



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 103

COURSE NAME: SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE  
EDUCATION TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

**MASTER OF ARTS  
ENGLISH-BLOCK I**



Tezpur University  
Centre for Distance and Online Education  
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# MEG 103: SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA



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# BLOCK I

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UNIT 1: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND  
LITERARY CONDITION OF MEDIEVAL  
PERIOD

UNIT 2: RISE OF ENGLISH DRAMA

UNIT 3: READING *EVERYMAN*

MODULE II: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE:  
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## **COURSE INTRODUCTION**

This course **MEG-103: British Drama I: Beginning to Restoration** will present an overview of the socio-political and religious background of the period covered. This Block will also examine its impact on the literary works produced during various stages of this broad historical period. We shall try to offer you a picture of the dramatic literature produced during this period, from its early stage, when it was strictly religious, to its matured phase when finest dramatists like Marlowe and Shakespeare wrote secular plays.

Dramatic literature flourished initially in the field of tragedy, as comedy was considered to be an inferior form of literature. But after reading this course you will find how comedy too enjoyed high popularity in the hands of Ben Jonson and Shakespeare and also during the Restoration period when the genre known as Comedy of Manners flourished.

The course is divided into six Modules and multiple units, each dealing with a unique and representative work of the period or with its socio-cultural background.

**Module I** deals with *Everyman*, one of the earliest and most popular morality play. Strictly religious, this play can be regarded as a forerunner of drama proper. It employs allegorical stories to teach moral messages, personification of abstract qualities and represents the eternal battle of the human soul. Like any other religious literary work, *Everyman* too emphasizes stages of repentance, penance and salvation. This module is divided into three units. **Unit 1** will present a brief socio-political background of medieval times for a better understanding of its relationship with a literary creation of the particular period. **Unit 2** will acquaint you with an elaborate background of the rise and development of English drama as a literary genre, impact of the Church on it and the beginning of secular aspects in the medieval drama. This unit will discuss the major forms of drama of the time such as Morality, Miracle and Mystery plays that shaped English dramatic literature. **Unit 3** will make you familiar with the story of *Everyman*. Along with

this, the unit will discuss various themes, allegorical presentation of characters and the primary theme of penance and salvation and the role of the Church.

**Module II** prescribes one of the epoch-making plays of Christopher Marlowe who was Shakespeare's contemporary and one of the prominent members of the University Wits. He was an important literary figure during the Renaissance period. Shakespeare himself was highly influenced by him. *Doctor Faustus*, the prescribed play, is discussed in three units of this module. **Unit 4** gives you an overview of the Elizabethan drama which was practised in various forms by the great dramatists of the period like Marlowe, other members of the University Wits and later by Shakespeare. **Unit 5** elaborates on the life and works of Christopher Marlowe and his chief work *Dr. Faustus*. We have tried to give you a detailed summary of the play, the context of the play and other related references. We hope this will help you to acquire a sound knowledge about the play as a whole. **Unit 6** will familiarize you with the character of Dr Faustus, his renaissance qualities and the tragic flaw in his character, considered essential in the representation of a tragic hero. The quality of a Morality play and of a tragedy as reflected in *Doctor Faustus* are other important issues that find place in this unit.

**Module III** will acquaint you with one of the most popular romantic comedies of William Shakespeare. The Module is divided into three units. **Unit 7** will give you an overview of the trends of comedy written during the Elizabethan period with a special emphasis on the Shakespearean comedy. **Unit 8** will discuss in details *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that was published in 1595-96, one of the finest romantic comedies of Shakespeare. In this unit we shall present a detailed summary of the text and its major themes so that you may prepare yourself for the next unit where a critical and analytical interpretation the drama will be discussed. In **Unit 9** we will learn how to see a text from different points of view. We shall discuss *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in terms of postcolonial reading, feminist perspectives and so on. Character analysis and the question of identity are few other aspects that find place in this unit.

**Module IV** will familiarise you with *Hamlet*, one of the most well-known tragedies written by Shakespeare. In the beginning we need to have a good understanding of the period which produced the play. In this module we shall also discuss how the dramatic tradition evolved in England and how much Shakespeare was influenced by it. **Unit 10** which is on Elizabethan Tragedy will give you an overview of the salient features of the genre of tragedy that became very popular during this period. **Unit 11** will discuss the text in details and will familiarize you with the plot and the action of the play. **Unit 12** will analyse various aspects of the play like theme, characterization, Hamlet's soliloquies. The soliloquies help us understand the crisis that the protagonist goes through.

**Module V** will acquaint you with *The Duchess of Malfi* written by John Webster, one of the famous dramatists of the Jacobean Era which refers to the reign of James I of England (1603–25). Webster worked further to take the Revenge Tragedy to its heights. In **Unit 13 and 14** we shall have an elaborate discussion of the play, its structure, plot construction, thematic aspects and art of characterization.

**Module VI** will familiarize you with one of the trend-setting comedies belonging to the genre of Comedy of Manners produced during the Restoration period. It has a single unit (Unit 15) and it will discuss features of Restoration Comedy, theatre conventions of that period, audience and actors, life and works of William Congreve. Apart from giving background information, this unit will also offer you ideas about the play *The Way of the World*, its major themes, major characters and the place of *The Way of the World* in the genre Comedy of Manners.

For your convenience this paper is divided into three blocks.

**Block I** consists of Module I and II (*Everyman* and Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*).

**Block II** will cover Module III and IV (Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*)

**Block III** comprises Module V and VI (*Duchess of Malfi* and *The Way of the World*)

## MODULE I: *EVERYMAN*

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***UNIT 1: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONDITION OF MEDIEVAL PERIOD***

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**UNIT STRUCTURE**

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2. Influence of Church in Medieval England

1.3. Towns and Villages

1.4. Feudalism

1.5. The Black Death and the Peasant's Revolt

1.6. Literary Developments

1.7 Summing Up

1.8 Assessment Questions

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***1.0 INTRODUCTION***

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The Medieval period in England began with the Norman Conquest in 1066. William I, who was the Duke of Normandy in France, killed Harold in the Battle of Hastings and became the last successful invader of Britain. With William's succession, the Anglo-Saxon period came to an end. The event of 1066 led to significant social, political, economic and cultural implications. By 1100, there were 500 Norman castles in England. There was also a reformation in the organization of the Church and monasteries. The Saxon bishops were replaced by Normans after their death and the churchmen were to act as royal

ministers and clerks and serve all the Norman kings. There was a language gap between the English and the Normans.

The latter tried to impose French as the language of law and authority, but they were not successful in consolidating their power over the English language (as it is evident because English is still the language of the English people). Neither could the Norman knights or William I could change that. In fact, William I, who intended to be the king of the English, was coroneted in the traditional way where both English and Latin were used. The English language gradually became a part of the Normans as the nobility, bishops and abbots started taking up English names. The ordinary people too continued using the English language. However, the official status of the language changed. Especially from the point of view of literature, there was a great change as effective composition in English almost ceased. It was no longer the language of the official culture. Due to lack of official patronage it had lost its old position and standard. Though the language still existed, it took time to move up to the social scale.

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### **1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to acquire

- a detailed overview of the social, cultural and literary background of England during the medieval period.
- the contexts which influenced the production of the variety of verse forms and plays at that time.

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### **1.2 CHURCH IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

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The English people lived in a closely-knit society where the church played a significant role. Amidst the chaos of war and violence, the church was an alternative source of inspiration to the medieval man which gradually became an intrinsic part of his life as time went by. The people's beliefs on the church lent the society a sense of order because the church influenced the people to follow a specific code of conduct based on religious doctrines. Therefore, it did not prove to be a "regimented form of governance"; it was rather an institution which largely contributed to the social and cultural processes of England and its people (Choudhury 1). The overwhelming influence, power and charisma exerted by the Church were connected to the needs and aspirations of the communities. Various agencies such as priests, parsons and bishops preached religious and moral lessons, enacted Biblical episodes and Saint's lives during special occasions in order to impact upon the medieval mind. The Church insisted on a proper conduct in life with a spiritual orientation and promise of a rewarding afterlife. Here, morality and spirituality were integrally connected. However, more than these scriptural teachings, the sacraments were what brought faith and daily conduct together. It was a part of a Christian's life since his birth. There were also specific sets of rituals that gradually became a taken-for-granted reality for the "superstition-prone public" (Choudhury 4). A person who opposed this way of life was socially ostracized. This was how the Church enforced discipline on the people through a well worked out mechanism which remained within the sphere of the ecclesiastical courts. But there emerged a gradual opposition from people who realized the Church's domination and intrusion into non-religious aspects too.

Many highlighted the hypocrisy of the Church and its agencies, and resisted its interference in the secular spheres. Instances of such resistance, however, could not shake the foundations of religious faith from the medieval man's mind because for him faith was deep-rooted and an alternative source of strength and solace. With war-lords and dispossessed men continually erupting into violence, the state of the country was unstable. The instability was particularly evident during the conquest of William I. This instability and chaos have been regarded as "a story of progress, however halting, towards an organized national community with some real peace and good order, in which towns flourished, wealth was created, education and especially literacy developed, and a high culture was created in the mother tongue of the people" (Ford, 17).

### ***1.3 TOWNS AND VILLAGES IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND***

The effects of the Normans were not just limited to the Church and language. The Normans were also largely responsible for the sudden growth of towns as they encouraged an urbanized lifestyle. In her book, *A Social History of England* (1983), Asa Briggs gives a rough idea of the villages in the medieval period:

They were often physically unattractive settlements with rough-and-ready cottage dwellings, sparsely furnished inside and filthy outside, but there were also gardens and fruits. The simplest dwellings would be made of mud and clay with a thatched roof.... It was a sign of luxury when the lord of the manor installed

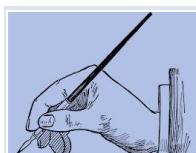
better quality roofs, ornamental tiles and floors and cobbled yards (65).

Rural English society was mostly based on agricultural with the use of very primitive technology. Nature was seen both as glorious and dangerous for they had to depend on the changing cycle of seasons for production of food. Reinforced by the teachings of the Church, they came to believe that Nature was ambivalent. People lived precarious lives with negligible medical and technological facilities. They could not do much to control the decreasing life expectancy. Moreover, the occurrence of natural disasters, plague and war, led people to surrender to religion and non-materialistic concepts. For them, life and death had profound meanings. With the advent of the Normans, these beliefs started dwindling away. More war meant more advancement in weaponry and other tools which led to technological developments. Consequently, this also meant the growth of factories and a faster rate of production. Historians, however, have argued that it was the poverty of the villagers that stimulated the growth of trade and new economic developments in England. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, due to scarcity of fertile land, cultivation expanded to less favourable lands such as moors, marshlands etc. This became a dominant factor in the increase of agricultural production. More attention was paid on technology and the economics of farming or changes in the cropping system. Industrial activities spread to the countryside as well. It was driven by technology and provided an alternative source of income other than that gained from tilling of land.

Hence, for the purpose of exchanging and gaining profits out of the products, the market place was developed

at the centre of the town. It became a major site of economic, social and cultural interaction. The markets and the country fairs, which involved extensive trading activities, were similar to the guilds that existed inside the towns. Market day was an important part of the social and economic transactions that were made. People from villages came to the towns to sell products that they gained out of farming. Asa Briggs mentions in her book that women were equally able to carry out transactions like the men in these markets (Briggs 66). This continuous process of transaction effected the growth of the town and also changed the lifestyle of the people. Towns like Coventry, which specialized in cotton and wool, became one of the wealthiest urban centres in medieval England. Therefore, as Bibhash Choudhury states, “the markets were an important barometer to measure the economic pulse of a medieval English town” (Choudhury, 8).

Along with these commercial sites, construction of many new buildings and towers provided scope for various activities and served many purposes. For instance, the Tower of London, which was initially built as a castle, served as a residence for the king. The Tower was later used for multiple purposes such as housing the royal mint, treasury and even a zoo. Another important construction was that of London Bridge in 1176, which remained the only one till 1739. The construction of the Old St. Paul’s Cathedral was another significant part of the medieval life.



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention at least three effects of Norman conquest

2. How did the Church influence the society of the medieval period? Mention three ways

#### **1.4 FEUDALISM IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

In terms of social structure, England was basically hierachal in nature. The king was above the Church and the Church above the ordinary public. But God remained the ruler of all, including the priests and the king. The Normans were aware of the difficulties that would arise while managing the resources and the people of the new land. Therefore, they introduced the feudal system in rural England in order to keep a check on the rising rebellions that could lead to social fragmentations.

Feudalism in England greatly shaped a medieval man's social and economic life. It was a system in which the private lords, who were in possession of large plots of land, exercised authority over individuals and also social groups. Feudalism in medieval England functioned as a system of justice, taxation, defence, governance and power relations. The evidences of England's land and people are recorded in the *Doomsday Book*. The book provides information

concerning the distribution of land and the taxes levied on the people.

Based on the hierachal class structure, the king and the feudal lord was the head. They not only owned lands but also distributed them under the Church in order to expand their exercise of power. But following the Norman Conquest, there was a growth in the manorial life, where the manor or the lord had tenants under him. The contract between the lords and the tenants was based on the service that is rendered. The tenants could return the lord's obligations through service, produced matter or money. Though such kind of a system existed even before the Normans came to England, the English feudal economy was much more flexible in terms of negotiating land settlements between the landowners and the tenants.

There were various gradations among the tenants; variously known as slaves, serfs, vassals and villeins. The reference of the existence of such kind of a hierachal class structure of rural England is recorded in the *Doomsday Book*. The most prominent class of this structure was the villeins. They were marginally superior to the slaves but were not free individuals. Unlike the slaves, they held land from the manorial lords to use it for farming and pasturing. However, despite tilling on his lord's land, a villien also have to carry out additional services to the master and his family. On special occasions such as Easter, he also had to pay a "seasonal tribute" (Choudhury,10).

There was a class of bordars and cottars, who were another version of the medieval villeins. They were not free individuals but they held land, granted by the lord, in return for which they were subjected to menial labour and other services as demanded by the lord. However, unlike the

villiens, they did have to pay the load of weekly services and some of them could also hire labour for their own needs.

Nevertheless, the manorial system was undoubtedly harsh on all these grades of landless labourers/ tenants because it gave exclusive power of control to the lord. All of these different class tenants were prohibited from entering the priestly class. They not only had to pay taxes for the lands but also had to give away part of their produce on those lands. In this way the lord claimed a larger share of the agricultural produce than the farmer himself. The worst part of this system is that the inability to pay back their debts relegates the tenants (who were free before) to serfdom. It is important to mention here that serfdom existed in England for centuries but the manorial system intensified and perpetuated it (Choudhury, 20).

Another impact that feudalism brought was in the functioning of the Church. Large plots of land were given to the English Church as gifts so that the Normans could get the support of the people. The Church was not directly under the monarchical control but it had the same relation with the lord as a vassal, though with a few exceptions. Due to this the control of the Church on property gradually increased.



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention the hierarchy of the Feudal system

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2. Who are the Vassals?

