leontes, King of Sicilia; in the second half, flower-strewn spring intervenes, and all the damage that the King's folly accomplished is undone—through coincidence, goodwill, and finally through miracle, as a statue of his dead wife comes to life and embraces him.

As the force behind the tragedy stems from Leontes's belief that his wife, Hermione, and best friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, are lovers, so Leontes has attracted more critical interest than any other character in the play. An Othello who is his own Iago, he is a perfect

paranoiac, convinced that he has all the facts and ready to twist any counter-argument to fit his (mistaken) perception of the world. Perhaps because of its uncertain origin, Leontes's madness is a terrifying thing: he becomes a poet of nihilism, demanding, when told that there is "nothing" between Hermione and Polixenes, "Is this nothing? / Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing, / The covering sky's nothing, Bohemia nothing, / My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings, / If this be nothing"(I.ii.292-296). The roots of his jealousy seem to run too deep for the play to plumb—there are hints of misogyny, of dynastic insecurity, and of an inability to truly separate himself psychologically from Polixenes, but no definitive answers. Indeed, the only answer is his own—in one of Shakespeare's finer images, Leontes says "I have drunk, and seen the spider"(II.i.45).

To balance his morbid, brooding nihilism and sexual jealousy, Shakespeare makes Leontes's daughter Perdita a poet of spring, rebirth, and revitalization, whose own lover (Polixenes's son Florizel) is as constant and generous as Leontes is suspicious and cruel. She appears decked in flowers, and when she dispenses them to everyone around her, the play links her with Proserpina, Roman goddess of the spring and growing things. If Leontes is a tragic hero, then she is a fairy-tale heroine, a princess reared among commoners who falls in love with a prince and—eventually—lives happily ever after. Leontes casts her out as an infant in Act III, when he is in the grip of darkness; in Act V she returns to him, and restores him to happiness. The miracle of Hermione's resurrection at the play's close is only a fitting close to the spirit of rebirth that Perdita brings into the story.

The play is also notable for its rich group of supporting characters. Hermione is an exemplary and eloquent figure, despite the fact that she spends the play defending herself against unjust accusations, and her friend Paulina is the voice of sanity while Leontes is mad and then the voice of reminder and penance once he regrets his crimes. The rustic Shepherd who takes in Perdita and the ever-faithful lord, Camillo are both sympathetic characters, too, but none can match Autolycus, the peddler, thief and minstrel who is a harmless villain (he robs, lies, and cheats)—so harmless, in fact, that the audience forgives and even applauds him as he sings, dances, and robs his way through the play, contriving even to find time to provide a helping hand to the other characters as they struggle toward their happy ending.

REFERENCE

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/winterstale>

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss and analyze Leontes's jealousy.
2. Discuss the changes in mood, plot and imagery that occur between Act I-III and Act IV-V.
3. Discuss the resurrection scene. Is the apparent miracle real?

XII. CYMBELINE

SUMMARY

Imogen, the daughter of the British king Cymbeline, goes against her father's wishes and marries a lowborn gentleman, Posthumus, instead of his oafish stepson, Cloten. Cloten is the son of Cymbeline's new Queen, a villainous woman who has made the king her puppet. Cymbeline sends Posthumus into exile in Italy, where he encounters a smooth-tongued Italian named Iachimo. Iachimo argues that all women are naturally unchaste, and he makes a wager with Posthumus that he will be able to seduce Imogen. He goes to the British court and, failing in his initial attempt to convince the princess to sleep with him, resorts to trickery: He hides in a large chest and has it sent to her room; that night he slips out, observes her sleeping, and steals a bracelet that Posthumus once gave to her.

Cloten, meanwhile, continues to pursue Imogen, but she rebuffs him harshly. He becomes furious and vows revenge, while she worries over the loss of her bracelet. In the meantime, Iachimo has returned to Italy, and, displaying the stolen bracelet and an intimate knowledge of the details of Imogen's bedchamber, convinces Posthumus that he won the bet. Posthumus, furious at being betrayed by his wife, sends a letter to Britain ordering his servant, Pisanio, to murder Imogen. But Pisanio believes in Imogen's innocence, and he convinces her to disguise herself as a boy and go search for her husband, while he reports to Posthumus that he has killed her.

