

Block-2

Unit 1 : William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (Introduction and Stage History)

Unit 2 : William Shakespeare:*Hamlet* (Reading the Play)

Unit 3 : William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (Supplementary Unit)

Unit 4 : Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer* (Introduction and Stage History)

Unit 5 : Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer* (Reading the Play)

Unit 6 : *She Stoops to Conquer*

Unit 1 : William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (Introduction and Stage History)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Shakespeare's Sources
- 1.4 Shakespeare's Techniques
- 1.5 Shakespeare's Language
- 1.6 Themes of the Play
 - 1.6.1 The extremes of the Human Condition
 - 1.6.2 Revenge
 - 1.6.3 Desire and love.
 - 1.6.4 Parenting and growth.
- 1.7 The Theatre in Shakespeare's Time
- 1.8 Suming Up
- 1.9 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 Objectives

In this unit you will be able to

- *learn* about the sources from which Shakespeare borrowed for Hamlet
- *identify* the techniques used by the bard for the play
- *discern* Shakespeare's use of language
- *learn* about the themes of the play
- *learn* about the theatrical conditions of his time

1.2 Introduction

Hamlet presents a skilful manipulation of the audience's knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of the king and Hamlet's doubts about it. The audience knows for certain, from Claudius's attempts to pray in Act III, that there has been a 'foul murder', a fratricide that has been covered up with the story that the king died from snake bite. Hamlet however does not hear Claudius's confession. He must bank on the testimony of the Ghost which seems to require corroboration.

1.3 Shakespeare's Sources

The primary source of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the Norse legend of Amleth, which was first written in the twelfth century by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. He collected several Danish legends, folk tales, and stories and transcribed them in Latin in a work titled *Historica Danicae*, or *History of the Danes*. More than three hundred years after his compilation, *Historica Danicae* was published for the first time in Paris in 1514. Book three and book four of this publication contain the story of Amleth with all the bare bones of the play you are studying. In this story, King Horwendil of Denmark is murdered by his brother Feng. King Horwendil has a son called Amleth, whose name translates to "simpleton". Feng then decides to marry the queen, Gerutha, Amleth's mother. Amleth vows to take revenge on Feng and while he is plotting his revenge, he pretends to be mad. As the story progresses, we find that Feng sends a young woman to unravel the secrets of Amleth. Amleth also has a conversation with his mother Gerutha, which a courtier of the King tries to eavesdrop by hiding under the bed. This courtier is discovered and killed by Amleth, who eventually gets sent to England accompanied by two members of the court. The two courtiers have a letter with them that demands the death of Amleth at the hands of the English. As you may have guessed, Amleth changes the contents of the letter and the two courtiers get murdered instead. Amleth comes back to Denmark, extracts his revenge and kills the king and gets on the throne himself.

There are some interesting things to note in this version of the old Amleth legend. They pertain both to the evolution of the story and Shakespeare's creativity in finally presenting *Hamlet* on the Elizabethan stage. In the old story there is no ghost who tells Amleth of the murder. The identity of the person responsible for the murder is known to everyone, including Amleth and there is no reason for him to pretend to be mad. In essence, he has a valid reason for seeking revenge. In England, after the two courtiers have been murdered, Amleth marries the princess of England. He returns to Denmark in disguise and while the whole court is celebrating his supposed death in England, he gets everyone drunk and kills the king. He then proclaims himself king. Compared with later versions of the story and Shakespeare's own version, you can see how character and plot development takes a new turn.

In 1570, the French writer and translator François de Belleforest published *Histoires Tragique* based on Saxo Grammaticus's *Historica Danicae*. Here he included the story of Amleth with some variations. (Note that in 1570, Shakespeare was six years old). Belleforest gave the characters of the story more depth and added backgrounds and character insights thereby laying the ground for further character development. The original story, with the battle with the Norwegian king is expanded by Belleforest, which enables him to introduce the character of young Fortinbras. He provides additional intrigue by introducing an adulterous relationship between Gerutha, Amleth's mother and his uncle. He also includes in the story Amleth's relationship with a young girl, who have known each other since they were children and are now lovers. This lays the ground for the character of Ophelia. Ophelia's madness and the revenge of Laertes, are however, additions by Shakespeare. Belleforest also does not include the play within the play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, that Shakespeare uses to optimum effect. Belleforest's version was itself translated to a English version in 1608, called *The Historie of Hamleth* which also contained phrases from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

1.4 Shakespeare's Techniques

Shakespeare had intricate knowledge of the classics, the Greek and the Roman authors of antiquity that we study as a part of classical literature today. He must also have been aware of the conventions and criticism of ancient drama, most notably the works of Aristotle. As far as his tragedies are concerned, Shakespeare modelled his works on those of the Roman author Seneca. But he also significantly experimented with the conventions of classical tragedies and expanded on the technical patterns to create more elaborate works that delved deep into the human psyche and made his stories richer and more insightful. The characters and situations that Shakespeare created explored the boundaries of human behavior and human relationships. This is one of the major reasons why the plays of Shakespeare continue to inspire scholarship, performance and adaptations- with each subsequent indulgence more fruitful than the previous ones. This is also why his plays continue to appeal to the modern reader- because of the affinity it has to the human condition, modern or otherwise.

The character of Hamlet offers us the perfect example of this blend of the classical and Shakespeare's experiments. Hamlet is the high-born tragic hero, a young man with lofty ideals and the expectations of the state upon him. The events of the play that have happened before Hamlet takes the stage work to mold the tragic hero image which is reinforced by the burden of seeking revenge and justice. Yet at the same time, we find that this young person is a product of his age, with a propensity for philosophy and poetry, speech that betrays humanist ideals of the high Renaissance and flaws in character that are closer to the *everyperson* than to the classic tragic hero. The classical convention of catharsis is obeyed here, since in the tragedy of Hamlet, the audience is able to experience heightened sense of pity and sympathy. Yet, for the audience, the tragedy of this hero is closer to their own lives and times than to the classical tragic hero. To further strengthen this connection, Shakespeare does not depend on anachronism. Anachronism happens when we find a character or a story that is identifiably old fashioned- it out of sync with the present. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a student of the University of Wittenberg, which was founded in 1527 AD. The original Hamlet of Saxo lived sometime in the 10th century AD. This would make Shakespeare's Hamlet immediately identifiable to the audience- they would assume Hamlet to be a probable Protestant and a skeptic- which is evident from the many references in the play where he doubts the ghost.

Shakespeare's innovations are also obvious in the **play within the play** (*The Murder of Gonzago*) that forms such an important part of *Hamlet*. The play within the play might give Hamlet a way of determining his uncle's guilt, for Shakespeare, several things are achieved by this technique. First, it offers Shakespeare a stage to discuss the rivalries between the child and adult acting companies in the London theatres during 1600 and 1601. In Act 2 Scene 2 (lines 320- 325) Hamlet asks several questions about these child acting companies which Rosencrantz tries his best to sum up. Contemporary editor Philip Edwards is of the opinion that "Perhaps he [Shakespeare] inserted it in the heat of the moment to replace a much briefer remark about fashion in the theatre, which would carry us from Rosencrantz at 312 to Hamlet at 334." Second, it gives Shakespeare a lot of space to comment on drama as an art itself. Hamlet's sympathies with the players and his belief in their talents is not an off-hand remark. Towards the end of this scene, Hamlet launches into a speech that is apparently about his own grief. But, if you read more closely, this speech

(Act 2 Scene 2, lines 501 -558) is also about the power of theatre and the power of actors to tap into the deepest recesses of human emotion. Third, this also offers Shakespeare to indulge in some act of literary criticism of his own within the play itself. If you carefully read the first 36 lines of Act 2 Scene 2, you will find that Hamlet is giving clear instructions about how his speech needs to be performed, with minute details that include body movements and the tone of voice. There are several other such details mentioned in these lines. This criticism and evaluation of the stage and drama continue even when the play is being performed in front of the King and Hamlet continues his commentary. Fourth, this technique also enables Shakespeare to present Hamlet's humanist education that would make him immediately identifiable by the audience. That he is a poet is beyond doubt, but here the hero displays intricate knowledge of drama, with special references to the classics. He also turns the author of the edited version of the play that is to be performed. The fact that he knows some of the players personally and that he even remembers snippets from their previous performances only serve to make Hamlet one of the audience's own.

Shakespeare's imagery is also a part of his unique technique. He makes sure that the state of tragedy is compounded by audio and visual cues that remains in the minds of the audience as the tragedy unfolds. It is not only through words that Shakespeare maintains that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. At the very start of the play, the new king's revelry is the subject of discussion, and the important thing to note here is that only sounds of the revelry reach the stage, which sets off the criticism of the king's conduct. That same impression is maintained by letters written to England in the middle of the play. Hamlet's grief, melancholy and confusion is reflected in the "inky cloak" that he wears. Curtains and screens throughout the play serve to elevate the state of mistrust, mystery and impending doom in the play. The placement of the Ghost under the stage in several scenes where only the voice of the ghost can be heard serve to tighten tensions during the play. Ophelia's white dress, her floral decoration at the time of her death and several similar techniques not only add on to the innocence of the character, it provides a direct visual contrast to the "inky cloak" of Hamlet and a metaphorical contrast to the darkness that pervades the play. Her words and her songs in her madness add on to the eeriness that the play has maintained since the start. Just before the final scene of the play, the scene at the graveyard, with skulls, shovels, dirt, open graves, dramatic confrontations and the physical act of jumping into graves

compound the effects already discussed. Apart from the “rotten state” that Fortinbras is invited to take charge of, his first job is actually to clean up four dead bodies that lie on the stage (and the reference to two more bodies lying somewhere in a distant land). You should note here the connections between *Hamlet* and what later came to be known as Jacobean Theatre. What have you learnt about the conventions of Jacobean theatre, and can you call *Hamlet* a Jacobean play?

1.5 Shakespeare’s Language

Shakespeare wrote in a combination of verse and prose. Verses are rhythmic patterned lines; they can be both rhymes and unrhymed. Shakespeare mostly used *blank verse* or unrhymed patterned lines in his plays. Blank verse is sometimes referred to as “Marlowe’s mighty line” after Christopher Marlowe who adapted it for the English stage. Shakespeare’s use of the *blank verse*, however, is more unique and spread out and he helped to carry it forward as the dominant technique. Blank verse may not have rhyme, but they are carefully rhythmic lines created by the structuring of iambic feet. In some cases, he also used rhymed couplets, which are two consecutive lines of rhyming verse, meaning, patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. One poetic foot is a single unit that is repeated to give a steady rhythm to a line of verse, and it doesn’t matter if the verse is rhymed or unrhymed. The iambic foot consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, like “inSIST” or “reSIST”. The iambic pentameter was quite popular in English drama and English poetry in Shakespeare’s time and the Earl of Surrey was the first person to use it in his translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

It is also important to note here that in Shakespeare’s time, authors were expected to follow the **Doctrine of Decorum**. This doctrine was based on the class structure of the society and helped to maintain this structure. Quite simply, it meant that characters who held high ranks in the society, such as kings, priests and courtiers, were expected to speak in verse. On the contrary people ranked lower on the hierarchy, like guards, laborers, clowns, and mad people were expected to speak in prose. For the most part, Shakespeare adheres to this decorum in *Hamlet*. The grave diggers speak in prose, as does Hamlet when he is acting mad. Do you think Shakespeare obeyed this doctrine to the fullest in *Hamlet*? Study the language of the characters of the play carefully and find out if he did. Hint: Ophelia’s madness and her verses. Hint 2: Hamlet’s language as he is talking to high born male characters, for example Claudius or Laertes as

compared to Hamlet's language as he is speaking to high born female characters, for example his mother or Ophelia. Find out similar examples and construct your argument. Hint 3: The soldiers speak in beautiful blank verse.

Space for Learner

1.6 Themes of the Play

Let's explore the themes in details:

1.6.1 The extremes of the Human Condition

In the play, we find that Shakespeare has contrasted extreme ways of understanding the human condition. Remember that this play was written when Humanism was a very popular philosophical thought, in theory and in practice. Yet, in this play, we find that Shakespeare presents situations that oscillate between extremes, forcing us to think that the exalted nature of the human condition and the emphasis on humanist thought may not be exactly what we think about. Consider the following examples to understand the prime theme of the play. For the audience of Shakespeare's time, Hamlet would have been the paragon of the Renaissance man, complete with his doubts and confusions. Yet, there are several times in the play when Hamlet refers to himself in terms we equate with vermin and insects, crawling the nether world of the earth. There are several times when Hamlet exalts death as compared to the troubled existence he is forced to live through. Go to Act 4, Scene 3 (lines 16- 35) and observe the conversation between Claudius and Hamlet. Observe what Hamlet has to say about Polonius's body. Apart from this, also observe what Hamlet has to say about his father, the most exalted of men, in contrast to what he has to say about his uncle. Observe Ophelia's apparent purity in contrast with Gertrude's apparent promiscuity. Furthermore, observe what Hamlet has to say about Yorick in Act 5 Scene 1.

1.6.2 Revenge

This is a widely discussed theme of the play. Hamlet's cause and grievance remains one of the most discussed revenge plots of our time. However, as with most things Shakespeare, the theme of revenge is not as straightforward as it may seem. For

starters, the information leading to the cause of revenge is provided by a spirit, who, for the longest time is not entirely trusted by the protagonist. Second, the execution of the revenge is delayed for a considerable time. There, at least two other prime characters of the play also have their own revenge plots, and they seem to be executed quickly, except for Hamlet's. Third, Ophelia is just as much cause for revenge and justice, yet, her revenge is not seriously pursued. Fourth, Shakespeare makes sure that by the end of the play, everyone gets one form of revenge or the other, even Ophelia, without seeking it.

The supplementary unit contains a detailed exploration of the theme of revenge in *Hamlet*. Go through that to add on to what you have learnt here.

1.6.3 Desire and love

At the root of the tragedy lies common human feelings like desire and love. Just as the previous themes, Shakespeare makes sure that we are exposed to various versions of desire and love. On the obvious front, we have Claudius's incestuous desire for his brother's wife and the desire for the throne of course. With both subjects, Claudius shows that his desires are well placed. We do not have any evidence in the play that would suggest that he did not, in fact, love Gertrude. He also proves to be an efficient administrator too. At the other end of this spectrum is Hamlet's love for his father, and his apparent disdain for the throne. We also have a see saw of his love for Ophelia. Whereas his letters (produced as proof of madness by Polonius) do point towards the lovelorn Elizabethan prince, his treatment of Ophelia would suggest otherwise. He does confess about having loved her before, and to stamp on this fact, behaves the way he does in Act 5 Scene 1. New also have the love of Fortinbras for his father, and that of Laertes for his father, both work as foil for Hamlet's love for his father. Far less discussed is the compassion and love in friendship that we see between Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet- which seems to be genuine in the first case, and not so genuine in the second. Hamlet is quite dismissive of sending his two 'friends' to death. In all this discussion, take careful note about the

loves and desires of Ophelia and Gertrude. Both of these characters have not been given genuine space to express their loves and desires as they would have liked, yet critics point towards Ophelia's purity in contrast to Gertrude's promiscuity. Hamlet himself seems quite harsh in his opinion about the emotions of both women, and in both cases, he is either mistaken, or the text does not have enough words for these two women to express themselves.

1.6.4 Parenting and growth

In a play rife with fathers being murdered, remarrying mothers, vengeful sons and self-harming characters, it is not odd that we may be talking about the theme of parenting (or bad parenting for that matter) and the growth of children. And just as we have seen with the other themes as discussed above, we find in *Hamlet* several different cases of parenting and growth in contrast with each other. Let us discuss a few of these. In the first case we have Claudius, trying to replace Hamlet's father and is seen to be welcoming him as his son. Halfway through the play, Claudius seems genuine in respecting this new bond and is concerned for Hamlet's situation. It is only later that this relationship turns sour. Contrast this with the genuine father-son relationship between Hamlet and his late father, that is at least apparent by Hamlet's words. However, the best example of parenting and growth is given by Polonius and his children. He gives very different advice to his two children. His lesson in parenting reeks of gender bias when he is talking to Ophelia. While talking to Laertes, it is clear he wants the son to be a worldly-wise man. He even sends Reynaldo to spy on his son's activities in Act 2 scene 1. Laertes, the brother, is also trying to be a parent. Observe his conversation with Ophelia in Act 1 Scene 3. He might come across as a concerned brother, but if you look closely, he is, like a patriarch, telling Ophelia how to be a good woman and not give in to temptations. Later in the play, Laertes is caught in a proxy fatherly relationship with Claudius, that has a violent end. Fortinbras seems to have enough control over his nephew in the other side of the story.