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### **1.5 THE BLACK DEATH AND THE PEASANT'S REVOLT**

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It cannot be denied that the arrival of the Normans brought about changes in the social, economic and political processes in England. From the viewpoint of materialistic growth, there had been an improvement in the quality of life of the medieval man. This improvement, however, was achieved notwithstanding some major misfortunes. One such misfortune was the bubonic plague (spread through the combination of rodents and fleas) termed as the Black Death, which struck England during the years 1348-1349. The population of England since the Conquest till the 14<sup>th</sup> century had gradually increased from one to three million. But with the plague, almost one-third of the total population of England was killed and about 20 percent of the villages were either abandoned or depopulated. Due to overcrowding and lack of proper sanitation, the plague primarily affected the cities like London. It has been estimated that almost 3000 of the 7000 people in London, died in the plague (Choudhury, 21). The plague also affected the prisons and the monasteries. And one of the main reasons of the spread of the plague was due to the lack of proper medical development. The loss of lives led to a sudden change in the demography of England. The economy of the country was greatly affected and the loss of labour led to an increase in its market value to two-fold. The desertion of lands, however, left more pasture lands for sheep grazing. Therefore, the Black Death is seen as the cause for the rapid

growth in the sheep rearing and cloth industry. It marked the beginning for the development of a new economy.

The depopulation of England after the plague led to other consequences too. The lords still possessed lands but had no labourers to work for them. The scarcity of labour also gave the tenants an incentive to increase their wages. The situation was not going well for the landowners and they were losing on their profit unlike the earlier times. Therefore they appealed to the Parliament for a legal solution to this problem. The Parliament, according to their demands, passed a Statute of Labourers in 1351. According to the statute,

Every free labourer, man or woman, would be bound to serve the employer who needed his/her services even though he/she was free to choose the landowner in the event of more than one vying for the services. It was also creed that the wage-structure would be the one that existed in 1347, i.e., before the plague came to England. It was further said that if any reaper, mower, or any other worker left serving his/her employer it would lead to imprisonment.  
(Choudhury, 24)

The rules and regulations of the Statute would tie the labourer to the land once again and therefore there arose a disapproval of this Statute among the labourers. As if the passing of this Statute was not enough, the Parliament in the year 1377 also imposed a poll tax of four pence on all people above 14 years of age, except beggars. In 1380, another tyrannical poll tax of twelve pence was imposed. This aggravated the situation and labourers/peasants rose in a revolt against the institution of villenage. The first outbreak took place in Kent where a tax collector was murdered. Though the peasants were not successful in

achieving their demands, this revolt is considered to be one of the first major conflicts between the labour and capital in English history.

### **1.6 LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS**

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The plots of literary works that emerged during this period were set against the social and cultural background described above. Since the life of a medieval man was dictated by the teachings of the Church and the Bible, there emerged hymns and Morality, Mystery and Miracle plays. All these plays were religious in nature and it sought to teach people about the difference between good and evil through enactment of the lives of saints and specific events from the Bible. These plays were an integral part of the lifestyle and the social condition of England. During the days of performance, the crowd consisted of people both from the towns and the countryside. This was a great opportunity for them to interact. The theatrical performances also mixed up the carnivalesque with the spiritual in order to engage the people. While the audience enjoyed the performances, they were influenced by the content which had serious Biblical doctrines. Along with religious works, the medieval period also produced secular works which were not overtly on Christianity or the Bible. One such example was the *Everyman*, a morality play, which brought about a dramatization of abstract concepts. In this play, there are concepts such as Death, Seven deadly Sins, Everyman, etc. who engage in a discourse on morality. Most writers had been influenced by the oral tradition of story-telling.

The literature produced during this period included works which presented glimpses of the rural setting and

countryside. Since, the country was a site of invasion for many outsiders, works also included anti-war themes. The French influence that came with the Norman Conquest, gave a new subject to the poets and artists. English writers during this period began writing on courtly love/romance, which gave rise to a huge variety of lyric poetry over the centuries. The Romance form was used both in prose and in verse. From this concept came the romantic notion of infidelity. While men went on crusades, women waited for them, embodying patience, loyalty and ideal virtue. For instance, Homer's *Odyssey* had Penelope waiting for her husband Odysseus for twenty years, while also rejecting prospective suitors. The early romances drew its content mostly from the ancient chronicles and literature, Arthurian and Germanic sources. The theme of quest of life or the Holy Grail and the chivalric structure of rescue of a woman were the most common variants of medieval romance. Gawain was the most celebrated hero of medieval romance and his *Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the classic examples.

Apart from the romances, there was the growth of different other verse forms too. Fabliau was one such popular form which was both humorous and satirical. It used the eight syllable couplet and the institutions, cultural groups and practices were the objects of its satire. Many renowned writers like Chaucer used the fabliau form in his tales of the Miller, Reeve, Merchant and the Shipman. The tales of Boccacio in *Decameron* also suggest the influence of fabliau.

Dream allegory was another form used by the writers during this period. Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Roman de la Rose* and Langland's *Piers the Plowman* are some examples. The allegorical form was important because

for the medieval man, everything in his life was implicated by spirituality. The elegiac poem *Pearl* also has a dream allegory. In the poem, the narrator falls asleep and finds himself in a land where the maiden named Pearl meets him. The theme of spirituality is infused in the poem through the maiden's persuasion of the narrator to believe in divine power.

The ballad was another form which developed from the oral tradition of story-telling. Most of the ballads were believed to be based on actual historical events. Due to the nature of oral transmission of these stories, the exact date of their production is not known. Ballads like the Robin Hood, however, became much popular.



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who wrote *Gawain and the Green Knight*? What genre of work was it?

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2. Give two examples of *Dream Allegory*.

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#### 1.7 SUMMING UP

This Unit has offered you a thorough discussion of the social, political, religious background of the period. This

historical survey traces the important moments in the development of socio-political and religious institutions, historical events and popular ideas. It shows how secular spheres emerged out of predominantly ecclesiastical environments. All these will help you contextualise the selected texts that you are to read. You have to relate the events and ideas to those we have discussed in this Unit. All the best for your reading efforts.



### ***1.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS***

1. What was the role of the Church during this period in shaping a medieval man's life?
2. Write a note on the social, economic and political process that was evident before and after the Norman Conquest. Was there a change or continuity?
3. Discuss the major setbacks during this period which both hindered and impacted the economic growth in England.
4. How did the diverse literary forms reflect the ethos of this period?

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## **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

## ***UNIT 2: RISE OF ENGLISH DRAMA***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

2.0 Introduction

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### ***2.0 INTRODUCTION***

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Drama, as M. H. Abrams wrote, is a “form of composition designed for performance in the theatre in which action takes the roles of the characters, perform indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue” (Abrams,93). In other words, a drama is a fictional representation which is performed through action and dialogue. However, there is closet drama too which is written in a dramatic form with dialogue, a setting and stage directions but is meant by the author to be read rather than performed. This form of drama gained much attention since the Romantic period.

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### ***2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- have ideas about a detailed genealogy of the rise of drama in England during the medieval period.
- appreciate the major influences which led to the rise of specific forms of plays and how it proliferated.
- understand the trends of religious and secular form of drama

## **2.2 RISE OF DRAMA**

It is difficult to trace the origins of theatrical practice in England. But it is believed that the English were much influenced by the Greek and Roman dramas. During the Roman rule there was the establishment of vast amphitheaters for the production of plays. With their departure, the theatre was also gone. Moreover, the Church had condemned the Roman Theater for various reasons. Therefore, it was after the Norman Conquest that drama once again became intimately associated with the lifestyle and the social condition of England.

During this time, the content for drama was deeply religious. It was the religious elements that resulted in the development of drama. Since the Bible was written in Latin and most of the public were not literate, the responsibility of transferring the knowledge of the Bible and maintaining peace and harmony through moral lessons was taken by the ecclesiastical authorities. Drama, during that middle ages, was generally an enactment of stories and important events were drawn from the Bible and the liturgy. Thus the plays were acted inside the church, mostly by the clergy, and were part of the ritual in the Church. Therefore, the Mass can be said to be an important defining factor in the development of

drama during that time. All throughout the year, the plays were performed to celebrate specific occasions like Christmas, Easter, Feasts of Saints, etc. The clergy also celebrated these Holy Days by performing scenes from the Life of the Christ.

The main objective of the clergy was to engage the medieval man's mind with a philosophy that served their purpose. Therefore, they sought to collaborate the carnivalesque with the spiritual. The Church made a skilful use of the elements available and combined instruction with amusement. Along with the religious doctrines or teachings, the audience could also get a festive experience. The introduction of clowns, fools and jugglers as a part of humor, played a significant role here. These heralded the development of farce and comedy in the later centuries. Thus in this way the Church started controlling the social and religious lives of the public. Gradually, however, the Church's autocratic control started dwindling as Catholicism gave way to secularism. This changing scenario is reflected in the different forms of plays and theatrical devices that emerged during this period. The three dominant forms of drama were the Mystery, Miracle and the Morality Plays. All three of them addressed the same audience and had doctrinal values in all its seriousness. However, the three of them differ in their emphases.

### **2.3 MYSTERY PLAYS**

The Mystery plays were those dramatic performances which were based upon stories from the Bible. One of the most popular mystery play was the *Harrowing of Hell*. The play is structured in the manner of a dispute and is the best

example for this type of plays. Boris Ford states that the harrowing here can be seen as a triumph of light over darkness (like good over evil) and it bears relation to the first breaking of light on Easter morning (Ford, 80). The main theme of these plays was to proselytize people to Catholicism and to disseminate Christian doctrines. The Christian teachings were dramatized on specific occasions throughout the year. Besides these special events, the plays were performed every day during Mass, with the idea of human redemption symbolically infused in it. This helped the people to concretely realize the importance of individual salvation and practice for its attainment. These concepts of salvation and damnation were later used by Elizabethan dramatists like Christopher Marlowe (*Dr. Faustus*).

Along with religious and moral contents, the plays also contained elements of humour that sought to cater to the festive spirit of medieval life. Though the subject was instructive and theological, it was also amusing and contemporary. Gradually it was felt that the religious instruction would be better if connected, and dramatized, with the history of man from his creation till the doomsday. This would then demand the inclusion of aspects which would not be possible within the walls of the church. Thus drama was taken outside and instead of the clergy it now went into the hands of the guilds. The organization and discipline that the plays demanded could be best fulfilled only by the guilds. Therefore there were guilds like Grovers, tanners, Dyers, Grocers, Shearers and Tailors who performed in the plays. The demand to portray the history of man led them to present the plays in the form of cycles. The reason for the development of these cycles was therefore more of social than religious nature.

Four of those cycles whose plays were extant were: Coventry, Chester, York and Wakefield. The content for the plays was still indisputably drawn from the Bible. But it also started considering various episodes which were initially not focused by the church. Along with the Creation stories some other episodes that served as a subject for the guilds were the Fall of the Man, the Great Flood, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the Last Judgment, Christ's life and so on. According to Boris Ford, the cycles of Mystery plays "represents or reproduces what might perhaps be called a history of the world- of mankind in relation to God.... Past and future co-exist in the immediate present of each performance. Thus the whole cycle itself (begins with creation and) concludes with what we should think of as a future event, the Last Judgment" (Ford, 76). In between the creation and the judgment there were other mystical events like birth, death and resurrection of Christ that was significant to every Christian. Every year these significant mystical events were recreated so that the future of the community and the individual is made fortunate.

#### LET US STOP AND THINK



##### Cycles and Guilds

The mystery plays were always performed in sequences, therefore they were also called 'cycle plays'. They are most commonly known as the 'mystery plays' because they took the mysteries of God as their primary theme. They aimed to show, in the course of a day, the whole history of the universe from the creation of Heaven and Earth to the Last Judgement – the end of the world, when everyone on earth will be judged by God and divided between Heaven and Hell, salvation and damnation. Mystery plays make up a

cycle of 48 surviving short playlets. Throughout the 15th and into the 16th century, around 300 years before the building of the London playhouses, these cycles were the most popular and enduring form of theatre in Britain, performed annually in the biggest towns and cities of the country

Guilds were associations of craftsmen or merchants, who were in charge of regulating and teaching their trade; they were often wealthy and wielded considerable power. The mystery plays gave guilds the opportunity to advertise and show off their wares. A play about *Noah's Ark and the Flood* would be sponsored by the Shipbuilders, who provided the ark itself, and the Goldsmiths would be in charge of the play of the Magi, donating lavish gifts as props. Significantly, these players were not usually professionals.

The performance of these plays was usually associated with the occasion of Corpus Christi as it was performed during such special occasions. And the variation in the cycles was based on the local conditions associated with its performance. Moreover, these plays were produced with much elaborateness. The preparation for these plays in this way needed the community's involvement. Therefore announcements were made weeks in advance. The guilds also started incorporating the carnivalesque aspects into these plays through the use of wagons. It was performed as pageants and drew massive attention of the public.

#### LET US STOP AND THINK



In theatrical terms, **pageants** denoted a performance done in large scale processions. Earlier, the term referred to a carnival float designed for the enactment of religious plays or cycles. Later the term came to refer, by extension, to the performances themselves. Thus, any kind

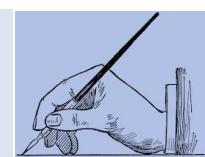
of lavish production that was performed with great pomp and show, be it inside or outside and whether having a religious content or not, was considered to be pageants.

During the performance days, people from towns and the countryside gathered together to be spectators of such sophisticated performance. These places thus became a site for interaction between various social classes. The inclusions of the elements of humour with spiritual idealism also lent a realistic touch to them. Comic figures, of which Satan was the favourite, were used. The combination of such comic relief with seriousness almost became a mandatory feature of the dramas that were produced in the later centuries, especially in case of Shakespeare. With this, the original intention for the development of these plays, i.e. rigid spiritual indoctrination with consequences for any violator, slightly altered. What was initially deeply religious only in Christian doctrines was now indeed “the peculiar blend of religious and secular, of cosmic conflict and homely comedy” (Blamires 15).

Due to the nature of the contents, these plays were not governed by the unities of time, place and action like the Elizabethan plays. Also the technology during that period was not yet advanced. Hence in order to give an extra dimension to the drama through the demonstration of angels, monsters, clouds, deaths and astonishing turnarounds, colourful settings and props were used. In this way the entertainment value of the plays increased. However, there were certain causes due to which the popularity of mystery plays declined by the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, people began to be attracted by the secular world view than the orthodox religious conventions. During this period, the early

waves or beginnings of Renaissance fervour and secularism were being felt and this was reflected in the later mystery plays. Moreover, people were no longer entertained by the recurring religious, particularly Catholic, subject of these plays. Secondly, the transfer of mystery plays from the Church to the guilds decreased the former's initial patronization of Christianity. In other words, the lack of institutional support from the Church led to the failure of mystery plays. Lastly, due to the growth of mercantilism, the role of the guilds changed and this impacted their performances.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that most of the themes and symbolisms that were present in the drama produced later were influenced by the mystery plays. The symbolic significance of storms, disorders, the themes of winter and spring, youth and old age, birth and death, disguises, transformations and restorations, tragedy, etc. were all present in the mystery plays. Some of the famous mystery plays were: *Noah's plays*, *The Birth of Christ*, *Shepherd's Plays*, *Fall of Lucifer*, *Last Judgment*, *Abraham and Isaac Plays* and so on.