Imogen, however, soon becomes lost in the wilds of Wales, and she comes upon a cave where Belarius, an unjustly banished nobleman, lives with his two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus. In fact, the two young men are not his sons but Cymbeline's; Belarius has kidnapped them to avenge his banishment, though they themselves are ignorant of their true parentage. They welcome Imogen, who is still dressed as a boy. Meanwhile, Cloten appears, having come in pursuit of Imogen; he fights a duel with Guiderius, who kills him. Imogen, feeling ill, drinks a potion the queen has given her. Although the queen told her it was medicinal, the queen herself believed it to be a poison. However, the draught merely induces a deep sleep that resembles death. Belarius and his adoptive sons come upon Imogen and, heart-broken, lay her body beside that of the slain Cloten. Awaking after they have left the scene, she mistakes the body of Cloten for that of Posthumus, and she sinks into despair. A Roman army has invaded Britain, seeking the restoration of a certain tribute Britain has ceased to pay. (A "tribute" here is a payment given to one nation by another in return for a promise of non-aggression.) The disguised Imogen hires herself out to them as a page.

Posthumus and Iachimo are traveling with the Roman army, but Posthumus switches to the garb of a British peasant and fights valiantly for Britain. Indeed, in his combat he actively seeks death: He believes his servant to have carried out his orders and killed Imogen, and he regrets his actions. The Romans are defeated, thanks to the intervention of Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, and Posthumus, still trying to punish himself, switches back to Roman garb and allows himself to be taken prisoner. That night, the god Jupiter promises the

spirits of Posthumus's dead ancestors that he will care for their descendant. The next day, Cymbeline calls the prisoners before him, and the confusion is sorted out. Posthumus and Imogen are reunited, and they forgive a contrite Iachimo, who confesses his deception. The identity of Guiderius and Arviragus is revealed, Belarius is forgiven, and the Queen dies, leaving the king free of her evil influence. As a final gesture, Cymbeline frees the Roman prisoners and even agrees to resume paying the tribute.

Overall Analysis

Cymbeline is not, to put it charitably, one of Shakespeare's finest plays. The language, while sometimes rich, is often clumsy, and the mediocrity of certain scenes (notably that witnessing the bizarre appearance of Jupiter in V.iv), have led a number of critics to suggest that the Bard collaborated with a less talented playwright in writing this play. The work does feature a number of excellent characters, including the wonderful and almost perfect Imogen and the entertaining Iachimo, but the title character, Cymbeline himself, is never developed or analyzed, and most of the supporting cast lacks depth. Imogen's husband, Posthumus, has an unfinished air about him; his character is at once difficult to make sense of and utterly unlikable, and he is manifestly unworthy of his wonderful bride. Structurally, the various scattered subplots effect incoherency, and they only find integration in the final scene, while major characters disappear from the action for extended periods of time--notably Posthumus, although his absence from the middle of the play may be considered a blessing.

Cymbeline often feels like a deliberate pastiche, in which the aging Shakespeare revisits various elements of his earlier plays, albeit in a less impressive form. The Cymbeline-Imogen relationship invokes Lear and Cordelia in *King Lear*, but while Imogen may be Cordelia's equal, Cymbeline is a nonentity. Iachimo's deceptions (not to mention his name) call to mind Iago's machinations in *Othello*, but this scoundrel, while zestful, hardly achieves Iago's level of villainy. Similarly, the petty Posthumus is never more than a mere parody of the raging Othello. The sleeping potion evokes *Romeo and Juliet*, and Imogen's cross-dressing recalls the great comedies, but these various elements never coalesce into a thematic whole, and the play suffers by comparison with the great works it echoes.

Nevertheless, *Cymbeline* offers its share of delights. Imogen is a worthy creation, and she has been a favorite of male critics for centuries, who have often presented her as a kind of ideal woman. Iachimo, while hardly deep, is a fun villain to watch--clever, well spoken, and not truly evil enough to hate. And the play is entertaining, if nothing else: It is filled with plot (in fact, it is *all* plot), confused as this plot may be, and provides us with swordfights, disguises, poisons, and two eminently hissable villains in the Queen and Cloten. Indeed, the entire story contains many elements of the fairy tale--including the best element, the happy ending.

The finest scene, in such a work, is inevitably the final scene, in which all the tangled strands of plot unravel in a brilliantly constructed series of revelations, and everyone receives their just reward. The villains die, Imogen and Posthumus are reunited, and

King Cymbeline's abducted sons are restored to him. Indeed, while the play invokes famous tragedies, these invocations heighten the relief at what *doesn't* happen. The king errs in his marriage and his treatment of Rome, but his kingdom survives; Imogen and Posthumus both mistakenly believe the other to be dead, but they do not kill themselves out of deluded grief; Cymbeline loses his sons but gets them back; the Romans are defeated but their lives are spared. Tragedy looms but never strikes, and, instead, as Cymbeline declares, "Pardon's the word to all" (V.v.422).

REFERENCE

<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/cymbeline>

REVISION QUESTION

1. Discuss the different plot strands in Cymbeline and how they are interconnected.
2. Discuss the play's villains.
3. Discuss the character of Posthumus; how does Shakespeare portray him? How do his actions reflect upon his personality, his virtues, and shortcomings?