Space for Learner

Note that all the people we are talking about here are quite young- Hamlet and Laertes are students and Fortinbras is referred to as young prince, Ophelia is yet younger. So, what about their mothers? So far, we have only seen the fathers or the absent fathers. Hamlet's treatment of his mother offers us some clue as to their relationship. But the truth remains that *Hamlet* offers us a case of absent mothers, or silent ones. This play does not explore the relationship of the characters with their mothers.

Stop to Consider:

Explore the question of the absent mothers in *Hamlet*.
And answer the final question. How do these young people grow (up) in the play?

1.7 The Theatre in Shakespeare's time

In spite of the rich tradition of plays that we have inherited from the late Elizabethan period, the theatre of those time was mired by contentious politics and policies. Technological advancements since the Middle Ages and the curiosity and innovation of the renaissance came as a boon to theatre, no doubt. But, to be able to stage a play on the Elizabethan stage as perfectly as the playwright wanted was still a tough thing to achieve. There are several reasons for this. For starters, strict regulations were applicable on theatres if they were to be built within the walls of the city. Since most of the plays were staged during the day time, it was believed that having the theatres within the city was likely to affect the performance of the working people. Such places of public performances were also thought of as a space where people would indulge in riotous behavior. London, by that time had also dealt with severe plagues and outbreak of other contagious diseases. The theatre was seen as a space for congregation, and hence as a catalyst for the spread of such diseases and behavior. The puritans, on the other hand, believed that the theatre was responsible for promoting immorality. Such attitudes towards the theatre forced the owners of the theatres to build their play houses outside the city, on the south bank of the river Thames, nearby places which hosted other kinds of restricted activities, like dog fighting and bull baiting.

The location of the theatre was not the only problem that had to be dealt with. Consider the following facts. Five years before Shakespeare was born, in 1559, the court of Queen Elizabeth proclaimed a censorship law that stated that no play should be performed that depicted “either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the common weal.” This essentially meant that the theatre had to be careful about depicting heresy, profanity and seditious acts on the stage. Consider what happened with Shakespeare’s *Richard II*. It was thought that the deposition of Richard II made rebellion very respectable and the complete scene was forcefully edited out of the first edition of the play. Consider the year 1606, the year *Macbeth* was first performed, when an act of parliament was passed which stated that,

“That if any time. . . any person or persons do or shall in any stage play, interlude, show, maygame, orpageant jestingly or profanely speak or use the holy name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the HolyGhost or of the Trinity, which are not to be spoken but with fear and reverence, shall forfeit for every offence by him or them committed, ten pounds.”

As a fallout of this edict, several old plays had to be revised. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, which, as you are aware, touches on some of these sensitive topics, had to be edited and there are several differences between the editions of 1603 and 1608. Similarly, Shakespeare’s works published before 1606 had to undergo changes and they differ from the *Folio* text printed in 1623.

Stop to Consider:

What do these examples tell you? Was it easy being Shakespeare, doing what he did, talking of contentious issues through his plays and being popular at the same time? Did these factors affect the creativity and innovation of Shakespeare? Could these factors be the reasons why Shakespeare indulges in extensive word play in his plays? Can you identify such instances of word play and camouflaged meaning in *Hamlet*?

1.8 Summing Up

The history of *Hamlet* criticism is an interesting point to begin to understand the play. The familiar procrastinating Hamlet, who is plagued by doubt about the ghost and about himself, is a late entrant into the scene of *Hamlet* reception. (You will read more about critical reception of *Hamlet* in Unit 2 of this Block). Twentieth century criticism of the play sensitizes us, apart from the character analysis, towards various aspects of the play such as language and imagery, mood of anxiety and uncertainty and contradictions. In fact, *Hamlet* is a rich repository of divergent meanings and presents itself as always a fascinating text for any reader to make forays into.

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Space for Learner

Unit 2 : William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (Reading the Play)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Date and Text
- 2.4 Critical Reception
- 2.5 Act-wise Reading of the Play
 - 2.5.1. Act I
 - 2.5.2. Act II
 - 2.5.3. Act III
 - 2.5.4. Act IV
 - 2.5.5. Act V
- 2.6 Summing Up
- 2.7 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

This unit should help you to read the play, *Hamlet*, and develop your own unique understanding of the ethos of the play. With the aid of the information provided in this unit you should be able to

- *describe* the unique character of the hero in the light of the intellectual conventions of the time.
- *connect* the concerns of the entire play to the relativistic mode of thinking which became popular at that time.
- *analyse* the nuanced presentation of Hamlet's delay and avoid a simplistic search for a conclusive reason for it.
- *read* each act for its development of certain dramatic elements like the ghost, Hamlet's assumption of madness, the play-within-the-play.
- *note* the reasons for various critical positions on the play at different historical junctures.

2.2 Introduction

Hamlet begins with an all pervasive sense of insecurity and uncertainty. Shakespeare exploits this initial sense of uncertainty throughout the play. Hamlet sets the trap of the play-within-the-play for his uncle and as if reacting to the presentation Claudius rushes out. But the doubts remain and the audience is made to wonder at the working of Hamlet's tortured mind.

The fracture between inner thoughts and feelings and the world around him is evident in his evasiveness with his school friends, with Polonius and the courtier Osric, but also with Ophelia and his closest friend Horatio. When he confronts his mother with the charge of murder she reacts with astonishment. Hamlet's strange and painful admonition seem to affect her deeply but then the Ghost reappears (this time visible only to Hamlet and of course to the audience) and Gertrude is convinced from Hamlet's behaviour that he is really mad. These oscillations lend their own density to the play making it difficult even for the audience to make up its mind one way or the other.

The distance between what Hamlet sees and what those around him see is smallest in the case of Claudius since they share knowledge of the secret crime and each manouevres against the other. This is an area of the play that you might find particularly interesting because you can actually see this in operation by the play's predominant use of devices of watching or spying that physically present on stage the dominant atmosphere of suspicion at all levels.

The opposition between Hamlet and his uncle never actually becomes visible until the final moments, nor does Hamlet succeed in unambiguously establishing his uncle's guilt. Until the final moments of betrayal and murder, the audience only sees a loving Claudius who refers to Hamlet as his son. Hamlet begins to explain 'O I could tell you' - but is cut short by death, caught in tragic isolation.

It is important to note that even before the Ghost exposed his uncle's villainy, Hamlet was a troubled young man - suffering from the traumas associated with his father's death, his mother's sexuality and a sickening

awareness of the vulnerability and corruptibility of the flesh. From the exaltation of ‘What a piece of work is a man!’ to the anguished ‘And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?’ (2.2 293-298), Hamlet’s melancholy is apparent.

Though Claudius’s secret crime is a political act that has poisoned the public sphere (note the concern with regicide, deposition of the rightful king, and questions of succession in the history plays), the roots of Hamlet’s despair lie elsewhere. If there were only the usurper to depose Hamlet might have been able to act. But his melancholy has several layers one behind the other: beyond political corruption there is the shallowness of his friends, Ophelia’s dismayingly compliant obedience to her father, his mother’s carnality and ‘frailty’ and finally the ongoing but morally indifferent cycle of life itself.

Hamlet’s sense of disgust is a corollary to these discoveries. He sums up this pervasive feeling in the statement to Claudius: ‘We eat all creatures else to eat us, and we eat ourselves for maggots’ (4.3. 22-23). In a world that is marked by decay the process of natural renewal also seems disgusting. Images of unwedded gardens, of nature run riot, of uncontrolled feeding and breeding come to centre on the body of woman - as evidenced in his bitterness at his mother’s marriage and his advice to Ophelia, ‘Get thee to a nunnery’ where the nunnery in Elizabethan slang could also refer to a brothel.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

The question of Hamlet’s delay, his inability to either make up his mind about Claudius’s guilt or to act must be seen against this complex presentation of uncertainty and anguish about human life in an indifferent world. You should be able to connect this reading of the play to the great doubts and intellectual shifts that occurred during the period of the Renaissance and of which you get a glimpse in Unit 1.

After you have read the play come back to this sub-unit and reassess Hamlet’s inability to act. You will, by then, have also become familiar with the critical positions on this aspect of the play and should be able to form your own opinion on the issue.

2.3 Date And Text

Shakespeare probably wrote *Hamlet* in 1600, but the exact date of composition is uncertain. The text of the play is problematic because of the number of variants of the text that have come down to us. The First Folio of 1623 contains the text called *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, but most editions of the play since the 18th century, have included passages from the text of the play as it appears in the Second Quarto (1604) with the title *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*.

SAQ

What are the important sources of the play ? What are the common features in these sources? (40 words)

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.....
.....

How has Shakespeare handled these issues in his play? What significance has he added to the issues of revenge, to filial relationships, to incest and to regicide?

2.4 Critical Reception

For the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries his lack of initiative was not an issue that interested critics and he was seen primarily as a princely avenger who eventually does the job he sets out to do.

It was in 1736, that for the first time a critic (Thomas Hanmer) noted two important facts about Hamlet - his delay, and his cruelty. He explained the delay as imposed by the necessities of the dramatist's craft (if Hamlet had not delayed the play would have ended too soon). And he also recorded his distaste of a cruelty unworthy of a hero, referring to the incident when Hamlet spares Claudius because he is at prayer reasoning that he would in fact like to destroy his soul. Dr. Johnson echoed this distaste in 1765.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century this trend of noting particularities of character became popular. Critics grew aware of his complexity and some like Goethe saw in him a reflection of themselves. The shift to a more psychological approach also marks the shift to acceptance of the play as a literary text. Coleridge's influential reading of Hamlet as a man whose great and subtle intellect made it impossible for him to take action marks the beginning of a philosophical-psychological analytic trend which remains well into the twentieth century.

As you observe, the increasing interest in Hamlet's character and the motives for his inaction, meant that the focus began to shift from the play to the individual and this also signals the move towards the nineteenth century interest in character analysis [Hartley Coleridge represents the most extreme position in this development when he invites readers to "put Shakespeare out of the question, and consider Hamlet as a real person, a recently deceased acquaintance".] Hamlet's delay became central and the debate on the play circled around questions about the external obstacles to his fulfillment of the Ghost's command. Was it moral scruples, extraordinary sensitiveness or neurosis, or was it his great reflective intellect that stood in the way? (Hippolyte Taine, A.C. Bradley, Dowden and Shaw all considered these issues).

The most well known and important landmark in the trend of character analysis is A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Bradley denies Hamlet the stature that he gives to the other tragic heroes. He has been accused of treating the play as a study of Hamlet's character, almost like a nineteenth-century novel, of neglecting the poetry, and of not taking enough note of Elizabethan stage conditions or of Elizabethan thought. But his important contributions include his noting of, a) Hamlet's puzzlement at his own procrastination; b) his doubting of the Ghost's word to still his conscience; and c) his genuine and active interest in the perfect performance of the play at the same time that he is also interested in Claudius's reaction and urges Horatio to take note of it. The contrary and ambivalent aspects that Bradley pointed to are still with us in contemporary approaches to the play which regard plurality as a significant Shakespearean trait.

There is noticeable neglect of theatrical reality in many of these interpretations. But the twentieth century has seen some attempts to address this aspect. Harley Granville-Barker's most substantial preface

(*Prefaces to Shakespeare*) is the one he writes to *Hamlet*. A.J.A. Waldock who followed with *Hamlet: A Study in Critical Method* (1931), noted that in the theatre, Hamlet's procrastination is hardly noticeable. But generally critics have stayed with the method of character-analysis. Dover Wilson argues that Hamlet's delay is prudent because the Ghost is an ambiguous figure. Some critics refute the notion of Hamlet as a gentle and noble figure. Wilson Knight sees him as a sick, cynical and inhuman prince who corrupts an otherwise healthy world. L.C. Knights points out his "attitudes of hatred, revulsion self-complacence and self reproach" as "forms of escape from the difficult process of complex adjustment which normal living demands and which Hamlet finds beyond his powers." Following Freud (1900) who ascribed Hamlet's irresolution to an Oedipus complex, Ernest Jones famously elaborated this idea in several versions before the final published version in 1949.

More comprehensive views of the play that do not exclusively concentrate on the character of the hero are those of D.G. James who averred that the play must not be seen "as merely an affair of the character of its hero;" W.H. Clemen who analyses the language and imagery; Maynard Mack who describes the world of the play, its imaginative environment; H.D.F. Kitto and John Holloway who see *Hamlet* as religious drama offering 1) the corroding influence of sin and 2) the developing spectacle of a diseased society respectively. Helen Gardner reads it against the background of the Elizabethan revenge play. Harry Levin examines Hamlet's 'antic disposition' against the background of other treatments of real and assumed madness in Elizabethan drama. T.S. Eliot sees *Hamlet* as a flawed masterpiece because it fails to find what he calls an "objective correlative" - "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion". Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear."

A new direction in criticism (brought about by structuralism and poststructuralism) has meant critical focus shifting to a wholly new set of issues. A few examples should be indicative. In an essay titled "On the Value of *Hamlet*" (1973), Stephen Booth shows how the play constantly frustrates its audience's understanding and creates a sense of unease through its inconsistencies and contradictions. He emphasizes the play's plurality and in a remarkable departure from traditional criticism he

decentres the mainstays of the earlier approaches (character and moral values) and replaces them with critic, audience (the question of reception) and language (particularly in its poststructuralist slipperiness).

James Calderwood in his book *To Be and Not To Be* is particularly interested in the self-reflexive or metadramatic quality of *Hamlet* - that is, in the way *Hamlet* draws attention to itself as a play so that it seems only to be about itself; to be, in other words, metaphorically about drama. You might like to reflect on the idea of the play-within-a-play on these lines.

Feminist criticism is perhaps most tellingly illustrated by Coppelia Kahn in her book *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*. Kahn argues that Shakespeare's work is filled with "problems of sexual identity, family relationships and gender roles" and his plays "reflect and voice a masculine anxiety about the uses of patriarchal power over women, specifically about men's control over women's sexuality". *Hamlet* as you will by now have recognized offers fertile ground for such an approach with Hamlet expressing his despair at the 'frailty' of women and the two problem figures of Gertrude and Ophelia trapped in stereotypical images of womanhood. One fascinating study by Elaine Showalter shows the representation of Ophelia through the centuries - a character who is the product of the criticism directed at her. In the process she suggests that feminist criticism involves confronting male hegemony (or rule) which reproduces Ophelia in the image of its own ideas and values.

Stop to Consider

On the one hand the play offers grounds for serious **psychological speculation** about Hamlet's reluctance/ inability to act. But the same elements of the play which feed this reading also allow consideration of a **political design**, his madness itself subverting a corrupt regime that is based on lies, spies and treachery.

Speculation about Hamlet's psychological makeup is closely tied to how we respond to dramatic characterisation. Let us remember also that Hamlet is a 'play', meant for 'live performance' whose meaning is finally dependent on the real human being who is going to enact the role.

This point becomes clearer if you refer to Bertolt Brecht's interpretation of *Hamlet* and how he used the hero's dilemma to interpret a wider ideological conflict.

Space for Learner

SAQ

1. Briefly outline the sequence of different views that have developed about Hamlet connecting them with different schools of thought.(100 words)

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2. How convincing do you find any particular reading of the play currently available? Discuss how the adoption of any one of these positions affects your reading of the play. (100 words)

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2.5 Act-Wise Reading of The Play

Let's discuss the play in details:

2.5.1. Act I

The first act begins with the change of guard on a dark winter night outside Elsinore Castle in Denmark,. In the heavy darkness, the men talk about a ghost they think they have seen on the castle ramparts in the late hours of the night looking exactly like the dead King of Denmark. The appearance of the ghost is central to the development of the entire play primarily because a restless spirit indicates foul play and forebodes some great misfortune perhaps in the form of a military attack.

The ghost materializes for a second time, and Horatio tries to speak to it. The ghost remains silent, however, and disappears again just as the cock crows at the first hint of dawn. Horatio suggests that they tell Prince Hamlet, the dead king's son, about the apparition. He believes that though the ghost did not speak to him, if it is really the ghost of King Hamlet, it will not refuse to speak to his beloved son. . His reaction to the ghost functions to overcome the audience's sense of disbelief, since for a man as

skeptical, intelligent, and trustworthy as Horatio, to believe in and fear ghost is far more impressive and convincing than if the only witnesses had been a pair of superstitious watchmen. The supernatural appearance of the ghost on a chilling, misty night outside Elsinore Castle indicates immediately that something is wrong in Denmark. The ghost serves to enlarge the shadow King Hamlet casts across Denmark, indicating that something about his death has upset the balance of nature. The appearance of the ghost also gives physical form to the fearful anxiety that surrounds the transfer of power after the king's death, seeming to imply that the future of Denmark is a dark and frightening one. Horatio in particular sees the ghost as an ill omen boding violence and turmoil in Denmark's future, comparing it to the supernatural omens that supposedly presaged the assassination of Julius Caesar in ancient Rome. Since Horatio proves to be right, and the appearance of the ghost does presage the later tragedies of the play, the ghost functions as a kind of internal foreshadowing, implying tragedy not only to the audience but to the characters as well.

The situation Shakespeare presents at the beginning of *Hamlet* is that a strong and beloved king has died, and the throne has been inherited not by his son, as we might expect, but by his brother Claudius. We meet prince Hamlet grieving over the death of his father and brooding over his mother's actions. His mother is no longer the widow of his dead father but the newly wedded Queen of King Claudius. Hamlet would rather have died and met his worst enemy in heaven than seen his mother's second marriage. When Horatio informs him about the appearance of the ghost, he is left perturbed and decides to look into the matter himself. As he waits with Horatio and Marcellus, the ghost appears. Hamlet not only talks to it but also follows it to a remote spot to discover its real purpose. The ghost starts telling its own story to the prince that it is indeed the spirit of his dead father. His own brother, who not only usurped the throne but also married his wife, that is Hamlet's mother, killed him. Hamlet is urged to take revenge without harming his mother. When his friends find him Hamlet is a changed man. He hints at the terrible discovery and makes them promise not to reveal anything of what they have seen. Hamlet now knows the truth behind his father's death and is determined to act alone. The act

ends in Hamlet deciding to “put on an antic disposition”, that is, he will pretend to be mad in the company of others. Everyone will then keep away from him and he will be able to plan his own strategy without anyone knowing about it. Hamlet seems to be aware that the present king keeps him under surveillance.

Theme and Dramatic Effect

Note how the anticipation of the Ghost’s arrival by Hamlet is exploited for the generation of suspense and the increase in interest for the audience. See how the dramatic effect is created by the Ghost’s arrival when Hamlet, his companions and the audience are briefly distracted by the sounds of revelry inside the castle. Also important to note is the debate on regicide introduced in this Act by the suspicion associated with the death of the king, with Claudius assuming the monarch’s place and power and the son Hamlet seeking the right answer.

We have a hero in deep mourning for his father and doubts raised about the father’s untimely death. We are also presented with the picture of unseemly haste with which the marriage of Claudius (the dead king’s brother and the new king) and Gertrude (the wife of the dead man) takes place. You might find it an interesting exercise to read this sense of haste against the delay predominantly associated with Hamlet.

What is the dramatic effect of the anticipation of the Ghost’s arrival? Does it heighten in any way the sense of a calamitous truth or does it simply detract from the sense of a plausible fact?

SAQ

1. What are the important points of Act I? What does it tell us about the state of Denmark? (30 + 20 words)

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2. After the audience's interest in the Ghost is dissipated by its appearance how is dramatic interest sustained? (30 words)

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Space for Learner

2.5.2. Act II

This act includes several important revelations and furthers the development of some of the play's main themes.

Hamlet has started behaving strangely and his first victim is Ophelia, Polonius' daughter. She rushes into her father's room to tell him about Hamlet's strange looks and even stranger behaviour. Critics down the ages have offered diverse views on Hamlet's supposed madness. His portrayal is so convincing that many critics contend that his already fragile sanity gets shattered at the sight of his dead father's ghost. It seems his madness is an outlet for his pent-up emotions. Within the castle Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's friends from Wittenberg. Increasingly concerned about Hamlet's erratic behavior and his apparent inability to recover from his father's death, the king and queen have summoned his friends to Elsinore in the hope that they might be able to cheer Hamlet out of his melancholy, or at least discover the cause of it. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to investigate, and the queen orders attendants to take them to her son.

This is followed by Polonius's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, which includes the discussion with the ambassadors; Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in which we see Hamlet consciously feigning madness for the first time; Hamlet's reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the scene with the players, followed by Hamlet's concluding soliloquy on the theme of action. These separate plot developments take place in the same location and occur in rapid succession, allowing the audiences to compare and contrast their thematic elements.

Polonius enters, announcing the return of the ambassadors whom Claudius had sent to Norway. They enter with the good news that Fortinbras swore he would never again attack the Danes. The Norwegian king, overjoyed, bequeathed upon Fortinbras a large annuity, and urged him to use the army he had assembled to attack the Poles instead of the Danes. He has therefore sent a request back to Claudius that Prince Fortinbras's armies be allowed safe passage through Denmark on their way to attack the Poles. Relieved to have averted a war with Fortinbras's army, Claudius declares that he will see to this business later. It is notable that Claudius appears indifferent to the fact that a powerful enemy will be riding through his country with a large army. Claudius seems much more worried about Hamlet's madness, indicating that where King Hamlet was a powerful warrior who sought to expand Denmark's power abroad, Claudius is a politician who is more concerned about threats from within his state.

Turning to the subject of Hamlet, Polonius declares, after a wordy preamble, that the prince is mad with love for Ophelia. He shows the king and queen letters and love poems Hamlet has given to Ophelia; he and the king decide to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia together. Polonius attempts to converse with Hamlet, who appears insane; But many of Hamlet's seemingly lunatic statements hide observations about Polonius's pomposity and his old age. Polonius comments that while Hamlet is clearly mad, his replies are often "pregnant" with meaning. As Polonius leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet seems pleased to see them. They discuss Hamlet's unhappiness about recent affairs in Denmark. Hamlet replies that having lost all his joy he has descended into a state of melancholy in which everything (and everyone) appears sterile and worthless. They propose possibilities, develop ideas according to rational argument, and find their attempts to understand Hamlet's behavior entirely thwarted by his uncooperative replies.

The other important event in this act is the arrival of the players. The presence of players and play-acting within the play

points to an important theme: that real life is in certain ways like play-acting. This is particularly true in Hamlet's case because he too is feigning madness for a purpose. Hamlet welcomes a few players to the court and entreats one of them to give him a speech about the fall of Troy and the death of the Trojan king and queen, Priam and Hecuba. Impressed with the player's speech, Hamlet orders Polonius to see them escorted to guestrooms. He announces that the next night they will hear "The Murder of Gonzago" performed, with an additional short speech that he will write himself.

Hamlet professes to be amazed by the player-king's ability to engage emotionally with the story he is telling even though it is only an imaginative recreation. As soon as he is alone in the room, he begins cursing himself for his inability to take action even with his far more powerful motive. He feels he is prevented from responding to his own situation because he does not have certain knowledge about it. He is certainly confused and upset, and his confusion translates into an extraordinarily intense state of mind suggestive of madness. He resolves to devise a trap for Claudius, forcing the king to watch a play whose plot closely resembles. Again, we find Hamlet finding a reason for his delayed action which is repeated again and again.

Another important area this act lets us explore is the contrast between Hamlet and Fortinbras. Like Hamlet, Fortinbras is the grieving son of a dead king, a prince whose uncle inherited the throne in his place. But where Hamlet has sunk into despair, contemplation, and indecision, Fortinbras has devoted himself to the pursuit of revenge. This contrast will be explored much more thoroughly later in the play. Here, it is important mainly to note that Fortinbras's uncle has forbidden him to attack Denmark but given him permission to ride through Denmark on his way to attack Poland. This at least suggests the possibility that the King of Norway is trying to trick Claudius into allowing a hostile army into his country.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Note here the disturbing use made by the king and queen of Hamlet's friends against him, setting them to spy on him. In the actual progress of the play you would do well to note the many instances when different characters conceal themselves to eavesdrop on private conversations, and a general atmosphere of watchfulness is created. (Hamlet and Ophelia are overheard by Claudius and Polonius; Polonius hides himself to listen in on Hamlet speaking to his mother). It might also be worthwhile to compare this 'watchfulness' with several other plays (take for example *Measure for Measure*) where spying is an inextricable part of political intrigue and the retention of political authority.

2.5.3. Act III

Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's behavior with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who say they have been unable to learn the cause of his melancholy. Claudius and Polonius intend to spy on Hamlet's confrontation with Ophelia arranged by her father. Gertrude exits, and Polonius directs Ophelia to walk around the lobby. Polonius hears Hamlet coming, and he and the king hide behind the tapestry.

Hamlet enters, speaking thoughtfully and agonizingly to himself about the question of whether to commit suicide to end the pain of experience. He also philosophizes regarding the terrors of life after death. This act contains the soliloquy that has been seen as representing Hamlet's nature and mental state most effectively: "To be, or not to be". The soliloquy is a brilliant technique of Shakespeare to make his characters seem three-dimensional. The audience senses that there is more to Hamlet's words than meets the ear—that there is something behind his words that is never spoken. Or, to put it another way, the audience witnesses signs of something within Hamlet's mind. However it can also be argued that even in this speech Hamlet is not trying to express himself at all; instead, he poses the question of suicide and after-life as a matter of philosophical debate.

In mid-thought, Hamlet sees Ophelia approaching. Having received her orders from Polonius, she tells him that she wishes to return the tokens of love he has given her. Angrily, Hamlet denies having given her anything; he laments the dishonesty of beauty, and claims both to have loved Ophelia once and never to have loved her at all. Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to enter a nunnery. Claudius is convinced that Hamlet's strange behavior has clearly not been caused by love for Ophelia and that his speech does not seem like the speech of insanity. In the king's opinion the best way to relieve his trouble is to send him away to England

This act contains the play-within-the-play staged in the great hall of the castle at Elsinore, which is important thematically as it exposes Claudius' guilt. Suspicions are confirmed and from now on the action centers on the struggle between Hamlet and his uncle. As the pressure builds on Claudius, he makes the final preparations to get Hamlet away to England. Hamlet on the other hand gets an opportunity to kill Claudius while the king was in his prayers but he hesitates. He makes an excuse for his inability to act that his revenge will not be fulfilled if he sends Claudius' soul to heaven while murdering him in his prayers. He thinks it best to wait to catch the king at some vice or other, and then kill him.

Hamlet then enters his mother's room. Polonius hides behind the wall-covering to eavesdrop on Gertrude's confrontation with her son, in the hope that doing so will enable him to determine the cause of Hamlet's bizarre and threatening behavior. Hamlet accosts her with an almost violent intensity and declares his intention to make her fully aware of the profundity of her sin. His manners make his mother think he is mad and she cries out for help fearing for her life. Polonius answers her from behind the arras and Hamlet thinking it to be Claudius seizes on this as the best opportunity to kill the King. Polonius, thus, pays the price of his own trickery. Hamlet's rash, murderous action in stabbing Polonius is an important illustration of his inability to coordinate his thoughts and

actions, which might be considered his tragic flaw. In his passive, thoughtful mode, Hamlet is too beset by moral considerations and uncertainties to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius, even when the opportunity is before him. However, when he does choose to act, he does so blindly, stabbing his anonymous "enemy" through a curtain.

At this very moment, the ghost appears to remind him not to delay in carrying out his resolves. Noting that Gertrude is amazed and unable to see him, the ghost asks Hamlet to intercede with her. Hamlet describes the ghost, but Gertrude sees nothing, and in a moment, the ghost disappears. Hamlet tries desperately to convince Gertrude that he is not mad but has merely feigned madness all along, and he urges her to forsake Claudius and regain her good conscience. Though Gertrude's speech in this scene is largely limited to brief reactions to Hamlet's lengthy denunciations of her, it is our most revealing look at her character. As the scene progresses, Gertrude goes through several states of feeling: she is haughty and accusatory at the beginning, then afraid that Hamlet will hurt her, shocked and upset when Hamlet kills Polonius, overwhelmed by fear and panic as Hamlet accosts her, and disbelieving when Hamlet sees the ghost. Finally, she is contrite toward her son and apparently willing to take his part and help him. An interpretation of her character in this act seems to be that she has a powerful instinct for self-preservation and advancement that leads her to rely too deeply on men. Not only does this interpretation explain her behavior throughout much of the play; it also links her thematically to Ophelia, the play's other important female character, who is also submissive and utterly dependent on men.

Stop to Consider

The great soliloquy and the element of subjectivity - the sense of being inside a character's psyche and following its twists and turns - both effects of a greatly expanded use of language are essential to an understanding of the play's complexity. The use of

the play-within-the-play and the disturbing exchanges and intimate encounters where love and poison are intermingled are Shakespeare's unique ways of rendering suspicion and spying from another angle. The two important points to be noted about this act are the great soliloquy and the play within the play.

Space for Learner

SAQ

What are the significant points in the soliloquy? (50 words)

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2. Is it possible to arrive at a conclusion about Hamlet's reasons for delaying his revenge from this soliloquy ? Comment on Shakespeare's use of the device in terms of plot and dramatic effect. (100 words)

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3. What does the play-within-the-play tell us about the theatre of Shakespeare's own time? How does it reflect on the resources of Elizabethan theatre? (80 words)

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2.5.4. Act IV

When the queen tells Claudius about Polonius' death, he thinks first of his own safety. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to watch Hamlet and get him out of the country as soon as possible. Hamlet is instructed to leave for England immediately. Claudius reveals in a soliloquy that he has arranged for Hamlet to be killed as soon as he lands in England.

Many events take place simultaneously in this act. Fortinbras' army is given a safe passage through Denmark. The Norwegian soldiers are on their way to meet the polish army in the battlefield. When they have gone Hamlet compares the urgent and

Space for Learner

large-scale action of this army over a trivial point of honour, with his own inaction in the face of the gravest offence. He describes Fortinbras as a “delicate and tender prince /Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed”(IV.iv). This comparison allows him to judge his own folly thereby inducing him to act fast and in a bloody manner.

SAQ

What are the several events that take place in this Act? How do these events develop from earlier ones and what is the dramatic significance of each? (50 + 50 words)

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Ophelia makes a dramatic reappearance on stage after a long absence in disheveled clothing with garlands of flowers about her. She is driven to insanity by the sudden loss of her father and the realization that Hamlet does not love her. She sings pathetic love songs and the theme of these songs is of a girl forsaken by her lover. The King laments the calamities, which have led her to the present state. It is then announced that Laertes has come with a band of men threatening the life of the King. Claudius’s behavior throughout this act shows him at his most devious and calculating. Shakespeare shows Claudius’s mind working overtime to derail Laertes’ anger, which is thus far the greatest challenge his kingship has faced. When Laertes demands to know about his father Claudius decides that the way to appease Laertes is by appearing frank and honest. When Laertes demands to know the whereabouts of his father, Claudius replies, “Dead” (IV.v). Additionally, in a masterful stroke of characterization, Shakespeare has the nervous Gertrude, unable to see Claudius’s plan, follow this statement with a quick insistence on Claudius’s innocence: “But not by him” (IV.v). At this point Ophelia re-enters singing and giving out flowers from her garland, each a symbol of her sorrow. Her brother’s anger rises at her deranged state.

Claudius is able to convince Laertes that Hamlet is responsible for the death of his father. He and a calmer Laertes discuss Polonius's death. Claudius explains that he acted as he did, burying Polonius secretly and not punishing Hamlet for the murder, because both the common people and the queen love Hamlet very much. As a king and as a husband, he did not wish to upset either of them. A messenger enters with the letter from Hamlet to Claudius, which informs the king that Hamlet is safe and will return the next day. Claudius' plan to kill Hamlet fails; Hamlet outsmarts his uncle by his presence of mind and judgment. Laertes is pleased that Hamlet has come back to Denmark, since it means that his revenge will not be delayed.

