Master of Arts (1ST YEAR)

MA-201

ENGLISH

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Subject : MA (English)	
Course Code: M.A. 201	Author : Dr. Nutan Yadav
Unit :01 (1550-1660) Sem-2	
Hamlet By William Shakespeare	

Lesson Structure

1.1 Learning objectives

- To develop critical thinking among students towards literature.
- To enhance their knowledge of literature.
- To let them enjoy different genres of literature.
- To make them proficient in the use of English language.

1.2 Introduction

Introduction of Age (Elizabethan Age)

The **Elizabethan Age** is the period associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and is often considered to be a golden age in English history. It was an age considered to be the height of the English Renaissance and saw the full flowering of English literature and English poetry. In Elizabethan theater, William Shakespeare, among others, composed and staged plays in a variety of settings that broke away from England's past style of plays. It was an age of expansion and exploration abroad, while at home the Protestant Reformation was established and successfully defended against the Catholic powers of the Continent.

The Elizabethan Age is viewed so highly because of the contrasts with the periods before and after. It was a brief period of largely internal peace between the English Reformation, with battles between Protestants and Catholics, and the battles between the parliament and the monarchy that would engulf the seventeenth

century. The Protestant-Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement and parliament was still not strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

1.3 Main Body of the Text

1.3.1 About the age

The renaissance period of literature (Elizabethan period) was marked by a strong national spirit, patriotism, religious tolerance, social content, intellectual progress, and unbounded enthusiasm. Such an age of thought, feeling & vigorous action, finds its best expression in the drama. Theater and poetry were the dominant forms of literature during this period. The drama was at its heyday during the Elizabethan era, and English people developed a sense of appreciation for plays performance, and very quickly that the habit of attending the theater halls was rooted in the English culture.

Although historians have delineated the eras of British literature in different ways over time, common divisions are outlined below.

- Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Period (450–1066)
- Middle English Period (1066–1500)
- The Renaissance (1500–1660)
- The Neoclassical Period (1660–1785)
- The Romantic Period (1785–1832

William Shakespeare(1564-1616)

1.3.2 About the author

William Shakespeare was an actor, playwright, poet, and theatre entrepreneur in London during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. He was baptized on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England, in the Holy Trinity Church. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway with whom he had three children. He died in his hometown of Stratford on 23 April 1616, aged 52.

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon" (or simply "the Bard"). His extant works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays, 154 sonnets, three long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of them of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. They also continue to be studied and reinterpreted. Shakespeare produced most of his known

works between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories and are regarded as some of the best work produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until 1608, among them *Hamlet, Romeo* and *Juliet*, *Othello, King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, all considered to be among the finest works in the English language. In the last phase of his life, he wrote tragicomedies (also known as romances) and collaborated with other playwrights. Many of Shakespeare's plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy in his lifetime.

Most Famous Works of Shakespeare

1. *Romeo and Juliet* (1595)
2. *The Merchant of Venice* (1595-96)
3. *Henry V* (1597-99)
4. *Hamlet* (1601)
5. Othello (1603-04)
6. King Lear (1605-06)

William Shakespeare altered his writing style significantly between his first play (1590-92) and his last (1613). For example, his style of 1590 was somewhat rigid in its adherence to established rules, though it did contain flashes of brilliance that astounded and delighted audiences. The style of the early 1600s, on the other

hand, was more creative and free because he had learned to listen more to his inner voice and less to the dictates of literary convention. In his later years—in particular, when he wrote The Tempest—Shakespeare achieved a writing mastery that confirmed what earlier masterpieces such as Hamlet and King Lear suggested: that he was one of the greatest writers in history.

Scholars generally assign each of his plays to one of four periods, (depending on the quality and maturity of the writing and characterization) classify as the Early Period, the Balanced Period, the Overflowing Period, and the Final Period.