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Which are the three types of early drama found in the medieval period?
2. Give few examples of Mystery play.

3. Write two characteristics of any Mystery Play.

#### **2.4 MIRACLE PLAYS**

Like the Mystery plays, the Miracle plays too dealt with liturgical subjects but it was not much popular like the former, though both came about in almost the same time. This was probably because it lacked in the elaborateness and the sophistication that became the primary focus of the guild during the later years. It was more specifically based on the dramatization of lives of saints. It also dealt with either real or fictitious presentation of miracles or any other significant episode, including martyrdom of a saint. The presentation of the saints' lives was an extension of the religious doctrine enforced on the people. The earliest recorded miracle play in England dealt with the life of St. Katherine, which was performed around 1100 in Dunstable. The miracle plays too could not proliferate for much longer because like the mystery plays, it also saw the infiltration of the elements of secularism which diverted it from its initial and primary objective.

It is to be noted here that the specific distinction between a mystery and a miracle play (as given above) was recognized only in France. In England both terms were used

interchangeably to mean any form of drama which dealt with Biblical stories, specific events and the lives of saints. Therefore the history of development and decline of both these forms of drama is considered to be almost the same.

## **2.5 MORALITY PLAYS AND INTERLUDES**

The third type of drama which deals with Biblical or religious subjects is the morality play. These plays are basically dramatizations of abstract concepts like good, evil, death, friendship, love, and other virtues and vices. The most popular of morality plays during the medieval period and even today is the *Everyman*. However, the earliest of the morality plays was *The Castle of Perseverance*. These plays are shorter in length but are equally powerful in their intense presentation of themes. By symbolically associating spiritual future (concepts like salvation and redemption) with the materialistic world, these plays seek to instill fear amongst the people of that time. For example, the play *Everyman* is not only about the salvation of Everyman but also about mortality. The medieval man was made to realize that in this mortal world, death is inevitable and it is only Good Deeds and not Goods, Knowledge or Strength that will salvage him from the harrows of hell.

Morality plays are in a way, another kind of allegorical dramas, presenting a somewhat simplified mode of life. These kinds of plays are different from both modern naturalistic drama and the Elizabethan drama. Unlike others, these plays precisely dwell on moral allegory. The origin of such plays may be traced back to the medieval sermons. And the need for such plays was to regulate or shape the moral consciousness of the medieval man, his knowledge of good

and evil, right and wrong. Besides these abstract concepts, there were also projections of supernatural beings like Angels and Devils, which imply the presence of a metaphysical universe – Heaven and Hell. The presence of these aspects indicates how significant faith was in human life during the medieval times.

The purpose of such plays was primarily didactic i.e. to give a moral lesson to the audience. At the end of the play it is always the good which triumphed over evil. Binary opposites such as these are put at the centre of morality plays probably to “suggest the importance of portraying conflict between spirituality and corruption” (Choudhury 28). This development of drama from mystery and miracle to the morality plays might indicate the shift from orthodox Catholicism to secularism. As Bibhash Choudhury states, this shift in focus, from religious to moral, might also be an indication to address the issues of material temptation which came to dominate the Renaissance mind (Choudhury, 28). The spiritual necessity at that moment therefore was to emphasize the consequences of material temptation.

The Morality plays, however, despite the seriousness of its content, did not fall short in the aspect of humour. The character of Vice was usually depicted as a comical and mischievous character through its physical appearance and its caricature. Vice was the progenitor of the character of the fool, clown or jester that was presented in modern drama.

The morality plays also led to the emergence of Interludes. It was a short version of a morality play. In Latin, Interludes meant ‘between the play’. This indicates that it was performed during breaks in a scene. Interludes are generally short stage entertainments, such as “secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious and political point”

(Abrams, 175). An example can be John Heywood's *Four P's*, performed in 1497. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Interludes were still used in between acts of longer plays.

Drama during the later centuries evolved from religious and moral to a representation of human life as it is. It began to draw inspiration from the classical models and produced its first comedy (*Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall) and tragedy (*Gorboduc* by Sackville and Norton) in the years 1561 and 1562 respectively. From this, drama finally evolved to regular forms known till today.



#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is a Miracle play?

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2. Which is the earliest recorded miracle play?

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3. Who wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gorboduc* ?

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#### 2.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we have described how drama as a genre was born and how it developed as a form of representation having distinct similarities with the modern form of the genre. It was born in the precincts of the Church and was a

powerful medium of moral instructions. Later, it moved out of the Church and came to be controlled by different Guilds. In the process it gradually assumed secular characteristics having more direct connections with day-to-day lives of common human beings. In the process were born the early dramatic forms of Morality and Miracle plays and Interludes. This Unit, by elaborating the above mentioned areas, will certainly help you to read Everyman which we shall examine in the next Unit.



### **2.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. How did the Norman Conquest impact on the literature produced during the medieval period?
2. Write an elaborate note on the evolution of drama from the religious mode to the secular one.
3. How did the Church determine or influence the production of the different forms of drama during this period?
4. Compare and contrast Morality plays with Miracle and Mystery Plays. How are they different in their emphases and approaches? How do you think they mark a shift or development from the medieval to the Renaissance?
5. How do you think the allegorical mode of representation helped in delivering the didactic message of the Church to its audience?

## **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

## **UNIT 3: READING 'EVERYMAN'**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 Summary of *Everyman*
- 3.3 Allegorical elements in *Everyman*
- 3.4 Elements of Humour in *Everyman*
- 3.5 Themes in *Everyman*
  - 3.5.1 Death and Fate of the Human Soul
  - 3.5.2 Sin and the Material World
  - 3.5.3 Penance, Salvation and the Catholic Church
- 3.6 Summing Up
- 3.7 Assessment Questions
- 3.8 References and Recommended Readings

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

The play *Everyman* is closely related to a Dutch play that probably circulated around the same time. The play exists in four different editions. Two of the copies were printed by Richard Pynson and the other two by John Skot. It has been said that there are numerous source stories of this play. One of them is the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, which is a version of the life of Buddha (Choudhury 4). The fact that the author of the play is anonymous casts light on the tradition and practice of morality plays.

### **3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit will help you familiarize yourself with the play Everyman, one of the most popular plays produced during the Middle Ages and which is relevant even today. This unit will discuss the form and the major thematic concerns of the play and will enable you to understand the socio-religious background which shaped it.

### **3.2 SUMMARY OF EVERYMAN**

The play begins with a Messenger announcing the play's purpose. The Messenger's declaration of Everyman's time for final judgment tells us that this is a play which is deeply rooted in Christian theological perspective of the 'beginning and end' of times. In the declaration we hear God lamenting the sinful nature of human beings. Despite giving them the whole world to live in with everything they want and sacrificing His own Son to salvage them from their sins, human beings have forgotten their benefactor. They have forgotten that their real purpose in life is to live a pious life. Instead, man has turned to sin and is desperately in search of material achievements. Man is misled and God believes they need to be reminded of their transient existence – that they will have to face the final reckoning before they either lead an eternal life in Heaven or eternal damnation in Hell. Or else man's craving for worldly pleasure will make him more bestial than the beast. Therefore God summons Death, the Messenger, to Everyman so that Everyman can stop himself from being damned to eternity, for forgetting his real purpose in life and living fearlessly in his sinfulness.

Everyman is the protagonist of the play, who represents the entire humanity. Therefore Death through Everyman, summons all the audience of the play to undertake the pilgrimage to God's heaven through good deeds. When Death sees Everyman, Death asks him if he has forgotten God. Everyman, on the other hand, is unprepared for death and is frightened at the journey Death proposes. He even tries to bribe Death but the latter warns him again that his judgment is at hand. Everyman, therefore, asks for more time to find someone to accompany him in his pilgrimage. He first sees his friend, Fellowship, with whom he has spent much time. Initially, Fellowship says he will accompany his friend wherever he is going. But when he hears that Everyman has been summoned to give an account before the high Judge of all the deeds he had done on earth, Fellowship declines. Everyman is disappointed but decides to ask Kindred. Just like Fellowship, Kindred too agrees to accompany him but declines the moment he learns of the destination. Everyman feels utterly isolated at this point and seeks help from Goods, the biggest reason for the sins that heavily weigh on Everyman now. Goods too cannot leave earth's bounds; what man acquires on earth must be left behind when he dies. The betrayal of Fellowship, Kindred and Goods makes him realize that he had been wrong in trusting them. At this time he remembers his good deeds and requests her to help him. She, however, replies that she would have willfully helped him only if she could stand up straight and walk with. His ill deeds have weakened her and buried her in the ground. She, therefore, advises Everyman to go to Knowledge, who in turn leads him to Confession. Everyman falls on his knees and begs Confession to speak

out before the high Judge of his good deeds. Confession then gives him the ‘jewel’ of penance to chastise his body in God’s name. By repenting and chastising his body, Everyman’s sins lift the burden of Good Deeds and she is now able to walk with him on his pilgrimage. As he sets out on the final leg of his journey, Everyman has several other companions like Beauty, Strength, Discretion and the Five Wits, who go along with him till one point of the journey.

Everyman then receives the last rites from a priest and prepares to meet Death. The audience is reminded that the priest is God’s representative on earth and that man must turn to priests to help them prepare for death. As the journey continues each of his companions leave Everyman. Only Good Deeds remain with him till the final point of his destination. An Angel greets Everyman and escorts him for the remaining journey and here only Good Deeds can speak for him. As the play ends, a Doctor of Theology appears to remind the audience that all earthly possessions are transient and only good deeds can lead people to Heaven. The Doctor also emphasizes the importance of realizing God’s presence in this life itself because after death it will be too late to make any amends.

### **3.3 ALLEGORICAL ELEMENTS IN ‘EVERYMAN’**

According to Abram’s *Handbook*, an allegory is a narrative...in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the literal, or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to communicate a second, correlated order of signification. (15-16)

This form of narrative was immensely used in the literature of the Middle Ages, especially when it produced verse-narratives with a dream vision in which the narrator falls asleep and experiences an allegorical dream. A play like *Everyman* allegorically instills fear in the medieval man, of the fate of the human soul by showing the consequences of materialism. The play uses the allegorical mode to deal with the concepts preached by Christianity in order to serve its moral and religious purpose.

In *Everyman* we find God demonstrating His displeasure with the ill deeds of man and decide to bring him back through grace. These demonstrations by God early in the play form its allegorical mode. God says:

And now I see the people do clean forsake me.

They use the seven deadly sins damnable;

.....

Therefore I will in all the haste

Have a reckoning of every man's person. (35-46)

In these lines we can see that God talks of every man. But in the play the character Everyman is used to suggest the whole humanity having qualities that are associated with man. Everyman also represents an individual person, whose trials and tribulations are different from others. The character Everyman further suggests that all the other characters are present only because of him, except God and Death. The other characters, however, are independent in their own ways.

There is ample use of abstract concepts like Death, Goods, Fellowship, Kindred, Good Deeds etc. having different allegorical significances which is an essential

characteristic of morality plays. For instance, Goods, Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Knowledge, Beauty are all *personified* (abstract qualities are presented as human beings) in order to indicate that these are materialistic pleasures and can give a happiness that is temporary. The character of Goods particularly helps in the visualization of materialism. These pleasures make the journey of life easier and more comfortable. But they cannot help a man in his journey of the final reckoning. When a man dies he can take none of these with him to the other world. The play not only implies the quest for material pleasure but also the consequences of such a quest. The way each of the characters refuse to help Everyman one by one, reveals the true value of each of them till the end. It also indicates that man in real life is selfish and will betray or be betrayed by worldly companions during the hour of need.

In the play there also are references from the Bible. For example, Death's reference to 'Adam's sin must die of nature' is an indication of the fact that Everyman is born of the 'original sin' and no matter what he does, he needs the grace of God to save himself from purgatory.

The allegorical mode is a quintessential feature of a morality play. And by using this mode the play seeks to convey a particular world-view which is comprehensible to the medieval man. This play thus serves the Church's purpose of educating the people of the medieval period in the spiritual side of life.

### **3.4 ELEMENTS OF HUMOUR IN 'EVERYMAN'**

The fact that the play *Everyman* has a moral lesson is quite apparent. The use of theological concepts like sin,

death, salvation, etc. has been a recurring phenomenon in literature. In *Everyman*, some of these concepts are used to represent specific forms of materialism. You have already seen that when Death tells Everyman that his time has come to undertake his journey to the final reckoning, Everyman requests Death to give him some time so that he can take the help of his friends to accompany him on that journey. As we find in the play, almost all of his friends betray him and refuse to accompany him. A series of refusals would of course make the actions of the play predictable and therefore boring. What salvages the play from this predictability and boredom is the use of humour. Everyman's dilemma and his experience have been expressed through witty and funny dialogues. For instance, when Everyman goes to Fellowship to ask for his help, Fellowship says:

But, and thou will murder, or any man kill,  
In that I will help thee with a good will. (281-  
282)

This shows the lack of seriousness with which Fellowship treats matters of life and death. Everyman then goes to Kindred and gets the same kind of reply.

Ye shall have my maid with all my heart;  
She loveth to go to feasts, there to be nice,  
...

I will give her leave to help you in that  
journey  
If that you and she may agree. (360-364)

Through these lines, the play seems to indicate that this kind of life is something that the Church wants the people to avoid. These are sinful activities in the sight of God and Church. Again, Cousin too refuses to help Everyman by saying “I have a cramp in my toe” (356). These are illustrations of the different kind of refusals that Everyman gets and this adds a sense of humour to the play. An otherwise drab story has thus been transformed in order to amuse the audience along with serious teachings of religious doctrines.

### **3.5 THEMES IN ‘EVERYMAN’**

#### **3.5.1 *Death and Fate of the Human Soul***

Death plays a very important role in the play *Everyman*. Fascination for death as a theme is not pervasive in medieval literature. Death as a theme has found place in different genres in different ages and it has been represented in different ways. We see that plays of Shakespeare have characters talking of death in a lively way without the element of fear.

Death is viewed as a powerful figure not only because of its inevitability but also because of its unpredictability. Like in *Everyman*, it can come in strange ways and in the most unexpected times. In the play, Death plays two different roles. On one hand, it plays the role of God’s messenger who would bring man to justify his ways to God. And on the other, it plays the role of an interrupter who time and again reminds man of his transient life on earth. This aspect of death keeps the fear intact in human

minds. The association of this fear with death has, however, seen a change throughout the centuries.

During the Middle Ages, due to lack of technological advancement and medical facilities, the idea of death was different from that of the modern man. For the medieval man, the idea of death was more creative than negative, as it was associated with ideas of Judgment and everlasting joys and sorrow. For the medieval man, it was due to the inevitable presence of death that life became either ominous or joyful. It gave a meaning to the everyday existence. And each existence was important because all individuals were playing their own part in the cosmic drama (Ford 18). It was death that determined the deeds of man on earth and according to his deeds the final fate of his soul was decided. Thus the play shows how the presence of death reminds man of the ways to lead a good life.

### **3.5.2 *Sin and the Material World***

*Everyman* is a play which displays the medieval man's realizations of the pleasure of the world. Material achievements such as money, property, success are shown as objects which give transient happiness but will not be helpful at the time of man's final reckoning. This is to say that man is tempted by materialistic pleasures, and that he is inherently sinful. It is stated in the play that "in the world each living creature/ For Adam's sin must die of nature" (56). Like Adam, Everyman has ignored God, His commandments, and has forgotten the sacrifice of God. This has led Everyman to drown himself in sin and therefore he will now have to mortify himself and leave all the material pleasures in order to receive salvation from the Divine providence.

In the play, materialistic happiness is equated with sin. It is through this materiality that man turns self-obsessed and negative attributes like selfishness, jealousy, greed, pride, arrogance, etc. fill him. Therefore, the play seems to proclaim that the more one desires and strives for material achievement, the more sinful he or she becomes. The pleasures of good life here on earth will not give man a good life in Heaven. These concepts form the basis or the moral of the play because during that time man was showing signs of moving away from religiosity to the worldly concerns.

However it is important to mention here that the play also talked about alternative ways to lead a good life with the materialistic pleasures. When *Everyman* approaches Goods for help, he immediately refuses. But he also gives a long sermon on charity:

For my love is contrary to the love  
everlasting;  
But if thou had loved moderately during,  
As to the poor give part of me,  
Then shouldst thou not in this dolour be,  
Nor in this great sorrow care. (427-434)

This shows that though the play has a religious and a moral purpose, it does not fail to recognize the changing nature of the world. Materialistic achievement might be a part of one's life but not a source of salvation.

### **3.5.3 *Penance, Salvation and the Catholic Church***

*Everyman* is deeply concerned with the idea of penance and salvation. When *Everyman* learns that Death

has been summoned to take him for his final reckoning, he is frightened and seeks help from his friends in order to salvage himself from his sins. None of his friends can help him except Good Deeds through Confession. He is asked to confess his sins and mortify himself as an act of penance. Only then Good Deeds gains strength to accompany him till the end of his journey. The play seems to demonstrate that a man has to live a life of penance by being pious during his lifetime. He is supposed to follow God's commandments, show his reverence towards God for all the blessings and stay away from the vices. If a man does not follow such kind of a life, he/she will end up with a fate like Everyman and opt for self-flagellation in order to gain salvation. Moreover the play also seems to suggest that the path to salvation is not something man can gain all by himself. Though Good Deeds can save Everyman from eternal damnation, it is only through the grace of God that he can gain salvation. When Everyman says, "I come with Knowledge for my redemption/ Redempt with heart and full contrition," it tells us that it is not just Good Deeds but also his willful acceptance of his need for help and his inadequacy in saving himself that he gains salvation.

These notions of penance and salvation were enforced by the Catholic Church during the medieval period in order to control the people. Through the play, we notice how God acts like a feudal chief, commanding respect and allegiance. There is a paradox here because He is also the redeemer. However, we must remember that man's efforts to purify or save himself are useless unless he is saved by his predestined redeemer. Moreover, through the various dialogues in the play, Everyman is also reminded that Christ has already paved his way to heaven. The way to

heaven is beset with miseries and adversities and he has to take this journey alone. The omnipotent God that the play talks about can be understood as the Catholic Church, which repeatedly highlighted on the salvation from God through it. Even in the play, Everyman confesses his sins to the Priest to strengthen Good deeds and his chances of saving his soul. The theologians at the service of the Church always preached that the Church is the only medium to purify one's soul. These proclamations immediately show how the Church had forced the medieval man to internalize its authoritarian views. Like the feudal lord, the Church also got tithe money and demanded allegiance of all who willed eternal happiness after death.

### **3.6 SUMMING UP**

This Unit has taken up *Everyman* for detailed exploration. It has linked the play conceptually with what has been discussed in the two preceding units. It has offered a critical summary of the text and explored various aspects of the story. All these aspects are related to the representation of the supremacy of the Church which was a powerful institution at that time. As you must have perceived by now, the Church wanted to control lives of the common people through its discourses. It instilled fear in their minds as to the consequences of the practice of materialism and the need for attainment of salvation through the agency of the Church. As the story shows, God can be approached through confessions and good deeds and the service of the Church is compulsory for the benefit of human beings. Everyman, you will agree, is representative of the early English play which projects the social and

religious institutions and psychology of the people of the time.



### 3.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Why does God send Death to summon Everyman?
2. How does Everyman react to the summons by Death?
3. Who follows Everyman into the grave?
4. How does the order in which Beauty, Strength, Discretion and Five Wits abandon Everyman parallel the process of aging?
5. Explain how the play supports the idea that knowledge of one's sin is necessary before one can be truly repent.
6. Discuss the play *Everyman* as a morality play.
7. Write a note on how the allegorical elements in help the play to serve its religious and moral purpose.
8. How does *Everyman* reflect the Christian medieval man's awakening to liberalism and materialism?



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## **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

## MODULE II: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: *DR FAUSTUS*

## **UNIT 4: ELIZABETHAN DRAMA**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Origin of the Elizabethan Drama
- 4.3 University Wits
- 4.4 Salient features
- 4.5 Summing Up
- 4.6 Assessment Questions

### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Elizabethan Age spans from the 1550 to the 1630. The reign of Elizabeth saw a number of literary features that made this age a very active period in the history of literary works. Poetry, drama, prose and even, to a large extent, essays all flourished during the time. The age was known for its New Classicism – the passion for classical learning which “tempered and polished the earlier rudeness of English literature” and New Romantics – the quest for “the remote, the wonderful, and the beautiful”.

### **4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After reading this unit you will be able to

- trace and understand the origin of the Elizabethan drama
- learn about the university wits and their works.

- analyze the salient features of Elizabethan drama

#### **4.2 ORIGIN OF THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA**

Renaissance had found a lasting expression for itself in the drama when it reached England. During the given time the country was said to have been undergoing “a rapid and peaceful expansion—when the national spirit soared high, and when the development of the language and the forms of versification had reached a point which made possible the most triumphant literary achievement” ever seen (Neilson,1909-14) The Elizabethan Drama during the Elizabethan Age had matured. It provided a much greater degree of secularism as compared to its predecessors. Much of the work created was based on rediscovery of the classical models.

John Lyly (1554-1606), Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), and Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) were the notable Elizabethan dramatists who rose in their work and gave a new dimension to the genre of drama. Their work projected a very new picture of the world and society. The dramas of the period portrayed complexity, working of the human mind and its beauty along with the infusion of historical themes. Politics played an important part but its representation was fresh.

The Elizabethan age also gave the world its most noted playwright – William Shakespeare (1564–1616). The enigma of this literary icon lingers strong even today and his work is still regarded as classics of English literature. The master was only twelve years old when the first theatre was built in England and in the years to follow the theatres

became his world as he had said “All the world’s a stage” (*As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII). The plays of Shakespeare raised Elizabethan drama and the English culture in general to a pedestal which only mounted higher and gave the readers much more each time.

English drama was mainly religious and didactic in the beginning. We have already made you acquainted with the early drama and their characteristics elaborately in the previous module. The temperament of religious changed with time and the prime characteristics soon shifted to the representation and reflection of the spirit and interests of the people, the common man and drama attained a secular mode.

The Drama, during this age took various forms and gave quite a variety. The initial form that was very popular was Chronicle History. Marlowe’s *Edward II* was a classic in the given form. Shakespeare too produced around ten plays based on historical figures which suited the taste of the Elizabethans. *Richard III* and *Henry V* were two prominent among them.

Tragedy was a very popular form of the Elizabethan drama. Revenge tragedy was the genre preferred which was highly influenced by Seneca. This form received expertise in the hands of Shakespeare who had experimented the form introduced by Marlowe and Kyd. Restrictions of time and place were discarded and free flow of creativity was encouraged. *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* are among the finest productions of Shakespeare and of Elizabethan tragedy as a whole.

*Hamlet* was perhaps the most popular play at the time of its production, and it has held its interest and provoked discussion as perhaps no other play has ever done. The charisma of *Hamlet* cannot be pointed to a single element but it definitely is the culmination of all the elements- the plot, characterisation, poetry of language, and its universal appeal. The subtlety and gripping complexity of this play makes it one the finest even today. *King Lear* is all about its awe-gripping overwhelming spectacle, in which the destruction of evil is personified along with the sustainability of the human nature. *Macbeth* is too about destruction but the one chosen by man himself when the choice of darkness is made over and above light.

Elizabethan Comedy lacked the depth of the tragedies but tried to represent the follies of the times. The Comedy too represented the truth of life but with comic undertones. It was Shakespeare who had however mastered the art of comedy side by side with his tragedies. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, display the mastery of the writer and focuses on the many sides of human nature. Serious as it may sound, he deals with the subject with "indescribable lightness and grace". Each character embodies a charm of persona with lines "rich in poetry and sparkling with wit, and bring before our imaginations whole series of delightful scenes" (Neilson, 1909-14). *The Tempest* explores further and brings out "the mellow wisdom of its author's riper years".

*The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson is a representation of the realistic comedy. This genre of comedy uses satire as form to talk about the trickery prevailing in London in the 1600—alchemy, astrology, and the like. *The Shoemaker's*

*Holiday* by Dekker very convincingly showed the other side of London life which was hardly represented in literature. *The Philaster* by Beaumont and Fletcher belonged to the genre of romantic drama but with a twist of comedy, “Comedy by virtue of its happy ending, but contains incidents and passages in an all but tragic tone”.

*The Shoemaker’s Holiday* was called a “citizen” drama as it projected and reflected on the other side of London – the life of the “trade folks”. Dekker through his work depicts the life of everyday London and gives a clear picture of what made London what it is today.

*A New Way to Pay Old Debts* by Philip Massinger brings into light the country life of England. The play illustrates the hardening of class distinctions, economic oppression and social disorder that characterised the early Stuart era, leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War. This work is credited as “one of the few Elizabethan dramas outside of Shakespeare which have held the stage down to our own time” ( Eliot, and Neilson,397).

*The Philaster* of Beaumont and Fletcher is a Tragicomedy. The element of comic relief is found in its ending. Philaster is restored to his crown but the play has a continuous tragic tone which sounds as one of tragedy. The poetry and individual scenes of the play are stellar and help mark its place in literary history.

The contribution of the University Wits helped drama reach its potential as they encouraged the “[e]xuberance and vitality which typify Elizabethan drama”. The success continued and reached its zenith with the contributions of Shakespeare but the decline began with Jonson and the fall

continued with Beaumont and Fletcher right till Dekker and Heywood.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



- There were no Elizabethan Theatres until 1576. Plays were performed in the courtyards of inns, which were referred to as inn-yards.
- Elizabethan Theatre attracted up to 3000 people.
- William Shakespeare and his company built Two Global Theatres.
- There were many rejections of the Theatre especially from the Church. Even officials from the City of London did the same.
- Peter Smith built the Globe theatre along with his workforce. It was begun in 1597 and finished by 1598.
- One of the appeals for Elizabethan playgoers was the theatre's bawdiness. Sexual innuendo and sexual situations were common features of many plays.

### **4.3 UNIVERSITY WITS**

“University Wits” was a group of six young men who were associated with Oxford and Cambridge. They contributed towards the foundation of the Elizabethan school of drama. George Peele (1558-98), Robert Greene (1558-92), Thomas Nash (1567- 1601), Thomas Lodge

(1558-1625), Thomas Kyd (1558-94) and Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) are known as the University Wits who had “radically changed English drama”. These six men shared some common features which were reflected in their works.

Fondness for heroic themes was a central feature in the plays written by the University Wits. The treatment of the plays was escalated and heroic. Splendor, greatness, violence, emotions – all these were part of the plays. These features of the plays often lead to disorder and loudness. The style adopted by the Wits was also ‘heroic’. The significant aim of the speech was to achieve strong and sounding lines, magnificent epithets, and powerful declamation. The blank verse was the noted medium used to achieve such strong depths. Tragedy was the theme opted by the Wits. The tragic nature was preferred by the dramatists in order to uphold their earnestness. Humour was coarse and immature when used and its lack in their works did make it a prominent feature.

The University Wits were credited with the honour of improving the quality of English drama in terms of language and structure. They brought in an era of creativity on stage and rejected what they considered as “low” comedy. This group of university educated playwrights, poets and pamphleteers freed drama of its conventions that were followed until that time. The six men were classical in their tastes and training but were open to greater freedom in drama and made drama more life-like.

Marlowe was the most famous among the University Wits. He was one of the first writers to use the blank verse

and made the English theatre a viable industry. His play *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) gave the English theatre the power to withstand its opponents. *The Jew of Malta* (1589), *Edward II* (1591), *Doctor Faustus* (1592) are a few of Marlowe's inspiring works. Marlowe had adopted literature as a profession after his education in Cambridge and was attached to the Lord Admiral's players. All his plays are tragedies and were written within the span of just five years (1587-1592). His had no eye for comedy and lacked comic sense which was quite clearly seen in his works. His comic work was quite inferior and is speculated to have been written by other writers. As compared to Shakespeare, Marlowe lacked the warmth of humanity. Marlowe's greatness as a poet is seen in his works. His verses are notable for "its burning energy, splendor of diction, sensuous richness, its variety of pace, and its responsiveness to the demands of the varying emotions" (Ronald and McRae., 2001).

"Marlowe's mighty lines" coined by Ben Jonson proved the power of his words and the emotions his words create. The plays by Marlowe had a vision that centered on "The sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (*Tamburlaine the Great*), "infinite riches in a little room" (*The Jew of Malta*) and "quest for more than human knowledge" (*Doctor Faustus*). *Tamburlaine the Great* is an episodic play that centres around one inhuman figure. The play lacks cohesion yet it "contains much of Marlowe's best blank verse". *The Jew of Malta* shows the change of Marlowe's attention to conventional Machiavellian villain. *Edward II* shows the "truest sense of the theatre". The plot is very skillfully woven and has dramatic requirements, making it

a new feature in English historical drama. *Doctor Faustus* is consistent right from the beginning till the end. Features of the miracle plays are seen which makes the play interesting.

George Peele's works include The *Araygnement of Paris* (1584) – a romantic comedy, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First* (1593), *The Old Wives' Tale* (1591-94) – a satire and, *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe* (published 1599). A few noted works of Robert Greene includes – *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587), *Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (1589), *Orlando Furioso* (1591) and, *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* (acted in 1592).

The works of Thomas Nash include- “*Summer's Last Will and Testament*” (1592). Nash had completed Marlowe's Dido and contributed to the development of the novel through his prose tale- “*The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jacke Wilton*” (1594).

Thomas Lodge is said to have collaborated with Shakespeare in Henry VI and also in the works of other dramatists such as Greene. “*The Woundes of Civile War*” and the famous romance- “*Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie*” (1590) are his surviving, noteworthy works.

Thomas Kyd, one of the important figures of the age was known for his works but unfortunately most of them were lost. Of the surviving, “*The Spanish Tragedie*” (1585) is the most important followed by “*Cornelia*” (1593). “The Spanish Tragedy established a new genre in English theatre, the revenge play or revenge tragedy. Its plot contains several violent murders and includes as one of

its characters a personification of Revenge. Many elements of *The Spanish Tragedy*, such as the play-within-a-play used to trap a murderer and a ghost intent on vengeance, appear in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Cornelia is a translated work from the French Senecan, Garnier. Though untraced, Thomas Kyd had contributed in many plays including *Soliman and Perseda* (1588), the First Part of *Jeronimo* (1592) and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Kyd was also well known for his "lewd libels" and "blasphemies" which got him imprisoned and tortured but later released.

#### **4.4 SALIENT FEATURES**

The salient features that define the Elizabethan Drama are:

- emergence of a mature genre (drama)
- attainment of a more secular mode
- The University Wits helped drama reach its latent potentialities
- insertion of comic episodes into tragic plays
- the Elizabethan drama was meant for the masses.
- theatre was patronized by the court and aristocracy that helped drama flourish during the time.
- The language used in the plays was more alive than the language of Prose and Poetry.

The plays reflected the true self of society and were like a mirror

- the decline later was due to the narrowing of motive, lack of creative power and, degradation of style.

## LET US STOP AND THINK



The plays of the Elizabethan period are printed in The Harvard Classics – originally known as **Dr. Eliot's Five Foot Shelf**. It is a 51-volume anthology of classic works from world literature, compiled and edited by Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot and first published in 1909.

Masque – a short dramatic performance composed for some particular festive occasion. This creative form had a brief but brilliant career during the Elizabethan Age. Distinguished by the ornate stage-setting, lyrics, music and dancing and, by allegorical characters, masque was quite refreshing. Shakespeare's *Tempest* uses this form. Jonson, Fletcher and other poets of the time developed the form very strongly in their works. Masque achieves its zenith in the hands of Milton in his work "Comus" (1637)

*The Faithful Shepherdess* by John Fletcher which deals with the darker side of sexuality and sexual jealousy, albeit within a comic framework and *The Parliament of Bees* by John Day, a series of dialogues on the subject of "the doings, the births, the wars, the wooings" of bees were exquisite literary pieces. These works had grace and charm and yet failed to uplift the decline of the Elizabethan drama and the falling of imagination.

### 4.5 SUMMING UP

The Elizabethan Age proves to be the period that has in the best possible manner expressed the spirit of the times through drama. It is in this age where drama had developed into a mature form. It manifested the spirit of the age,

growth, maturity and even the decline of a literary form. The Elizabethan drama had stalwarts like Shakespeare and Marlowe who represented the society faithfully. The dramatists did show their profound and sympathetic knowledge of mankind and the possibilities for suffering and joy, for sin and nobility. The Elizabethan Drama had a great start, a fabulous run and a steady decline but the works are still celebrated and revered as unfailing contributions to literature.



#### **4.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Sketch the Origin of the Elizabethan Drama with special reference to Elizabethan Tragedy.
2. Shakespeare is said to have started where Marlowe left. Discuss Marlowe's contribution towards Elizabethan Drama.
3. Discuss the contributions of the University Wits towards strengthening of drama as a popular form of expression.
4. Trace Thomas Kyd's contribution to the rise of drama and comment on his prominence as a University Wit even though most of his works were lost.
5. The University Wits were influenced by classical European drama. Discuss the truth of this statement.
6. Discuss the common features shared by the six young men who were known as the University Wits.
7. Discuss the salient features of Elizabethan drama.
8. The dramatists actively projected society in their works. Discuss the statement.

## **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

## **UNIT 5: READING DR FAUSTUS**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Christopher Marlowe: His Life and Works
- 5.3 Context of the Play
- 5.4 Reading the Play
- 5.5 Reference to the Context
- 5.6 Summing Up

1.6 Assessment Questions

### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, published in 1604, is a tragedy in blank verse and prose by the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe. Even though the later edition of 1616 is considered to be more reliable, yet, in fact, both the editions are faulty. The 1604 text, known as A-Text, was published by Thomas Bushell and the 1616 text was published by John Wright which is known as the B-text. The play is about the medieval legend of the bargain of Faustus with the Devil and the tragic consequences of this act of overreaching. It shows the dreadful consequences of a man's deliberate commitment to evil for gratifying his own pride, ambition, and lust. *Doctor Faustus* is based on the German story of *Faust*, in which a man sells his soul to the devil in exchange for all things powerful. The play was performed by the same company which produced Marlowe's other play *Tamburlaine*, the Admiral's Men. These men were now

called the Earl of Nottingham's Men, recognizing their patron's new eminence. In this unit, we are going to discuss the context of the play *Doctor Faustus* and do a reading of the text along with a discussion of certain passages from the play.

### **5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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

- discuss the life and works of Christopher Marlowe
- familiarize yourself with the play, *Doctor Faustus*
- appreciate some relevant passages from the play

### **5.2 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: LIFE AND WORKS**

Christopher Marlowe was a famous playwright born in Canterbury in 1564. His father, John, was a shoemaker, and a member of the shoemakers' and tanners' guild. It is interesting to note that one of the greatest playwrights and poets of the world, William Shakespeare, and one of the greatest astronomers the world has known, Galileo Galilei were born in the same year as Marlowe. He entered Corpus Christi College of Cambridge on a scholarship in 1580 and took his BA degree in 1584 and MA degree in 1587. It is probable that while in the university, he became an agent of Francis Walsingham, the principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I of England, who was a great schemer and remembered as her "spymaster". Marlowe became a favourite of Walsingham's brother Thomas, and although the details of the missions that he undertook in the secret service are not known, yet it can be speculated that his

activities as an agent might have a possible link to his death by violence. 1587 was also the year in which Parts I and II of *Tamburlaine the Great* was successfully performed in the London Theatre, giving the London stage “pageantry and a spectacle of amoral aspiration sweeping all before it, with death as the only enemy to whom the hero became subject” (Datta 1). The lead actor of the Lord Admiral’s Men, Edward Alleyn, gave a just deliverance of the play’s superb rhetoric. It will interest you to know that Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (1587) was also performed about this same time. Although Marlowe might have already written *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1593) in collaboration with Thomas Nashe, yet it was *Tamburlaine* which established him as a playwright in his own right. The play was published in 1590. Incidentally, it was the same year when Books I-III of Spenser’s *Fairie Queene* was published.

Marlowe was a man-about-town with a ‘reputation’ of a man with a notorious private life, coupled with accusations of atheism, blasphemy, homosexuality and the like. Owing to lack of evidence, the chronological order of *Dido* cannot be dated with certainty, but the play, even with all its shortcomings, is a proof that Marlowe applied the playwright’s craft seriously. It also shows his careful apprenticeship in the classics. The poem is drawn mostly from Book IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, but Marlowe’s familiarity with the entire poem can very well be understood from his writing. *The Jew of Malta*, another of Marlowe’s greatest plays was performed in 1589. In the same year, he was arrested and imprisoned for taking part in a street fight, but after trial at the Old Bailey, he was discharged. *The Jew of Malta* is a tragedy, or rather, a grotesque comedy which

deals with how “murderous excess and inflated rhetoric parody statesmanship and the posturing of Christian authority” (Ousby 595). The hero is obviously the villain here – the Jew Barabas – and the play belongs to this utterly unscrupulous man. In fact, after *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe “continued to dramatize the careers and aspirations of overreaching heroes whose bold defiance of social, political and religious morality invites admiration at the same time as it deserves condemnation” (Ousby 595).

It is possible that *Doctor Faustus* was performed circa 1592-93, but the years 1588 and 1589 are also a matter of conjecture. *Edward the Second*, Marlowe’s most accomplished play was performed in 1592. It is a historical tragedy in blank verse published in 1594. The play is more personal than historical, but the history, however, is very well handled. It depicts in a new and plain style the defeat and murder of a homosexual king by powerful barons. It is the best constructed of all Marlowe’s works, with the focus shifting from Edward to his lover Gaveston, and from his Queen Isabella to her lover Mortimer. *The Massacre at Paris* was performed in 1593, and the poem *Hero and Leander* was also written. The protagonist of the former play, the Duke of Guise, is similar to Barabas of *The Jew of Malta* in his villainy. The satirical treatment of the horrific St. Bartholomew massacre of 1572 was distasteful and disturbing in the contemporary Protestant England, and Marlowe’s indiscretion was also risky at the time.

The logic that the Marlovian over-reacher comes to a seemingly logical conclusion in *Doctor Faustus* may have contributed to its being claimed by scholars and critics as the last of Marlowe’s plays. As mentioned earlier, the play survives in two editions, 1604 and 1616. On 12 May, 1593,

Thomas Kyd was arrested and he revealed under torture that certain sacrilegious and unorthodox documents denying the divinity of Jesus Christ found in his possession actually belonged to Marlowe; a warrant was subsequently issued for Marlowe's arrest on 18 May on charges of atheism and blasphemy. But his life was cut short when Marlowe was stabbed to death by Ingram Frizer in a brawl in a Deptford tavern. No one can predict what greater plays Marlowe might have gone on to write or what heights of literary excellence he might have achieved. London was reeling under the Great Plague, and Marlowe spent the last months before his murder writing *Hero and Leander*, which was published in two editions in 1598. The lyrical poem *The Passionate Shepherd* is another well-known poem by Marlowe. In 1599, printed copies of Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Elegies* into heroic couplets were publicly burnt on orders of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London because of the alleged licentiousness of the work. In 1600, his translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Book I was published, but the work was probably completed in Cambridge.

After his violent death, Christopher Marlowe was finally laid to rest in the churchyard of St. Nicholas at Deptford.

#### EXERCISE

Consult any book on history of English literature and prepare a list of Marlowe's contemporaries. Prepare a chart of their works chronologically.

### 5.3 CONTEXT OF THE PLAY

As we all know, the play *Doctor Faustus* is about the medieval legend of Faustus's bargain with the Devil followed by death at his hands. Men seemed to become very powerful and also acquired supernatural powers by making agreements with the Devil. This legend first found its way into print at Frankfurt in 1587, the chief character being identified with a Doctor Georg Faust, a necromancer of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Germany. He is called Johann Faust in the Frankfurt *Volksbuch*, and Marlowe also calls his protagonist John in his dramatization of the story. In fact, the historical Georg or John Faustus was probably a wandering scholar and fortune-teller, and documentary proof does not paint him as a very attractive man. Rather he was described as "guilty of the grossest immorality" and also arrogant and conceited. The description of his association with evil and of his final death at the Devil's hands can be found in a work published by a Protestant theologian in 1548, and subsequent literary writings elaborated and carried forward this legend. And as mentioned earlier, the full narrative of the legendary life and death of this new, most interesting protagonist, Faustus, engaged in a compact with Satan appeared in 1587, published in Frankfurt-on-Main as the *Histria von D.Iohañ Fausten* or the German Faust-Book. The translation of its title page literally sums up the story of his life:

History of Dr. John Faust, the celebrated  
conjuror and master of black magic: How he  
sold himself to the Devil with effect from an  
appointed time: What in the meanwhile were

the strange adventures he witnessed, himself initiated, and conducted, until at last he received his well-deserved reward. Mostly collected and printed from his own writings which he left behind him, as a terrifying instance and horrible example, and as a friendly warning to all arrogant, insolent-minded, and godless men. (Jump 2)

The German Faust-Book aims at making people aware of the terrible consequences of a man's deliberate commitment to evil in order just to pander to his own pride and ambition. Since Faustus was also a scholar, therefore, this German book allows the leading character some touches of the Renaissance man. As Kitty Datta says, "...Marlowe's play belongs in a special way to Renaissance Europe, both through its echoing of Continental mystery, miracle-play and carnival traditions, through its German source, and through its link with contemporary philosophical and religious debate over the extent of human freedom" (iii).

#### **5.4 READING OF THE PLAY**

The main action of the play *Doctor Faustus* can be divided into three parts. A Chorus introduces the Prologue and says that this play is about the "fortunes" of a man born of parents "base of stock" in a town called Rhode in Germany, a scholar of theology, but who, consumed with a "self-conceit" and a complete arrogance, decided to overreach himself, because of which "heavens conspir'd his overthrow". Faustus became a glutton of learning and

overindulged himself in necromancy, preferring it over true religion. After the Chorus exits, we find Faustus sitting in his study. We find him weary of scientific study and therefore he bids adieu to philosophy, medicine, law and divinity, claiming them as “odious and obscure” and turns to “heavenly” book of magicians and necromancy, excited about the “world of profit and delight,/Of power, of honour, of omnipotence” that it has to offer. Faustus invokes the aid of the Devil, but the Good Angel pleads with him to keep aside the “dammed book” and read the scriptures instead. However, the goading of the Bad Angel’s was more powerful and attractive, and Faustus became satisfied by imagining the possibility of black magic, and contemplates on the adventurous enterprises that can be performed with it. He is rapturous as he contemplates on the unlimited powers that will enable him to accomplish whatever he desires.

“O what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,  
Is promis’d to the studious artisan!  
All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command...  
A sound magician is a demi-God.” (I. i)

Marlowe in these lines wonderfully portrays the flights of fancy of Faustus’ eager mind indicating his confidence and daring. He welcomes his German friends Valdes and Cornelius who know the technicality of black magic and who will teach him the “concealed arts”. They tell him that once he masters black magic, more people will frequent him than the “Delphian oracle”. You should remember that the ultimate decision to commit himself to

evil is Faustus' own and like all tragic heroes, he must be responsible for the choice that he makes. The Evil Trinity constitutes Lucifer, Mephistophilis and Belzebub. When Faustus calls upon the Devil in his quest for power, he sends his agent Mephistophilis in the form of an ugly beast. Faustus charges him to change his shape and return as an "old Franciscan friar"; upon doing so, Faustus gloats on how "pliant" and humble Mephistophilis is. Faustus tells the Devil that he shall do whatever he commands, whether it be "to make the moon drop from her sphere,/Or the ocean to overwhelm the world" (I. iii). Mephistophilis cannot experience the prospects of hope because he is eternally damned. He acknowledges the fact that there is a heaven and that he and Lucifer rebelled against God and therefore they were damned till eternity, and a soul that is eternally damned will always experience despair no matter wherever it goes. When the Good Angel exhorts Faustus to leave the "execrable art", he seems to yield for a moment but the Bad Angel draws him back to his arrogant ways by encouraging him to think of the "honour and of wealth" that now lie within his power. Faustus makes his bargain with the Devil thus: Lucifer will give him twenty-four years of life, and Mephistophilis will be his servant and do his bidding, and shall "appear to the said John Faustus at all times, in what form or shape soever he please", but at the end of the stipulated period, he will give both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East. This is sealed by a deed in Faustus' own blood as a security. Interestingly, when Faustus cuts his arm to draw blood, it congeals, perhaps a sign of God telling Faustus to back away from his damnable pursuit, but Mephistophilis brings a chafer of fire to make his blood flow again. Upon signing the deed,

Faustus gives him the scroll, “a deed of gift, of body and of soul” (II. i).

The contract gives Faustus everything he asks for. He questions Mephistophilis about hell, and he says that

“Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib’d  
In one self place, but where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be.” (II. i)

Mephistophilis tries to excite Faustus’ hedonistic instincts by saying that “marriage is a ceremonial toy” and he will produce the “fairest courtesans” and bring them to his bed every morning. However, he also refuses to answer certain questions like when Faustus asks him who made the world, Mephistophilis says he will not tell him because “Thou art damn’d, think thou of hell”. Faustus’ guardian Angel tries to make him repent so that he may redeem himself, but the Bad Angel goes on saying that he should never repent because he is already damned. The Good and the Bad Angel serve to externalize Faustus’ internal struggle with his conscience. Faustus himself says that “My heart’s so harden’d I cannot repent”, but also calls upon Christ, the saviour to help “save distressed Faustus’ soul”. Lucifer, Belzebub and Mephistophilis enter and say he should not think of God, but of the Devil and Faustus vows “never to look to heaven,/Never to name God or to pray to him.” The Devils show him the pleasures of the Seven Deadly Sins who appear in “their own proper shapes and likeness”, a sight which will be as pleasant to him “as Paradise was to Adam the first day of his creation”. You may perhaps be aware that the Seven Deadly Sins are Pride, Covetousness or Greed, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth and Lust.

Chorus I introduces the second part of the play wherein Faustus will arrive at Rome to “see the Pope and manner of his court,/And take some part of holy Peter’s feast”. The Pope, the Cardinals and Bishops, the Monks and Friars, Raymond, King of Hungary enter with Bruno, the Rival Pope led in chains. Faustus urges Mephistophilis to haste so that he may “restore this Bruno to his liberty/And bear him to the states of Germany”. After a confrontation with the Pope and Cardinals in Rome where Faustus was cursed with “bell, book and candle”, Faustus invokes the spirit of Helen of Greece, “the admirablest lady that ever lived... that peerless dame of Greece, whom all the world admires for her majesty” (V. i). An Old Man pleads with Faustus to “leave this damned art,/This magic that will charm thy soul to hell”, pleading with him to step back from the brink because there is still hope that his “amiable soul” can achieve mercy.

“Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
Do not persevere in it like a devil.  
Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable soul,  
If sin by custom grow not into nature:  
Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late,  
Then thou art banish’d from the sight of heaven;  
No mortal can express the pains of hell.” (V. i)

The Old Man suggests the reality of time in moral consequences. But Faustus is in despair because he cannot be absolutely humble, and the Old Man leaves with “grief of heart”, fearing the ruin of Faustus’ “hapless soul”. Feeling bereft, Faustus cries out that he does repent and does despair, and wants to escape the “snares of death”, but

Mephistophilis brands him a traitor for trying to disobey his “sovereign Lord”, and threatens to tear him apart. Faustus, fearing retribution, volunteers to re-confirm his bond with Lucifer. He makes his choice and calls upon the spirit of Helen once again, who enters, passing over between two Cupids. Faustus embraces her and exclaims his famous apostrophe,

“Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies.  
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena.” (V. i)

When Faustus implores Helen to make him “immortal”, he uses the Platonic language of love, but in a grim, desperate situation. As a consequence of this final hedonistic activity, Faustus has to suffer eternal damnation. The Old Man enters again and tells Faustus that his soul will never acquire the “grace of heaven”. The appearance of the Old Man suggests that Faustus is still in the world of Time.

In the last scene of the play, we see Lucifer, Belzebub and Mephistophilis entering to claim the soul of Faustus, bringing with them “lasting damnation”. The climax of the play is Faustus’ monologue expressing his states of mind and feeling and anticipating the terrifying ordeal that awaits him once his soul is forfeited. He has by now learnt to think about others and a sense of morality and humanity has entered into his character. The clock striking

eleven creates the atmosphere of doom and portends the horror in his last hour of mortal life.

“Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damn’d perpetually.” (V. ii)

Time is the substance and essence of the monologue and the momentum of the language follows the movement of the mind of the protagonist.

“The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike.  
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn’d.  
O I’ll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?  
See, see, where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!  
One drop would save my soul, half a drop.  
Ah, my Christ!” (V. ii)

His speech shows us a mind that is completely broken, as he comprehends the enormity of eternity. Faustus admits that he had committed sins of the flesh and also realizes that hope is forever lost for a damned soul. All tragic heroes must in the end take responsibility for their situation and Faustus does the same. In his final moments of anguish, Faustus hopes for extinction:

“O soul, be chang’d into little water drops  
And fall into the ocean, ne’er be found.” (V. iii)

The last Chorus sings of moralistic sentiments typical of the Morality plays, but it seems to be redundant as the Chorus does not enhance the play in any way. Nevertheless, *Doctor Faustus* is a magnificent play with a

great theme that is expressed in a language which rises equal to it.

#### EXERCISE

1. Consult books and other materials to read more about the original sources on Faustus.
2. Try to find out whether/ how much Marlowe deviates from the original stories.

#### 5.4 REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT

In this section, let us discuss some passages from the play for your better understanding and appreciation.

“Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art  
Wherein all nature’s treasury is contain’d.  
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
Lord and commander of these elements.”

The passage is an extract from **Act I Scene i** of *Doctor Faustus*. These lines have been uttered by the Bad Angel at a significant moment in the play when Faustus had just made up his mind to pursue necromancy after dismissing the conventional branches of learning as being inadequate to meet his potential. The black arts seem to hold a world of infinite possibilities for “the studious artisan”, as Faustus affirms; “a world of profit and delight”, a world of “power”, “honour”, “omnipotence”. Faustus believes that he can realise his passions to perfection through the use of necromancy. Therefore, he ecstatically exclaims that “a sound magician is a demi-god”. The lines spoken by the Bad Angel is just an echo of Faustus’ own utterances. You

may note that the quoted lines also indicate Marlowe's mastery in handling blank verse with grace and fluidity.

Let us have a look at another passage:

“Jerome’s Bible, Faustus, view it well.

*Stipendium peccati mors est. Ha! Stipendium, etc.,*

The reward of sin is death. That’s hard.

*Si pecasse negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis veritas.*

If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and

There is no truth in us. Why then, belike we must sin,

and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera.*

What will be, shall be. Divinity, adieu!”

These lines occur in **Act I Scene i** when Faustus makes an evaluation of the conventional branches of learning. You have learnt that Faustus had already rejected philosophy, medicine and law as being too restrictive to meet the demands of his passion. He now conducts a scrutiny of Jerome’s Bible or the Vulgate and quotes from it which also reflects his perception of the Christian metaphysics. It is significant that Faustus overlooks the inherent principles of Christianity like the concept of God’s mercy and man’s Salvation and chooses to emphasize the grim realities of sin and damnation. This is again important as we understand that Faustus’ pride and his massive ego have flawed his understanding of the Christian myth. He thinks that sin and damnation is the only course open to man. The warped logic in the quoted lines highlights the

moral failing in his character as well as his impatience to move into the forbidden yet tantalising world of necromancy. You may also note the easy, conversational tone in the lines which reflect Faustus' state of mind.

Let us move on to another passage:

“Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think’st thou that I who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being depriv’d of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul.”

The quoted lines are spoken by Mephostophilis in **Act I Scene iii** when Faustus taunts him that Lucifer’s emissary is “out of hell”, being in the presence of the protagonist. You may have noted from your reading of the play that Mephostophilis presents himself in a very detached yet dignified manner; therefore, this passage may be seen as one of his rare emotional outbursts. The spoken lines dramatize in a very human way, the reality of his suffering. You surely remember that Mephostophilis is a fallen Angel and having tasted divine bliss, he finds his present agony very tormenting, he seems to be “tormented with ten thousand hells”. Although Mephostophilis is a devil, Marlowe humanises his character and makes him almost a tragic figure. This delineation of Lucifer’s emissary by Marlowe may be seen a conspicuous departure from the presentation of the stereotypical devils in the Morality plays. Here again we see Marlowe’s mastery over blank

verse where the emotion experienced by the speaker is beautifully borne out by the rhythm and flow of the language.

Let us read another relevant passage:

“O gentle Faustus, leave this damned art,  
This magic, that will charm thy soul to hell,  
And quite bereave thee of salvation.  
Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
Do not persevere in it like a devil.  
Yet, yet, thou hast an amiable soul,  
If sin by custom grow not into nature:  
Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late”

These lines occur in **Act V Scene i** in the play and are spoken by the Old Man. In **Acts III and IV**, Faustus shows his frivolous side through his trivial merrymaking in the Pope's chamber and the Emperor's court. The dramatic tension in the play is thus downplayed a bit. However, in Act V, the serious issue of Faustus' spiritual condition is once again brought to the forefront. Prior to the appearance of the Old Man, Faustus performs his enchanting magic in the presence of his admiring audience, even conjuring up Helen, “that peerless dame of Greece”. Awed by Faustus' magic and praising him for “this glorious deed”, the Scholars depart. It is then that the Old Man enters and implores Faustus to “leave this damned art” to save himself from damnation. The Old Man speaks with concern as he has a lot of compassion for Faustus who, he believes, still retains his “amiable soul”. Therefore, hope is still not lost and salvation is still a possibility for Faustus. However, if Faustus debases his soul further, eternal damnation will be

inevitable. The Old Man's "exhortation" is very poignant, he speaks "not in wrath" but "in tender love", as he tries to dissuade Faustus from committing more blunders. Hearing the Old Man's words, Faustus is in despair because he knows he cannot be absolutely humble. With the departure of the Old Man, however, Mephistophilis accuses Faustus of being a "traitor" and threatens to "arrest" his soul for "disobedience" to his "sovereign lord". Hearing this, Faustus tamely succumbs and even volunteers to reconfirm his bond with Lucifer with his own blood. Debasing himself further, Faustus even demands of Mephistophilis to "torment" that "base and crooked age" which dared to "dissuade me from thy Lucifer" with the "greatest torment that our hell affords". Even though this is uttered after the departure of the Old Man, Faustus' enslavement to evil and his eternal damnation is affirmed in his symbolic utterance of "our hell". There is no hope for Faustus and his final bondage to evil is complete.

### **5.5 SUMMING UP**

After reading the unit and going through the discussion, you have learnt that the play is about the medieval legend of the bargain of Doctor Faustus with the Devil and the consequences of this act of overreaching and also shows the dreadful consequences of a man's deliberate commitment to evil for gratifying his own pride, ambition, and lust. You have also familiarized yourself with the life of Christopher Marlowe, who, even within his short life-span, has produced works of high literary merit. We have discussed the context of the play and also done a reading of the play with all its nuances. Further, we have discussed a

few references to the context in order to better underscore your understanding and appreciation of the play.



### 5. 6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note on the life and works of Christopher Marlowe

2. Is the thirst for knowledge at the root of the tragedy of Doctor Faustus? Discuss on the basis of your reading of the play.

3. Examine how Marlowe represents the conflicts in Doctor Faustus's mind?

4. Discuss with reference to the context:

(a) "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul."

(b) "Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art

Wherein all nature's treasury is contain'd.  
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
Lord and commander of these elements."

Find the full e-text of *Dr Faustus* in

- [www.fullbooks.com/The-Tragical-History-of-Dr-Faustusx6791.html](http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Tragical-History-of-Dr-Faustusx6791.html)
- [www.fulltextarchive.com/page/Dr-Faustus/](http://www.fulltextarchive.com/page/Dr-Faustus/)

**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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## **UNIT 6: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Is *Doctor Faustus* a Morality Play or a Tragedy?
- 6.3 Significance of the Chorus
- 6.4 Significance of the Comic Scenes
- 6.5 Character of Doctor Faustus
  - 6.5.1 Doctor Faustus as a Renaissance Man
- 6.6 Stages of Damnation of Doctor Faustus
- 6.7 Summing Up
- 6.8 Assessment Questions
- 6.9 Reference and Recommended Readings

### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

As discussed in the previous chapter, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, published in 1604, is a tragedy in blank verse and prose by the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe. The play, as you have read, is about the medieval legend of the Faustus's bargain Faustus with the Devil and the tragic consequences of this act of overreaching. In the previous unit, we had discussed the trajectory of the character of Doctor Faustus from being a brilliant man of knowledge to his ultimate fate for being an overreacher. In this unit we are going to critically analyse Doctor Faustus as a Renaissance man and see how Marlowe's Faustus has the “restless curiosity, the riotous

imagination, and the audacious desires of a man responding fully and delightedly to the new trends in his age and the possibilities they seem to open up" (Jump, 25). At the same time, he is also arrogant and headstrong, and is wholly responsible for bringing about the catastrophe upon himself.

### **6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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

- analyse the themes of the play
- understand the complex character of the protagonist
- assess your understanding of the play

### **6.2 DOCTOR FAUSTUS: MORALITY PLAY OR TRAGEDY**

You have already learnt about the Miracle plays of the late Middle Ages in the earlier unit. Miracle plays were dramatized versions of Biblical stories from the Creation to the Resurrection, celebrating God as manifest in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Morality plays, however, took their inspiration from the sermon and dealt with the problems and dilemmas faced by Man. The plays were usually written in the form of an allegory, with personified abstractions of Virtues and Vices which accompany Man in his progress through life and engage in a battle for the soul of Man. During the Medieval times, the Church was a dominant influence in peoples' lives and the subject matter of the Morality plays were often those that were preached in the Church. In some of the early Morality plays, it can be

seen that “the tragic pattern of conflict between the human will and the divinely-laid-down conditions of life, the sequence of temptation, sin and remorse are only part of a wider optimistic pattern which includes repentance, divine forgiveness and recovery” (Datta, 27). The Morality plays were essentially didactic in nature preaching such Christian virtues as the salvation of man, as in the battle between Good and Evil, the former always triumphs.

The beginning of the Renaissance saw the waning of the influence of the Church on the stage as newer energies were released. Man was becoming aware of his need to realize his dreams and urges. As Wilson Knight puts it, “Nature was no longer under a ban; Lucifer was again scaling the heavens”. All this energy and ebullience became a little difficult to be contained with the limits of a Morality play. Marlowe in his *Doctor Faustus* definitely made use of the characteristics of the Morality plays like the Christian myth, suggestions of Heaven and Hell, the Good and the Bad Angel, the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Old Man and the purely Christian moral verdicts of the Choruses, which are thoroughly didactic. One such pronouncement of the Chorus is the following:

Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,  
To practise more than heavenly power permits.

But to decide whether *Doctor Faustus* is a Morality play or not on the basis of the fact that Marlowe made use of the ‘moral’ element in his play seems a little prejudiced. It is

also true that the tradition of the Morality play was still strong during Marlowe's time and he profited by it in writing *Doctor Faustus*. The play is at best a tragedy, and like all tragedies, it has a moral. After reading the play, you may comprehend that what is being dramatized is not the fight between Good and Evil, rather the trauma of the human experience, focusing on the restlessness of a man who takes part in activities within the cultural pressures of his time and the dilemma of choices presented to him. Faustus is not simply an 'Everyman', but a 'Renaissance Everyman'.

Of all Marlowe's plays, *Doctor Faustus* has proved to be the most difficult to interpret. The fact that Marlowe did not intend to write a Morality play is apparent from the depiction of Mephistophilis. The Devil is thoroughly stoic throughout the play; a humanized Fallen Angel who neither tempts Faustus nor derives any pleasure from his task. He is just an "unhappy spirit" who "conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,/And are for ever damn'd with Lucifer" (I. iv). In fact, he seems to be detached from the whole exercise and even sympathetic to Faustus as he says with his tragic wisdom:

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strikes a terror to my fainting soul. (I. iv)

The play therefore does not try to vindicate Christian values like the Morality play does and neither does it try to subscribe to the protagonist's defiance of the natural order of things. It is rather a play about Marlowe's own agony of loss, an investigation of the human condition. Truth and wisdom can be had only when living is experienced by graduating from innocence to experience, which more than the Morality play, the tragic genre is more capable of handling.

Doctor Faustus lived at that historical moment in time when medieval beliefs were losing both their significance as well as their mystery. He is filled with a passion in his quest for knowledge and power which the protagonists of the earlier Morality plays could never comprehend. Even after forfeiting his soul to the Devil, Faustus seemed to be contemptuous of Hell as can be read from his dialogues with Mephistophilis:

Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to  
imagine  
That after this life there is any pain?  
Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives'  
tales. (II. i)

Humanism was paving its way into the mind of man, and Faustus being the man in the moment also feels the pressures of the cultural forces. The play deals with the despair and aspiration of a man who cannot but live in keeping with his nature and his time even when knowing fully well the risks involved in this adventure. If "Character is Destiny" be the principle of the tragic hero, then Faustus is surely tragic. As mentioned earlier, the tragic hero must

behave the way he does, taking full responsibility for the consequences of his actions. This is what makes him extraordinary and compels our awe. You should remember that although Faustus was born of parents “base of stock”, he was a scholar and a Doctor of Divinity, yet he deliberately and consciously chose necromancy as the means for self-fulfilment, even after being aware of the penalty for his actions. He, like Icarus, used his “waxen wings” to “mount above his reach”. In the sixteenth century, Icarus was a familiar symbol for self-will and destructive ambition. This attempt to overreach himself suggests the height of daring that a tragic hero must necessarily take. The hero of a tragedy should dare to rise above ordinary mortals by doing extraordinary things and make a solitary, hazardous journey to keep his tryst with destiny. Faustus fulfils all these requirements till the very end, keeping his individuality intact. However, you should also remember that since Good should ultimately triumph over Evil, Faustus in the end cries out to his God to save his soul from being damned.

After making his formal deal with Lucifer, Faustus is ecstatic and consumed with his own feeling of power, starts behaving like a child, wanting a “wife, the fairest maid in Germany”, for he is “wanton and lascivious, and cannot live without a wife”. Faustus is aware that he is going against the orthodox world of Christian values by despairing in God and trusting in Belzebub; at the same time, he also attains a glimpse of intense self-realization, when he says that God does not love him and that “The God thou serv’st is thine own appetite”. This sentence highlights Faustus’ insight into his own nature and also highlights his pride. He is the first modern tragic man as he

lives his twenty-four years of hedonistic life wavering between belief and despair in God and Christian truths, choosing a life which was his nature to choose. He derives gratification by imagining the possibilities of black magic. He realizes that he could “ransack the ocean for orient pearl”, “tell the secrets of all foreign kings”, “wall all Germany with brass”, and also clothe the students of the public schools with silk, but actually he never really does that. His quest for knowledge and the need to overreach stems from the essential nature of all men to know the truth and drive away ignorance. After reading the play, you may realize that what Marlowe is trying to dramatize is not only the evil of necromancy, of the black arts, but also the wondrous possibilities it holds, and the daring of the man who makes use of it. Faustus conjures up Helen and also brags to Mephistophilis that:

Have not I made blind Homer sing to me  
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?  
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes  
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,  
Made music with my Mephistophilis?  
Why should I die then, or basely despair?  
I am resolv'd, Faustus shall not repent. (II. ii)

By not repenting for his actions, Faustus lives out his tragedy and retains his individuality. At the end however, he is compelled to reconcile himself to the fact that God is all-powerful and he is but an ordinary mortal, a realization achieved at a supreme price. He acknowledges the grace of the merciful God saying that one drop of Christ's blood would save his soul, but he is also acutely aware that he has

long since deprived himself of His mercy with his buoyant defiance of God. In his final moments of life, he begs Lucifer not to come for him, but that is not to be. With a tragic sigh of “Ah, Mephistophilis!”, he surrenders himself to the Devil and his ultimate destiny.

It has been reiterated time and again that Doctor Faustus knew what his fate will be once he had chosen his path of bartering his soul with the Devil and also knew that his destiny could have been altogether different had he chosen otherwise. But he persists in his chosen course of abjuring God in spite of a few misgivings in the beginning. In the hope of overreaching himself, Faustus succeeds in separating himself from God, isolating himself from his fellowmen and also finally consigning himself to the flames of everlasting Hell. Faustus can be seen as embodying the new enquiring and aspiring spirit of the age of the Renaissance, and Marlowe can be understood as sympathizing with this new spirit, but also at the same time recognizing the pitfalls and perils that it entails. Marlowe while acknowledging Faustus’ spiritedness, also makes it clear in the last Chorus that “such forward wits” who “practice more than heavenly power permits” will ultimately have a “hellish fall”. This overwhelming human experience can be justified better by a tragedy than a Morality play. Doctor Faustus thus lives out man’s deepest aspirations and finally makes the supreme sacrifice at the altar of humanity.

## EXERCISE

1. Go back to the Units on Morality Plays and note down their characteristic features. Now, think in terms of Doctor Faustus and consider how many of the features are applicable to Marlowe's work.
2. As a Renaissance individual Doctor Faustus wants to transcend the borders of available knowledge. Are ethics and search for knowledge mutually exclusive?
3. Try to think why Faustus is a 'Doctor'.

### 6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHORUS

You may have read about the use of the Chorus in classical Greek drama. They are a group of performers who play the role of the narrator, commenting with a collective voice on the dramatic action of the play. The audience is provided with a means through which to follow and understand the action of the play. The Chorus gave an insight to the unexpressed feelings, emotions and thoughts of the main characters of a play by standing outside the main action. Aristotle in his treatise *Poetics* had even stated that the Chorus should be regarded as one of the actors, and have a share in the action. Although this technique was frequently used in ancient Greek theatre, modern instances are also available, where the Chorus is used to great effect. The Chorus was used in *Gorboduc*, the early tragedy by Sackville and Norton, and it was also used as a device by Thomas Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Later on, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson also made use of this medium. However, unlike the Chorus in Greek drama which consisted of a group, the chorus in *Doctor Faustus* is the

voice of one person. As mentioned earlier, the Chorus performs the role of narrator making some detached observations upon the action and defining the moral perspectives of the play. There are two Choruses in *Doctor Faustus* performing the function of the Prologue and Epilogue, and two Choruses within the main action of the play.

In the Prologue, the Chorus announces in formal, rhetorical language that the play is not about great wars nor love affairs nor the grandeur of kings. The focus of the play is on the “form of Faustus’ fortunes, good or bad”, thus making a departure from the conventional themes of a tragedy. The Chorus gives the audience information about the protagonist saying he was

...born, of parents base of stock,  
In Germany, within a town called Rhode.  
...The fruitful plot of scholarism grac’d,  
That shortly he was grac’d with doctor’s name.

The Chorus then arouses the audience’s interest by informing them that this profound scholar however chose to venture into the forbidden domain of the black arts because he was “swol’n with cunning, of a self-conceit”.

...glutted now with learning’s golden gifts,  
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy;  
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,  
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.

The use of the symbolism of Icarus from classical mythology is significant because it shows how the divine

powers conspired to bring about Faustus' downfall. Icarus, as you all know, soared towards the sun on his wax wings, his pride blinding him to the limitations of those wings. Likewise, Faustus was also consumed with a sense of pride over his scholarship, thus blinding himself to his own limitations as a human being.

Since Faustus was “glutted” with “learning’s golden gifts” and was tired of the conventional branches of learning which he finds boringly inadequate for a man of his erudition, therefore he chooses to over-indulge himself in black magic. This image of “glutted” used by the Chorus also foreshadows Faustus’ voracious appetite throughout the play. The Chorus thus in the very beginning, gives broad hints about the sensuality of Faustus as will become evident from the action of the play. Chorus I indicates Faustus’ decision to go to Rome to meet the Pope and partake of “holy Peter’s feast”, because even after going around the world, “new exploits” still “hale him out again”, and therefore,

...with his wings did part the subtle air,  
He now is gone to prove cosmography,  
That measures coasts and kingdoms of the  
earth.

Chorus II sings of how Faustus could answer all “questions of astrology” put forward by his friends with “learned skill”. His fame had also spread far and wide, and he is now feasting with Carolus the Fifth at his palace. But the Chorus also remains silent on what happens there because it wants that the audience should see it for themselves.

What there he did in trial of his art,  
I leave untold: your eyes shall see perform'd.

As discussed earlier, the Chorus in the Epilogue delivers the last word on the new Renaissance spirit of man by making it clear that “Faustus is gone” and his “fiendful fortune” suggests that it would be wise not to “practise more than heavenly power permits”.

By blending history, myth and literature, the Chorus creates an atmosphere of solemnity necessary for a tragedy which is further underscored by Marlowe’s brilliant use of the dignified medium of the blank verse.

#### **6.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COMIC SCENES**

You may be familiar with the technique of introducing comic scenes in a tragedy to relieve the tension of the dramatic action and provide the much needed comic relief. Shakespeare’s artistic genius has entertained us with such comic episodes as the grave diggers’ scene in *Hamlet* (1603) or the drunken Porter scene in *Macbeth* (1606). Although Marlowe’s humour may not be equal to Shakespeare’s, yet the comic scenes in *Doctor Faustus*, besides providing comic relief also parody the main action of the play. The comic scenes with Faustus’ servant Wagner and the Clown Robin serve to criticize the heroic stance of the protagonist and although the scenes seem to be nothing but harmless clowning, yet the attitude is one of disrespect. A careful reading of the play will bring to light the pattern on which the heroic and comic scenes play out.

In the first scene, we see how Faustus arrogantly rejects the conventional classical disciplines of philosophy,

medicine, law and divinity as being restrictive to fulfil his heroic dreams. He aspires after achieving the status of God as “a sound magician as a demi-God”. Thereafter, in the next scene we see Wagner trying to ape his master by acting as an overreacher and wanting to intellectually outwit the two Scholars, one of whom is fatalistic and the other more hopeful of change. We then see Faustus, blinded by pride, bartering his soul to Lucifer for power and sensual living. Immediately afterwards, in Scene iv, we see Wagner and the Clown Robin conversing where Robin considers giving his soul to the devil for a “shoulder of mutton...well roasted, and good sauce to it”. Wagner then tries to hold sway over Robin saying, “...sirrah, if thou dost not presently bind thyself to me for seven years, I’ll turn all the lice about thee into familiars and make them tear thee to pieces.” (I. iv)

Later this echoes happenings in the main plot. Wagner then offers the Clown some “guilders”, and on accepting it, he tells Robin that he will have to serve him from now. Robin acquiesces to it, but he also implores Wagner to teach him the “conjuring occupation”, to which he replies, “Ay sirrah, I’ll teach thee to turn thyself to a dog, or a cat, or a mouse, or a rat, or anything” (I. iv). This looks forward to Robin and Dick being turned into an ape and a dog respectively by Mephistophilis at the end of Act III Scene iii.

During the action of the play, we have Faustus sealing his bond with the Devil with his own blood, conjuring up a wife, discussing “celestial bodies” with Mephistophilis, and enjoying a show of the Seven Deadly Sins. Faustus, by doing all this, seems to distance himself from his initial overreaching ambitions, of tiring his brains

“to get a deity” and stoop down to petty magic. In Act II Sc. iii, Robin proudly carries Faustus’ books of magic and declares to Dick that they will have “such knavery” as surpasses everything else. He even goes on to say that he is not afraid of his master, because magic will allow him to “clap as fair a pair of horns on’s head as e’er thou sawest in thy life.” You need to know that horns are traditionally the sign of a cuckolded man whose wife has been unfaithful to him. In Act III Sc. iii, we see Robin and Dick parodying Faustus’ conjuring powers by trying to steal a goblet from a Vintner, Robin saying that “...I’ll so conjure him, as he was never conjured in his life”. Mephistophilis enters and as mentioned earlier, in anger he turns Robin and Dick to an ape and a dog respectively.

To purge the rashness of this cursed deed  
First, be thou turned to this ugly shape,  
For apish deeds transformed to an ape  
...be thou transformed to a dog, and carry  
him upon thy back. (III. iii)

From the above discussion, you may have deduced the irony of these scenes as the hero and the clown somewhere merge rather than becoming dissociated from each other. Faustus drowning in his feeling of power seems to confuse reality and fantasy and Marlowe uses these comic scenes to filter his ironic perspectives. At the beginning of the play, Faustus appears to be very serious about his high ambitions, but as the play progresses, we see him making a fool of himself by indulging in petty activities. He abuses a Pope in Rome by boxing his ears, beats up the Friars, entertains the Emperor, Carolus the Fifth, horns a Knight

Benvolio, cheats a horse-courser of forty dollars by giving him a bundle of hay instead of a horse, and also produces ripe grapes out of season for the Duke of Vanholt's pregnant Duchess. In this way, Faustus seems to be parodying his own vaulting ambitions just as Wagner and the Clown had burlesqued them earlier. The "demi-God" stoops down to the level of his own servant and his minions.

Just as Wagner, trying to be a scholar, is as futile as Faustus wanting to be a God, Faustus, selling his soul for twenty-four years of hedonistic pleasure, is as ludicrous as Robin wanting to sell his soul for a shoulder of roasted mutton. In Rome, Faustus steals meat and the wine goblet from the Pope, and later on we see Robin stealing the cup from the Vintner. Faustus seems to succumb to deception as he performs only inconsequential acts with his newly acquired powers. As pure comedy, the comic scenes in themselves do not induce much laughter. But these scenes are significant because they serve the important purpose of correcting the moral barometer of the audience and showing that the difference between the hero and the clown is one of degree only and not of kind.

### EXERCISE

1. Go back to relevant sources and note down the roles the Chorus in Greek tragedies plays. Who constitute(s) the Chorus there? Compare and contrast the Greek Chorus with that in *Doctor Faustus*.
2. Take any Shakespearean tragedy you have read and think of the functions of comic scenes there. Compare these functions with those in *Doctor Faustus*.

## 6.5 CHARACTER OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS

From the above discussion, you may have acquired a fair idea of the character of Doctor Faustus. For purposes of clarity, however, let us try to interpret how his character works out and progresses throughout the play. You must have already realized that Faustus' pride stems from a false perception of his own potential, and therefore he stubbornly persists in his chosen path of evil, throwing caution to the winds. In the beginning, we learn that Faustus has read Jerome's Bible and also quotes from it, but he reads only part of each Divine statement and conspicuously overlooks that part of the Holy Books which talks about God's mercy towards sinners: "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord", and "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins". Faustus argues that all men are sinners and they must inevitably commit sin, so they must be condemned to perdition.

The reward of sin is death...

If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. Why then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death. (I. i)

The tragic flaw of Faustus's personality is his warped perception of Christianity because he never really shows any conviction regarding the gentler manifestations of Christianity. And when he does realize this and implores Christ to "save distressed Faustus' soul", the Devils take advantage of his earlier mistrust and terrorize him by asserting that "Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just."

According to Laurie Maguire and Aleksandra Thostrup,

Marlowe depicts character by ironising distance – between the character and his theatrical predecessors, between the character and his role, between two terms in a simile. Faustus even ironises the theatrical equivalent of sumptuary laws when he instructs Mephistopheles to dress as a friar, since that holy shape ‘becomes a devil best’(I.iii.27): he is simultaneously making and mocking stage-devils and the semiotics that render the staged body and its character assimilable to a specific way of seeing and interpreting dramatic action. Throughout *Doctor Faustus* the very shape and meaning of the devilish become a source of crisis, growing ever more disturbing to inherited modes of theatrical experience. As Mephistopheles answers honestly and Lucifer, in a single scene of theatrical ‘show’, stands impotently by, it is Faustus who assumes the role of tempter and seducer, of the word-juggler who cites Scripture to his purpose. Not the devil but Faustus’ words mould his thought. In presenting Faustus as his own tempting devil, Marlowe collapses the distance between the externally and the internally diabolic. (quoted in Bartels and Smith, 42)

Faustus’ logic is that if salvation is impossible for him, then the only possible course left for him is damnation since all men are guilty of the Original Sin. He realizes that he cannot be saved as he makes a blasphemous assertion before making the pact with Lucifer:

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damn'd?  
And canst thou not be sav'd.  
What boots it then to think on God or heaven?  
Away with such vain fancies, and despair;  
Despair in God, and trust on Belzebub.  
...Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.  
To God? He loves thee not.  
The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite. (II. i)

Faustus thus makes the mistake of thinking that the behaviour of supernatural beings, devil or God is dependent on human attitudes. These lines also express his sense of pride, and give an insight into his nature. As mentioned earlier, his flawed perception of the Christian metaphysics is Faustus' fatal flaw. According to Kitty Datta,

...Faustus' self-deception operates at a very deep level: he seems to be strikingly hard-headed and open-eyed at the beginning of the play as regards his damnation, but he turns out to have been mistaken not only about the real state of his soul, but also about the positive compensations for the loss of it. The growth of Faustus' mind may therefore be seen in his later recognition of the bitter implications of his original decision to cross hands with evil, which he had failed to realize in imagination beforehand. (Datta, 52)

Faustus is a man surging with unbounded energy and full of knowledge, but because of his inflated pride, he fails to give a proper orientation to that knowledge and thus it lacks

purpose and direction. One fundamental lack in his personality is the instability of his character. At one moment, Faustus will indulge in such silly pursuits as horning the knight Benvolio, or snatching the food and drink of the Pope, and at other times, he will also take pleasure in the classics of Homer and the beauty of the Helen. Faustus seems to be unsure of what he wants as when Mephistophilis asks him in their first meeting, “Now Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do?”, he gives a very vague, unfocussed answer:

I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,  
To do whatever Faustus shall command,  
Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,  
Or the ocean overwhelm the world. (I. iii)

Because of the flaws in his character, Faustus cannot be objective enough to measure the wisdom in the words of the Good Angel, the Old Man and even Mephistophilis. If you read the dialogues between Faustus and Mephistophilis, you will find that the latter at times speaks with a tragic detachment. For example, when Faustus asks him about the whereabouts of Hell, Mephistophilis replies with an honest appraisal:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd  
In one self place, but where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be.  
And to be short, when all the world dissolves  
And every creature shall be purified,  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven. (II. i)

The tragedy is that Faustus considers Hell to be paradise, and since pride has blinded him to the truth, he fails to understand the worth of Mephistophilis' words. Faustus' hedonistic urges seem to be a manifestation of his attempts to relieve the burdens of his soul. Unable to counter Mephistophilis' assertion about the reality of Hell in the above mentioned quote, Faustus digresses from the discussion and demands a wife, for he is "wanton and lascivious" and "cannot live without a wife". Maguire and Thostrup have aptly commented that

...Marlowe's central figures are remarkably lonely ones and thus have more ontological verisimilitude than they are generally seen to have. Barabas converts social marginality into dramatic centrality; but the centre of the stage, like the apex of political power or the empty space bounded by a conjuror's circle, is a lonely place to be in Marlovian drama. Beneath the emotionally anaesthetised stereotype of 'the Jew' stirs a very human need for companionship and sympathy – the very things from which Barabas's designated 'character' excludes him... Faustus fantasises about filling up a world that seems sinisterly empty, depleted of humanity even before he begins to conjure...At the most pragmatic level, Faustus seems to want either an equal with whom to have intellectual argument ('I think hell's a fable' could be a debating motion as much as a denial; II .i.130) or a wife (his instructions to Mephistopheles to be pliable, obedient, and appear whenever summoned sound like an early modern male's vision of marriage). (qtd. in Bartels and Smith 45)

Mephistophilis also tries to excite Faustus' hedonistic instincts deliberately by tempting him with sensual pleasures to distract him from more serious pursuits. And Faustus unfortunately, gives in to the Devil's designs, albeit consciously. When he asks for Helen in order to "glut the longing of my heart's desire" and wants her to make him "immortal with a kiss", Faustus seems to seal his ultimate fate once and for all, surrendering himself to Hell.

Towards the end of the play, we see a man emotionally and spiritually drained out but with his sense of pride still intact. He has now learnt to think about others too and recovers his nobility and humanity. The human content can be perceived when Faustus appeals to nature against his unnatural destiny.

Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make  
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.

(V. ii)

He even acknowledges the mercy of Christ when he exclaims, "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! One drop would save my soul, half a drop." This however cannot happen because Faustus is beyond salvation. Realization dawns upon him about the heavenly bliss that he has lost as he contemplates on the eternity of damnation. Faustus' final monologue evokes all the horror and tragedy of a soul comprehending the enormity of eternal damnation and of a hope lost forever for a damned soul.

### **6.5.1 Doctor Faustus as Renaissance Man**

Doctor Faustus is a modern man, breaking free from the restraints of a limiting social structure and responding to his cultural moment and this is what makes him attractive. His pride is combined with an ambition far in excess of what is proper to mankind. Pride and “self-conceit” is his primal sin which opens the floodgates to all other sins of the flesh. Even the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins is significantly led by Pride. But if we keep his pride and stubbornness aside, we find that Faustus is a representative of the Renaissance ideal of the perfectibility of man. He is a romantic discoverer, a daring adventurer, a curious humanist, and a connoisseur of beauty and the arts. His union with the immortal beauty of Helen testifies to his love of beauty although it ultimately leads to his downfall. Lisa Hopkins comments that in *Doctor Faustus*, “Helen of Troy symbolizes both beauty and the goal of the ultimate and most culturally prestigious quest narrative of Marlowe’s age, the Troy story” (160). If we study Faustus’ character, we find the tragic possibilities of a direct clash between Renaissance zeal and Christian orthodoxy. In the first scene itself, we see how Faustus scornfully bids adieu to the constricting classical disciplines because “a greater subject fitteth Faustus’ wit”. He vehemently denounces Divinity which shows a callous disregard for the Christian metaphysics. He aspires for liberation from all conventional learning and dares to study necromancy which will pander to his quest for knowledge and power, to the whims of his being and endow himself with the status of a demi-God. This attitude marks him out as a Renaissance man.

During the Renaissance there was a rebirth of learning and man started asserting his individuality because of a new sense of confidence. Faustus, over-satisfied by imagining the possibilities of black magic, dreams of indulging in hedonistic as well as aesthetic pleasures when he says,

“I’ll have them fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
And search all corners of the new-found world  
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates.” (I. i)

While waiting for Valdes and Cornelius who will teach him the “concealed arts” and initiate him into black magic, Faustus contemplates the varied uses to which he will put his acquired skills. This bears witness to his ranging curiosity, his desire for luxury and wealth, his nationalism as well his yearning for power which are the unmistakable traits of a Renaissance man. He is fascinated with the classics and even compares his intellectual prowess to the Greek love poet Musaeus. There are frequent allusions in Marlowe’s works which show that he was well-versed in the classical poetry and legends that men were enthusiastically studying during the Renaissance. The Faustus character is constantly struggling between extremes, the possibilities of heavenly bliss and the enormity of Hell. According to Lisa Hopkins, “Doctor Faustus’s indecision touched a culturally crucial chord; even the two texts in which the play survives, and the difficulties of choice they present, are aptly emblematic of the difficulties of choice presented to an entire culture” (164). The instability of the tragic hero thus matches the

instability of the age. John D. Jump has aptly commented that

...Faustus' dream of power includes much that must by its nature have appealed strongly to the people for whom Marlowe wrote; and the liveliness and zest with which it is expounded must have made the appeal irresistible. (28).

Faustus' wish to be the "great emperor of the world", to assure that the "Emperor shall not live but by my leave,/Nor any potentate of Germany" testifies to the Renaissance spirit of imperialism. Necromancy seemed to offer greater possibilities than theology, but his achievements within the black arts succeeds only in debunking his intellectual proficiency in the course of the play. Even though towards the end, Faustus is finally able to envisage accepting Christ's forgiveness, his pride becomes an obstacle, and he even reconfirms his bond with Lucifer. Pride thus leads to the pathetic downfall of the scholar extraordinaire. Faustus seems to have more in common with Icarus who because of his recklessness and pride, met a premature death by falling into the Aegean sea, than with Faust. Doctor Faustus is more a representative than an individual figure. The play deals with the paradox at the heart of the Renaissance, the deeply problematic relationship between freedom and necessity, between timidity and appetite. And Faustus with his passion and zest for life is a man of his historical moment. Even though he lost control over himself, he can also be defined as a Renaissance Icarus. According to John D. Jump,

...we can surely have no hesitation in thinking of Faustus as embodying the new inquiring and aspiring

spirit of the age of the Renaissance, and of Marlowe as expressing in this play both his fervent sympathy with that new spirit and, ultimately, his awed and pitiful recognition of the peril into which it could lead those whom it dominated. Emancipation from an old order; the free play of the mind; the assertion of one's individuality—these Renaissance purposes evidently attract Marlowe; but he delivers his last word on the subject in the Epilogue, where he makes it clear that 'such forward wits' as 'practise more than heavenly power permits' are preparing for themselves a 'hellish fall' (ll. 7–8,4). (37)

#### **6.6 STAGES OF DAMNATION OF 'DOCTOR FAUSTUS'**

There is a medieval belief that repentance is possible after death and the soul may proceed towards heaven after going through purgatory. According to Roman Catholic theology, purgatory is "a state in which souls who have departed this life in the grace of God are cleansed by suffering and are thereby prepared for heaven" (Datta, 64). But a soul damned will not be able to enjoy any of these benefits. Damnation is a spiritual condition characterized by extreme despair and moral sufferings experienced by someone who operates within a state of evil, defying the mercy of God. There is also no such state as being less damned or more damned. Faustus, like the devil Mephistophilis, is a damned soul and the play *Doctor Faustus* is at best a tragedy of damnation concerning a human being. A careful reading of the play will enable you to trace the history of the moral decay of Faustus. He sinks

to an abominable low with his actions and declarations during the twenty-four years of his hedonistic enterprise within the black arts. Evil has a tendency to protract, therefore Faustus loses his humanity and progresses towards a moral deterioration.

From the above discussions, you are now aware of the fact that the primary flaw or sin of Faustus is his pride and all his actions are consequences of this fact. He refuses to listen to the Good Angel, the Old Man, his own conscience and even at times to the wise words of Mephistophilis and becomes ultimately damned. He wallows in his “cunning” and “self-conceit” as the Prologue tells us, and his undue intellectual pride makes him “practise more than heavenly power permits” as the Epilogue affirms. Faustus sweeps aside the conventional classical disciplines with an impatient scorn and breathlessly contemplates the “world of profit and delight”, the power and “omnipotence” that he expects to enjoy as a practitioner of black magic. He considers philosophy to be “odious and obscure”, law and physic to be for “petty wits” and Divinity to be basest of all, “unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile”. The Renaissance humanistic ideal and zeal makes Faustus heady and he rejects the Christian metaphysical order. Drunk with power and energy, the overreacher aspires after the fulfilment of self and dreams of achievement which reflects his ambitions. He anticipates that the spirits will release him from all doubts and uncertainties and do what he bids them, whether it be flying to India for gold, or telling him the “secrets of all foreign kings”, or walling Germany with brass. His rhapsody dramatizes the fervour of the human spirit in its quest for the limitless. But his ranging imagination makes his accomplishments all the

more petty as the play progresses and Faustus indulges in such base acts as horning a Knight, thieving from a Pope and such other practical jokes. He is therefore no better than his servant Wagner and the Clown Robin. This moral chaos is a consequence of a soul acting within the state of damnation.

As mentioned earlier, Faustus's hedonism culminates in the famous Helen episode when he performs an act of demonic dimension by attempting to embrace and physically unite with her, which seals all prospects of redemption. When Faustus asks Mephistophilis about the whereabouts of Hell, the latter very detachedly replies that "hell hath no limits" and that "where we are is hell,/And where hell is, there must we ever be", thus suggesting perdition to be a state of mind. This is not merely a definition of damnation, but also an assertion of Faustus' real situation, from which he is never able to redeem himself. Even when the Old Man assures Faustus that his soul can still achieve mercy, he in turn losing all his humanity, commands Mephistophilis to heap on the Old Man the "greatest torment that our hell affords". When the Old Man rules out the possibility of redemption for Faustus, he adds to his sins the further mortal sin of despair. His union with Helen and the presence of the Old Man throughout most of that scene further plunges him into irremediable despair. Pride, thus, along with blinding him, brings only despair for Faustus, and his actions symbolize the metaphysics of damnation. John D. Jump says,

In a prose passage which must be one of the very few we have by Marlowe, he takes a moving farewell of the Scholars. Mephistophilis assures him that it is now too late to repent; and when the Angels enter

immediately afterwards they merely moralize upon the fact of his damnation. For Faustus' conviction that he has committed himself finally to evil has made his despair absolute and impregnable. So what we hear in the great soliloquy which expresses his states of mind and feeling during his last hour is the voice of an already damned soul. (35)

The tragedy of his condition is that he realizes a little too late the need to prostrate himself before a greater power, and this realization comes at too dear a price. In the last Act, this Renaissance Icarus comprehends the glory of God; that even half a drop of Christ's blood is enough to save his soul. Alas! That is not to be and because of the despair in his soul, Faustus is hurled to eternal damnation. In theatre, this scene offers the maximum to the actor, but at the same time, also demands the maximum from the actor.

### **6.7 SUMMING UP**

After reading the unit and going through the discussion, you have learnt to critically analyse the play with all its attendant themes and motifs. The question of whether *Doctor Faustus* is a Morality play or a tragedy has been dwelt upon. The unit also discusses the significance of the Choruses in the play as also the introduction of the comic scenes to provide thoughtful laughter. You are now able to delineate the personality of Faustus and recognize the primary flaws in his character. That he is also a Renaissance man breaking free from the restraints of a limiting social structure and responding to his cultural

moment has been discussed. Finally you have been able to trace the history of the moral decay of Faustus, the stages of his damnation during the twenty-four years of his hedonistic enterprise within the black arts.



### 6.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss, in your own words, whether *Doctor Faustus* is a Morality play or a Tragedy.
2. Is Faustus a Renaissance man? Discuss with relevant examples.
3. What are the tragic flaws of Faustus which leads to his ultimate destiny? Discuss with reference to the play.
4. Write a short note on the history of the moral decay in the character of Faustus.
5. Discuss with reference to the context:

“Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib’d  
In one self place, but where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be.  
And to be short, when all the world dissolves  
And every creature shall be purified,  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.”



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## **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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