The scheming Claudius encounters Laertes at approximately the same moment as he learns that Hamlet has survived and returned to Denmark. He decides to appease Laertes' wrath and dispense with Hamlet in a single stroke: he hits upon the idea of the duel in order to use Laertes' rage to ensure Hamlet's death. The devious king thus thinks of a way for Laertes to ensure his revenge without creating any appearance of foul play. Laertes agrees, and they settle on a plan. Laertes will use a sharpened sword rather than the customary dull fencing blade. Laertes also proposes to poison his sword, so that even a scratch from it will kill Hamlet. The king concocts a backup plan as well, proposing that if Hamlet succeeds in the duel, Claudius will offer him a poisoned cup of wine to drink from in celebration.

Gertrude enters with tragic news. Ophelia, mad with grief, has drowned in the river. Anguished by the loss of his sister so soon after his father's death, Laertes flees the room. Claudius summons Gertrude to follow. He tells her it was nearly impossible to quiet Laertes' rage, and worries that the news of Ophelia's death will reawaken it. The image of Ophelia drowning amid her garlands of flowers has proved to be one of the most enduring images in the play, represented countless times by artists and poets throughout the centuries. Ophelia is associated with flower imagery from the beginning of the play. In her first scene, Polonius presents her with a violet; after she goes mad, she sings songs about flowers; and now she drowns amid long streams of them

The resulting plan brings both the theme of revenge and the repeated use of traps in the plot to a new height-Laertes and Claudius discuss several mechanisms by which Hamlet may be killed.

Note how the issue of revenge is presented in this Act. Shakespeare introduces several complications into the simple structure of the revenge tragedy from which he drew his theme and his story. You can compare the way this theme is developed by Shakespeare throughout the play with the way it is swiftly developed in the several sources mentioned briefly in 2.4.

SAQ

How many times does Ophelia appear in this Act and how does her appearance each time affect the characters and also have serious dramatic impact? (20 + 40 words)

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2.5.5. Act V

In the churchyard, two gravediggers shovel out a grave for Ophelia. They argue whether Ophelia should be buried in the churchyard, since her death looks like a suicide. Though they are usually figures of merriment, in this scene the gravediggers assume a rather macabre tone, since their jests and jibes are all made in a cemetery, among bones of the dead. Their conversation about Ophelia, however, furthers an important theme in the play: the question of the moral legitimacy of suicide under theological law. By giving this serious subject a darkly comic interpretation, Shakespeare essentially makes a grotesque parody of Hamlet's earlier "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i), indicating the collapse of every lasting value in the play into uncertainty and absurdity.

Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work. Hamlet's confrontation with death, manifested primarily in his discovery of Yorick's skull, is, like Ophelia's

drowning, an enduring image from the play. Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the sight of the skull. He realizes forcefully that all men will eventually become dust, even great men like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar.

However, his solemn theorizing explodes in grief and rage when he sees Ophelia's funeral procession, and his assault on Laertes offers a glimpse of what his true feelings for Ophelia might once have been. Grief-stricken and outraged, he bursts upon the company, declaring in agonized fury his own love for Ophelia. He leaps into the grave and fights with Laertes, saying that "forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / make up my sum" (V.i.). The funeral company pulls the combatants apart. Hamlet picks up a skull, and the gravedigger tells him that the skull belonged to Yorick, King Hamlet's jester. The king urges Laertes to be patient, and to remember their plan for revenge.

Interestingly, Hamlet never expresses a sense of guilt over Ophelia's death, which he indirectly caused through his murder of Polonius. In fact, the only time he even comes close to taking responsibility for Polonius's death at all comes in the next and last scene, when he apologizes to Laertes before the duel, blaming his "madness" for Polonius's death. This seems wholly inadequate, given that Hamlet has previously claimed repeatedly only to be feigning madness. But by the same token, to expect moral completeness from a character as troubled as Hamlet might be unrealistic. After all, Hamlet's defining characteristics are his pain, his fear, and his self-conflict. Were he to take full responsibility for the consequences of Polonius's death, he would probably not be able to withstand the psychological torment of the resulting guilt.

The next day at Elsinore Castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he plotted to overcome Claudius's scheme to have him murdered in England. He replaced the sealed letter carried by the unsuspecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which called for Hamlet's execution, with one calling for the execution of the bearers of the letter—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves. He tells Horatio that he has no sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who betrayed him and catered to Claudius, but that he feels sorry for having behaved with such hostility toward Laertes. In Laertes' desire to

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avenge his father's death, he says, he sees the mirror image of his own desire, and he promises to seek Laertes' good favor.

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier comes to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight. The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes will not forgive Hamlet but accepts Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king too is ready with a cup of poisoned wine for Hamlet. The duel begins with Hamlet striking Laertes but declining to drink from the cup, saying that he will make another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude unknowingly drinks from the poisoned cup. In the meantime, Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet with his poisoned sword, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

SAQ

What are the important events in this Act? How are they the culmination of decisions taken and of actions undertaken in earlier Acts? (20 + 40 words)

.....
.....
.....

Which action in this Act has been led up to inexorably from an earlier action? (30 words)

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.....
.....

In the final scene, thus, the violence, so long delayed, erupts with dizzying speed. Characters drop one after the other, poisoned, stabbed, and, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, executed. The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his

own sword, declares, “I am justly kill’d with my own treachery” (V.ii). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. With this the theme of revenge and justice reaches its conclusion. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet. Hamlet achieves his father’s vengeance, but only after being spurred to it by the most extreme circumstances one might consider possible: watching his mother die and knowing that he, too, will die in moments.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies. The arrival of Fortinbras effectively poses the question of political legitimacy once again. In marked contrast to the corrupted and weakened royal family lying dead on the floor, Fortinbras clearly represents a strong-willed, capable leader, though the play does not address the question of whether his rule will restore the moral authority of the state.

Hamlet’s Psyche and His Situation

The great soliloquies which present Hamlet’s troubled state of mind as a reflection of the political turmoil in the state and the doubt in Hamlet’s own mind about the death of his father, the remarriage of his mother, the role of his uncle in his father’s death, the veracity of the ghost; the atmosphere of intrigue and spying that spares no one; the problematic human relationships especially Hamlet’s relationships with Ophelia, with his mother and uncle, and even with his friends. Also important for an appreciation of the play’s characteristic impression of indecision and delay, is the

dramatic contrast offered by the dizzying speed with which the events at the end are played out.

The Use of ‘Scenes’

The comic scene with its ‘grave’ undertones may compare well with other scenes in many Shakespearean plays where serious action is apparently relieved by a comic scene. One famous example that may be set beside the gravedigger scene is the porter scene from Macbeth. The porter in his speech on equivocation adds resonance to the dominant atmosphere of ambivalence of that play. Here the gravedigger’s talk of suicide adds another dimension to Hamlet’s great problem: “To be or not to be”.

Stop to Consider

Conventional assumptions of revenge tragedy are discussed in the context of Hamlet by Stephen Greenblatt in his introduction to the play. “First revenge is an individual response to an intolerable wrong or a public insult. It is an unauthorized, violent action in a world whose institutions seem unable or unwilling to satisfy a craving for justice. Second, since institutional channels are closed and since the criminal is usually either hidden or well protected, revenge almost always follows a devious path toward its violent end. Third, the revenger is in the grip of an inner compulsion: his course of action may be motivated by institutional failure - for instance the mechanisms of justice are in the hands of the criminals themselves - but even if these mechanisms were operating perfectly, they would not allow the psychic satisfactions of revenge. Fourth, revengers generally need their victims to know what is happening and why: satisfaction depends on a moment of declaration and vindication. And fifth, revenge is a universal imperative more powerful than the pious injunctions of any particular belief system, including Christianity itself” (Greenblatt 1662).

SAQ

1. How does the triad of Hamlet/ Fortinbras/ Laertes add to the complexity of the play's meaning?

.....
.....
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2. All three, Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras, are connected to the problematic of action that is the play's overriding concern - how to act, when to act and the debate between thought and action? Do you think that Fortinbras can be seen as achieving a happy balance between the tragic extremes represented by Hamlet and Laertes? (100 words)

.....
.....
.....

Space for Learner

2.6 Summing Up

One of the most significant theatrical works of the Elizabethan literary era, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a grotesque tale of madness, melancholy, betrayal, bloodshed, revenge and death. Usually clubbed within the genre of revenge tragedy, the play, *Hamlet*, can be read as an expression of the anguish of the Renaissance man as well of human despair in general. With an exaggerated theatricality and archaic framework, the play is a profound exploration of the incoherence of human actions. With a prodigious number of performances, the play enjoyed an extraordinary popularity not only on the Elizabethan stage but through the centuries, worldwide. A host of influential critics, academicians and literary scholars have explored and evaluated the play from numerous critical lenses as per their interest and expertise. It is still celebrated as one of the greatest works of the Shakespeare canon and continues to exert its influence in both theatre as well as the academia, even in the present times.

2.7 References And Suggested Readings

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Unit 3 : William Shakespeare: *Hamlet* Supplementary Unit

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 How to write an answer
- 3.3 Probable questions and suggested answers
- 3.4 Other Study Suggestions
- 3.5 Summing Up
- 3.6 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives:

In this unit, you will be able to

- *have* an idea of how to write an answer to questions from the text
- *learn* the basic points for answering these questions
- *familiarise* yourself with the resources that enable you to understand the text better

3.2 How to write effective answers

Let us discuss how to write effective answers. The first requisite for writing a good answer is to read the text well. It is always better to read the text at least twice. As literary critics in training, one of our major tasks is to provide an accurate analysis of a text with valid arguments. This will happen only if you have read the text. More often than not, a good answer can be written just by reading a text well. Over and above the study material that you study or how many commentaries you go through, the basic duty has to be kept in mind. The second requirement of writing a good answer is to have valid arguments that are tied to each other to make a composite answer. These arguments then need to be organised and arranged in a proper manner. Often the evidence that you cite from the text in support of your arguments and answer overall are scattered all over the text. Hence, the importance of multiple reading. The third important

requirement for writing a good answer is to take the help of experts and critics who have already contributed to the study of a text or a subject. Whenever valid, you have to cite the works of such critics to support your answer and provide more justification. For a text like *Hamlet*, this is a major advantage since Shakespeare and his works have a rich critical heritage. The fourth important requirement for writing a good answer is to have some amount of research skill, which involves visiting libraries and finding out journals and books where past masters have left their mark. Towards the end of this unit, you shall find that one such rich source is available to you right next door. The fifth important thing to consider present trends of research for a text or a subject. This means keeping in mind recent publications which add not only to the understanding of a text, but also enriches the critical heritage. With a text like *Hamlet*, this is another advantageous case, since its contemporary scholarship is also rich, as you shall find out at the end of this unit.

In 1927, while addressing the Shakespeare Society, TS Eliot made the following observation about our understanding of Shakespeare:

“About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.” (Eliot 126)

The enormity of this statement lies not in the uncertainty of our being right or wrong about Shakespeare, but in the exercise of generating meaning from subsequent readings of his plays; building upon or challenging previous readings of the plays. The sustained scholarship on *Hamlet* and the consequent generation of readings and perspectives that have continued in the twenty first century is one testament to this exercise. Hence, the stress on re reading the play multiple times, considering the critical heritage of the play and keeping abreast of contemporary scholarship. The attempt of this unit is to guide you towards a holistic understanding of the play and demonstrate in practice how to write an effective answer. We will do this by considering three questions form *Hamlet* and demonstrating how to structure your answer, how to use the close reading of a text to formulate an argument, how to support that argument from evidence from the text, how to reinforce your argument further, how to cite form the critical heritage and how to refer to contemporary research in some cases.

(Please note that all quotations have been taken from the following edition of *Hamlet*

William Shakespeare, Burton Raffel. *Hamlet*. Yale University Press, 2003.)

3.3 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

a) **Write a critical note on Hamlet's delay.**

Critics have often pointed out Hamlet's inability or reluctance to execute his revenge as one of the major unresolved questions raised by the play that determines how we understand the mind of Hamlet. In what has come to be known as Hamlet's delay; here the reference is to the many doubts and questions Hamlet has regarding what the ghost has told him, his many schemes to arrive at the truth, his inability to confront his uncle directly, and his inability to raise the sword when the opportunity presents itself towards the end of Act 3 scene 3. The reference here is also to his many soliloquies expressing self-doubt, creating excuses for his delay, and finally frustration at his inaction.

To understand and answer a classic question like Hamlet's delay, you have to keep four things in mind. First; what evidence can you glean from the text, second; how Shakespeare reinforces the reading of delay in the play, third; what do critics have to say about the delay, and, fourth and most importantly, what your own close reading of the play tells you about Hamlet's delay.

First, attempt a close reading of the play. It is the ghost who informs Hamlet of a murder 'most foul'. ***Yet Hamlet continues to have doubts about what the ghost says.*** The only time Hamlet is absolutely convinced of his duty is in Act 1 Scene 5, lines 92- 109, and says of the Ghost's commands "And thy commandments all alone shall live Within the book and volume of my brain," (102- 103), which he continues by calling the ghost 'honest' in line 137. Soon after, in Act 2, scene 2, he makes a decision to observe his uncle to determine his guilt and says, "The spirit that I have seen May be a devil, and the devil hath power T' assume a pleasing shape – yea, and perhaps Out of my weakness and my melancholy As he is very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds More relative than this." (Lines 585- 590). To confirm his suspicions, he primes Horatio to observe his uncle during the play in Act 3, scene 2, and

Space for Learner

one of his motives is to prove if a ‘damned ghost’ has made ‘foul’ his imagination (lines 78-79). Later in the scene, as Horatio perceives he saw guilt in the expression of Claudius, Hamlet assures himself that he will take the ghost’s word for a ‘thousand pound’ (line 275). Yet again, Hamlet shows his ambiguity towards the ghost in Act 3, Scene 4, (he is confronting Gertrude, and the ghost enters) when he refers to the ghost as ‘it’ as the ghost steals away (line 134). (William Shakespeare)

Second, continue with a close reading of the play, only this time, ***concentrate on the speeches and soliloquies of Hamlet. What does Hamlet make of his own delay?*** The first instance is Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 2, (lines 532- 590) where he begins by acknowledging that he has not been quite up to his task and questions himself ‘Am I a coward?’ (Line 555) and uses expressions like ‘pigeon livered’ and ‘lack gall’ (562) to reinforce his feelings. His tone gets severe between lines 568-574. Yet the action that he plans after line 576 does not match his words. His famous soliloquy, ‘To be or not be’ in Act 3 Scene 1 can also be seen as an outcome of his inability to take action. Here, you can observe how existential torment in his speech relates the personal to the universal. A few lines later, while talking to Ophelia, he refers to himself as being ‘proud, revengeful, ambitious’ (Line 124) with enough things to give him offence. Immediately after, he questions his actions, ‘crawling between earth and heaven’, equates himself to ‘arrant knaves’, and asks Ophelia not to trust fellows like him (Lines 127- 129). The only time he seems to be taking action is when he confronts his mother in Act 3 Scene 4 and he foreshadows his meeting and confrontation with his mother by his words towards the end of Act 3 Scene 2 “Let me be cruel, not unnatural. I will speak daggers to her, but use none.” (Lines 378- 379). For once, he does what he says. The closest he comes to yield his sword is towards the end of Act 3 Scene 3, when Claudius is praying alone. This is a much-debated scene, and you must mention carefully Hamlets reasons, religious or otherwise. In any case, notice the strong “No” in line 86.

There are other speeches and soliloquies of Hamlet that you can use to support your argument. But we must leave them for the third argument of your answer.

Third, write about how ***Shakespeare reinforces Hamlet’s delay by contrasting it with two other characters in the play who are quite prompt in taking action where they feel wronged or denied justice.***

At the very start of the play, we have young Fortinbras who has already made considerable progress in his mission of avenging his father, so much so that the new king Claudius has to send envoys to the king of Norway to rein in his nephew. In Act 4 Scene 5 of the play, we have Laertes seeking revenge for his father, who manages to gather a band of supporters who demand “Laertes shall be king” (line 108), whose rebellion seems “giant- like” to Claudius (line 121) and who minces no words while confronting the king directly (lines 130- 136). Hamlet is aware of the two young men and their grievances, and their eerie similarities to his own situation. Later in the play (Act 4 Scene 4) as Hamlet comes to know of young Fortinbras’ new quest in Poland; he wonders, “How stand I then” (line 56), compared to this “delicate and tender prince” (line 48) who seems prompt in leading twenty thousand men to battle. This stirs up his urge for revenge and decides in the end that from this time on his thoughts shall be “bloody, or be nothing worth!” (Line 66). Of Laertes’ situation, Hamlet says in Act 5 Scene 2 “For by the image of my cause I see the portraiture of his.” and, “But sure the bravery of his grief did put me Into a tow’ring passion” (lines 77- 79).

Shakespeare reinforcements can be very subtle. Here are two more examples from the text that you can cite to make your argument better. As Claudius goads Laertes towards extracting revenge from Hamlet for his father’s murder, he is very careful with his choice of words. He asks if Laertes will be able to “show yourself your father’s son in deed More than in words?” (Act 4 Scene 7 lines 122- 124). In effect, Claudius’ entire speech between lines 108- 124 is a general lesson on why deeds must be done on time and should not be delayed, with clever wordplay involving the words ‘should’ and ‘would’. In any case, this indecision is carried till the very end, with Hamlet stabbing Claudius only after he knows that he is about to die, and when he does stab Claudius, he makes no mention of his father’s murder, his mother’s poisoning, or revenge (Act 5 Scene 2). Note that he displays a similar kind of instantaneous action when he stabs Polonius, and he also sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death without much contemplation.

Fourth, write about *what critics have to say about Hamlet’s delay*. The critic A.C. Bradley is of the opinion that, “. . .no theory will hold water which finds the cause of Hamlet’s delay merely, or mainly, or even to any considerable extent, in external difficulties.”((())) He proceeds to explain

how Hamlet makes no mention of any external difficulty at all, regarding his access to the person of Claudius and he does mention that he has everything he needs; cause, will, strength and means, to execute his revenge (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 45). In any case, we do not find, anywhere in the play, a scheme of Hamlet's to bring Claudius to public justice- we only find an experiment in the approximation of locating guilt by reading facial expression. He goes on to support his argument by alluding to Laertes's ability to raise a rebellion at such a short notice, whereas, Hamlet. Claimed to be the beloved of the people is not able to do that. In any case, he never even once mentions any thought of raising public opinion against for their murdered king and his personal motive of revenge. Gabriel Josipovici is of the view that "He cannot take part in the Revenge Tragedy his father wants him to act in because, first of all, he is not sure if the Ghost really is the spirit of his dead father and not a spirit out of Hell sent to lead him to destruction, and secondly because the whole notion of Revenge Tragedy strikes him as out of date and no longer relevant, what the French call *pompier*. Because he loved, or imagines he loved, his father, and loathes his uncle, he would dearly like reassurance on the authenticity of the Ghost, and because he deeply admires the old revenge ethos he is deeply troubled by his inability to embrace it wholeheartedly." (Josipovici 254)

Many other critics have commented on Hamlet's delay. You may quote them to further strengthen your answer.

(b) Comment on Shakespeare's use of madness in the play *Hamlet*.

As you may have noticed, both sample question 1 and sample question 2 are open ended general questions. These questions have been put in here so as to guide you to answer any question on Hamlet's delay and madness.

In answering Shakespeare's use of madness in *Hamlet*, we will follow the same strategy employed in Sample question 1. There will be four arguments in the answer.

In the first argument, ***write about how madness is used as a plot device in the play***. The first instance is contrived use of madness by Hamlet to find out the truth about his father's death. He makes his compatriots swear not to reveal to anyone the instances of the night (Act 1 Scene 5) and also tells them that from now on, he might "put on an antic disposition" (line 172) and might bear himself "odd" (line 170) and enhance

this behavior by “pronouncing of some doubtful phrase”. Madness as a plot device is already underway and in subsequent scenes, each character in the play takes notice of Hamlet’s behavior- there are plans to understand his behavior (as is shown in the concern of Gertrude and Claudius), plans to cure his madness by issue of companionship (as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are employed) and an erroneous estimate of his madness. Polonius is convinced love is “The very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy” (Act 2 Scene 2, Line 49). Hamlet’s letters to Ophelia serve as proof later. Immediately after, Gertrude gets extremely close to understanding Hamlet’s behavior, the only character in the play to do so, and says “I doubt it is no other but the main, His father’s death, and our o’erhasty marriage” (lines 56- 57). But of course, before any discussion on this statement can take place, news from Norway arrives in the form of Voltimand and Cornelius. Madness takes backstage, politics takes front stage. As Polonius encounters Hamlet in the same scene, their conversation and Hamlet’s words convince Polonius that there is a “method” in his madness (line 202). From here on, as a plot device, madness is attached with Hamlet’s philosophical musing, each reinforcing the other to make the effect stronger. It is as if Hamlet’s feigned behavior gave him the license to be bitterly sarcastic and philosophical. (At this stage, compare the Elizabethan convention of using the fool or the clown to present controversial or caustic statements in the garb of laughter or madness. What other plays written by Shakespeare or Webster have a similar device?)

In the second argument, ***write about how madness is used as an excuse to explain Hamlet’s behavior, even by Hamlet himself.*** This may also be taken as a continuation of the plot device argument. Here, cite three examples. First, in Act 3 Scene 1, concentrate on the meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet. Hamlet is fresh off his philosophical musing alone, deciding to be or not to be, when Ophelia confronts him. In his flow of emotion, Hamlet talks of his predicaments (which Ophelia does not completely understand), he says he does not love Ophelia anymore and he advises Ophelia to go to a “nunnery” (line 121). Ophelia’s conclusion, after Hamlet leaves, is that “a noble mind is here o’erthrown” (line 149) and that Hamlet’s “noble and sovereign reason, Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,” (lines 157- 157). The second example is from Ophelia’s burial in Act 5 scene 1, where Hamlet jumps inside the open grave of Ophelia and makes a passionate scene of his affections for the drowned girl. In this dramatic scene, consistent with the unpredictable behavior of Hamlet, he

even manages to get into a scuffle with Laertes, who is anyway in the lookout for revenge for his own two personal tragedies. Once the men are forcibly separated, Gertrude concludes this of Hamlet's behavior "This is mere madness" (line 269) and that "the fit will work on him" awhile (line 270). The third and most compelling example comes from Act 5 Scene 2, where Hamlet himself takes the help of his feigned madness to explain his rash actions that lead to Polonius' death. Seeking forgiveness from Laertes before their duel, this is his complete excuse:

"Give me your pardon, sir: I have done you wrong,
But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,
How I am punished with a sore distraction.
What I have done
That might your nature, honor and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness. If 't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged:
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy." (lines 211- 224)

In all the three examples cited above, we find that in each time madness is used as an explanation or excuse to understand Hamlet's behavior. Hence this also serves as a plot device.

In the third argument ***write about the one case of real madness in the play that is seldom talked about: Ophelia's madness***. The circumstances of Hamlet and Ophelia are fairly similar. Both their fathers have been murdered. The circumstances leading up to and immediately following their death are conveniently suspicious. In both cases, there is an attempt at brushing up the truth about the murders and the truth is only known to the people directly involved in the murder. In both cases there are fair grounds of seeking revenge. Whereas hamlet feigns madness to find the truth and seek his revenge, Ophelia is not even shown to come near the idea of revenge. Here, contrast and compare the violent reaction of her brother in seeking revenge, in the name of honor and pride and justice. The female character is not even considered to express similar feelings. She is

given a different outlet altogether, one devoid of any purpose; madness. Only in her case, the madness is real. Her singing, mystical melancholy and eventual death is all explained by madness. In her first appearance on the stage in Act 4 scene 5, after her father's death, her behavior is first termed "conceit" (line 45) by Claudius and soon after, he describes her situation as "Divided from herself and her fair judgement" which he generalizes as "Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts." (Lines 85- 86). In the same scene, she appears again and Laertes seems to think that if she had her 'wits' about and pursued revenge, her situation might have been avoided. Her behavior, he terms "A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted" (lines 177- 178)

In the fourth argument, ***write about what critics have to say about Shakespeare's use of madness.*** Here, the issue is that there are other plays by Shakespeare where madness is a theme, so you will either need to take the help of criticism that focuses on Shakespeare's use of madness in Hamlet in the context of his other plays or take the help of comments that directly deal with *Hamlet*. Your choice of criticism to cite should make your answer better, that should be the focus of your citation.

A.C Bradley has this to say about Hamlet's madness, "His adoption of the pretence of madness may well have been due in part to fear of the reality; to an instinct of self-preservation, a fore-feeling that the pretence would enable him to give some utterance to the load that pressed on his heart and brain, and a fear that he would be unable altogether to repress such utterance." (Bradley 101). Of Ophelia's madness, Bradley is of the view that Shakespeare's introduction of madness in Ophelia is, "...though intensely pathetic, is beautiful and moving rather than harrowing; and this effect is repeated in a softer tone in the description of Ophelia's death" (Bradley 48). Feminist critic and theorist Elaine Showalter has a different opinion of Ophelia however. She says, "Ophelia's symbolic meanings, moreover, are specifically feminine. Whereas for Hamlet madness is metaphysical, linked with culture, for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature, perhaps that nature's purest form. On the Elizabethan stage, the conventions of female insanity were sharply defined. Ophelia dresses in white, decks herself with "fantastical garlands" of wild flowers, and enters, according to the stage directions of the "Bad" Quarto, "distracted" playing on a lute with her "hair down singing." Her speeches are marked by extravagant metaphors, lyrical free associations, and

“explosive sexual imagery.” She sings wistful and bawdy ballads, and ends her life by drowning.” (Showalter 80)

(c) There are two sides to Claudius - treacherous villain; and the tormented sinner who longs for redemption. Discuss these two aspects of Claudius’s character, showing which, in your opinion, is more dominant.

As you can see, this question is more direct than the other two and is clearly asking you for your opinion. This means that whatever argumentative skill that you have derived from the exercise of the previous two questions; you have to use those skills in a more pointed way. Here, the question is already telling you that there are two sides to Claudius. And then, the question is asking you to argue which one is dominant. There will be four arguments in this answer. You have to *first demonstrate, from the text, argument and evidence where Claudius displays his treacherous side*. Second, you have to demonstrate from the text, argument and evidence where *Claudius demonstrates his cowardly side*. Third, you have to give evidence as to which side is more dominant. Fourth, you have to *support your answer by citing and referring to critics whose opinion of Claudius support your arguments*.

For better or for worse, the original crime that Claudius is allegedly accused of, that of the murder of Hamlet’s father lies outside the action of the play. As the play commences, you get a good insight into what kind of a person Claudius is. At the very start, you find him doing three things at once; grieving for his dead brother, celebrating his wedding and dispatching envoys to quell young Fortinbras’s rebellion (Act 1 Scene 2 Lines 1-39). In the same scene you find him giving fatherly advice to Hamlet at once personal and philosophical. So far so good. Things only unravel in Act 1 Scene 4, as Claudius’s noisy celebrations off stage threaten the eerie calm of the stage. Claudius’s treacherous side begins to emerge as he effectively convinces Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet (Act 2 Scene 2), the result of this initiation does take a sinister turn as we come to know in Act 5 Scene 1. At this point, take care not to include his political decisions outside of Denmark, those concerning Norway and England, to cloud your judgement of Claudius. There is evidence in the text where Claudius can be seen plotting political gambit. That may be a reflection on his character, but that is also something that a king is supposed to do (Think

in terms of a Machiavellian character, political cunningness was a required skill and personal treachery is a character flaw). He is supposed to be cunning and treacherous when it comes to protecting his kingdom or demanding taxes. At best, you may mention that in the process of collecting taxes, he combines treachery by plotting Hamlet's murder in England as a favor.

Thereafter, come to the point where Laertes accuses Claudius of his father's murder, or at best, concealing details of the murder. From this point on, Claudius makes no pretense of his villainous side. He manages to convince Laertes that he is innocent, he grieves as much at Polonius's death (Act 4 scene 4 lines 149- 152) and promises him the truth. His treachery here lies in telling exactly what Laertes wants to hear, promising him the kingdom if he be found guilty, giving him the permission to do something he wishes to do (raise a group of friends to judge Claudius, which Laertes has actually already one, but now it has the king's sanction) and knowing full well that he himself is innocent of Polonius's death, the extracts from Laertes the promise that if he be found innocent, Laertes will do as Claudius says (Act 4 Scene 5 Lines 200- 209). From this point on, Claudius's treacherous side takes over completely. He manages to explain his inaction (Act 4 Scene 7 Lines 9- 24) by citing two reasons, both reasons being valid. Immediately after, he makes Laertes his confidante by reading Hamlet's letter aloud and in front of him, saying "Laertes, you shall hear them" (line 42). For a kind to read out personal correspondence from a common enemy, in front of a young man crying for revenge, this must be a morale booster. The second plot to murder Hamlet springs up immediately, since now he has his instrument, Laertes, primed and fueled. The treachery lies in the idea of making it seem like an "accident" (line 66). He now has two cards to play, Hamlet's supposed jealousy of Laertes (Lines 125- 137), and Laertes's skills with the sword and wish for revenge. This side of the character is only reinforced after Claudius makes the following statement- "Therefore this project should have a back or second, that might hold If this should blast in proof." (Act 4 Scene 7 lines 151- 153). He is calling for a backup plan in case the duel does not work.

All the lines and incidents quoted above clearly confirm Claudius as being treacherous

In contrast, there are very few instances that prove that Claudius was a tormented sinner who longed for redemption.

This is the second argument of your answer. Here, refer to two instances. The first instance occurs in Act 3 scene 3, after the play within the play has successfully managed to tingle the guilt of Claudius. Between lines 35 and 72, Claudius makes some interesting comments on his position. He begins by calling his offence 'rank' which 'smells to heaven' (line 36) and then he says he cannot pray and ask for redemption (38), though his inclination and will to pray are 'sharp' (39) yet he says 'My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent' (40). His attempt to seek forgiveness and redemption are both beyond his reach, for, he says,

"That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?" (53- 56)

In the subsequent lines, he follows up with more tormented words, admits to his guilt, yet does not directly ask for forgiveness. It would appear from his words that he has already accepted that there can be no redemption for his action. There is an element of fatality in his speech. The second instance comes in Act 4 scene 5, where Claudius, as opposed to the scheming and cunning king that we can observe in the first argument, suddenly appears vulnerable and fearful of what is to come. Between lines 75 and 96, he is referring to the secret arrival of Laertes in Denmark, having heard of his father's death and steaming for revenge. His speech to Gertrude is hysterical and fearful, and at the same time involves some retrospection at his actions following the death of Polonius. Besides these two events, there is seldom any part in the play where Claudius appears vulnerable or weak or like a sinner who is seeking redemption.

Your third argument must be a clear statement stating that based on the arguments and evidence cited above, it is clear that in your opinion Claudius is a treacherous villain and not a tormented sinner seeking redemption.

Your answer, in this case, seems to conform to critical opinion about the character of Claudius. A.C Bradley has this to say about Claudius

King Claudius rarely gets from the reader the attention he deserves. But he is very interesting, both psychologically and dramatically. On the one hand, he is not without respectable qualities. As a king he is courteous and never undignified; he performs his ceremonial duties efficiently; and he takes

good care of the national interests. He nowhere shows cowardice, and when Laertes and the mob force their way into the palace, he confronts a dangerous situation with coolness and address. His love for his ill-gotten wife seems to be quite genuine, and there is no ground for suspecting him of having used her as a mere means to the crown. His conscience, though ineffective, is far from being dead. In spite of its reproaches he plots new crimes to ensure the prize of the old one; but still it makes him unhappy (III. i. 49 f., III. iii. 35 f.). Nor is he cruel or malevolent. (Bradley 143)

Find out what other critics have said of Claudius and refer and cite their comments to make your answer better.

As you have seen from the three sample questions and the exercise in writing answers for them, careful study of a text, organizing your arguments and reading critical essays and texts can greatly enhance your answer writing skills. Here, we may be talking of Hamlet only, but if you follow a similar model of writing answers for other texts and papers, you stand to benefit greatly. Also remember that this is not only an exercise in writing answer, it is also an exercise in clear analytical thinking and arrangement of your analytical arguments.

3.4 Other Study Suggestions

Hamlet happens to be the only play by Shakespeare that has a journal dedicated exclusively to an individual play. *Hamlet Studies: An International Journal of Research* was first published in 1979 by its founder editor Professor Rupin Desai. Writing a review of the inaugural edition of *Hamlet Studies* in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1980, Jay L. Halio had the following words to say about this unique journal:

It was, of course, bound to happen. Given the plethora of criticism and scholarship on *Hamlet*, including film and television analyses and related studies, a journal devoted exclusively to this most famous of all of Shakespeare's plays was inevitable. And now we have it: *Hamlet Studies*, Volume I, Number 1, April 1979, published in India by Vikas Publishing House of New Delhi, and edited by A. N. Kaul and R. W. Desai. (Halio 1980)

Interestingly, the Krishna Kanta Handique Library of Gauhati University has in its collection copies of this rare journal. Even though we

may now be in the grip of digital media and scholarship, it would be an interesting task for students to access the copies of this journal in the University Library. Make an annotated bibliography of papers published in the journal which are relevant to the themes and issues that have been discussed in this study material. This should not only increase your knowledge of the play; it will also serve as a research exercise for the future.

Apart from this journal and many others which talk about *Hamlet* and other plays by Shakespeare, you should also pay attention to recent works that have enriched this field of study. Mentioned below are some such works that you should refer to:

1. Burnett, Mark Thornton. 'Hamlet' and World Cinema . Cambridge University Press, 2019.
2. Croall, Jonathan. Performing Hamlet: Actors in the Modern Stage. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.
3. Lewis, Rhodri. Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness. Princeton University Press, 2020.
4. Purakayastha, Anindya Sekhar. Literature, Cultural Politics and Counter-Readings: Hamlet as the Prince of Deconstruction. New York: Routledge, 2021.
5. Sonia Massai, Lucy Munro, ed. Hamlet: The State of Play. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
6. Sonya Freeman Loftis, Allison Kellar, and Lisa Ulevich, ed. Shakespeare's Hamlet in an Era of Textual Exhaustion. Routledge, 2018.
7. White, Paul Megna · Bríd Phillips R. S., ed. Hamlet and Emotions. Springer International Publishing; Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

3.5. Summing Up

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was the longest play by William Shakespeare. It is considered as one of the most influential and greatest of Elizabethan tragedies ever composed. The play has been staged widely all across the globe all through the centuries since it was written. *Hamlet*, even in the present times continues to assert its influences, not only in the theatrical world but also eminently contributing towards a wide array of academic scholarship.

3.6 References and Suggested Readings

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth*. 3rd Edition. New York: Macmillan Education, 1992.

Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1932.

Halio, Jay L. "A New Hamlet Journal." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31.3 (1980): 462-464.

Josipovici, Gabriel. *Hamlet : Fold on Fold*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. London: Taylor & Francis, 2005. 77-94.

Space for Learner

Unit 4 : Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer* (Introduction and Stage History)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 4.1. Objectives
- 4.2. Introduction
- 4.3. Date and sources
- 4.4. Contexts of the play
- 4.5. The play on the Stage
- 4.6. Adaptation
- 4.7. Critical Reception
- 4.8. Summing Up
- 4.9. Reference and Suggested Reading

4.1. Objectives

In this unit, you will be able to

- *learn* about the date and sources of the play
- *learn* the context of the play
- *know* about the staging of the play
- *know* about the various adaptation of the play
- *know* the critical reception of the play

4.2. Introduction

A well-known Anglo-Irish novelist, playwright, poet, Oliver Goldsmith has to his credits novels like *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), pastoral poems like *The Deserted Village* (1770) along with plays like *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771).

Written in 1771 and first performed in 1773, the play got its title changed just before its first performance from *Mistakes of a Night* to a more intriguing title *She Stoops to Conquer* by Goldsmith himself. The play can be seen as a reaction against the traditional works produced during the period of 1750-1778 (Age of Sensibility). At a time when most of the

literary works were focusing more on emotions rather than humor, the ‘sentimental comedy’ ruled the stage. The genre that focused more on the philosophical conception of human being as inherently good but capable of being led off the track through bad examples, the sentimental comedy was not a pure comedy in true sense. It has been considered comedy just because it has a happy ending not because it is humorous in tone. As a reaction to such form of drama, Goldsmith came up with a trial to restore the essence of the missing humor and wit of the sentimental comedy. The play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, thus, becomes a representative of an alternative to the eighteenth century popular forms of theatre.

The unit is an attempt to look into the context of the play. Furthermore, it will also delineate the context of the play, its stage history and adaptations.

4.3. Date and Sources:

The play was written in 1771 and was first performed in the year 1773 in the Covent Garden Theatre.

A study on the sources of the play has been made by Gertrude van Arsdale Ingalls in the article “Some Sources of Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*”. To bring forth some suggested sources of the text, the author projected certain incidents in the article.

The very first incident that the author highlights are the trick made by Tony Lumpkin on Mrs. Hardcastle where she and Constance are made believe that they have travelled far to aunt Pedigree’s house but are made travel within their own garden. Even though there is no hint made by Goldsmith about the similarity of the incident with any other textual evidences, yet, Richard Steele is seen describing one such incident in no, 427 of *The Spectator*. Steele spoke about the story of Lady Bluemantle:

She is so exquisitely restless and peevish, that she quarrels with all about her, and sometimes in a Freak will instantly change her Habitation. To indulge this Humour, she is led about the Grounds belonging to the same House she is in, and the Persons to whom she is to remove, being in the Plot, are ready to receive her at her own Chamber again. At stated Times, the gentlewoman at whose House she supposes she is at the Time, is sent

for to quarrel with, according to her common Custom: When they have a Mind to drive the Jest, she is immediately urged to that Degree, that she will board in a Family with which she has never yet been; and away she will go this instant, and tell them all that the rest have been saying of them. By this means she has been an Inhabitant of every House in the Place, without stirring from the same Habitation; and the many Stories which every Body furnishes her with to favour that Deceit, make her the general Intelligencer of the Town.(565)

The similarities between both Mrs. Hardcastle and Lady Bluemantle, both in humorous portraiture and the incidental occurrence, makes a sense that Goldsmith's corresponding incident in his comedy has got a base from the story narrated by Steele.

Another story as narrated by Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* (No. 289) has the similarity with the main plot of Marlow mistaking the home of Mr. Hardcastle to that of an inn. Addison wrote the following anecdote which according to him he had read in the "Travels of Sir John Chardin":

A Dervise, travelling through Tartary, being arrived at the town of Balk, went into the King's Palace by a Mistake, as thinking it to be a publick Inn or Caravansary. Having looked about him for some Time, he entered into a long Gallery, where he laid down his Wallet, and spread his Carpet, in order to repose himself upon it, after the Manner of the Eastern Nations. He had not been long in this Posture before he was discovered by some of the Guards, who asked what was his Business in that Place? The Dervise told them, he intended to take up his Night's Lodging, in that Caravansary. The Guards let him know, in a very angry Manner, that the House he was in, was not a Caravansary, but the King's Palace. It happened that the King himself passed through the Gallery during the Debate, and smiling at the Mistake of the Dervise, asked him how he could possibly be so dull, as not to distinguish a Palace from a Caravansary? Sir, says the Dervise, give me Leave to ask Your Majesty a Question or two. Who were the Persons that lodged in this House when it was first built? The King replied, His Ancestors. And who, says the Dervise, was the last Person that lodged here? The King replied, His Father. And who is it, says the Dervise, that lodges here at present? The King told him that it was he himself. And who, says the Dervise, will be here after you? The King answered the young Prince, his Son. 'Ah Sir,' said the Dervise, a House that changes its Inhabitants so often, and receives such a perpetual Succession of Guests, is not a Palace, but a Caravansary.'(566)

Even though the incident described by Addison shows a little situational connection with the play, yet it is very difficult to directly point the same as the only source of the play and not a literary co-incidence. Speaking of the same incident of the mistaken identity of the inn, John Forster, the biographer of Oliver Goldsmith has spoken of some of Goldsmith's boyhood memories:

At the close of his last holidays, then a lad of nearly seventeen, he left home for Edgeworthstown, mounted on a borrowed hack which a friend was to restore to Lissoy, and with a guinea, store of unaccustomed wealth, in his pocket. The delicious taste of independence beguiled him into a loitering, lingering, pleasant enjoyment of the journey; and instead of finding himself under Mr. Hughes's roof at nightfall, night fell upon him some two or three miles out of the direct road, in the middle of the streets of Ardagh. But nothing could disconcert the owner of the guinea, who, with a lofty confident air, inquired of a person passing the way to the town's best house of entertainment. The man addressed was a wag of Ardagh, a humorous fencing-master, Mr. Cornelius Kelly, and the school-boy swagger was irresistible provocation to a jest. Submissively he turned back with horse and rider till they came within a pace or two of the great Squire Featherstone's, to which he respectfully pointed as the "best house" of Ardagh. Oliver rang at the gate, gave his beast in charge with authoritative rigour, and was shown, as a supposed expected guest, into the comfortable parlour of the squire. Those were days when Irish inn-keepers and Irish squires more nearly approximated than now; and Mr. Featherstone, unlike the excellent but explosive Mr. Hardcastle, is said to have seen the mistake, and humoured it. Oliver had a supper which gave him so much satisfaction that he ordered a bottle of wine to follow; and the attentive landlord was not only forced to drink with him, but, with like familiar condescension, the wife and pretty daughter were invited to the supper-room. Going to bed, he stopped to give special instructions for a hot cake to breakfast; and it was not till he had dispatched this latter meal, and was regarding his guinea with a pathetic last look, that the truth was told him by the good-natured squire. The late Sir Thomas Featherstone, grandson to the supposed inn-keeper, had faith in the adventure; and told Mr. Graham that as his grandfather and Charles Goldsmith had been college acquaintance, it might the better be accounted for. (567)

Even though the author has made a detail study about the sources of the play, it is never mentioned by Goldsmith about these incidents to be the

direct source of the play. In this context, one can consider the incidents as not the only sources. Rather, those incidents could have been a base and making a detail illustration of the same in his own way.

Space for Learner

4.4 Context of the play:

The play was written at a time when England was going through numbers of social and economic changes. The Industrial Revolution fueled the whole situation which marked a time of huge transformation for Britain. With the Industrial Revolution, cities gained their importance which resulted in a new sense of cosmopolitanism. The middle class so called cities urban elite started considering themselves superior. This new class division made the traditional way of living a threat.

The social dynamics gets reflected in many of the interactions in the play. She stoops to Conquer. The two, Marlow and Hastings, portrayed as two city dwellers, visited the countryside. Marlow's arrogance towards Mr. Hardcastle (even though as a result of mistaken identity as inn keeper) provokes laughter because it highlighted the emerging hierarchy between the city dwellers who considered themselves to be more sophisticated and the unsophisticated country dwellers.

Check Your Progress:

Write a note on the Age of Sensibility and consider how Goldsmith used those in the play *She Stoops to Conquer*. (in 150 words)

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4.5. The Play on the stage:

The play was written in 1771 and was first performed in the year 1773 in the Covent Garden Theatre. The story behind the acceptance of the script needs a special mention. The manager of Covent Garden Theatre, George Coleman, thinking about the popularity of the sentimental theatre did not want to accept a complete new form of drama and thus returned the script for improvements to Goldsmith. But it was the help from

his friend from the literary elite group of London like Samuel Johnson that Coleman accepted the script and the play was put to rehearsal in 1773. It was a difficult job for the manager to make the actors do the work because the low faith of the production house made the actors think twice before joining the play. So the casting of actors became difficult then. The actors habituated of playing moral characters in the sentimental comedies were in doubt to play the roles of characters like Tony Lumpkin or Kate. With the actors confused at their respective roles, the play got its title changed just before its first performance from *Mistakes of a Night* to a more intriguing title *She Stoops to Conquer* by Goldsmith himself. The very first performance had Mary Bulkley, a well-known comedy stage actress of the eighteenth century, playing the role of Kate.

The play was staged not only in the eighteenth century but also in the nineteenth century. The British comedian Lionel Brough became very famous with his role played as Tony Lumpkin in the year 1869. It is said that Brough became the widely accepted representative of the eighteenth century Tony Lumpkin and played the role over seven hundred times. The play was also staged the year 1881. That was the very first socialite production of the play with the socialite actress Lillie Langtry debuting as a comedian.

The play was also staged in the year 1964 by the Edinburgh Gateway Company, directed by Victor Carin. The Frederic Wood Theatre, University of British Columbia presented *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1889. The play was directed by Kevin Orr. The most modern incarnation of the play came up in the year 1993. Even though there is a lack of proper evidence yet it is said that the 1993 version was a Peter Hall's version and had Miriam Margolyes as an actor.

The distribution of the time period showcases the popularity of the play. A play written as a trial, challenging all the traditional norms, became favorite not only for the eighteenth century audience. Right from the time of its debut in the 1773 on stage *She Stoops to Conquer* was welcomed by the audiences and remains a popular play even till date. The play can be thus noted as one of the few eighteenth century plays to be performed regularly for the modern audiences.

4.6. Adaptions:

Space for Learner

In 1910, The Thanouser Company of the United States made a film ‘She stoops to Conquer’ which was an adaptation of Oliver Goldsmith’s play with the same title. It was released on 19th August, 1910 and got a mixed reaction from the critics.

The play was also adapted as a comedy film again in 1914 by the London Film Productions and was directed by George Loane Tucker.

Another film adaptation was made in the year 1923 which was directed by Edwin Greenwood. The play was an all-time favourite and thus had not only film adaptations but also television adaptations too.

The play was adapted as a TV movie in the year 1939 in the United States by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Another BBC television production came up in 1971.

Another BBC television production of the play came up in 2008.

SAQ:

Do you think there can be differences in the staging techniques of the play with the change of the time of its staging? (write in 150 words)—

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4.7. Critical Reception:

At a time when the traditional form of drama was the sentimental comedy, the play *She Stoops to Conquer* came up as a reaction to this traditional form of drama. With lots of objections and fear in mind, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, George Colman, accepted the script and the play was staged in 1773 two years after it was written. The play got large applause on stage. As a pioneer to the new form of drama, Goldsmith argued that the main function of comedy is to evoke laughter and thus he opposed the sentimental comedy which was more a tragedy than a comedy. In place of the serious heroes or heroines with moral characters or a pathetic lover, the play focuses on human follies. The imperfections in

the characters, the witty dialogues and the situational irony in the play made the audience laugh. As the prologue of the play suggests that comedy in real sense was no longer in existence and that the play aimed at creating a true comedy is justified through its positive response on stage. Had the play not been accepted positively, it would never have got a place on stage even in the modern time.

The words from the renowned writer Samuel Johnson admiring the play signifies the popularity of the play. James Boswell quoted Johnson's words in his *The Life of Samuel Johnson* where Johnson says, "I know of no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience that it has answered so much the great end of comedy- making an audience merry"(179).

At a time when Samuel Johnson was praising the play because of its capability to make people laugh with the witty dialogues, there were mixed responses to it too. Horace Walpole told the Countess of Ossory that "What play makes you laugh very much, and yet is a very wretched comedy? Dr. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. Stoops indeed!- so she does, that is the Muse: she is dragged up to the knees, and has trudged, I believe, from Southwark Fair. The whole view of the piece is low humour, and no humour is in it. All the merit lies in the situations, which are comic; the heroine has no more modesty than Lady Bridget, and the author's wit is as a *manque* as the Lady's- but some of the characters are well acted..."

Walpole told William Mason, "Dr. Goldsmith has written a comedy- no, it is the lowest of all the farces. It is not the subject I condemn, though very vulgar, but the execution. The drift tends to no moral, no edification of any kind... The situations, however, are well imagined, make one laugh in spite of the grossness of the dialogue, the forced witticisms and total improbability of the whole plan and conduct."

The Westminster Magazine wrote "On the whole the comedy has many excellent qualities; though we cannot venture to recommend it as a pattern for imitation."

The Gentleman's Magazine praised the play by saying the play to be "truly comic... irresistible."