Early Period (1589-1595)

His early plays seem technically rigid; somewhat immature. The plots generally are well organized.
These plays are often superficial or shallow as compared with the characterization in later plays.
Dialogues of these plays are sometimes stilted, unnatural.
Shakespeare tries hard—maybe too hard—to be consistent in the structure of his lines.

Balanced Period(1595-1601)

In style, the plays of this period are less technically rigid; more creative. The plots are generally well designed. Shakespeare demonstrates his range by writing outstanding works in three genres: comedy (As You Like It, Twelfth Night), tragedy (Hamlet, Julius

Caesar), and history (Henry IV Part I, Henry V). In addition, he presents a highly tragic character, Shylock, in a comedy (The Merchant of Venice).

The characterization of these plays is Strong and rounded, reflecting deep insight into human nature. Among the magnificent character portrayals of this period are those of Hamlet, Macbeth, Shylock, Othello, Iago, and Brutus. In Henry IV Parts I and II, Shakespeare achieves a wonderful balance between the comic (represented by Sir John Falstaff)

A mixture of verse and prose is depicted in dialogues. Shakespeare also uses the soliloquy as more than a device to disclose the direction of the plot, to present pretty poetry, or to deliver long-winded asides. In Hamlet, Macbeth, and Julius Caesar, for example, soliloquies plumb the depths of the characters' souls, revealing doubt, indecision, fear, and ambition. The "To be or not to be" soliloquy in Hamlet, perhaps the most famous passage in English literature, reveals all of these emotions.

Overflowing Period (1601-1608).

Plays of this period are highly creative and are bursting with insight. Shakespeare ignores many rules to allow his genius to "overflow." The plots of this period sometimes twist and turn, challenging the reader with their complexity. Characterization is superb and deeply insightful. Dialogues of these plays are often highly suggestive of the

speaker's state of mind and suffused with memorable metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech. Many passages are in prose.

Final Period (1601-1608)

The plays of this period (Cymbeline, Henry VIII, Pericles, The Tempest, The Winter's Tale) depict his mastery. Shakespeare has just the right mix of technical skill, creativity, and wisdom while exhibiting hope for flawed humanity.

Characterization is Superb, deeply insightful. Several plays of this period—including Pericles, The Winter's Tale, and Cymbeline—introduce characters who suffer loss, then regain what they have lost. Dialogues are highly creative, with many memorable passages in both verse and prose.

Shakespeare was an astute businessman as well as an artist. He recognized that he could entertain his audiences by using characters and language that would appeal to both the noble and the lower classes. He mixed both bawdy and sophisticated humor to appeal to his larger audience. He also wrote about the human experience with universal themes of love, ambition, and envy that are still felt and loved by modern audiences.

The plays are often categorized as tragedies, comedies, or histories. Tragedies featured sympathetic protagonists who were doomed by their flaws. Comedies tended to be more upbeat, with happy endings that often led to marriage. The historical plays were frequently

politically motivated to appeal to the Elizabethan court and featured British and Scottish kings.

As an actor, Shakespeare was present during the production of his plays and therefore wrote them with very little stage direction. The dialogue was written in blank verse and iambic pentameter, meaning that each line of speech is ten syllables long and unrhymed. In his early works, lines were often stressed at the end. As his writing developed, Shakespeare gained an understanding that a more lyrical style of writing would hold the interest of the audience and be more pleasing to the ear. He developed a characteristic cadence to his dialogue, stressing his lines in the second syllable to provide a rhythmic pattern to his speeches.

Shakespeare's writing developed and evolved throughout his career. Scholars often divide his work into periods based on different aspects of his writing style.

Still early in Shakespeare's career, the plays of this period tend to be less sophisticated than his later works. The plays of this period are typically set in Roman and Medieval times.

Shakespeare developed his writing further, with scenes flowing more naturally. His comedy became more sophisticated and he set himself apart from other playwrights by the use of comic relief and mild humor in his tragedies. His most famous work of this period, The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, is a fine example of using the servant class, especially Juliet's nurse, to break the tension with comic relief.

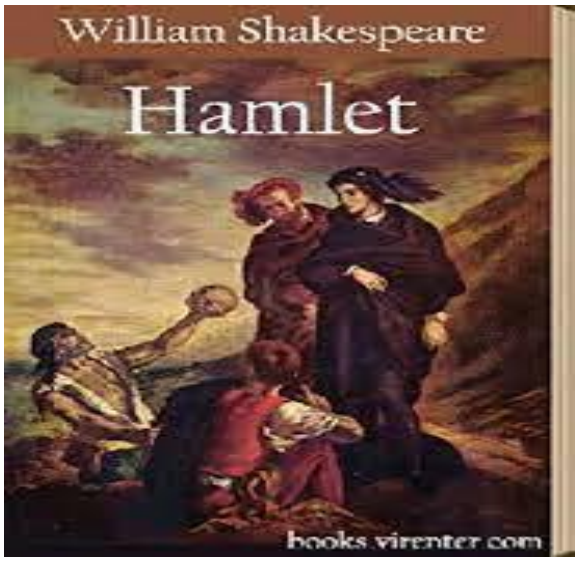
In 1609, Shakespeare published his collection of one hundred fifty-four sonnets. Like his plays, the sonnets encompass many aspects of the human experience. Mortality is a strong theme, explored from the perspective of youth being encouraged to procreate to extend their lives to a future generation. Mortality is also examined as he writes about the lives of lovers growing old, death, and the brief nature of existence.

The sonnets are constructed of fourteen lines, divided into three groups of four lines, called quatrains, and a final group of two lines called a couplet. Usually, the mood of the sonnet changes in the third quatrain as the writer expresses a realization or sudden insight.

All of the sonnets are written in iambic pentameter and the final word in each line follows an abab cdcd efef gg rhyming scheme. To this day, any poem written in this pattern is known as a Shakespearean sonnet.

Shakespeare retired from writing in 1613 and died three years later at the age of fifty-two. Most of his works were published posthumously in 1623.

1.3.3 About the play



Summary

On a dark winter night, a ghost walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Discovered first by a pair of watchmen, then by the scholar Horatio, the ghost resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet, whose brother Claudius has inherited the throne and married the king's widow, Queen Gertrude. When Horatio and the watchmen bring Prince Hamlet, the son of Gertrude and the dead king, to see the ghost, it speaks to him, declaring ominously that it is indeed his father's spirit, and that he was murdered by none other than Claudius. Ordering Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who usurped his throne and married his wife, the ghost disappears with the dawn.

Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's death, but, because he is contemplative and thoughtful by nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and even apparent madness. Claudius and Gertrude worry about the prince's erratic behavior and attempt to discover its cause. They employ a pair of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. When Polonius, the pompous Lord Chamberlain, suggests that Hamlet may be mad in love for his daughter, Ophelia, Claudius agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with her. But though Hamlet certainly seems mad, he does not seem to love Ophelia: he orders her to enter a nunnery and declares that he wishes to ban marriages.

A group of traveling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He will have the players perform a scene closely resembling the sequence by which Hamlet imagines his uncle to have murdered his father so that if Claudius is guilty, he will surely react. When the moment of the murder arrives in the theater, Claudius leaps up and leaves the room. Hamlet and Horatio agree that this proves his guilt. Hamlet goes to kill Claudius but finds him praying. Since he believes that killing Claudius while in prayer would send Claudius's soul to heaven, Hamlet considers that it would be an act of inadequate revenge and decides to wait. Claudius, now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fearing for his safety, orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bed-chamber Polonius has hidden behind a tapestry. Hearing a noise from behind the tapestry, Hamlet believes the king is hiding there. He draws his sword and stabs through the fabric, killing Polonius. For this crime, he is immediately dispatched to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. However, Claudius's plan for Hamlet includes more than banishment, as he has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sealed orders for the King of England demanding that Hamlet be put to death.

In the aftermath of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns in the river. Polonius's son, Laertes, who has been staying in France, returns to Denmark in a rage. Claudius convinces him that Hamlet is to blame for his father's and sister's deaths. When Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet indicating that the prince has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, Claudius concocts a plan to use Laertes' desire for revenge to secure Hamlet's death. Laertes will fence with Hamlet in innocent sport, but Claudius will poison Laertes' blade so that if he draws blood, Hamlet will die. As a backup plan, the king decides to poison a goblet, which he will give Hamlet to drink should Hamlet score the first or second hits of the match. Hamlet returns to the vicinity of Elsinore just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Stricken with grief, he attacks Laertes and declares that he had always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he tells Horatio that he believes one must be

prepared to die since death can come at any moment. A foolish courtier named Osric arrives on Claudius's orders to arrange the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

The sword-fighting begins. Hamlet scores the first hit but declines to drink from the king's proffered goblet. Instead, Gertrude takes a drink from it and is swiftly killed by the poison. Laertes succeeds in wounding Hamlet, though Hamlet does not die of the poison immediately. First, Laertes is cut by his own sword's blade, and, after revealing to Hamlet that Claudius is responsible for the queen's death, he dies from the blade's poison. Hamlet then stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies, and Hamlet dies immediately after achieving his revenge.

At this moment, a Norwegian prince named Fortinbras, who has led an army to Denmark and attacked Poland earlier in the play, enters with ambassadors from England, who report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Fortinbras is stunned by the gruesome sight of the entire royal family lying sprawled on the floor dead. He moves to take the power of the kingdom. Horatio, fulfilling Hamlet's last request, tells him Hamlet's tragic story. Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be carried away in a manner befitting a fallen soldier.

1.4 Further Body of the Text

1.4.1 Character list Character List

Hamlet	**Protogonist**
Claudius	**Hamlet’s uncle**
Gertrude	**Hamlet’s mother**
Ophelia	**Hamlet’s beloved**
Polonius	**Ophelia's father**
Laertes	**Ophelia’s brother**
Horatio	**Hamlet’s friend**

1.4.2 Original Text

Act wise Summary of the play

The ghost of the King of Denmark tells his son Hamlet to avenge his murder by killing the new king, Hamlet's uncle. Hamlet feigns madness, contemplates life and death, and seeks revenge. His uncle, fearing for his life, also devises plots to kill Hamlet. The play ends with a duel, during which the King, Queen, Hamlet's opponent, and Hamlet himself are all killed.

Act I

Late at night, guards on the battlements of Denmark's Elsinore castle are met by Horatio, Prince Hamlet's friend from school. The guards describe a ghost they have seen that resembles Hamlet's father, the

recently-deceased king. At that moment, the Ghost reappears, and the guards and Horatio decide to tell Hamlet.

Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, married Hamlet's recently-widowed mother, becoming the new King of Denmark. Hamlet continues to mourn for his father's death and laments his mother's lack of loyalty. When Hamlet hears of the Ghost from Horatio, he wants to see it for himself.

Elsewhere, the royal attendant Polonius says farewell to his son Laertes, who is departing for France. Laertes warns his sister, Ophelia, away from Hamlet and thinks too much of his attentions towards her.

The Ghost appears to Hamlet, claiming indeed to be the ghost of his father. He tells Hamlet about how Claudius, the current King and Hamlet's uncle, murdered him, and Hamlet swears vengeance for his father. Hamlet decides to feign madness while he tests the truth of the Ghost's allegations (always a good idea in such situations).

Act II

According to his plan, Hamlet begins to act strangely. He rejects Ophelia, while Claudius and Polonius, the royal attendant, spy on him. They had hoped to find the reason for Hamlet's sudden change in behavior but could not. Claudius summons Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, old friends of Hamlet to find out what's going on in his

mind. Their arrival coincides with a group of traveling actors that Hamlet happens to know well. Hamlet writes a play that includes scenes that mimic the murder of Hamlet's father. During rehearsal, Hamlet and the actor plot to present Hamlet's play before the King and Queen.

Act III

At the performance, Hamlet watches Claudius closely to see how he reacts. The play provokes Claudius, and he interrupts the action by storming out. He immediately resolves to send Hamlet away. Hamlet is summoned by his distressed mother, Gertrude, and on the way, he happens upon Claudius kneeling and attempting to pray. Hamlet reasons that to kill the King now would only send his soul to heaven rather than hell. He decides to spare his life for the time being.

Polonius hides in Gertrude's room to protect her from her unpredictable son. When Hamlet arrives to scold his mother, she hears Polonius moving behind the arras (a kind of tapestry). He stabs the tapestry and, in so doing, kills Polonius. The ghost of Hamlet's father reappears and warns his son not to delay revenge or upset his mother.

Act IV

Hamlet is sent to England, supposedly as an ambassador, just as King Fortinbras of Norway crosses Denmark with an army to attack

Poland. During his journey, Hamlet discovers Claudius has a plan to have him killed once he arrives. He returns to Denmark alone, sending his companions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in his place.

Rejected by Hamlet, Ophelia is now desolate at the loss of her father. She goes mad and drowns.

Act V

On the way back to Denmark, Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard (along with a gravedigger), where they talk of the chances of life and death. Ophelia's funeral procession arrives at the very same graveyard (what luck!). Hamlet confronts Laertes, Ophelia's brother, who has taken his father's place at the court.

A duel is arranged between Hamlet and Laertes. During the match, Claudius conspires with Laertes to kill Hamlet. They plan that Hamlet will die either on a poisoned rapier or with poisoned wine. The plans go awry when Gertrude unwittingly drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Then both Laertes and Hamlet are wounded by the poisoned blade, and Laertes dies.

Hamlet, in his death throes, kills Claudius. Hamlet dies, leaving only his friend Horatio to explain the truth to the new king, Fortinbras, as he returns in victory from the Polish wars.

1.4.3 Analysis of the Major Character

Details of characters
Characters Character List

Hamlet

He is the Prince of Denmark in the play *Hamlet,* and the protagonist. About thirty years old at the start of the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle's scheming and disgust for his mother's sexuality. A reflective and thoughtful young man who has studied at the University of Wittenberg, Hamlet is often indecisive and hesitant, but at other times prone to rash and impulsive acts.

Claudius

He is the King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. The villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven by his sexual appetites and his lust for power, but he occasionally shows signs of guilt and human feeling—his love for Gertrude, for instance, seems sincere.

Gertrude

The Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married Claudius. Gertrude loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth.

Polonius

He is the Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, a pompous, conniving old man. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia.

Horatio

He is hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlet's death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlet's story.

Ophelia

She is Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes. Dependent on men telling her how to behave, she gives in to Polonius's schemes to spy on Hamlet. Even in her lapse into madness and death, she remains maidenly, singing songs about flowers and finally drowning in the river amid the flower garlands she had gathered.

Laertes

He is Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is a foil for the reflective Hamlet.

Fortinbras

The young Prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras) was killed by Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet). Now

Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honor, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet.

The Ghost

The specter of Hamlet's recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. However, it is not entirely certain whether the ghost is what it appears to be, or whether it is something else. Hamlet speculates that the ghost might be a devil sent to deceive him and tempt him into murder, and the question of what the ghost is or where it comes from is never definitively resolved.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

They are two slightly bumbling courtiers, former friends of Hamlet from Wittenberg, who are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior.

Osric

He is the foolish courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.

Voltimand and Cornelius

These are two courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

Marcellus and Bernardo

These are the officers who first see the ghost walking the ramparts of Elsinore and who summon Horatio to witness it. Marcellus is present when Hamlet first encounters the ghost.

Francisco

He is a soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Reynaldo

He is Polonius's servant, who is sent to France by Polonius to check up on and spy on Laertes.

1.5 Check Your Progress

- Discuss the chief characteristic of Shakespearean tragedy.
- Analysis of the character of Hamlet
- Analysis of the character of Ophelia
- Discuss Hamlet as a revenge tragedy

1.6 Summary

"Hamlet": Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's murder, committed by his uncle, Claudius. Hamlet's quest for revenge causes the deaths of many friends and loved ones, including his mother. In the end, Hamlet is lured into a fight to the death with Laertes, brother of Ophelia, and is stabbed by a poisoned blade. Hamlet kills his attacker, as well as his uncle Claudius, before dying himself.

1.7 Keywords

- Soliloquy
- Revenge
- Tragedy
- Catharsis
- Aside
- Dramatic
- Poisoned

1.8 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)

- **Discuss the chief characteristic of Shakespearean tragedy**.
- **Hamlet as a revenge tragedy**
- **The character sketch of Hamlet.**
- **Discuss Hamlet as a revenge tragedy**

1.9 Answers to Your Progress

1. Discuss the chief characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy.

Elements of Shakespeare's Tragedies

In Shakespeare's tragedies, the main protagonist generally has a flaw that leads to his downfall. There are both internal and external struggles and often a bit of the supernatural thrown in for good measure (and tension). Often some passages or characters have the job of lightening the mood (comic relief), but the overall tone of the piece is quite serious.

All of Shakespeare's tragedies contain at least one or more of these elements:

- A tragic hero
- A dichotomy of good and evil
- A tragic waste
- Hamartia (the hero’s tragic flaw)
- Issues of fate or fortune
- Greed
- Foul revenge
- Supernatural elements
- Internal and external pressures
- The paradox of life

2. Analysis of the character of Hamlet

Hamlet

Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries, and the first thing to point out about him is that he is enigmatic. There is always more to him than the other characters in the play can figure out; even the most careful and clever readers come away with the sense that they don’t know everything there is to know about this character. Hamlet tells other characters that there is more to him than meets the eye—notably, his mother, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—but his fascination involves much more than this. When he speaks, he sounds as if there’s something important he’s not

saying, maybe something even he is not aware of. The ability to write soliloquies and dialogues that create this effect is one of Shakespeare's most impressive achievements.

Hamlet is a university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death. He is extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions that cannot be answered with any certainty. Faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, evidence that any other character in a play would believe, Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle's guilt before trying to act. The standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt" is simply unacceptable to him. He is equally plagued with questions about the afterlife, about the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die—the list is extensive.

But even though he is thoughtful to the point of obsession, Hamlet also behaves rashly and impulsively. When he does act, it is with surprising swiftness and little or no premeditation, as when he stabs Polonius through a curtain without even checking to see who he is. He seems to step very easily into the role of a madman, behaving erratically and upsetting the other characters with his wild speech and pointed innuendos.

It is also important to note that Hamlet is extremely melancholic and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and his own family—indeed, in the world at large. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates

Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At several points in the play, he contemplates his death and even the option of suicide.

But, despite all of the things with which Hamlet professes dissatisfaction, it is remarkable that the prince and heir apparent of Denmark should think about these problems only in personal and philosophical terms. He spends relatively little time thinking about the threats to Denmark's national security from without or the threats to its stability from within (some of which he helps to create through his carelessness).

3. Analysis of the character of Ophelia

Ophelia's role in the play revolves around her relationships with three men. She is the daughter of Polonius, the sister of Laertes, and up until the beginning of the play's events, she has also been romantically involved with Hamlet. Ophelia's relationships with these men restrict her agency and eventually lead to her death. From her very first scene, men tell Ophelia what to do. In Act One, scene three, where we first meet her, Laertes and Polonius admonish Ophelia not to trust Hamlet's expressions of love. Despite the force of their warnings, Laertes and Polonius both trust Ophelia to make her own decisions. However, as the question of Hamlet's state of mind increasingly dire, Polonius tightens the reins on his daughter. At the top of Act, Three Polonius forces Ophelia to return Hamlet's letters

and renounce his affections. