COURSE CODE: MAEGD 103

COURSE NAME: SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF ARTS

ENGLISH-BLOCK III

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

CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVRESITY)

TEZPUR, ASSAM-784028

INDIA

MEG 103: BRITISH DRAMA I: BEGINNINGS TO RESTORATION

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BLOCK III

MODULE V : ***JOHN WEBSTER: THE DUCHESS OF MALFI***

UNIT 13: READING'THE DUCHESS OF MALFI'

UNIT 14: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

MODULE VI: WILLIAM CONGREVE: THE WAY OF THE WORLD

UNIT 15: RESTORATION COMEDY AND THE WAY OF THE WORLD

MODULE V : JOHN WEBSTER: THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

MODULEVI: WILLIAM CONGREVE: THE WAY OF THE WORLD

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

For your convenience we have divided **MEG103: British Drama I: Beginnings to Restoration** into three blocks. This the third block in which we have included the following Modules with unit division as described below.

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.

Hope reading of all the blocks with select, but representative works of the periods will be fruitful to you and you shall have a comprehensive knowledge of drama from beginning to Restoration.

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MODULE V: JOHN WEBSTER: *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI*

UNIT 13: READING 'THE DUCHESS OF MALFI'

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be able to learn *The Duchess of Malfi* written by John Webster, famous for taking the genre of Revenge Tragedy to its heights. He belonged to the Jacobean Era, attributed to the reign of James I of England (1603–25). Though rich like Elizabethan literature, Jacobean literature was often dark in mood, questioning the stability of the social order, corruption, cruelty, problem of evil, class issues etc. The prominent Jacobean dramatic writers that preoccupied with these issues were John Webster, John Marston, Thomas Middleton, and George Chapman who induced all the terror of tragedy. William Shakespeare's greatest tragedies were written between about 1601 and 1607.

The Duchess of Malfi was first performed at the Blackfriars Theatre as a private performance, before it was taken to a larger audience at The Globe Theatre, in 1613–14. The story of the play moves in Malfi, Rome and Milan.

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you to the works of one the major playwrights in seventeenth century England, John Webster. To this end, the unit will try to

- introduce you with the life and works of John Webster, one of the pioneers of revenge tragedy
- give a summative but detail reading of the Acts and scenes of the play
- acquaint you with the sources used in the drama and different variations made
- learn the socio-political scenerio of Jacobean age

13.2 JOHN WEBSTER: LIFE AND WORKS

Born to John Webster Sr., a wealthy London coach-maker, John Webster (c.1580-1634) was a Jacobean dramatist who is known in the annals of English Drama for two of his plays belonging to the genre of revenge tragedy, namely, The White Devil (c.1612) and The Duchess of Malfi (c.1613). It is probable that he received his education at the well-known Merchant Taylors' School before moving to the Inns of Court to study law. He wrote his plays at a time when collaborations between playwrights was a common trend. Not much is known of his early life until he began his career of a playwright collaborating with Thomas Dekker (c.1570-1632) for plays like Westward Ho (1604), The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1604) and Northward Ho (1605), and subsequently also collaborated with Thomas Heywood (1573-1641) for a play based on Roman history called Appius and Virginia (c.1608).

However, as already mentioned, Webster attained popularity on the strength of the plays that he composed entirely by himself. While he

is also presumed to have singularly composed a play called Guise which has been lost, there is another play called The Devil's Law Case (c.1618) which is rather infamously known for its sensational and tragicomic elements utterly in discordance with the dramatic ingenuity evident in The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi. Towards the later part of his life, he is supposed to have again written two plays in collaboration: Any Thing for a Quiet Life (c.1621) with Thomas Middleton (c.1580-1627), and A Cure for a Cuckold (c.1624) with William Rowley (c.1585-1626).

LET US STOP AND READ

Jacobeans: Jacobeans or the Jacobean Age: Jacobeans or the Jacobean Age is named after Jacobus, the Latin translation of "James." Critics and scholars use this term to refer collectively to the literary and critical works created during the reign of James I (1603-1625) in England.

Revenge Tragedy: The Revenge Tragedy or Revenge Drama had its origin in the Roman tragedies of Seneca in which the basic plot was a quest for vengeance and which typically featured scenes of bloodshed, murder and mutilation. On the English stage this genre was made popular by Thomas Kyd with *The Spanish Tragedy* (performed *c.* 1587) and taken into the summit by Shakespeare in *Hamlet.* John Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are other very famous Revenge Tragedies of its time.

13.2THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

13.1.1 Sources and Variants

Having talked about the literary career of John Webster, we may now move on to the play *The Duchess of Malfi* to be discussed in the course of this unit. The character of the Duchess is based on the real-life persona of Giovanna d'Aragona who was ruling as the regent in the Duchy of Amalfi after the death of her husband. She was, however, charged guilty of entering into a clandestine marital relationship with Antonio Bologna. She, along with her two children, were imprisoned and subsequently killed, while Antonio Bologna was murdered by Daniele da Bozzolo. All these incidents took place between the years 1478 and 1513.

The story of the Duchess was recounted in three connected narratives: i) the four volumes of Matteo Bandello's Italian *Novelle* published between 1554 and 1573, ii) Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques* published in 1565, and iii) William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* published in 1567. It is quite likely that John Webster had read Painter's book which then formed the main basis for the plotline of his play. However, in terms of influence, Webster was also indebted to Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) whose *The Spanish Tragedy* heralded the tradition of revenge drama in England.

The Duchess of Malfi was first performed in *c.*1613 by the Shakespeare's company of the King's Men at the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres. In 1623, the first Quarto edition of *The Duchess of Malfi* was published by John Waterson, which contained a list of the names of actors and verses of commendation by Middleton, Ford, and Rowley. The second, third, and fourth Quartos of the play were respectively published in the years 1640, 1678 and 1708 (renamed as *The Unfortunate Duchess of Malfy or the Unnatural Brothers*).

13.3.2 As a Dramatic Representation of the Political and Social Times of Jacobean England

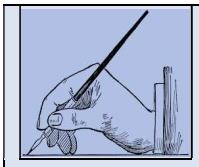
The play *Duchess of Malfi* is set in the turbulent times of political and social unrest in Jacobean England. As you all may already

know, the Jacobean period in British history is associated with the reign of King James I in England from 1603 to 1625. While composing the play, John Webster might have had in his mind the incident of Arbella Stuart, the cousin of King James, who was punished by the king for her marriage to William Seymour. She was imprisoned in the Tower where she was eventually starved to death. The year of the first performance of *The Duchess of Malfi*, i.e., 1613 was also marked the marriage of King James's daughter Princess Elizabeth to the Protestant Prince Frederick, later the king of Bohemia. In the year 1620, Princess Elizabeth was persecuted and banished by the Catholic Emperor Ferdinand and she had to flee Prague with her servants and children, much like our Duchess in the play. Another lady of the Jacobean era who might have been in the mind of the audience while they witnessed the Duchess in performance was Lady Anne Clifford. Just because her father had no male heir, he bestowed his property in the name of her uncle. Lady Clifford fought a persistent battle with King James thereby staking her claim for her rightful inheritance of the property. For the Duchess, her marriage to Antonio is not only motivated by her desire to find personal fulfilment but also to secure the future of her own lineage. The anxiety of her brothers *vis-a-vis* her marriage is caused not merely by her contravention of the moral code of conduct of the time, but also the economic and political exigency related to property and inheritance.

The reign of Elizabeth I was a glorious one in all aspects as the period witnessed not only political supremacy but also economic consolidation. With the victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, the naval supremacy of Elizabethan England was established. This also led to the facilitation of trade and investments abroad and the subsequent growth of a huge and influential merchant class in England. This drive towards social mobility through economic expansion is well reflected in the play. While the Duchess in the play is keen to hold on to her rights as an aristocrat, other characters in the play, namely, the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and, most importantly, Bosola are self-seeking individuals

who are motivated by the desire for economic aggrandisement. For Antonio, on the other hand, the urge towards life is to live it out without much ceremony and fanfare. And it is the cruel fate of the times that has dragged him and the Duchess into the relentless stranglehold of profit-mongering individuals like the Aragonian brothers and Bosola. The desire to acquire ownership over Antonio's land as expressed by the minor characters in the play also reflects the general tendency of the period towards upward social mobility through economic means.

In a way, Ferdinand, along with his brother, the Cardinal, may also be considered as representing the Catholic world (of Spain) and its decadent value-system within a largely Protestant England. Considering the fact that Ferdinand and the Cardinal are Spaniards and members of the House of Aragon, *The Duchess of Malfi* may also be seen as an anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish play. The projection of Ferdinand and the Cardinal as Spanish villains would have resonated well among the Jacobean audience given the contemporary attempts by Spain to restore Catholicism in England.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention few important works created by John Webster.

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2. What representation of the period you can see in *The Duchess of Malfi* ? Give at least two such examples.

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3. Mention few variants of the play Webster was supposed to take inspiration from .

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13.4 READING THE PLAY THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

As you all might have noticed, the settings of most of the plays written during the Renaissance were located outside England (you may recall *Hamlet* and the 'rotten' state of Denmark). The action of the play *The Duchess of Malfi* is similarly takes place in the state of Italy (which is in fact the chosen location of a number of plays written during the aforementioned period, for instance, *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare). In what follows, we shall do an act-by-act analysis of *The Duchess of Malfi* which will enable you to acquaint yourself with the basic narrative of the play.

ACT I

The play begins with a conversation between Delio and Antonio, the latter having just returned from the court of the French king. Antonio gives a detailed exposition of the manners and customs of the French court, which according to him, is comparable to a "common fountain, whence should flow/ Pure silver-drops in general" (I.i.12-13) and where one can "dare freely inform him [the king] [of] the corruption of the times" (I.i.17-18). Antonio's lucid description of the French court, as we can presume, sets the impending events of the play in perspective. Immediately henceforth, we are introduced to Bosola, the most important character in the play, who appears as a melancholic and sulking person complaining against the Cardinal for being neglected and passed over in some reward or promotion. He says to the Cardinal: "I have done you better service than to be slighted thus. Miserable age,

where only the reward of doing well, is the doing of it!" (I.i.31-33). In the second scene of the Act, we hear Antonio speaking of the Duchess in extreme admiration. However, soon after, we witness her brother Ferdinand entrusting Bosola with the charge of spying on her. So, the tension builds up in the very first Act itself. If Antonio's description of the Duchess has a sense of Platonism implied within it, the reference to her as a 'young widow' (I.ii.182) by Ferdinand may alert us to her position as a woman prematurely deprived of sexual gratification. Also, Ferdinand's strict disavowal of her remarriage has two possible dimensions: psycho-sexual (of a possible incestuous feeling on the part of Ferdinand towards his sister) and economic (*vis-a-vis* the present position of the Duchess as a dowager).

The view of the Duchess as a 'divine' and 'desexualised' widow is acutely problematic towards the end of the scene as we see her taking the initiative in proposing her remarriage with Antonio. The Act ends with Cariola, the waiting-woman to the Duchess and the sole witness to her marriage with Antonio, hinting at the nature of her mistress' impulsive and aggressive marriage as an act showing 'a fearful madness' (I.ii.425).

ACT II

With the first scene of this Act, we are gradually made aware of the growing importance of Bosola as an active agent in the course of the narrative of the play. We witness Bosola closely scrutinising the movements of the Duchess as well as the possibility of her being already pregnant with Antonio's child. To ascertain his guess about the Duchess' pregnancy, he decides to offer some apricots to her. On seeing her greedily eat them, his guess is transformed into certainty. The scene ends with the Duchess being carried to her chamber on account of her sudden falling into labour pain and Antonio's panicky decision to cover up the situation by making it public that Bosola has allegedly poisoned the Duchess with the apricots.

The second scene of the Act carries the action forward with Antonio's continued attempts to conceal the Duchess' birth of the child by announcing that jewels belonging to the Duchess are missing from her chamber and a search operation is on by the orders of the Duchess. Further, on behalf of her, he orders that each officer in the palace be locked into his own chamber for the whole night till the rising of the sun the next day. By the end of the scene, Cariola informs Antionio that he has become the "happy father of a son" (II.ii.76).

The third scene of the Act opens with Bosola contemplating on the stratagem behind the confinement of all the courtiers by Antonio on the pretext of a search operation. His subsequent dialogue with Antonio reveals his intent of ascertaining the father of the Duchess' just-born child whereas the latter's growing uneasiness with the state of affairs is established by his overhasty accusation that Bosola may have supposedly poisoned the apricots as well as stolen the jewels belonging to the Duchess. However, Bosola soon discovers a piece of paper accidentally dropped by Antonio, which reveals the birth of the child and the prediction that it will die a violent death. Interestingly (and ironically, of course), it is this first-born child of the Duchess who will outlive everyone at the end.

The fourth scene of the Act takes us to a parallel (and, no doubt, adulterous) relationship between the Cardinal and Castruchio's wife Julia that has been developing through the course of the play. As you might have already sensed, this play is replete with misogynistic thoughts and attitudes towards women. The Cardinal's comment on women's behaviour attests to the fact just stated.

> We had need go borrow that fantastic glass
> Invented by Galileo the Florentine,
> To view another spacious world i'th' moon,
> And look to find a constant woman there.
>
> *(II.iv.16*-19)

In the fifth scene of the Act too, we are confronted with similar attitudes of extreme repugnance against women, this time reflected in Ferdinand's description of the Duchess' violation of the norm of widowhood. Also, the language used by Ferdinand throughout the scene for referring to his sister betrays his peculiar psychological state bordering on strong hints of incest and thwarted political ambitions.

> Oh confusion seize her,
> She hath had most cunning bawds to serve her turn,
> And more secure conveyances for lust,
> Than towns of garrison, for service.
>
> *(II.v.8-11)*

ACT III

The third Act takes a long leap ahead in terms of time as we hear Antonio telling Delio that the Duchess has two more children, a son and a daughter. However, you may wonder that neither Bosola nor the two brothers, the Cardinal and Ferdinand have concrete knowledge of the developments as we still find them spying and trying to outtalk the Duchess to go into the heart of the real matter.

The second scene of the Act begins with a conversation between the Duchess and Antonio which gives us an idea of the manner in which they have been living through all these years. Antonio can be with the Duchess only during the night ("My rule is only in the night" [III.ii.7]) and is compelled to follow a mechanically worked-out routine so as to avoid detection (Labouring men,/Count the clock oft'nest Cariola,/Are glad when their task's ended. [III.ii.18-20]). However, as soon as this domestic banter ends, we see Ferdinand entering the Duchess' bedchamber with a poniard which he gives to his sister for ending her sinful existence. The Duchess, in response, continues to

make strong protestations of her clean and safe reputation as well as her right for self-affirmation.

Later in the same scene, we also see Bosola in conversation with the Duchess where the latter falsely accuses Antonio of a feigned crime and thereby makes a pass for him to get away from the court and avoid persecution. Bosola, on the other hand, plays his own game on the Duchess by praising Antonio as the "most unvalued jewel" (III.ii.250) and "an excellent/Courtier, and a most faithful a soldier" (III.ii.252-253), and, subsequently, wins her confidence to the extent that she ends up divulging the very facts that ought to have remained secret to the spy, Bosola: "This good one that you speak of, is my husband" (III.ii.278) and "I have had three children by him" (III.ii.282). She also reveals to Bosola about Antonio's temporary retreat to Ancona to remain underground for a few days. She asks Bosola to follow him, and, within a few days, she too plans to go thither. Bosola aims to bolster her confidence in him by suggesting (and thereby also aiding her) to make a feigned pilgrimage to Loretto so as to make her 'flight' seem more princely and honourable.

The third scene of the Act throws some disconcerting light on some of the bloated and hypocritical aspects of the aristocratic society. The Duchess has followed Antonio to Ancona, and the two brothers have been apprised of these developments by Bosola. The scene is important for the perspectives we receive from one character about the other. Talking about Bosola as a deeply speculative person and with a meticulous eye for detail, Delio describes him as a "fantastical scholar" (III.iii.40) and a "speculative man" (III.iii.47).

Also Ferdinand's increasing hatred and revengeful feelings towards the Duchess and Antonio are emphasised when we hear him describing them respectively: "Methinks her fault and beauty/Blended together, show like leprosy,/The whiter, the fouler" (III.iii.63-65) and "Antonio!/A slave, that only smell'd of ink and counters,/And nev'r in's life look'd like a gentleman,/But in the audit time" (III.iii.71-75).

The fourth scene of the Act shifts the action to the shrine of Loretto where the Duchess, Antonio and their children are presently lodged. A mute dumb-show is enacted whereby the Cardinal, in collusion with the Pope, undertakes the task of banishing the whole family from the state of Ancona.

The fifth scene of the Act has an air of fatality as the Duchess and Antonio know that their time is nearing. Antonio moans the ill-fated 'fashion of the world' where "From decay'd fortunes every flatterer shrinks,/Men cease to build where the foundation sinks" (III.v.10-11), while the Duchess feels that "The birds, that live i'th' field/On the wild benefit of nature, live/Happier than we; for they may choose their mates,/And carol their sweet pleasures to the spring" (III.v.17-20). In the meantime, Bosola brings a letter from Ferdinand to the Duchess whereby Antonio is immediately summoned for a purpose which can be none other than his execution (Send Antonio to me; I want his head in a business. [III.v.27]). However, the Duchess is shrewd enough to decipher the covert intention behind the message as she says: "The devil is not cunning enough/To circumvent us in riddles" (III.v.39-40). Antonio declines to accept the summoning and, upon the advice of the Duchess, decides to leave the place with his eldest son. The parting words spoken by the Duchess to Antonio are ominous:

> Let me look upon you once more; for that speech
> Came from a dying father; your kiss is colder
> Than I have seen an holy anchorite
> Give to a dead man's skull. (III.v.84-87)

Soon after, Bosola comes in disguise to imprison the Duchess along with her remaining children to her palace.

ACT IV

The fourth Act is important *vis-à-vis* the overall narrative plot of the play, for it is in this Act that we witness the gradual yet rapid unfolding of the events leading to the eventual tragic denouement. In the beginning of the first scene itself, we hear Bosola talking in a different tone. On being asked by Ferdinand about the Duchess and her condition under imprisonment, he extols the virtue of stoicism and mental toughness in the Duchess in the face of adversity. This is contrasted against the growing lunacy in the character of Ferdinand as he takes a vow never to 'see' his sister again, and, subsequently, meets her in darkness and gives her a dead man's hand to kiss upon. She is driven to further despair upon being presented with artificial wax figures of Antonio and his children appearing as if they were dead. She responds to this despair in typical theatrical image:

> I account this world a tedious theatre,
> For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will. (IV.i.83-84)

Apart from that, the exchange between Bosola and the Duchess in this Act is replete with Christian overtones whereby the former keeps on insisting on the virtues of mercy, charity, and redemption, and the latter keeps on reacting violently and defiantly to all such statements from Bosola designed to bring her to submission. Here, Bosola becomes a significant factor as he stands witness to the contrasting modes of behaviour exhibited by the Duchess and Ferdinand. However, even Bosola seems to be affected from within when he reacts to Ferdinand commanding him to see the Duchess again:

> Never in mine own shape;
> That's forfeited by my intelligence,
> And this last cruel lie; when you send me next,
> The business shall be comfort. (IV.i.131-134)

The 'last cruel lie' refers to the false travesty of Antonio and his children being presented as dead before the Duchess. Antonio,

meanwhile, is in Milan, and Ferdinand asks Bosola to go after Antonio and seek his vengeance.

The second scene of the Act begins with the horrifying spectacle of a procession composed of madmen designed by Ferdinand to unsettle the Duchess and drive her further into despair. However, the Duchess seems impervious to the subterfuge by maintaining her mental toughness and subverting the very motives behind such a cruel spectacle on the part of her brother. The company of madmen comprised an astrologer, a lawyer, a priest, a doctor, a tailor, a gentleman usher, and a farmer. This 'external' act of madness provides an ugly premonition to the bouts of bestial madness that is developing and will soon engulf the very perpetrator of this spectacle of madmen. However, soon after the termination of this spectacle, we see Bosola appearing in the scene, disguised as a tomb-maker as well as her executioner. The exchange between the Duchess and Bosola here is fast-paced, witty and tragicomic.

> *Bosola*. My trade is to flatter the dead, not the living;
> I am a tomb-maker.
> *Duchess*. And thou com'st to make my tomb?
> *Bosola*. Yes.
> *Duchess*. Let me be a little merry;
> Of what stuff wilt thou make it?
> *Bosola*. Nay, resolve me first, of what fashion?
> *Duchess*. Why, do we grow fantastical in our death-bed?
> Do we affect fashion in the grave? (IV.ii.152-160)

Very soon we see the real executioners appear in the scene with a coffin, cords, and a bell. The Duchess, even at the point of being strangled, remains 'bold and resolute' and tells the executioners: "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength/Must pull down heaven upon me" (IV.ii.234-235). Cariola is brought in thereafter, and Bosola, ignoring her plea for confession that she has conceived a child outside marriage, orders her to be strangled and carried to the adjoining room.

The ensuing conversation between Bosola and Ferdinand is disturbingly introspective as both of them ponder over the possible innocence of the Duchess and the extent to which each of them are guilty of being complicit in her murder. While Ferdinand's confession is tinged with twin admissions of her innocence and his revenge, Bosola is insistent on the fact that it was by the order of the former and due to the assurance of a reward for his service that he had embarked upon the heinous mission to spy on the Duchess and eventually orchestrate her execution.

Soon after, we see the Duchess getting back her consciousness momentarily. This leads the despairing Bosola to hope in vain for expiation: "She stirs; here's life./Return, fair soul, from darkness, and lead mine/Out of this sensible hell. She's warm, she breathes;/Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart/To store them with fresh colour" (IV.ii.343-347). When the Duchess enquires about Antonio, Bosola tries to atone for his sins by telling her that he is still alive and that the dead bodies shown to her were only feigned wax-statues. He further tells her that her husband has been happily reconciled to her brothers and also that the Pope has granted him a reprieve and a chance for atonement. The Duchess utters *Mercy* and breathes her last. At the end of the scene, we see a heavily repentant and remorseful Bosola carrying off the body of the Duchess.

ACT V

The first scene of this Act begins with Antonio, unaware of the incidents befalling his wife and children, still deliberating upon ways to reconcile himself with the Cardinal and Ferdinand. We also come across the Marquis of Pescara who tactfully advises Antonio's friend Delio against petitioning for some part of the land unlawfully taken away from Antonio. Antonio, on his part, decides to see the Cardinal privately in the middle of the night and work out a possible way for

reconcilement. Further, it is in the scene that we get the first hint about Ferdinand's impending disease of 'wolf-madness' called 'lycanthropy'.

In the beginning of the second scene, we hear the Doctor telling Pescara about the pestilent disease called lycanthropy.

> I'll tell you:
> In those that are possess'd with't there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour, they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves.
> Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up. (V.ii.7-12)

Witnessing the madness and bestiality of Ferdinand in his strange illness, Bosola has a sudden moment of realisation where he comments in an aside: "Mercy upon me, what a fatal judgement/Hath fall'n upon this Ferdinand!" (V.ii.83-84). And just when the audience/reader assumes that the misery that has befallen Ferdinand is an appropriate punishment for his misdeeds, we are presented with an aside from the Cardinal as he watches Bosola coming towards him:

> [Aside] Are you come? So, this fellow must not know
> By any means I had intelligence
> In our Duchess' death. For, though I counsell'd it,
> The full of all the engagement seem'd to grow
> From Ferdinand. (V.ii.103-107)

In the conversation that ensues between Bosola and the Cardinal, the latter pretends to be unaware of the death of the Duchess and her children. Further, he instructs Bosola to seek out Antonio who is hiding in Milan and kill him. For that, Bosola is instructed to spy on Delio, Antonio's friend and thereby trace the whereabouts of Antonio. Bosola, who by now has been convinced of the ungratefulness of the two brothers, decides to play on and thereby get to the root of the crime. He takes Julia into confidence by using her newly developed fascination towards him. Julia, upon Bosola's advice, inveigles the

Cardinal into confessing his crime before her and, consequently, meets her death at his hands for being a potential threat. The Cardinal's complicity in the murder of the Duchess and her children is exposed before Bosola whom the former terms as his "fellow murderer" (V.ii.291). The Cardinal attempts to incite Bosola into more action by promising him 'fortune' and 'honour' in return for his service. With respect to Bosola, his dehumanisation is complete. In spite of being exposed before Bosola as a criminal mastermind, the Cardinal has no apprehension of being caught or punished. He continues to engineer Bosola into further acts of murder as if the latter is merely an instrument to the purpose. Finally, at the end of the scene, Bosola decides to side with Antonio in order to protect him against his enemies.

The third scene of this Act presents the unique phenomenon of an echo signifying the voice of the Duchess and speaking to Antonio by repeating after him some of his own words spoken out to Delio. As per his intentions mentioned earlier, Antonio is on his way to see the Cardinal privately in the middle of the night and work out a possible way for reconcilement. Delio is trying his best to dissuade him. Antonio remembers his Duchess and her little ones who might be fast asleep as he makes his way out in the darkness. In this situation, the short statements articulated by the echo/voice of the deceased Duchess—Like death that we have./Deadly accent./A thing of sorrow./That suits it best./Ay, wife's voice./Do not./Be mindful of thy safety./O fly your fate./Thou art a dead thing./Never see her more.—are repeated warnings given out to Antonio of the dangers looming over him.

In the beginning of the fourth scene, the Cardinal requests Malateste, Pescara and the others who are watching over Ferdinand in his illness to remain in their own rooms and not to come out even when they hear shrieks of madness or violence. This is arranged by the Cardinal so as to facilitate the safe disposal of Julia's body with the help of Bosola. Once the job is done, he plans to see the end of Bosola.

In the meantime, Bosola enters and overhears the Cardinal utter his name and his death. As he stands his ground trying to further overhear Ferdinand and the Cardinal talk about it, Antonio enters with a servant. And Bosola mistakes Antonio for some hired assassin deployed to murder him and, thus, instantly stabs him from behind. The realisation of his mistake and the accompanied sense of guilt makes Bosola speak out immediately: "Antonio!/The man I would have sav'd 'bove mine own life!" (V.iv.51-52). As Antonio lies dying, Bosola attempts to facilitate the end of his misery by confessing in his ear that his fair Duchess and her two sweet children are already murdered dead. Antonio's death defeats the very purpose that spurred Bosola on to take 'just revenge' alongside him against his perpetrators. Now, he decides to be 'his own example' and take his final revenge against the Cardinal and his brother Ferdinand.

The fifth and final scene of the Act opens with the Cardinal in a state of melancholy. In the meantime, Bosola arrives with the body of Antonio and immediately makes known his intention to kill the Cardinal. By ordering his courtiers to stay in their rooms and not to pay heed to any sounds of help or danger, the Cardinal has laid his own trap for himself. The courtiers stand outside his room listening to his cries for help but take no action until Pescara decides to go inside and find out the real cause behind his shrieks. Bosola, by the time, has stabbed the Cardinal many times and has reminded him of his unjust act of killing his sister as well as her husband. In the meantime, Ferdinand appears on the scene and, imagining himself on the battlefield, wounds both the Cardinal and Bosola. In the fight that ensues, Bosola also strikes Ferdinand and also receives his death wounds in return.

With the death of Bosola and the two brothers, the tragedy is complete as each of the main characters of the play fall prey to the antagonisms and conflicts of interests between various warring factions of the day vying for political supremacy. There is tension looming in

the air even as the play ends with the eldest son of Antonio being proclaimed in his mother's right as the legitimate heir to the Dukedom.

13.5 SUMMING UP

I hope you have had an enjoyable and fruitful reading of *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster. In the course of our discussion, we touched upon various aspects of the play, beginning with the life and works of the playwright. We have known that Webster wrote a number of plays through collaboration. However, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* are two of his most popular and successful plays that have been composed entirely by himself. We then acquainted ourselves with the multiple sources behind the true story dramatised by Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

A large part of our discussion involved a close textual analysis of the play. We realised how the Duchess waged a defiant struggle against her brothers and paid with her life. Antonio, her husband, was caught in the midst of this struggle, and he too was a prey to the ensuing circumstances. Reading of the text gave us the idea that the most intriguing character of the play was Bosola and the Cardinal and Ferdinand were villains of the narrative. We also understood at the end of the reading that Webster's one of the high points of the dramatic designs is the transformation of his characters. In the next unit we shall concentrate on other angles of the text, such as, the nature of a revenge tragedy, various themes underlying the plot of the play.

12.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Webster's life and works.
2. Discuss the possible sources of The Duchess of Malfi and the points of deviance you trace in the play.
3. Write a critical note on how the plot is developed in the play.

4. How many women characters do you find in the play? Comment on the element of defiance in the character of the Duchess.

5. How is the institution of family represented here? Discuss.

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JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS

UNIT 14: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

14.0 INTRODUCTION

A play, apart from a storyline, plot and characters to carry out the storyline, keeps many things inside it which needs to be seen critically to understand the work of art. To read critically, one must think critically. This involves analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Each of these processes helps the reader to interact with the text in different ways: highlighting important points and examples, taking notes, testing answers to questions, brainstorming, outlining, describing aspects of the text or argument. Thus, critical reading is a more ACTIVE way of reading. Therefore, it is very essential to develop our critical thinking skills to QUESTION both the text and our own reading of it. In this unit our intention is to develop that ACTIVE reading capacity in the learners.

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Reading of the play *The Duchess of Malfi* will help you to learn critically

- various themes, issues, and debates that have framed and influenced the critical reception of the play
- the detail analysis of the characters and their roles in the development of the plot
- Various critical responses that the play received

14.2 THEATRICAL DEVICES OF THE PLAY

Theatrical devices are used in a play to enhance its experience to the audience. The devices are used onstage for a definite purpose. It can have narrations, use of placards, direct address to the audience etc. *The Duchess of Malfi* utilises of a number of theatrical devices. Some of these theatrical devices are from the Senecan tragedy. Now, Senecan tragedy is the set of Ancient Roman tragedies. The theme of revenge was rampant in Senecan tragedy and this was adapted by some English playwrights, Webster being one of them in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The Senecan tragedy also included the depiction of violence on stage and the portrayal of bloodshed to shock the audience, which were used in *The Duchess of Malfi.*

In the fourth scene of the third act in the play, Webster highlights the shrine of the Lady of Loretto, which is a religious place, and this is where the Cardinal banishes the Duchess. Now, the act in the play with its backdrop of the shrine is a testament of the distinction between evil and good. Here's what the pilgrims who saw the scene had to comment

> Here's a strange turn of state! who would have thought
> So great a lady would have match'd herself

Unto so mean a person? yet the cardinal
Bears him much too cruel.

Another instance of a theatrical device used in the play is in the third scene of the fifth act. Antonio and Delio engage in a conversation where the latter warns the former against visiting the Cardinal and then Antonio hears an echo in the voice of the Duchess from her grave which repeats certain warnings. It foreshadows Antonio's death, and highlights the role of Fate. Here are the words of the echo:

Echo (from the Duchess' grave). Like death that we have.
Echo. Deadly accent.Echo. A thing of sorrow.
Echo. That suits it best.

14.3 MAJOR THEMES

The major themes of the play *The Duchess of Malfi* will be discussed and analysed.

14.3.1 The Duchess of Malfi as a Revenge Tragedy

The tragedies composed by Seneca, the Roman dramatist of the first century, were well known across Europe in the period under study and exerted powerful influence upon the genre of tragedy in England. Janette Dillon, in *Cambridge Introduction to Shakespearean Tragedies*, notes two influential ways in which Seneca's plays became influential: "on violent and sensational content, especially in revenge tragedy, and on the development of an elevated rhetoric, including especially the pronouncement of *sententiae* (moral and universalising statements)" (9). Two popular English plays composed under Senecan influence are: Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1585–89) and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1592). In most of the Elizabethan revenge tragedies, the contemporary Christian ethics often came into conflict with the pagan

ethos of revenge. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a case in point. Even Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* engages with this collision between Christianity and classical paganism.

The theme of revenge is intimately associated with the theme of morality, particularly in English drama by the late 1570s when "[t]he popular theatre ... began to be perceived as a kind of alternative church or anti-church" (White,172; quoted in Streete, 131). It has already been mentioned earlier that the play *The Duchess of Malfi* is primarily seen as a revenge drama or, rather, a revenge tragedy. This is because the element of 'revenge' in the play is pervasive and it motivates the behaviour of all the main characters in the play, barring Antonio and the Duchess, in the play, though in different ways. In the beginning of the play, we have Bosola who is complaining against the Cardinal and Ferdinand for being overlooked and neglected in matters of reward and promotion. This provides us with an early instance of motivation towards revenge. However, the scenario gets complicated soon after as we witness the Aragonian brothers revealing their concerns regarding the behaviour of the Duchess whom they refer to as the 'lusty widow'. For the Cardinal, the figure of the Duchess with respect to her 'body of flesh and blood' needs to be preserved (or destroyed) in conformity with his Catholic faith and with respect to her supposed violation of the norm of chastity and widowhood. The aspects of 'feeling' and 'emotionality', on the other hand, that came to be emphasized as constituents of the Protestant belief were championed by the Duchess herself as well as Antonio. Bosola is 'employed' to spy on the Duchess and watch over her suitors for marriage. And once it is confirmed that she is married to Antonio and even has children, the revenge motive on the part of the brothers is made clear. At this point, the usual structure of revenge is inverted since the Aragonian brothers, who are the villains of the play, are taking revenge against the Duchess, the protagonist of the play. However, the rightful purpose usually associated with revenge narratives is restored in the end when Bosola, for being used as an

instrument by the tyrannical authority of the Cardinal and Ferdinand as well as having mistakenly killed Antonio whom he had vowed to protect, decides to assume the pose of the conventional avenger. And rightfully, like all the tragic heroes from Hamlet to Othello, he dies with a philosophical speech.

14.3.2 Class structure in the play

Webster makes a commentary on the class settings of Jacobean England in the play. The society in Jacobean England was hierarchical in nature. The top rungs were reserved for members of the royal family followed by the aristocracy and so on. Members of the upper class generally frowned on upward movements from the class point of view. In Duchess of Malfi, the active harm in the plot is brought upon by characters who are obsessed with the idea of their social and class position, and they act to maintain the status quo. The protagonist, the Duchess, believes that a man's social standing does not define his character but his actions do. Cardinal and Ferdinand, the brothers of the Duchess, revile her marriage to Antonio because they consider that she married beneath her rank. They never considered Antonio's character but his social standing, his place in the class ladder is the prime cause of their disgust. In a case of dramatic irony in the play, Bosola defends the Duchess' choice to marry Antonio, and praises it as progressive. He says that it is to be seen as a hope for those who wish to climb the class ladder. The irony is that Bosola says all this to gain the trust of the Duchess, which he does, all the while acting as a spy. Bosola's honest feelings also disgust him and he considers the unworthiness of the union between the Duchess and Antonio.
In the play, most of the vicious characters belong to the nobility, such as the Cardinal and Ferdinand. Also, characters such as Count Malataste, a member of the nobility, are highlighted as hypocrites. The Duchess, who belongs to the nobility, is the one truly noble character. Amongst those who represent the lower rung of classes in the play,

Cariola and Antonio are examples of noble characters. There is also Bosola who, despite repenting later, is a perpetrator of violence and thinks that his lack of power and class position leads to his deeds. Hence, the play signifies that the class position of characters does not determine their true social and moral worth.

14.3.3 Madness and Horror

Webster has assiduously implicated the dual themes of madness and horror with the fabric of the play. Ferdinand's descent into 'wolf-madness' or the grotesque pageant of the madmen are the visible instances of 'mad' behaviour in the play. However, madness needs also to be understood in relation to the suggestion of its contravention of what is considered as rational behaviour. Cariola's responds to her nature of her mistress' impulsive and aggressive marriage as an act that shows 'a fearful madness' (I.ii.425). Even the company of madmen, comprising an astrologer, a lawyer, a priest, a doctor, a tailor, a gentleman usher and a farmer, are, as you can see, identified by their respective professions, and their acts of madness are associated with the very nature of their professions. Ken Jackson argues that Webster skilfully plays around the aspect of madness by skilfully orchestrating the audience sensibility towards perceiving the 'irrational' behaviour of the Duchess as emblematic of her stoic defiance. She is thus a subject for pity, but at the same time it is a ploy to condemn the thoughts and actions of Ferdinand as unjust. It ultimately vindicates his subsequent plunge into lycanthropia. He says: 'Webster thus gives two "twin" shows of madness, the Duchess and Ferdinand's, and directs two opposing responses, one charitable, one mocking' (197). Talking about the fortitude of the Duchess in the face of death as well as Webster's masterful and subtle management of the spectacles of madness and horror, Charles Lamb remarks: "She has lived among horrors till she has become 'native and endowed unto that element'. She speaks the dialect of despair.... To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the

quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeit—this only a Webster can do." (Quoted in Hamilton, 426)

The death scene (Act IV, Scene ii) of the Duchess may be considered as symbolic of all that is horrifying and dreadful in the whole narrative of the play. The element of horror is included here not merely as a prelude to the savagery and fitful killings that follow in the final Act of the play, but, more importantly, it leads to the pathos that is generated first from the Duchess' heroic submission to her destiny and then from Bosola's realization of the misdeeds committed by him. For the first time in the play, Ferdinand seems to be pondering over the extent and consequence of his revenge against his 'twin' sister. For all the horror that follows, this scene effectively sets up the psychological domain within the characters, particularly Bosola and Ferdinand, that operates in the subsequent stages of the play.

14.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Having gone through the critical summary of the text as well as the themes and issues related to the play, you must have, by now, acquired a fair idea of the various characters inhabiting the narrative. In this section, we shall deal with these characters and see how they contribute to the overall development of the narrative of the play.

If we take a look at the 'dramatis personae' at the beginning of the play, we will notice that Bosola's name appears at the head of the list. This may seem unnatural at first sight, since it is a general custom to list the names of the characters in order of gender, rank or status. Therefore, we may argue that the placing of Bosola's name at the top of the list is reflective of the importance given to him by Webster, the playwright. Also, on the basis of our discussion so far, we too have surely felt the way in which Bosola's role in the narrative has gradually grown in significance. So, we will first take up his character-analysis.

Bosola:

Bosola is usually discussed as an example of the 'villain-hero'—a character-type widely popular in the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, represented by characters like Faustus, the Jew of Malta, Richard III, Edmund or even Macbeth. Another word to describe the 'villain-hero' is the 'evil protagonist'. Webster lets us take a glimpse into the thought-process of Bosola as he contemplates on the deeper aspects of human existence.

> What thing is in this outward form of man
> To be belov'd? ...
> ...
> Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity,
> In any other creature but himself.
> But in our own flesh, though we bear diseases
> Which have their true nature only ta'en from beasts,
> ...
> And though continually we bear about us
> A rotten and dead body, we delight
> To hide it in the rich tissue. (II.i.53-66)

Bosola appears to us as the melancholy malcontent who seemed initially to be 'more sinned against than sinning' but gradually becomes a visible agent in the manipulation of action in the play. However, in the case of Bosola, we see a gradual transformation of him from being a 'malcontent' towards taking the 'righteous' posture of a revenger in the end. Even though he was complicit in almost all the murders that were committed in the course of the play, he seemed to have undergone a change of heart in the end, especially after the death of the Duchess. And as we see, unlike Ferdinand and the Cardinal who were subsequently afflicted by diseases and mental imbalances, Bosola's conscience remained on purpose and motivated till the end. His death, at the end, seemed more in keeping with the larger design of revenge and tragedy on the part of the playwright.

In the political atmosphere of the play, Bosola may also be seen as a preferment-seeking individual, and his actions throughout the play remained directed towards securing a reward or promotion. However, considering the manner in which he enacted the role of a tomb-maker, a sermonizer and, finally, an executioner thereby facilitating the death of the Duchess, and, subsequently, a revenger vowing to avenge her death and fight alongside Antonio against all his enemies, it is difficult to find a clear and well-defined motive to his actions. In this, we may compare him to Shakespeare's portrayal of Iago whose characteristic attributes are aptly described as 'motiveless malignity'—a phrase that we may, with some qualifications, apply to Bosola as well.

Duchess:

The Duchess is the protagonist of the play *The Duchess of Malfi*. She remains at the centre of the plot and the other characters react and respond to her actions and decisions. The Duchess is introduced through a speech of extreme admiration from Antonio:

> For her discourse, it is so full of rapture,
> You only will begin, then to be sorry
> When she doth end her speech...
>
> ...in the look
> There speaketh so divine a continence,
> As cuts off all lascivious, and vain hope. (I.ii.118-128)

We, however, see the Duchess as an ageing widow, though her desire for a life of fulfilment remains alive. This desire is made evident in the way she converses with Antonio and gets married to him.

> Sir, be confident
> What is't distracts you? This is flesh, and blood, sir,
> 'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
> Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man,
> I do here put off all vain ceremony,
> And only do appear to you, a young widow

That claims you for her husband, and like a widow,
I use but half a blush in't. (I.ii.374-381)

In her independent decision to choose her partner, she resembles Desdemona from *Othello*. However, unlike her, the Duchess is fully cognisant of the consequences of an 'unequal marriage'. Her actual moment of error comes about when she believes the words of Bosola falsely praising Antonio. As a result, she reveals her marriage with Antonio and the existence of children by that union. This gullibility on her part ultimately proves fatal for her and her children. Other female characters from contemporary plays that resembled the Duchess in various aspects of their character are Bianca from Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* and Vittoria from Webster's *The White Devil*.

Nevertheless, the Duchess remains bold at the moment of her execution. She continues to endure the sufferings with the same fortitude and perseverance truly characteristic of her throughout the play. Her conversation with Bosola, who is disguised as a tomb-maker, is expressive of the keen awareness that she develops *vis-a-vis* her own self and her surroundings in the course of the trials and tribulations confronting her right from the start of the play. Her defiance of the 'empty' rituals till her last breath symbolises her character as 'tragic'. And it is at the precise moment of her death that she makes Bosola realise the true nature of the situation. Bosola undergoes a change of character (however problematic or unqualified that might be) which makes him side with Antonio and eventually kill the Aragonian brothers. From the point of view of defiance and strength of character we may compare her to the character of Cleopatra in Antony and Cleopatra. In the ultimate analysis, the Duchess remains an intriguing female character in the annals of Jacobean drama in England.

Ferdinand:

Ferdinand is one of the Aragonian brothers, whose character is confirmed by Antonio as one of the ‘‘most perverse and turbulent nature’’ (I.ii.97) and a living embodiment of tyranny. After Bosola, Ferdinand’s character is the most problematic in terms of analysis. With respect to his sister, the Duchess, he is distressed on two counts: one, being widow and open to suitors, she is susceptible to remarriage which somehow hinders his chances of acquiring her wealth, and secondly, and more problematically, he is troubled by an incestuous passion for his sister. For these reasons, economic as well as psychological, he deploys Bosola to watch over the Duchess, whom he refers to as a “lusty widow” (I.ii.265). He tells Bosola:

> I give you that
> To live i’th’ court, here: and observe the Duchess,
> To note all the particulars of her behaviour:
> What suitors do solicit her for marriage
> And whom she best affects: she’s a young widow,
> I would not have her marry again. (I.ii.178-183)

The strangeness of Ferdinand’s character in the play emerges from his gradual plunge into lycanthropy after his sister’s death. As in the case of Bosola, her death too leaves an impact on him. He remembers his twin relationship with the Duchess, and her death seems to have taken ‘life’ out of him too. We may also perceive a slight change of character in him as he accuses Bosola of villainy for killing her. However, any possibility of his reformation is soon engulfed by his subsequent descent into madness which forestalls any further participation in the narrative of the play. The Doctor describes the condition of Ferdinand which, as the following lines suggest, became more and more animalistic and bestial.

> [H]e howled fearfully;
> Said he was a wolf; only the difference

Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
Rip up the flesh. (V.ii.15-19)

Ferdinand's belief that he has hair of a wolf inside him is testimony to his troubled state of mind. His bestiality comes to the fore through his excessive insistence on his sister's secrecy and 'immoral' sexuality

Cardinal:

The Cardinal, unlike Ferdinand, seems more calculative to his task and does not seem to be bothered by any perceptible distress. The character of the Cardinal is crucial to the understanding of the manner in which religion and politics were intermeshed thereby leading to mutual corruption. The Cardinal and his brother Ferdinand, according to Bosola, are arrogant and ungrateful: "He and his brother are like plum trees that grow crooked over standing pools, they are rich, and o'erladen with fruit, but none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them.... Who would rely upon these miserable dependencies, in expectation to be advanc'd tomorrow?" (I.i.51-58). The Cardinal is also the embodiment of the hypocrisy and rottenness associated with the supposedly decadent Catholic order of the play. Under the vow of celibacy, he is seen dallying with Julia on the one hand, and preaching the vow of widowhood with respect to his sister on the other. However, his active role in the orchestration of the events is revealed after the death of the Duchess and Ferdinand's descent into madness. His conversation with Bosola as his 'fellow murderer' betrays the cold diplomacy of his character and strength of persistence even in the face of disclosure. This is also made evident in the cold spy-like conversation between Ferdinand and Bosola regarding the Duchess at an earlier stage of the play when Bosola was spying on the Duchess.

Ferdinand. Her guilt treads on
Hot burning cultures. Now Bosola,
How thrives our intelligence?

Bosola. Sir, uncertainly:
'Tis rumour'd she hath had three bastards, but
By whom, we may read i'th' stars. (III.i.57-61)

Perhaps it is fitting that the Cardinal falls prey to his own contrivance in the end. The ironic and brutal jest among the courtiers while he was being hacked mercilessly by Bosola inside his own room is an apt rebounding of sadistic pleasure induced in him earlier by the death of his victims. The murder of Julia is a case in point. The double-faced character of the Cardinal is aptly summarised by Bosola as he stabs the former: "Now it seems thy greatness was only outward;/For thou fall'st faster of thyself than calamity/Can drive thee" (V.v.41-43).

Antonio:

Antonio, as a character in the play, is seen mostly as a fellow sufferer of the Duchess in the latter's challenge to and defiance of the patriarchal norms. In the beginning of the play, we meet him as a courtier who has just returned from the French court. We hear him talk in an appreciative way about the administrative machinery of the French king. He was soon engulfed in an entirely contrastive state of affairs. By marrying the Duchess, his position is elevated from that of the steward to her 'lord'. However, this upward social mobility brings him no happiness as his relationship with the Duchess is deemed clandestine, and this brings him into conflict with forces that are beyond his control. His aspirations reflect those of an obedient and a dutiful courtier, who is trying to ensure that the issues confronting him are settled amicably so that he can live a peaceful life. So, we see him attempting to reconcile himself with the Cardinal in the middle of the night.

One may see Antonio as a weak and flat character whose nature hardly undergoes transformation in the course of the play. Even in the courtship scene with the Duchess, he is seen mostly as a passive participant who merely responds to the wooing of his female partner.

And when he should have been with the Duchess supporting her against Bosola and her brothers, he chooses to abscond with his elder son. Perhaps it was fitting to the playwright's design of the narrative that he should meet an inglorious death inadvertently at the hands of Bosola. Nevertheless, the play is also remembered for the tragic love affair between the Duchess and Antonio which sought to break the prescribed bounds of patriarchy and matrimony. Their defiance consisted in their Christian-Stoic acceptance of the events that befell them as the will of God. It is worthwhile to note, in the final analysis, that the only surviving son of Antonio and the Duchess was proclaimed in his mother's right as the legitimate heir to the Dukedom.

Delio

Delio is one of those characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* who, in spite of remaining more or less unaffected by the tragic chain of events, are important participants in the overall narrative framework of the play. We are introduced to him in the very first line of the play where he welcomes Antonio to Italy after a long sojourn in France. In fact, the initial conversation between Delio and Antonio sets the play in motion. It is in response to Delio's questions that Antonio (or rather Webster as a dramatic stratagem) 'introduces' the main characters of the play. Then again in the opening scene of the second Act, Delio and Antonio seem to meet after a long time, as the former asks the latter: "And so long since married? You amaze me" (79-80).

In the play, it is only in front of Delio that Antonio can lay open his heart and speak without any apprehension. We see them at conversation at crucial junctures of the play, for instances, at the moment of the birth of Antonio's first child in the second scene of the second Act and then again at the opening scene of the third Act when we get to know that there was a significant time-gap between Acts II and III. Most significantly, we see them together in the echo scene (Act V, Scene III) where Delio tries to dissuade Antonio from going to the Cardinal and asks him to be mindful of his safety. And finally, at the

end of the play, Delio brings forward the eldest son of Antonio and the Duchess as the 'hope' of the coming times. Interestingly, the play begins and ends with the lines spoken by Delio. In the opening lines of the play, as mentioned above, he is seen with Antonio. And, in the closing lines of the play, he is seen with Antonio's eldest son, the surviving symbol of the love between the tragic couple. From these observations, it is clear that Delio remains an important character in the dramatic design of the playwright. Even though he is not accorded enough agency in the manipulation of the action in the play, yet his presence, as indicated above, at crucial junctures enables us to acquire critical perspectives with respect to the flow of events within the narrative.

Cariola

Cariola is the woman who not only attends to the Duchess as her lady-in-waiting but also has access to her secret relationship with Antonio. As with Antonio in his attachment to Delio, so is the case with the Duchess in the faith she puts on Cariola when she says: "Cariola/To thy known secrecy I have given up/More than my life, my fame" (I.ii.274-276). She stands as a witness to the secret marriage between Antonio and the Duchess. Interestingly, Webster has made Cariola speak at certain instances in reaction to the actions of the Duchess. In the final analysis of the play, her apprehensions do turn out to have serious implications for the tragic protagonists. Two instances may be noted in this regard: First, after the secret solemnisation of the aforementioned marriage by the end of the first Act, Cariola remarks—"Whether the spirit of greatness, or of woman/Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows/A fearful madness; I owe her much of pity" (I.ii.423-425). Second, at the end of the second scene of the third Act when the Duchess plans to escape to Ancona under the pretext of a feigned pilgrimage, Cariola expresses her displeasure with these words—"I do not like this jesting with religion,/This feigned pilgrimage" and the Duchess responds by calling her a "superstitious

fool" (III.ii.319-21). In both these instances, the apprehensions of Cariola are proved to be right as the Duchess gets fatally trapped into the stranglehold of Ferdinand and Bosola.

The intimacy of Cariola with respect to the conjugal relationship between Antonio and the Duchess is made evident in a number of instances throughout the play. She shares and partakes of the sexual chitchat between the couple. Her character gains prominence from the fact that she is the only one who develops a psychological insight with respect to the couple's tumultuous relationship of love and passion. However, her desperate attempts to evade death and punishment by repeatedly inventing 'fictionalised' accounts of her pregnancy and the need to 'confess' and undergo trial betray her tenuous position in the overall scheme of events. We may think of a comparison between the character of Cariola and that of Emilia in *Othello* where the latter, however, has a more active and sustainable position than the former.

13.5.1 Malcontent in the play

The 'malcontent' in *The Duchess of Malfi* is embodied in the character of Daniel de Bosola, often argued by critics as the most significant character of the play. Now, the question arises that what exactly a malcontent is. It is a type of character which was common to the English Renaissance theatre. A malcontent in a play is a character who displays dissent to the actions of the other characters of the play; the character is generally discontent at the societal structures in the plot. The malcontent observes and makes justified comments on the action of the play.

The malcontent in the play represents a dramatic and often political voice, and expresses an understanding that the other characters in the play seem to lack. Bosola's morality and sympathy in the play is variable. Although he participates in violence, scheming, and spying, yet he displays an understanding of the evil and displays remorse;

ultimately acting as an avenger. Bosola is displeased with the world depicted in the play, he is displeased at the constant scheming and the suffering of noble characters, and constantly is at odds with his conscience and his duty. Bosola cites that it was the reward offered to improve his social standing that made him commit the crimes, and his deep resentment stems from the injustice done to him, when Ferdinand blatantly puts the blame on him, and the Cardinal disregards him, along with a deep rooted sense of injustice. The flaws in the existing situation motivate Bosola to express his discontent and he vents his disgust at the rampant corruption and scheming of the nobility. He despises his own position as an errand man and is disturbed by the scheming and exercise of violence by the members of the nobility. And yet he wishes for material gains by fishing in troubled waters. There is a duality in his character. When Antonio refers to Bosola as, 'only court gall', he states an important metaphor to describe the character of Bosola – he refers to his fondness for tormenting the noble court verbally.

Here are a few lines in the play describing the malcontent Bosola

> yet I observe his railing
> Is not for simple love of piety,
> Indeed he rails at those things which he wants,
> Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,
> Bloody, or envious, as any man,
> If he had means to be so.

13.5.2 Identity in the play

In the play, identities clash, and characters seek to assert their identities by establishing their own agencies. The identity of the Duchess is attacked by her brothers, who try to curtail her agency and impose their own idea of a chaste female identity on her. She is constantly trying to assert her own identity, one she has nurtured for

herself, over the identities that are being imposed on her. Her identity is that of a witty noble woman who is a loving wife and a mother.

For her angst-ridden brother Ferdinand, she exists as a duchess, and her social position is her identity of a political, aristocratic figure. Her identity is also that of his sister. He does not want to allow the duchess to carve an independent identity for herself, an identity of an independent woman. The duchess rebels against this imposition of identity on her. She states that she has 'youth and a little beauty', so she is willing to exercise her agency to carve out a niche. Ferdinand wants her to remain a widow, always in mourning, chaste and pure. To this stifling notion, she revolts. Here are Ferdinand's words about his sister.

Ferdinand: A sister damn'd; she's loose i'th' hilts,
Grown a notorious strumpet[…]
She hath had most cunning bawds to serve her turn,
And more secure conveyances for lust,
Than towns of garrison for service.

-Act II scene V

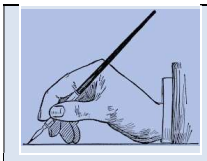
The words signify that Ferdinand, in his myopic idea about women, considers her as a base whore just because she chooses to assert her own an identity. The duchess is a noble woman but Ferdinand creates a false identity for her to justify the vitriolic hatred that he seethes beneath. This false identity assumed by Ferdinand is regressive and misogynistic in nature. Here is a quotation representing the strong reaction of the duchess:

Duchess: This is flesh and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster,
Kneels at my husband's tomb.

– Act I scene II

The duchess does not mix her public and private self. Although, the society, especially her brothers, want her to be her public identity only, but the duchess creates a private one for her and does not allow external forces to suppress that identity.

No matter how dire the punishments imposed on her, she never wavers. She holds onto it steadfast. Although she dies, her character represents a moral victory of the personal identity of a woman over that of one imposed by external forces. Her last request to her maid, Cariola, is also the final assertion of her personal identity, that of a mother and a wife: “look thou giv’st my little boy/Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl/Say her prayers ere she sleep.”



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What do you understand by the term ‘malcontent’? Who, according to you, is playing that role in this play?

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2. What is Ferdinand’s view on the duchess’ independent identity formation? What false identity did he try to impose on her due to this?

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13 .6 CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE TEXT/PLAY

It has already been mentioned that the first Quarto edition of *The Duchess of Malfi* was published in 1623 by John Waterson, which contained a list of the names of actors and verses of commendation by Thomas Middleton, John Ford, and William Rowley. Middleton praised Webster by describing *The Duchess of Malfi* as "Thy monument [...] raised in thy lifetime" and also declaring as follows:

> Thy epitaph only the title be:
> Write, 'Duchess', that will fetch a tear for thee.
> For who e'er saw this Duchess live, and die
> That could get off under a bleeding eye? (qtd. in Gunby, 14)

John Ford urged the audiences and readers of the play to "crown [Webster] a poet whom nor Rome nor Greece/Transcend in all theirs for a masterpiece" (qtd. in Gunby, 14).

For most critics of the subsequent period, there were two significant problems with the play. One was the considerable time-gap between the second and the third Acts of the play. You may have noted that by the beginning of the third Act, Antonio has three children by the Duchess, when in the first Act he had only one. The critics have termed this time gap as the breach of the 'unity of time' on the part of the playwright. The other problem has been the premature death of the Duchess by the end of the fourth Act. Nevertheless, the play was performed many times during the Restoration (in 1660) and till the end of the seventeenth century. An important interpretation of the play is the conception of the four main characters in terms of the four humours: the Cardinal phlegmatic, Ferdinand choleric, Bosola melancholic and the Duchess sanguine.

The eighteenth century witnessed a lean period for *The Duchess of Malfi*. The play was rewritten by Lewis Theobald in the early part of 1730 under the title *The Fatal Street* where the breach of the unity of

time is rectified. Besides that, the Cardinal and Ferdinand are made to kill each other, while Bosola fakes the killing of the Duchess as the latter comes to the fore along with Antonio and live happily ever after.

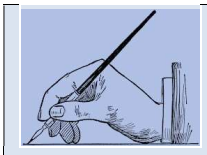
In the nineteenth century, *The Duchess of Malfi* won the praise and acclaim of Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt, both of whom, however, also conceded that the play is composed in the line of Shakespearean tragedy. Most critics, including Hazlitt, preferred The White Devil over *The Duchess of Malfi* so far as the treatment of horror and the profundity of tragedy are concerned. The year 1830 saw the publication of Alexander Dyce's *The Works of John Webster* which remained as the standard edition of the play for almost a century. An anonymous reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (June 1833) concluded that Webster "far, very far, surpasses [Jonson, Fletcher and Massinger] in the depth of his pathos, his tragic powers, and his command over the sublime, terrible and the affecting", describing The Duchess as "the play in which Webster's tragic powers expand to their full height" (qtd. in Gunby, 16).

In the year 1850, Richard Hengist Horne came out with an adaptation of the play *The Duchess of Malfi* which held the stage for a considerable period till 1892 when William Poel's version of the play was performed by the Independent Theatre Society. It is worthwhile to note that Horne's and Poel's version of the play drew considerable attention towards *The Duchess of Malfi* more as a dramatic work than a work of literature. Poel himself said that "Webster's most celebrated passages are not great simply because they are pre-eminent in beauty of idea and felicity of expression, but because they carry with them dramatic force by being appropriate to character and situation" (qtd in Gunby, 19).

The Leavisite critics of the twentieth century, namely, W. A. Edwards and Ian Jack condemned the play as 'incompetent' and 'inconsistent'. At the same time, however, other critics like M.C. Bradbook, in her book *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan*

Tragedy (1935) attempted to examine the play on the basis of the conventions of writing and performance in vogue during the stated period of discussion. Bradbook's opinion is shared by Una Ellis-Fermor, who in her book *The Jacobean Drama* (1936), argues that the "Jacobean dramatists are shaped by, and reflect, a general questioning and pessimism, born of the political uncertainties of the age, of which ... Webster [has] the clearest perception and most profound expression" (Gunby, 24).

An important twentieth-century edition of the play appeared in 1964 with John Russell Brown as its editor. According to Brown, most of the characters in the play could be studied as composed of dualities complementing or even contradicting one another. To quote Gunby "[Brown] notes radical critical disagreements, such as that Antonio's death is either a testament to 'the nobility of his endurance' or 'contemptible', while the Cardinal either 'redeems himself at the last' or is condemned as a 'coward'. Likewise 'Bosola is said to be more a chorus than a character' or 'to show a development from illusion to self-knowledge', while Ferdinand's madness is 'convincing' or 'unconvincing'" (29). With respect to Webster's dramaturgy, Catherine Belsey, in her essay 'Emblem and Antithesis in *The Duchess of Malfi*', argues that the play is "poised, formally as well as historically, between the emblematic tradition of the medieval stage and the increasing commitment to realism of the post-Restoration theatre" (qtd. in Gunby, 35).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention two reactions shown by the 19 Century critics to the drama.

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2. What reactions did The Way of the World face during 20 Century? Mention two of the major critics of this period

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13.7 SUMMING UP

I hope the reading of this unit will help you to know how to analyse a text critically from all possible angles. From the discussion of the characters to that of various themes underlying the text, this unit tries to touch upon almost all the necessary aspects of the play.

During the discussion of the various themes underlying the plot of the play, we talked about the play's position as a Christian/moral allegory, as a revenge narrative and as a play reflecting the contemporary chain of events in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. We then carried out in-depth analyses of the major characters of the play. Finally, we looked at the critical history of *The Duchess of Malfi* as a work of literature and as a play in performance from the time of its composition in early seventeenth century to the late twentieth century.

13.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the genre of 'revenge tragedy' with special reference to *The Duchess of Malfi.*

2. Describe *The Duchess of Malfi* as a play having anti-Catholic overtones.

3. What do you think of the transformation that is witnessed in Bosola's character in the course of the play?

4. Draw a comparative character-analysis of Ferdinand and the Cardinal as the two villainous characters of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

5. Write a note on the theme of incest with reference to Ferdinand's attitude towards his sister. Can you think of any other instance in the history of English Literature?

6. What do you think about the character of Antonio in the play? Was he actually a victim of the circumstances? Explain with examples.

7. Write a note on the elements of madness and horror with respect to *The Duchess of Malfi.*

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JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS

MODULE VI: WILLIAM CONGREVE: *THE WAY OF THE WORLD*

UNIT: 15: RESTORATION COMEDY AND "THE WAY OF THE WORLD"

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to William Congreve's play *The Way of the World*. It will also offer useful information about the background of the play and the playwright. This corpus of information will certainly help you in the contextualisation of the play. You will have a better idea of the contemporary society and how people used to behave at that time and what their value system was. The follies and foibles of the time have been explored through the satirical and ironic style of the playwright. You will be better placed now to appreciate the text.

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint you with the major characteristics of Restoration comedy and with one of the key playwrights of the Restoration period, William Congreve and his work, *The Way of the World*. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the Restoration age in English literature.
- familiarize yourself with the major characteristics of the Restoration drama.
- read critically the selected play which is one of the most representative of Comedy of Manners or Restoration comedy
- analyse the major thematic concerns and the stylistic form of the play

15.2 RESTORATION COMEDY

The period from 1660 to 1700 is usually known in English literature as the Restoration Age. The age is named after the restoration of King Charles II to the throne of England in 1660 after the rule of Cromwell as the Lord Protector from the year 1653. When Oliver Cromwell died in the year 1658, the Protectorate began to collapse and in 1660 the Parliament voted to restore Charles II to the throne. The whole nation gladly accepted the change of government from Commonwealth to monarchy and England entered into a new epoch of life and literature. Restoration was a reaction against the excessive moral severity of Puritanism. The decorum, seriousness, and the moral intensity of the Puritans were replaced by complete opposite forces and almost the whole nation, particularly the court, indulged themselves in

violent excess. Charles II himself was extremely immoral and audacious in his attitude; and the ministers in his court were also similar sort of people – immodest and corrupt. The Restoration period was marked by laxity in moral propriety and it began a process of social transformation. The period considered the religious enthusiasm of the Puritans as marks of hypocrisy and believed in living a sophisticated and worldly life, looking at everything through the lens of scepticism and disbelief and subjecting everything to the inspection of reason. In religion, they lacked the spiritual conviction and devotion of the Puritans and most of them had just a conventional adherence to the Church of England.

The environment of merriment, licentiousness and immoralities also affected the art and literature of the period. The people of the Restoration period found it difficult to believe anything which was beyond the concrete affairs of life and were more interested in the practical, the rational and the demonstrable in literature, rather than anything imaginative and spiritual which abounded in literature of the period that preceded the Restoration period. The use of conceits of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century and the use of highly regular rhymed pentameter couplets were done away with in favour of satire.

Another significant change that came about during the Restoration period was the restoration of the theatres. Before the Restoration period, the theatre had been closed for a period of 18 years because it was considered sinful by the religious and political leaders to go to the theatres or to be associated with it in any way**.** But Charles II, as he himself loved drama, encouraged drama and theatre in England. Theatre developed and the subject was taken up from current affairs, political, ecclesiastical and sexual. The period saw many innovations in theatre, including the important new genre called, Restoration comedy or Comedy of Manners.

The Restoration Comedy of Manners flourished from 1660 to 1710. This type of comedy was greatly influenced by playwrights like

Plautus, Terence, Moliere and the Spanish dramatist, Calderon. After the public stage performances had been banned for 18 years by the Puritan regime, the re-opening of the theatres in 1660 signalled a new beginning of English drama. People now freely began to see the stage plays. There was now also a new set of audience – the middle class along with the aristocrats and their servants. The playgoers were mostly attracted to comedies and by up-to-the-minute topical writing, crowded and bustling plots, introduction of the first professional actresses and by the rise of the celebrity actors. William Congreve was one of the most prolific writers of the Comedy of Manners and he strove to present a true picture of the lives and manners of the contemporary society in his comedies. Comedy of Manners has got certain characteristics. It is notorious for its sexual explicitness, witty and blunt sexual dialogues, boudoir intrigues, sensual innuendos, rakish behaviour and witty language.

Besides Congreve, there was a crop of talented writers like Dryden, Etherege and Wycherley who wrote Comedy of Manners, but Congreve is the undisputed master of this literary genre as he is able to portray a very realistic depiction of his contemporary society. He draws the most entertaining and amusing picture of the men and women of Restoration society and displays his wit and humour in the plays. His main concern in the plays is the life-style of contemporary men and women mostly belonging to upper class society and he exposes satirically their shortcomings, vices and follies. The figure of fops, dandies, coquettes and elements of love, conspiracies and intrigues are the regular features of his plays. He presents things very clearly, free from any sort of ambiguity which shows his clear influence from Shakespeare. In his plays the characters have a very unconventional perspective of life which was full of fun, ecstasy and juvenile irresponsibility.

15.3 THEATRE CONVENTIONS

After the theatres were re-opened during the Restoration period, the control of the London public theatre went to two of Charles II's courtiers – Killigrew and Davenant. They opened new playhouses to accommodate the audience of the period who were smaller in number after years of Puritan dominance. The size of the playhouses was much smaller as the audience mostly belonged to aristocratic families who preferred intimacy. Killigrew and Davenant proceeded in different directions in terms of making renovations of the theatre. Killigrew preferred a U-shaped seating on two levels, and a benched pit on the auditorium floor. His theatre was not very different from the old "private" theatres of Shakespeare's times. On the other hand, Sir William Davenant converted a tennis court into a playhouse but he made it in the manner of the court theatre and it also featured scenery. In order to attract the middle class audience, Davenant felt the need to equip his theatre with scenery. His plans for a new theatre included scenes and machines. He also preferred to have women play female roles rather than men. By the mid-seventeenth century, the continental roofed playhouses, actresses and scenery had become very popular. But, the scenery was not built in three dimensions, "but painted on flat, canvas-covered frames called wings, lined up on each side of the stage, with the view closed off about the middle of the scenic area with larger flats: shutters" (Fisk 9). However, Restoration acting companies were organized much like those in Shakespeare's day. Davenant and Killigrew, although were the main people who also held royal patents, did not own the companies. The companies were run for business and shares in them were sold to raise funds to meet requirements – furnishing theatres, hiring actors, producing plays, etc.

Interestingly, in 1682, The King's and Duke's companies merged. Towards the end of the 17th century more playhouses came into being, like the Bridges Street Theatre, theatre in Dorset Garden,

The Queen's Theatre and Drury Lane Theatre. By the beginning of the 18th century, everything from playwriting to the nature of audience changed. The trend was towards less risqué dramatic offerings, greater visual spectacle, more songs and dances, bigger theatres and larger but less sophisticated audience.

An important characteristic of all restoration theatre, and unique to England, was an apron or forestage – "an acting area forward of the curtain thrusting well into the audience space, with permanent proscenium entrance doors on each side" (Fisk 7). This space was quite close to the audience which gave them the feeling of closeness. The scenic area remained at the back and the performer could, "if they wished, move back and use the scenery as an environment instead of a decorative background" (Fisk 8). The forestage, variously called the platform, area, stage, theatre, scene and proscenium was used as a space from where the performers usually recited their witty dialogues, soliloquies, asides to the audience.

Again, Restoration theatres featured not only scenery but also machines for creating aerial flight, appearances from above and below, ocean waves and other special effects. Many devices such as cranes and trap doors were also used. For lighting, since there was no electricity, candles, tallow lamps and chandeliers were used. Costumes were also an important part of the visual display. Most actors wore 'modern' dresses – the fashion of the day which added to the audience's sense of familiarity with the world of the play.

15.4 AUDIENCE AND ACTORS

The audience of the Restoration theatre was very different from the modern audience of today's time. Since there was no provision to create virtual darkness in the theatre, the audience created a lot of commotion and distraction for the actors. The audience could see each other and therefore were less likely to remain quiet when the

performance was going on. They were also acquainted with the plots and therefore watching the play was never their sole motive of going to the theatre. They had other motives like social adventure.

During the Restoration period, the audience affected the course of drama. Their likes and tastes decided whether the theatre should stage a comedy, melodrama or other types of drama. The companies were often funded by patrons. In the playhouses, the patrons had access to the backstage and the actors and actresses were not safe from the bullies of the patrons. In fact many theatre patrons went to playhouses because they were on the lookout for women and sexual games. They passed comments, criticisms and tomfoolery to the actors and actresses acting on stage. For many Restoration spectators theatre was a game, like the games played out in so many plays of the period, and people enjoyed the imitations of immorality that they were so closely acquainted with. The spectators often disrupted the performances and misbehaved, especially if the play did not meet their expectations. But, they also appreciated good acting which could keep them glued to their seats. They responded to the performances speaking to the actors themselves.

The actors and actresses of the Restoration England were objects of public fantasy. Their job was to attract people to the playhouses and since there were not too many actors and actresses, the few who acted had to work very hard, working for long hours throughout the season. But it was also during this time when actors and actresses achieved celebrity status – became popularly recognized public figures.

15.5 WILLIAM CONGREVE: LIFE AND WORKS

William Congreve was born in the year 1670, at Bradsey, near Leeds. His father was a Cavalier and he spent his childhood in Ireland. Congreve's schooling started in the year, 1681 when he was sent to

Kilkenny for his primary education. In 1696, he joined Trinity College and received his master degree in 1696. Jonathan Swift was one of his schoolmates and they remained friends for the rest of their lives. William Congreve gained proficiency in Greek and Latin at quite an early age.

When Congreve was twenty years of age, he fell in love with Beatrice Nelson, daughter of an architect, whom he met at London theatre. His love for her was very intense but Beatrice's uncle was not in favour of their marriage. Congreve, therefore, decided to end their lives by consuming poison. Congreve, fortunately, survived the effect of poison. However, they could never get married to each other. Congreve attended Beatrice's marriage to Horace Well which was held at a cathedral.

After this incident, Congreve concentrated on writing plays. His first work was however a novel called, *Love and Duty Reconciled or Incognita*, which is a work of comedy of errors. The novel is full of comic elements such as mistaken identity, use of masks, assumed names, disguised persons, etc. Congreve also wrote poems and his poetical works appeared in an anthology known as *Miscellany of Original Poems*. The half cynical song, 'The Decay', is the most popular segment of this anthology.

However, Congreve's poetic skills did not bring any fame for him. In fact, some of his poems were severely criticized. Soon Congreve came into contact with Dryden and his relationship with such great men of letters inspired him to try his luck in the field of drama. At the age of twenty-three he produced his first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*, in 1693. It was performed on the stage and was highly appreciated by the spectators. Congreve skilfully manipulated the success of *The Old Bachelor* in his second play, *The Double Dealer*. But this play was not as successful as the first one. The play lacked wit and humour and was a melancholic tragic-comedy. He therefore, rejected his technique of tragic element in his comedy as he did in his

earlier play, *The Double Dealer*, and wrote his next play, *Love for Love* in the form of a pure comedy. This play, which glorifies love, helped Congreve re-emerge as an outstanding comedy playwright of those times.

William Congreve also wrote a tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, which appeared in the year 1697. *The Way of the World* is Congreve's last comedy which placed him in the zenith of literary success. *The Way of the World* is a reservoir of wit, humour, sparkling dialogues and lively characters. It deals with the life-style of the upper class of the Restoration period. Congreve lived for twenty-eight years after the success of *The Way of the World*. However, in the last phase of his life, he suffered from gout and cataracts on both eyes. He met with a carriage accident in late September 1728. He never recovered from the injuries from this accident and died in London in January 1729 and was buried in Poet's corner in Westminster Abbey.

15.6 READING THE PLAY 'THE WAY OF THE WORLD'

The play opens with a prologue which is spoken by Mr Betterton.

ACT I

As the play opens, Mr Fainall is involved in a conversation with Mirabell about Millamant, Mirabell's beloved. However, Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort does not approve of Mirabell, and Millamant is not free to marry according to her own wishes because if she does so she will lose half of her fortune. Lady Wishfort dislikes Mirabell because Mirabell had pretended to love her in order to hide his love for Lady Wishfort's niece, Millamant. Mirabell, therefore, makes a secret scheme which is not revealed to us until later. Mirabell directs his servant, Waitwell to get married to Foible without any delay and the servant humbly obeys the master's orders. Mirabell tells Mr Fainall that

Millamant has committed a number of mistakes in the past but he loves her in spite of all her faults. Fainall then advises him to forget Millamant's faults and enjoy her charm alone.

A letter for Witwoud brought by a messenger reveals that Sir Wilfull, who is half-brother of Witwoud, had already arrived in London. Sir Wilfull is Lady Wishfort's nephew and she wants him to woo Millamant and marry her. Sir Witwoud and Mr Petulant who themselves want to marry Millamant does not like Sir Wilful coming to London. Mr Petulant and Sir Witwoud further inform Mirabell that his uncle is coming very soon to court Lady Wishfort.

Mirabell and Fainall decide to go for a walk on the Mall. At the same time, Petulant and Witwoud also decides to go for a walk in order to make satirical comments on ladies and to tease them. Mirabell however does not like their idea and rebukes them and stops them from causing any embarrassment to the ladies. All the principal characters are introduced in the opening Act except Millamant and Lady Wishfort. Mirabell's plot remains the major point of interest in the Act.

ACT II

The second Act opens with Mrs Fainall and Mrs Marwood discussing men and their impulsive nature at St. James Park. Both of them outwardly show their hatred for men although it is noticeable that they do not mean what they say. Both of them are shy when they talk about Mirabell which shows that they have some affection for him. After Mirabell and Fainall arrive Mirabell and Mrs Fainall go away leaving Fainall with Mrs Marwood. Mrs Marwood informs Mr Fainall that there is something suspicious going on between Mirabell and Mrs Fainall. Here, we also come to know that Mrs Marwood is Fainall's mistress and he had married Mrs Fainall only for her fortune. As Mrs Marwood informs Mr Fainall about his wife's involvement with Mirabell, Mr Fainall detects Mrs Marwood's jealousy of for Mrs

Fainall as she herself evinces interest in Mirabell. Mrs Marwood however tries to convince Mr Fainall that she loves him only and not Mirabell. Mr Fainall then confesses his love for Mrs Marwood and his willingness to marry her, but only after he possesses the fortune of his wife. He chides Mrs Marwood for revealing Mirabell's plans to Lady Wishfort because the secret would have helped him to become a richer man. Mrs Marwood starts weeping because of the dispute with her lover which ends in a reconciliation.

After Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood leave the stage, Mirabell and Mrs Fainall re-enter the stage which offers new revelations. Mrs Fainall reveals that she had married Mr Fainall only to protect her reputation as she was pregnant with Mirabell's child at the time of her marriage. Mirabell also shares his secret plan with Mrs Fainall. He tells Mrs Fainall that he has directed his servant, Waitwell to marry Foible who is the maid-servant in Lady Wishfort's house. After that Waitwell will disguise himself as the uncle of Mirabell and present himself as a suitor to Lady Wishfort. Mirabell plans to reveal the truth about Waitwell later and would propose to release Lady Wishfort from the clutches of a married man but on the condition that she will have no objection to his marriage to her niece, Millamant.

At this point of time Millamant enters the stage followed by Witwoud and Millamant's maid servant Mincing. She is thoroughly aware of her charm and her power over Mirabell. She is apparently quite prepared to go along with Mirabell's plot, which Foible has revealed to her, a clear indication that she intends to have Mirabell.

ACT III

The scene is in a room in Lady Wishfort's residence.

As the scene begins, Lady Wishfort is busy in her make-up as she has been informed by her maid-servant that Sir Rowland is coming

to meet her. She is not satisfied with the make-up and rebukes the maid, Peg for her inefficiency in the art of make-up.

In the meantime, Mrs Marwood comes and tells Lady Wishfort that she has seen Foible talking to Mirabell which annoys Lady Wishfort because she wants her plan to marry Sir Rowland to remain a secret; she does not want Mirabell to know about it because Sir Rowland is Mirabell's uncle and it could place Lady Wishfort in an embarrassing situation.

After that Foible comes and tells Lady Wishfort that Sir Rowland is impatiently waiting to meet her and kiss her hand. Lady Wishfort however, first interrogates her about her meeting with Mirabell in the park. Foible is clever and she was already prepared for this question. She lies to Lady Wishfort saying that she has spoken to Mirabell only because he was using derogatory words for her lady and she wanted to give him back a proper reply. When Lady Wishfort learns about this she becomes furious at Mirabell and decides to teach him a lesson. Foible further urges Lady Wishfort to accept Sir Rowland as her husband.

In the meantime, Mrs Fainall, Lady Wishfort's daughter arrives at her mother's residence and speaks to Foible and tell her about her intention to support Mirabell in his plot against her mother, Lady Wishfort. Foible informs Mrs Fainall that she was seen by Mrs Marwood during her conversation with Mirabell and also about how she tackled Lady Wishfort regarding the matter. Mrs Marwood overhears the conversation.

Lady Wishfort comes and informs Mrs Marwood about the arrival of her nephew, Sir Wilfull. Mrs Marwood who is annoyed with Mirabell, in order to teach him a lesson suggests that Sir Wilfull can be a suitable husband for Millamant, Mirabell's lover.

At this juncture, Petulant and Sir Wilfull Witwoud appear. Sir Wilfull refuses to recognize his foppish brother, and Petulant Witwoud refuses to recognize his rustic elder brother. Afterward, when Mrs

Marwood is left alone with Fainall, she describes Mirabell's plot to him and Fainall becomes angry thinking of his unfaithful wife. Mrs Marwood prepares a scheme for Mr Fainall through which he can get half of the fortune of Millamant. They know that Lady Wishfort loves her daughter very much and they can insist Lady Wishfort to hand over Millamant's money to Fainall on the threat of making public Lady Wishfort's daughter's transgressions.

ACT IV

The scene is in a room in Lady Wishfort's house.

The scene opens with Lady Wishfort preparing herself, working on her appearance and posture to receive Sir Rowland. Lady Wishfort also hints to Sir Wilfull that he should try to win the heart of Millamant. However, Sir Wilfull feels embarrassed in front of Millamant because he was found in a drunken state by Millamant and because of the derangement caused by excessive drinking; Sir Wilfull was unable to understand anything that Millamant had spoken to him. He feels only grateful when Millamant later dismisses him.

Mirabell appears in the scene and a conversation ensues between Mirabell and Millamant which is also often referred to as the proviso scene. Millamant puts forward certain conditions to marry Mirabell. Millamant tells Mirabell that she wants complete dedication from Mirabell after her marriage to him. She further tells him that she doesn't want any interference from anybody in her daily routine. For example, Mirabell cannot compel her to rise early in the morning as she is habitually a late-riser; Mirabell cannot address her by such out-dated phrases like, 'My sweet love', 'My dear', or 'Sweetheart', etc.; he cannot compel her to go to theatres or to attend any social gathering. She also says that she should be free to meet anyone and receive anybody at any time, and write letters to anybody even after they get married.

Mirabell also puts forward his own terms and conditions to marry Millamant. He tells Millamant that she cannot hide any personal affair from him, she cannot indulge in heavy drinking and she cannot wear tight-fitting dress which would be harmful for the baby. Both of them agree on the conditions and Millamant allows Mirabell to kiss her hand as a token of love.

Lady Wishfort is annoyed with Sir Wilful because he drinks too much. Lady Wishfort is afraid that he might lose the opportunity to win over Millamant because of his drinking habits. In the meantime, Mirabell's servant, Waitwell appears as Sir Rowland in front of Lady Wishfort and proposes marriage to her. He tells her that he is impatient to marry her and any further delay could be fatal for his heart. He says very cruel things against Mirabell and declares his intention to teach Mirabell a lesson. A messenger appears at that moment with a letter which reveals that Sir Rowland is actually Mirabell's servant, Waitwell. Waitwell however manages to convince Lady Wishfort that the letter has been sent by Mirabell to create misunderstanding between the two of them. He further tells Lady Wishfort that he is ready to hand over all his assets to her and Lady Wishfort becomes very pleased to know this.

ACT V

This is the last act of the play. In the first scene Lady Wishfort comes to know of the real identity of Sir Rowland from Mrs Marwood. She also gets to know that Foible is also involved in the conspiracy and she becomes furious.

Foible on the other hand informs Mrs Fainall about the love affair of Mrs Marwood and Mr Fainall. Lady Wishfort also comes to know about her daughter, Mrs Fainall's affair with Mirabell. Mr Fainall blackmails Lady Wishfort and Lady Wishfort lands into a critical situation as she is unsure about what she should do in order to protect her daughter. Meanwhile Sir Wilfull tries to explain the reason for

Mirabell's intrigue to Lady Wishfort saying that he had plotted only to win the love of Millamant.

Mirabell ultimately rescues Lady Wishfort from the clutches of Fainall by proving his involvement in the conspiracy along with Mrs Marwood and that the legal documents that Fainall possesses are all fake and that Mrs Fainall had already given all her legal rights to Mirabell before her marriage.

Lady Wishfort finally gives her consent to the relationship between Mirabell and Millamant.

The play ends with an epilogue.

15.7 MAJOR THEMES

15.7.1 Conspiracy and Intrigues

The Way of the World has a very complex plot as it is packed with intrigues and conspiracies. The intrigues and conspiracies showcase the prevalent immorality and values of upper class society in London. Almost all characters are involved in intrigues. Mirabell, the hero of the play plots a conspiracy in order to dupe Lady Wishfort because he wants to marry her niece, Millamant. He presents his servant Waitwell as Sir Rowland in front of Lady Wishfort so that he can woo her. Waitwell does everything as Mirabell instructs him and Foible also gives her full co-operation to the scheme. In the same way, Mr Fainall who is the son-in-law of Lady Wishfort also schemes with Mrs Marwood to usurp the property of Lady Wishfort, Mrs Fainall and Millamant. The plot proves a failure as Mirabell is able to foil the treacherous plan of Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood. Mirabell fabricates another plan to save Millamant's property taking the help of Sir Wilfull , Lady Wishfort's nephew. In fact Lady Wishfort is also involved in a conspiracy as she is willing to marry Sir Rowland so that she can have her revenge on Mirabell.

15.7.2 Gender Relations and marriage

Love and marriage are important themes in the play. There are different varieties of love shown in the play and the different lovers handle love in different ways and fall in love for different reasons. The main motive for choosing life partners is to avail wealth. Even the most ideal couple in the play, Mirabell and Millamant, love each but even they are not ready to sacrifice their monetary interest. Millamant too, on the other hand is not ready to compromise with her freedom after marriage. It is interesting to note that even though Mirabell claims to love Millamant, he has affairs with other women like Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall. *The Way of the World* presents to its readers a world where love and money are important for all people. Even an old lady like Lady Wishfort dreams of having a man to love her which makes her come across as desperate, vain and pathetic. Money and love share a deep relation in the play as the characters believe that love thrives on money and love without money is bound to fail.

15.8 FEATURES OF 'COMEDY OF MANNERS' IN THE WAY OF THE WORLD

The Way of the World is one of the best examples of the Comedy of Manners, a type of comedy which was in vogue during the Restoration period. Along with Congreve, there were others like Wycherley, Etherege and Vanbrugh who wrote comedies of manners. Comedies of manners mainly aimed at satirising the social follies prevalent in their time. *The Way of the World* contains satirical elements like elements of love, marriage, romantic dialogues, wit and humour, conspiracies which are essential ingredients of Restoration comedy. The play maintains a satirical tone from the beginning to the end and throws ample light on the sophisticated class of society in

England at that time. Some of the most important characters in the play are women and they are shown as sophisticated, crazy about fashions and love affairs and are shown as devoid of any moral values and principles. All the characters like Mrs Fainall, Mirabell, Mrs Marwood, Mr Fainall and Lady Wishfort give a clear picture of the upper classes of the contemporary society and their immoral behaviour. For instance, Mirabell suggests that Mrs Fainall marry Mr Fainall in order to conceal her pregnancy with him. Mr Fainall on the other hand does not take his wife's relationship with Mirabell very seriously and he himself has an illicit relationship with Mrs Marwood. The love affair between Millamant and Mirabell is the only genuine relationship among the many love-affairs in the play.

The Way of the World depicts a picture of the affectations of the people, particularly women in upper class, sophisticated society. He satirises them for their obsession with fashion. All the women characters dress in very tight fashionable dresses which were very much in fashion during those times. Congreve mentions about Cabal nights when women of the upper class of society assemble and gossip about various scandalous affairs. Lady Wishfort despite crossing the age of fifty still likes to dress up as young women do and takes make-up very seriously and scolds her attendant because of her inefficiency in the art of make-up. Along with the craze for fashion, the feeling of vanity and jealousy was very much common among the women of Restoration society. Mrs Marwood who likes Mirabell a lot develops jealousy for Millamant. Jealousy is shown as a universal weakness among all women of the period.

Conspiracies and Intrigues are an important feature of the Comedy of manners. *The Way of the World* is filled with intrigues and conspiracies as men and women are deeply involved in plotting and scheming. Almost all the male characters in the play plot to trap rich women in order to acquire their wealth. In the case of Mr and Mrs Fainall, Mr Fainall marries Mrs Fainall only for her wealth. He also

plots to usurp the property of Lady Wishfort on the basis of an illegal document. On the other hand, Mirabell also pretends to be in love with Lady Wishfort in order to marry her niece Millamant. Mrs Marwood and Fainall also fabricate an intrigue to exploit Lady Wishfort and even Sir Wilfull joins Millamant in an intrigue when he declares that Millamant is ready to marry him.

The play is filled with witty dialogues. The characters often try to exhibit their capabilities by using witty dialogues and passing vulgar comments to prove their hopeless wit. Petulant, Witwoud and Sir Wilfull are perfect examples of this type of characters. Congreve uses a lot of humour in constructing the dialogues of the characters. For example, when Witwoud refuses to recognise Sir Wilfull because he comes from the countryside saying it is unfashionable to recognize relatives, Sir Wilful loses his temper and replies by saying that fashion is foolish and Witwoud is not better than a fop.

Thus, as a comedy of manners, *The Way of the World* presents a vivid picture of the Restoration period and depicts the follies and vices of the people as a group.

15.9 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Millamant

Millamant can be called the heroine of the play. As a character, she is unique in various aspects. She is often described as the 'wisest, wittiest and most mature of Restoration coquettes' (Lynch xx). She moves in the Restoration milieu wearing mask of etiquette and affectation. She displays her wit and beauty at every opportunity that she gets and she is the one who trains Mirabell to give up his sententious behaviour and be a good and worthy lover. She comes across as a strong woman who does not want to be dominated by men. She belongs to a high class of society and is very sophisticated and

commanding in her approach. She overshadows all other characters because of her sparkling wit and intellectual prowess. Her beauty and grace attracts many lovers but she is very particular in her choice and is a very confident woman. She receives innumerable letters from her lovers but she wouldn't go through them as she thinks that the letters haven't been written in a proper way. She says, "I hate such letters because they don't know the art of letter writing."

Millamant hates any form of pride in men. Therefore, although she likes Mirabell, she also hates him because of his vanity. She never feels any compunction in chiding men for their stupidity. Although she is not a man-hater, she is of the view that there should be a code or discipline in love for every man and they must live within their limits. Millamant reveals herself as a true lover of freedom and she would not compromise with her liberty. Therefore, when she discusses their love with Mirabell, she puts a condition before him that she would love him only if he can agree to certain conditions. She says, "I would like to be free to pay visits to and from whom I please; I would be free to write and receive letters without any interrogation from by you; I would wear what I please; and choose conversation with regard only to my taste; I have no obligation to converse with wits, what I don't like because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations." She makes it a point to tell Mirabell in advance, that she is not like the usual type of women who can accept domination and exploitation from their husbands. Millamant does not like to be addressed with phrases like 'My Sweet Love' or 'Sweetheart' but is at the same time romantic, has deep love for poetical verses and loves to recite romantic verses composed by Suckling. She is however not a hopeless romantic but a very firm and stable person. She dislikes any kind of superficiality and the company of women who are silly, stupid and wear masks to hide their age. She reveals herself as a true feminist, an egoist and a straight forward person who is not ready to live under the influence of her husband. The provisio scene proves this. She puts

forward her conditions in a very strong manner before Mirabell and although she likes Mirabell, she doesn't let Mirabell influence her and remains firm in her demands. She has also certain feminine qualities like her desire to be wooed by men, especially Mirabell. Sometimes she exhibits a rare sense of humour. She appears very amusing when she prevents Witwoud from using unlimited number of similitude because she is fed up with all that. Millamant is not without her share of follies but the magnitude of her personality absorbs her follies.

Mirabell

Mirabell emerges as the chief protagonist of the play. Apparently, he appears as a typical Restoration beau envied by others for his wit and different characters try to expose his follies. Mirabell is one of the principal characters involved in the intrigue in the play, which he plots both to win Millamant for her beauty as well as her fortune. He pretended to be in love with Lady Wishfort and later tried to win her favour to marry Lady Wishfort's neice, Millamant. He created the fictitious character of Mirabell's uncle to win over Lady Wishfort. But he also proves himself to be a good person when he saves Lady Wishfort's from the clasp of Mr Fainall. He plotted against Lady Wishfort but his intention was not callous and he had done everything only to win Millamant. In the proviso scene, he immediately accepts the conditions put forward by Millamant which shows him to be a very loving person. He not only accepts Millamant's conditions but also states his own conditions, which shows his wit. His comments on characters like Fainall, reveals his common sense and they are full of wit and irony. He is mature in intellect and in his judgement and is able to come out of difficult situations because of this quality. He can also be very satirical and cynical at times. For instance, he ridicules women who wear make-up and masks to cover up their age and women who strive to look slim when their bellies and hips have swollen with pregnancy.

There are in fact many aspects to his character. The different characters in the play have different opinions about him. Fainall, for example calls him a "gallant man" although he does not like his attitude; for Lady Wishfort he is an imposter and a confirmed cheat but she also admires him for his intellectuality and Millamant, although she does not declare it openly, loves him from the core of her heart. He is a very lively character who combines wit, energy and judgement. He shows patience in adverse situations and although he has certain weakness, he proves himself to be a true lover of Millamant.

Lady Wishfort

Lady Wishfort is one of the central figures around whom the play revolves. She is a snob, naive, old and desperate to get a husband. Congreve highlights Lady Wishfort's social and sexual hypocrisy in fashioning her character. She tries to hide her age by applying make-up and wants to be wooed by men. Most of the conspiracies in the play are woven around her and she is unaware of them. While Mirabell flirts with her to win her favour in order to marry her niece, Millamant, Mr Fainall conspires against her to take away Mrs Fainall's property.

As a character she is different from other women characters in the play like Millamant, Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall. There is an element of humour in her character which evokes laughter among the audience. The different situations in which she lands herself make her a humorous figure. She comes across as a funny character because she can be easily wooed, she believes all the false praises that men shower about her appearances, spends a lot of time applying make-up and behaves like a teenager although she is over fifty years of age. When she gets to know that Sir Rowland is going to meet her she says, "Yes, but tenderness becomes mere best – a sort of dyingness – you see my picture has a sort of – what, should I call it Foible? A melting look in the eyes? Yes I will look so, my niece Millamant pretends to have this

kind of look. But she is devoid of a good physical appearance." The readers enjoy her follies to a great extent.

Lady Wishfort later finds herself in a helpless condition and her character evokes pathos. She is apparently a very authoritative figure who controls significant amount of wealth but she also exhibits stupidity most of the times. She becomes a victim to a number of conspiracies. Her servant, Foible and her friend, Mrs Marwood exploit and influence her in a negative manner and Fainall blackmails her. She is not only slow at realising other people's trickery but is also bad at defending herself. She lacks good judgement and is easily deceived by people around her and doesn't know how to distinguish between a good person and a bad person. She has a deep dislike for Mirabell but ultimately it is he who comes to her rescue and saves her fortune and social reputation.

She does not show enough patience in most of the circumstances. She becomes impatient in waiting for Sir Rowland and she asks her maid servant, "But art thou sure, Sir Rowland will not fail to come? Or he will not fail when he does come?" She is easy to lose her temper and becomes easily annoyed. Lady Wishfort comes to hate men and her hatred for men is justified as she is deceived by men like Mirabell and Mr Fainall and her nephew Sir Wilfull disregards her. Although she is the subject of Congreve's satire, she also becomes a helpless, pitiable character and is able to gain pity and sympathy of the readers.

15.10 STYLE: WIT/ IRONY IN THE WAY OF THE WORLD

The Way of the World is a comedy where wit and irony pervade. Although some critics like to believe that the play is a comedy with serious overtones, it will not be wrong to claim that wit is the essence of its seriousness. Irony is an integral part of the speeches of the characters and it is closely related to style and wit.

Congreve possessed the imagination that delighted in a playful inventiveness and therefore he had filled the speeches in *The Way of the World* with verbal wit. However, Congreve did not give his readers any definition of wit, but, he wanted his spectators to distinguish between a true wit and a witwoud. Dryden says that wit is something which is more than verbal word play (puns, similitudes, antitheses, etc.) According to him, it also points to a traditional ideal of decorum ("a propriety of words and thoughts"). Propriety is the norm by which wit can be measured in *The Way of the World*. For instance, Sir Wilfull and Lady Wishfort's are loud characters which lend their dialogues an affected quality. On the other hand, Petulant's repetitive speech makes him come across as a fool who tries to affect the ways of the brave, but that only aggravates his folly. Witwoud is a more obvious case of wit without judgement. He is a parasite who aims only at impressing other people. He desperately wants to erase his past and wishes to be accepted in the world of fashion but comes across as fatuously self-congratulatory, and transparently foolish. Witwoud is a kind of industrious but incompetent apprentice in an inverted world.

Many of the improprieties of characters concern the abuse of language. The characters' speeches do not show any link between 'words' and 'thoughts'. For instance, Sir Wilfull's address to Millamant in Act IV Scene I, Wilfull tries to use vocabulary of fashionable gallantry without having any idea about what they mean, and he uses them repeatedly.

The incongruity between natural speech and affected wit is even more apparent in the case of Lady Wishfort. She loves to appear as a refined woman and her dialogue is often studded with malapropisms which are the result of her affected learning. Her dialogue with Peg in Act III Scene I show faulty intellectual connections.

> Lady Wishfort. I have no more patience – if I have not fretted myself till I am pale again, there's no Veracity in me. Fetch me

the Red – The Red, do you hear, Sweetheart? An errant Ash colour, as I'm a Person. Look you how this Wench stirs! Why dost thou not fetch me a little Red? Did'st thou not hear me, Mopus?

Peg. The Red Ratifia does your Ladyship mean, or the Cherry Brandy?

Lady Wishfort. Ratifia, Fool? No Fool. Not the Ratifia Fool – Grant me patience! I mean the Spanish Paper Idiot, Complexion Darling.

Congreve also highlights false wit in Petulant. In one instance, he tells Millamant of his attitude toward Witwoud which shows his disdain for the meaning of words and therefore the affected nature of his speech. He says, "If he says Black's Black – if I have a humour to say 'tis Blue – Let that pass – Alls one for that. If I have a humour to prove it, it must be granted" (III.i. 404-406)

The abuses of wit can also be found in other characters like Mrs Marwood, Mrs Fainall and Fainall. The character of Mrs Marwood proves that wit and madness are closely related. Mrs Marwood's speech abounds in absolutes: "never", "every", "always", etc. She is always ready to make rash statements which she does not carry out. In a bitter encounter with Fainall, she says, "But not to loathe, detest, abhor Mankind, myself, and the whole treacherous World" (II. 273-238). Fainall replies to Mrs Marwood saying, "Nay this is Extravagance", which highlights the discrepancy between her words and her actual intentions.

Like Mrs Marwood, Mrs Fainall is also capable of making statements that she does not believe. But in her case, it stems from naiveté and a faulty education. The confusions of her speech emerge as a consequence of a lack of judgement. Again, in the case of Fainall, although he can be mistaken for a true wit, his speech lacks Mirabell's plain sense. Congreve condemns false wits like Fainall and Mrs

Marwood because their wit, far from enabling them to engage with reality, merely entangles them with their own illusions.

It is Mirabell and Millamant who dramatize true wit. Congreve brings out the true wit in them by initially placing them in opposition to each other, each one doubting the other one's integrity. Both of them are wary and difficult, resenting the loss of judgement that love imposes even as they accept it. Mirabell says, "As for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a love, for I like her with all her faults: nay, like her for her faults ... They are grown as familiar to me as my own frailties; and in all probability, in a little time longer, I shall like 'em as well". Millamant also declares, "Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing, - for I find I love him violently." The two characters are rational and they test each other and themselves, if they can be honest in marriage. Millamant's affectations also do not make her come across as artificial but they are clearly defensive exercises. In fact, she makes an attempt to free herself and Mirabell from the world of hypocrisy. In the proviso scene, they fight with each other but for a vision of marriage free from the hypocrisy around them. The triumph of the play, ultimately, is in the surfacing of lovers who, through a balance of strong affection and self-knowledge, achieve a balance that liberates them from the power of the world.

15.11 SUMMING UP

In *The Way of the World* we have seen how Congreve weaves a perfect Restoration comedy by bringing in the elements of love, wit, intrigues, rakish behaviour, etc. in the play. The play is reflective of the various follies of the age like immorality, affectation, social hypocrisy of the period and Congreve satirises them in the play.

15.12 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Attempt a biographical sketch of William Congreve and discuss the major works by the playwright.
2. Assess William Congreve as a playwright of the Restoration Period.
3. Critically analyse *The Way of the World* as a comedy of manners.
4. Critically discuss the Proviso Scene of the play.
5. Discuss Congreve's art of characterization in *The Way of the World*.
6. "In The Way of the World, Congreve has highlighted the relations of men and women in marriage." Do you agree with this statement.
7. "Wit is the basic strength of Congreve's *The Way of the World*." Explain this maxim with appropriate examples.

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