SAQ

Why do you think the play has its significance even in the modern period of time? (write in 150 words)

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Space for Learner

4.8 Summing Up:

The play is difficult to categorize in one specific form of comedy. Some are of the view that the play can be said as a Restoration Comedy. But the fact is that it was written much later. The Restoration period can be traced from 1660 to 1710 and the play was written in 1771 and first performed in 1773. *She Stoops to Conquer* neither fulfils the characteristics of the Restoration comedy nor the contemporary eighteenth century comedies, the sentimental comedy. In this context the play can be said as a reaction to the traditional form of sentimental comedy. It is more a situational comedy where Goldsmith is seen going back to the classical old style of writing. The playwright tactfully situates various situations and events throughout the play making the audience realise that they are witnessing certain situation. It can also be termed as comedy of manners keeping in mind the characterization of the lower class people like the servants and the working class people. The play is also seen satirizing the town dwellers and the city dwellers. It is more a play of the opposites: town and the country people, working class people and the wealthy people, also about the rich and the poor and the shy and arrogant person. The following units will put light to some of the other aspects of the play.

4.9 Reference and suggested reading:

Boswell, James. *The Life Of Samuel Johnson, Volume 2. Library of Standard biographies*. Hutchinson:1791. Print.

Boas, Frederick Samuel. *An Introduction to eighteenth-century drama,1700-1780*. Oxford: Clarendon Press,1953. Print.

Ingalls, Gertrude van Arsdale. "Some Sources of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*."

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Sentimental Comedy." *The Westminster Magazine*, 1773.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. *Comedy and Conscience After Restoration*. New York: Columbia

University Press, 1949. Print.

Lynch, James J. *Box, Pit, and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson's London*. Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1953. Print.

Pedicord, Harry William. *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick*. New York:

King's Crown Press, 1954. Print.

Richards, Kenneth and Peter Thomson (ed). *Essays on the Eighteenth Century English*

Stage. London: Routledge Literaray Editions: 18th Century Literature, 1972.

Unit 5 : Oliver Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer* (Reading the Play)

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 5.1. Objectives
- 5.2. Introduction
- 5.3 Style and Structure of the Play
- 5.4 Character List
- 5.5 Brief character sketch of the major characters
- 5.6 Act- wise reading of the Play
- 5.7 Critical Analysis of the play
- 5.8 Summing Up
- 5.9 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives:

By the end of the unit, you will be able to

- *understand* the structure of the play
- *understand* the plot of the play
- *understand* the critical analysis of the play

5.2 Introduction:

The classification of the play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, into one specific category has always been a difficult job. Many people believed the play to be a Restoration Comedy whereas the fact is that the play has been written much later. Written in 1771 and performed in 1773 for the first time, the play was produced at a time when a specific form of comedy was in trend. The traditional form of comedy better known as the Sentimental Comedy was a form where emphasis was given more on moralities and pathos than humour. In reaction to those, playwright like Goldsmith came up with a complete new form of comedy which can be said as a return to pure form of comedy and partial return to comedy of manners. In this context, some light should be thrown on the play considering it as an anti-sentimental comedy. This will be discussed in the following unit.

SAQ

What is Restoration Comedy? How is it different from the Sentimental Comedy? (write within 150 words)

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5.3 Style and Structure of the Play:

The play can be said as a perfect example of the mixture of wit and humour. The simple yet witty dialogues made the plot of the play a well-constructed one. The very well knitted plot helped the audience not only to understand the play but also enjoy it. One of the specific characteristics of the play is its pace. The events in the play are not made lengthy. Instead, the play moves along rapidly foreshadowing all the events that are to be followed in the coming acts.

The play is divided into five acts with a prologue and two epilogues to it. Act 1 and Act 5 has two scenes and the rests have a scene each. It was not Goldsmith but one of the famous actor and theatrical producer of the eighteenth century, David Garrick who wrote the prologue of the play. The prologue can be said as the mirror to Goldsmith's thoughts regarding comedy. Spoken by Mr. Woodward, who played the role of Tony, the prologue can be said as a trial to make the audience understand the need of a comedy different from the traditional form of sentimental comedy. The first epilogue is believed to be written by Goldsmith himself and the second was said to be added later and was written by another actor and playwright Joseph Cradock.

Apart from all these, Goldsmith has also followed the concept of the three unities: unity of time, place and action. The action of the play is uniform and the action takes place in the English countryside and the whole action narrates the happenings of a single night.

5.4 Character List:

The Major characters of the play are:

- Charles Marlow
- Kate Hardcastle

- Constance Neville
- George Hastings
- Mr. Hardcastle
- Mrs. Hardcastle
- Tony Lumpkin

The Minor characters of the play are:

- Sir Charles
- Aunt Pedigree
- Pimple
- Diggory
- Bet Bouncer
- Landlord

5.5 Brief sketch of the major characters:

- **Charles Marlow:** The central male character of the play, Marlow has been portrayed as someone educated and an aristocratic lad. Even though educated, Marlow is someone who lacks self-confidence when comes around women of upper class and is absolutely seducing in front of the lower class women. He is someone who finds it quite comfortable to communicate with the people of the lower class. The main plot of the play revolves round Marlow and his love for Kate whom he initially thinks to be a barmaid.

- **Kate Hardcastle:** Kate is portrayed as someone who is intelligent and beautiful. A girl who is interested in fashion and at the same time never defines herself by her way of dressing, Kate is the central character of the play. The 'She' in the title *She Stoops to Conquer* is a reference to Kate. It is her action of stooping to a barmaid to gain the love of Marlow that is being referred to in the play.

- **Constance Neville:** A young girl and the niece of Mrs. Hardcastle, Constance is portrayed as someone who is enriched by some inherited jewellery. After the death of her father, she is made to stay with her aunt Mrs. Hardcastle because she wants her son to marry Constance. But Constance is in love with Hastings.

- **George Hastings:** A well-educated and good natured man, Hastings is a good friend of Marlow and also the person whom Constance loves.

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Unlike Marlow, Hastings is not portrayed as someone who is constrained in social situations. He is totally in love with Constance and is ready to elope with her even giving up the jewelry inherited by Constance. Desperate to elope with Constance, he also took the help of Tony in deceiving Mrs. Hardcastle.

● **Mr. Hardcastle:** An old person owning a house in the countryside, Hardcastle is portrayed as someone who is more indulgent towards the old way of living than the modern way. An ideal father, Hardcastle is protective of his daughter Kate but disapproves of the way his stepson Tony lives. He is indulgent towards his wife too.

● **Mrs. Hardcastle:** A greedy woman Mrs. Hardcastle has lived all her life in the countryside with her husband but is obsessed with what is fashionable in the city. She alone is responsible for the spoiled nature of her son Tony. She is the guardian to her niece, Constance, and is with the hope to force her to marry Tony to keep Constance's fortune in the family.

● **Tony Lumpkin:** A very rustic character, Tony is spoiled by his mother Mrs. Hardcastle. He is not an educated one and infact it is his mother who is sole responsible for this. He passes his time drinking and loitering around and loves to play trick with family members. He is the sole mover of the play because his trick on Marlow makes the whole situation different.

5.6 Act-wise reading of the Play:

Prologue:

Although written by one of the famous actor and playwright of the eighteenth century, David Garrick, the prologue plays a vital role in the play. Spoken by Mr. Woodward, one of the actors who played the role of Tony Lumpkin, the prologue mourns the condition of the comedy of the eighteenth century. The prologue can also be seen as a mirror to the philosophy of Goldsmith where he made atrial to make a return to the real form of comedy. Thus, one can say that the prologue set a platform that helped the audience to understand that they will be witnessing something new, digressing from the traditional form of sentimental comedy.

Act I:

The first act begins at the Hardcastle's home. Both Mr and MrsHardcastle are having a discussion where Mrs. Hardcastle expresses her desire to go to the city. She complains her husband for not leaving their home. In response, Mr. Hardcastle showcases his disinterest in the city and city lifestyle. Rather, he is affectionate about the antiquated.

The act further introduces us to two more characters, their sons and daughter, Tony Lumpkin (stepson) and Kate Hardcastle.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle awaits the arrival of Marlow, son of Charles Marlow (one of the friends of Mr. Hardcastle) who is selected as the suitor to Kate whom none of them have ever met. Marlow and his friend Hasting's arrived at their destination but could not find the house of the Mr. Hardcastle. They approached the three Pegions Tavern where Tony Lumpkin was enjoying a reverie. When asked Tony plays a joke on them by describing Mr. Hardcastle's house as inn run by a strange man.

Act II :

The second act begins with the gatherings of the servants of the Mr. Hardcastle's House and Mr. Hardcastle explaining them about their expected guests. He asks them to behave properly for the expected giest in his future son-in-law. On the other hand, be fooled by the trick played by Tony, both Hastings and Marlow's arrive at the Hardcastle's House thinking it to be an inn. They also treat Mr. Hardcastle in a rude way thinking him to be the owner of the inn. Meanwhile the real picture of Marlow comes to the forefront when he confuses Hastings that he is shy towards the rich ladies and becomes a complete different person in front of the ladies.

This act also unfolds the story of Hastings and Miss Constance. Neville, niece of Mrs. Hardcastle. Both of them are secretly courting each other and plan to elope. However, Constance want to elope without taking her inherited jewellery from Mrs. Hardcastle. MrsHardcastle, on the other hand, in order to help the jewellery in her own house, wants her son Tony Lumpkin to marry Constance. Meanwhile, Hastings become aware of the origin Identity of Mr. Hardcastle but does not bother to tell Marlow about it thinking Marlow might ruin his planning of eloping with Constance.

Act III :

The act begins with the confused Mr. Hardcastle as to what his friend Mr. Marlow would recommend his son for Kate as he finds Marlow to be weird and incompletable to his daughter. Mr. Hardcastle and Kate discuss about Marlow and his two facedness. Marlow seems to be rude to Mr. Hardcastle thinking him to be the owner of the inn and is too shy around Kate.

In the meantime, Tony in order to help initiate Constance and Hastings's plan of elopement sends the ancestral/ inherited jewellery to Hastings. Unaware of Tony's plan, Constance also asks Mrs. Hardcastle the jewellery hoping to elope wearing them. Tony manages the situation by telling his mother not to give the jewellery giving the excuse.

Meanwhile, the information regarding the trick played by Tony reaches Kate and she does not reveal the truth. Instead, she is mistaken as a barmaid by Marlow and gets attracted.

Act IV:

The whole plot gets almost revealed by the end of act 4. The plan of Constance and Hastings elopement gets almost confirmed by the act of entrusting the jewellery box to Marlow to keep it safe. However, things get amiss when Marlow hands over the jewellery box to Mrs. Hardcastle to keep them safe.

This act also reveals the true identity of Hardcastle's home which was mistaken as an inn. With the confrontation of Mr. Hardcastle's disappointment regarding Marlow's behaviour (as the son of his friend Mr. Charles), Marlow can be seen confused. Unaware of the whole situation, Marlow becomes horrified with the realisation of the error he has made. Unable to adjust to the situation, Marlow announces his departure to which Kate became emotional. She does not reveal her identity and Marlow gets touched with the tears in her eyes.

Meanwhile the couple, Hastings and Constance, then plan to elope even without the jewellery. But, a letter from Hastings to Tony changes the whole scenario. Illiterate Tony makes his mother read the letter where Hastings has described the whole plan of elopement. Furious Mrs. Hardcastle immediately decides to send Constance to far away Aunt Pedigree's house. Situation worsens with the yelling of Hastings at Tony to

reveal their secret of elopement to Mrs. Hardcastle and at the same time Marlow yells at both Tony and Hastings for deceiving him. Heartbroken Constance with Mrs. Hardcastle to leave for aunt Pedigree's house.

The act ends with the invitation of Hastings by Tony in the garden in two hours after Constance left.

Act V:

The arrival of Mr. Charles marks the beginning of the last act where the friends (Mrs. Hardcastle and Mrs. Charles) discuss the marriage of Kate and Marlow. Hardcastle informs about the growing romance between Marlow and Kate (whom Marlow thinks to be a maid). But things turn out different for Marlow. He cannot accept the proposal of his marriage with Kate as he is too shy to court her whom Marlow's decision confuses Hardcastle. Kate assures both of them and asks them to hide and look into the matter.

On the other hand, Hastings is made clear by Tony that both Mrs. Hardcastle and Constance will return to Mr. Hardcastle's home. Hastings urges Constance to elope and marry him. Constance, however, negates Constance of Hastings. She instead wants to explain the whole situation to Mr. Hardcastle so that he can manage to handle Mrs. Hardcastle so that she accepts Hastings and Constance marriage.

Inside, both the fathers await to see Kate's words being fulfilled. Kate, no longer pretending a barmaid, speaks to Marlow, to which Marlow replies in a low tone. He accepts that he cannot go against his family by marrying someone from lower class. When Kate exposes her real identity, both Mr. Harcastle and Mr. Charles burst out in laughter.

In the meantime, Mrs. Hardcastle informs Tony about the affair of Hastings and Constance and their elopement. However, she is contented with the thought that the jewellery is still with her. However, Hastings and Constance reach the place and speaks of their decision. Tony also reveals that he has never had any affection towards Constance and never wants to marry her freeing Constance to marry the man of her choice, Hastings. The play comes to a happy ending with the marriage of Kate and Marlow, and, Constance and Hastings.

Epilogue:

Just like the prologue gives the platform to make the audience understand the philosophy of Goldsmith, the epilogue can be said as the final attempt to grab a place in the hearts of the audiences. Both the epilogues try to showcase some of the loopholes of the so called aristocratic society. The role of a barmaid played by Kate hints to the fact that class can never be inborn but rather a performance. Similarly the second epilogue too make a satire of the new born class based society of the eighteenth century through the character like Tony Lumpkin.

Check Your Progress:

1. Try to made an assessment of how the events are moved in the play. (Write within 150 words)

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2. What do mean by Prologue and Epilogue? What are their importance within a play? (Write within 200 words)

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5.7 Critical Analysis of the play:

Though not a direct contribution of Goldsmith, the prologue pf of the play plays a vital role. The prologue attributed to David Garrick is important aa it can be said as the the way to understand Goldsmith’s purpose in the play, the purpose of creating a comedy in its true sense - A play that can make audience laugh. The prologue, thus, becomes a mirror to the new trend coming into term, which was different from the ongoing ‘sentimental comedy’. At a time when the audiences hoped for a sentimental comedy, Goldsmith came up with an extra purpose: making people laugh than engaged in more emotions

The play, thus, becomes, one of the notable work as it subverts the expected notions of the audiences. Audiences, habituated with the

sentimental comedies, were provided with a different plot structure. Goldsmith's intended purpose to write a pure comedy can be seen right from the very first act where he knitted all the plot details in a such a manner that it does not become problematic for the audience to understand and establish the connections later on. Details like the Hardcastle's houses resembles an inn, Constance Neville is to inherit jewels that Mrs. Hardcastle wants to keep in the family by making Tony marrying her or Marlow's tendency to speak differently to women of different societal statuses are made clear at the very first act. The dramatic irony plays another important role. The act of tricking by Tony provides information to the audience which evokes laughter at a situation when all the characters on stage are unaware of the happenings and are confused and as audience we are aware of.

The first act also establishes the plot line. Even though the plot revolves round the question of marriage between Kate and Marlow yet it is vivid that Goldsmith's concern was on Tony. Keeping him at the centre and making him the mover of the plot, Goldsmith tactfully portrayed Tony as a character devoid of all the characteristics of a traditional protagonist. Tony being a rogue persona is portrayed as someone who is more an immoral character than a moral one which can be said as a crucial part for Goldsmith in order to praise low farce comedy. The first act also subverts the traditional expectations of virtuous characters to be portrayed as heroes and the elite class people to be superior both educationally or in terms of behavior. Even though we have characters like Marlow (sophisticated city dweller) yet Goldsmith has created a complete different world which is subversion of the traditional expectations. It is not only Marlow but also Hardcastle, the lady who wishes to live a sophisticated life at the very beginning is seen portrayed as someone more concerned about wealth and outward vengeance than the a real educated one. She not only spoiled her son but also made him marry Constance just to have the inherited jewellery. Actions like these contrast the traditional way portraying a sophisticated character. Apart from this, Marlow, as a hero in traditional sense would have been someone very praiseworthy because of his modest nature. But, here, he is portrayed more as a person with dual nature suggesting the hypocrisy lying behind those modest sophisticated people.

With the set-up being done in the very first act, the second act gives a movement to the plot establishing its contradictions and complications.

Keeping his purpose intact, Goldsmith contradicts the characterisation. In contrast to the sentimental comedy, the play exhibits 'heroism' to the lower characters and foolishness to the heroic characters. Example can be cited of Hastings and Marlow. The two young men from aristocratic background should have signs of good breeding but are portrayed as someone with meanness Marlow's love for common women and shyness towards the high status women exemplifies Goldsmith's attempt to contrast the so called traditional 'vice' in sentimental comedy by considering the same as a desire in Marlow's part. Such subversion of expected characteristics can also be seen in the assumption of Mr. Hardcastle's behaviour. The young men assumed that Mr. Hardcastle cannot be a gentleman just because he is the owner of an inn. However, Mr. Hardcastle is actually a gentleman and has learned everything and it is their own perspective that they cannot oversee their perspective.

The women characters are also portrayed in a quite different way as compared to traditional women characters. While the traditional heroines of the sentimental comedy are portrayed as characters more moral in tone, we have characters like Constance who is more practical in nature. At a point where Hastings only needed Constance, she was firm with her decision that she needed money too. Thus, Constance can be said as that creation of Goldsmith who is more concerned about practicing on life than romanticizing it. Kate, on the other hand, is more a traditional heroine, who is capable of balancing her life in between simplicity and sophisticated. A girl who dresses in a simple way for her father and differently for her friend, Kate not only manages the shyness of Marlow but also made fun of her own self at the time of need. Mr Hardcastle is more a stock character

The concern of appearance over any other substance or situation remains one of the most important thematic concerns in the second act. However, it can be said as one of the prime focus of Goldsmith to highlight the fact that appearance can also be deceptive. Had this been not the fact, Marlow and Hastings, even though dressed well, would not have shown their true colour in front of the Hardcastles. Just because the trick was made and they believed the house as inn, things changed. Similarly, Marlow's disability to court a woman from upper class signifies Goldsmith's desire to focus on the follies of human virtues. This act also highlights Goldsmith's artistic capability of bringing in the comic elements in the play

through mixture of low humour (like the action of the servants) and dramatic irony where the whole web of confusion make the audience laugh at that who are revealing their true colour.

The third act serves as the platform to complicate the whole plot of the play. The way Goldsmith portrayed the complicated plot with such an ease is quite a commendable job. Even though he used stock characters yet it is through them only that the complications are made believed by the audiences. The dramatic irony made the play great fun. Goldsmith made the audience omniscient by letting them know the whole events right from the very first act in a simple way. The simplicity in his narrative helps the audience understand the play and at the same time evokes laughter among them because the audience are aware of things prior to the characters. This act also highlights one more concern of Goldsmith- the complicacies of human life and the hypocrisy related to it. It is done through the character of Marlow. Both Mr. Hardcastle and Kate finds it difficult to digest the behaviour of Marlow. Kate's stooping help others to know about the truth of Marlow's portrayal. Marlow, the shy aristocratic lad is more an aggressive person in front of women from lower state. Actions like this highlights Goldsmith's return to pure form of comedy where he is seen celebrating the lowness of human being as the mirror of the truth.

The forth act serves as the climax where almost everything becomes complex for the main characters. It is also the act where Goldsmith has highly implemented the concept of hypocrisy and dualness existing in human world through the character like Marlow. By the time Marlow realises that his family members are also involved in his marriage with Kate, he confesses the barmaid (distinguished Kate) that he no longer will be able to continue with her because his father will not accept someone from lower class. Such duality of Marlow can be said as the representative of the hypocrisy of the upper class sophisticated society. On one hand he is in love with a woman (disguised Kate) and on the other hand, he is more concerned about the views of the society rather than his passion for the woman just because the woman does not come under the umbrella of aristocratic society.

The disguise of Kate is also an indicative of the importance of appearance in the society. Marlow's behavior towards the same girl changes once he becomes aware of the truth. Even though Kate doesnot

change, the perspective of Marlow changes after knowing her true identity. Such realities of the society become the most important fact for Goldsmith to mock and create laughter. However, the acceptance of Marlow at the end of everything showcases the fact that Goldsmith's main intention was not to criticize the society but to point the absurdities and vices of the society at large. This act also shows Tony's growth more as a trick player.

The last act possesses the typical characteristics of the comedy with a happy ending. Both the couples: Marlow and Kate, and Constance and Hastings are ready to live together. The final act, however, somewhere contrasts Goldsmith's philosophy of true form of comedy and highlights some of the characteristics of sentimental comedy. Even though as a playwright he highlights the vices of the society, yet at the end of the play the virtuous side only makes it possible for Marlow to marry Kate. And Kate makes Marlow her suitor only through the trickery or deception. The duality or the concept of appearance remains intact till the last act. Both Charles and Mr. Hardcastle could not believe the contradictory character of Marlow. It is Kate, a character who is portrayed as someone who understands both the simplicity and sophistication and made both the fathers understand Marlow. Tony, the character which can be identified as a 'low' character with no virtue, becomes the facilitator of the happy ending. It is Tony who helped Hastings and Constance to come together. He made his mother realise that he is not interested in Constance and let the marriage of Hastings and Constance happen. One important fact that is to be mentioned here is the decision made by Constance not to leave the home without the jewellery. She is more concerned with the reality that economic balance is something that is much needed. This incident contradicts the pure form of comedy where the plot seems to be more farcical than realistic.

Goldsmith deserves a high applause because of his capability to make the complex plot an easier one. The play seems to be natural in its tone and throughout the play the themes are kept intact. The whole play is an expression of all the themes like deception and misunderstanding, the class division, the importance of appearance and all the themes come together to make the play come to an end in a satisfying manner.

Check Your Progress:

Comment on the final act of the play.(write within 150 words)

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5.8 Summing Up:

A brief discussion on the play is made in this unit. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of the play. As mentioned earlier, the play can be and should be read in the light of various other aspects. A few aspects of has been discussed in the next unit.

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Unit 6 : *She Stoops to Conquer*

Supplementary Unit

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Themes of the play
- 6.4 *She Stoops to Conquer* as Anti-Sentimental Comedy
- 6.5 Probable Questions
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives:

In this unit, you will be able to

- Learn some of the important themes of the play
- Know the play under the light of Anti-sentimental comedy
- Probable questions

6.2 Introduction:

In the preceding units, one of the most frequently said topic is the sentimental comedy. This unit is devoted to that. A detailed study of what sentimental comedy is and how the play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, contradicts those characteristics is made in this unit. Moreover, some of the themes of the play is also discussed.

6.3 Themes of the Play:

- **Deception and Mistake:**

The whole play revolves round numbers of misunderstandings and mistaken identities. However, it is the misunderstanding of the hero Marlow that becomes the centre of the play. As an anti-sentimental comedy and a

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partial comedy of manners, it is the theme of deception that helped bring in the laughter. The theme of deception also helped the playwright to make certain characters know their real value. Example can be cited of Marlow here. An aristocratic as well as educated lad, Marlow shows a complete opposite behaviour to the Hardcastles thinking them to be the owner of the inn. It is the misunderstanding and deception which eventually leads the complicated surrounding that amuses the audiences. Marlow mistakenly thinks Hardcastle to be the owner of the inn just because he was tricked by Tony and treats him in a different way. At the same time Hardcastle becomes confused with the rude behaviour of Marlow as he was sure of the identity of the guest (his future son-in-law). Towards end of the play, Tony again tricks his mother Mrs. Hardcastle during the time of their departure to Aunt Pedigree's house. However, what evokes laughter as well as a critique to the character of Mrs. Hardcastle is the fact that the lady who considers herself as a privileged one could not even locate her own backward.

Even though deception and misunderstanding seems to be used as light hearted themes, yet there are incidents where the same themes act in an alternate way. It is the theme of deception that change the whole plot. Marlow not only got tricked by Tony but also faced embarrassing situations. By the end of the play, however, nobody looked back at his mistakes. Rather importance was given to his positive traits. The happy marriage of Kate and Marlow is suggestive of the fact that even though Marlow faced lots of deceptions, yet those helped him to open up with a woman from the upper class which seems to be beneficial for him.

- **Class differentiation:**

Written at a time when the whole England was witnessing rapid geographical shifts and differences, the play can be seen as a connecting link between the country life and the city life. The play is more about the master-servant relation or the high class and lower class divisions. Throughout the play, the higher class aristocratic people are shown as those who predicted the lower class people and treated them likewise. Marlow mistreats Mr. Hardcastle only because he thought him to be the keeper of the inn.

- **Courtship and Love:**

Like most comedies of the time, *She Stoops to Conquer* is also a story more about courtship and how the couples overcome their obstacles

to finally have a happy conjugal life. Most of the traditional comedies exaggerate the whole concept of love. The play becomes a platform to satirise those exaggerated obstacles. Rather, emphasis is given more on individuals' journey towards enlightenment which becomes a factor for the starting of a romantic relationship. A study of the character of Marlow will help to know this. A person who is unable to socialize with women of his class, Marlow is shown developing a dilemma in his mind regarding the courtship with Kate. However, by the end of the play, Marlow overcomes the embarrassment and accepts Kate.

Since the play is a trial against the sentimental comedy, unlike many of the sentimental comedies of the time, Goldsmith has not portrayed typical couples from the higher classes, separated by strict parents or class difference. Rather, emphasis is given to the portrayal of two normal couples in the play.

- **Parents and Children:**

The play shows the effect of parenting on a child's character. The play is a platform to highlight the balance that is needed to make the children understand the difference between freedom and independence. Example can be said of Mr. Hardcastle. Even though portrayed as an old fashioned person, Mr. Hardcastle's concern about Kate help in successfully raising a daughter who is respectful towards her father and at the same time is capable of making her own decisions. On the other hand, Tony Lumpkin reflects how bad parenting can affect someone. It is Mrs. Hardcastle who spoiled Tony by covering up him in almost every aspect.

6.4 *She Stoops to Conquer* as an anti-sentimental Comedy:

To discuss the play in the light of anti-sentimental comedy, one must know what sentimental comedy is.

The sentimental comedy came up in the 18th century as a new form of drama. This form of drama appeals one's emotions. The main point of reflection is the philosophical conception of human being as inherently good but capable of moving to wrong paths through bad examples. The aim behind the form is to evoke emotion from the audience as a tract against the moral ambiguity of the Restoration period. Even though the genre gets the name sentimental comedy, yet it does not have too much humour in it.

The sentimental comedies had certain specific characteristics. The very first is the teaching nature. These plays aim at giving a moral lesson that the audience can carry home by the end of the plays. The prime focus becomes the middle class people and the protagonist is someone who at the initial stage is a virtuous person but eventually loses the track because of some negative influence. This is done because the whole of the sentimental comedies try to bring forth the virtue versus vice scenario in front of the audience. Every sentimental comedies try to focus on atleast a redemption of the sins before the end of the play. In order to make the audience understand the moralities in a better way, the playwrights of the genre always tried their best to evoke sympathy and pathos. Coming to the plot structure, the sentimental comedies hardly have any realistic plot. Because of the focus of imparting moral lessons, the playwrights hardly focused on the plot and plot structure. The only thing that make this form of play a comedy is the happy ending. Other than this, these comedies evoke more pathos and sympathy than humour.

Anti-sentimental comedy, can be said as a reaction against sentimental comedy. These form of comedy, this, is going back to old form of comedy. These dramas are low farce and situational humour. Dealing mainly with the upper class society, these forms of drama have relationships and intrigues of men and women living in sophisticated society. Contrary to the sentimental comedy, the anti-sentimental comedy is pure comedy. It evokes laughter and are never tragic. Verbal and situational irony plays a vital role in the anti-sentimental comedy.

Goldsmith is one of the pioneering figure who practiced anti-sentimental comedy. Goldsmith argues that the true function of a comedy is to exhibit humour. He argues that a comedy should exhibit human follies in such a manner that it can evoke laughter among audiences. Goldsmith opposed sentimental comedy because sentimental comedy is more a tragedy than a comedy. In place of laughter, the sentimental comedy provides tears, serious heroes and heroines or a pathetic love. Goldsmith, thus, tried to revive sincere laughter on stage.

Richard Sheridan also argued against sentimental comedy and as a result of these reactions, sentimental comedies were driven out. With this, the emotions, moralities, preachings and meddling sentimentality were replaced by humour and wit in the form of anti-sentimental comedies. This form of drama is pure comedy.

Goldsmith's '*She stoops to Conquer*' is one of the best examples of anti-sentimental comedy. The play was first known as 'The Mistakes of a Night' and is a perfect mixture of wit and humour. The fun, humour, mischievous tricks by Tony Lumpkin and the witty dialogues of the play make it a direct attack on the sentimental comedy. Goldsmith through the play tried to reform the very idea of comedy. The very fact that comedy was supposed to be humorous and exhibit laughter was counterquestioned by arguing that comedy can also represent immoral actions and such actions need to be reformed through plot and necessarily through characterisation.

The play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, stands with the concept of anti-sentimental comedy right from the prologue as the prologue directly addressed and mourns the deaths of comedy.

The prologue not only mourns the death of comedy but also criticises the sentimental comedies and hope for a reformation in the whole genre of the comedy through this work of Goldsmith. The anti-sentimental comedy, in contrast to sentimental comedy, gives emphasis on the sophisticated lifestyle rather than a middle class protagonist. We have Marlow in the play who looked down Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle thinking then to be the owner of an inn. He is also portrayed as someone who has different attitude towards the woman of high classes and woman of the lower statuses. This class consciousness made Marlow realises by the end of the play that his relationships with Kate (disguised as a maid) would be rejected by his father. Such reflection of the growing division in the anti-sentimental comedy.

An attack to the sentimental comedy is also given through the character of Tony Lumpkin. A comical character who happened to be the star trick player in the whole play brings forth humour in the play. Tony not only tricked Marlow and Hastings but also tried to help Constance and Hastings elope by stealing the jewels from his mother, Mrs. Hardcastle. Such immoral action goes against the moralistic tone of the sentimental comedy which always tries to impart a good lesson to people. But in *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith presents immoral action without characterization rather through the story or the plot.

As an anti-sentimental comedy, the play not only projects a happy ending but also the reformation of the immortality. In contrast to the moral

characters, the anti-sentimental uses its plot where in the characters intertwined to accept the actions. In the play both Constance and Hastings decided to accept their mistakes of elopement confront in front of Mrs.Hardcastle. Their marriage being accepted by Hardcastles leads to a happy ending of the play which is suggestive of a typical Shakespearean comedy. The play not only projects the happy ending of a typical Shakespearean comedy, but also reflects certain other characteristics like mistaken identity and cheating. Marlow and Hastings become the victim of the mistaken identity.

Check Your Progress:

Can you find out any other points that will help justify the play as an anti- sentimental comedy? (Write within 150 words)

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Can you spot the differences between sentimental comedy and anti-sentimental comedy? (Write within 150 words)

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6.5 Probable Questions:

1. Discuss Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* as an anti-sentimental comedy.
2. Oliver Goldsmith’s eighteenth-century production *She Stoops to Conquer* restored humour to the English theatre after almost half a century. Discuss.
3. Elaborate upon the title of Oliver Goldsmith’s play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
4. The subtitle of Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* had initially been conceived as its title. Discuss how its encapsulates the play’s spirit
5. Of the three young men in Oliver Goldsmith’s ‘ , who would you consider the play’s hero – Hastings, Marlow or Tony Lumpkin. Substantiate your choice with arguments from the text.

6. Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* attempts to subtly critique the social snobbishness of the 18th century English aristocracy. Discuss.
7. In Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, the playwright attempts to both establish and deconstruct the essential difference between the town and the countryside that largely characterized Neo-classical literature. Discuss with reference to the text.
8. Discuss the theme of courtship and marriage that looms large over Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.
9. In Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, both Kate Hardcastle and Constance Neville are the agents of their respective marriages. Do you agree?
10. Discuss dramatic irony of situation and dialogue in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.
11. Write an essay on humour in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.
12. Discuss Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* as a comedy of errors.
13. Discuss Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* as a comedy of manners.

6.6 Summing Up:

Throughout the whole unit, some of the important aspects of the play has been discussed. The play can be read under the prism of various themes and sub-themes. Very few has been given light in the whole units. Light to those themes can help in the further reading of the text.

6.7 References and Suggested Reading:

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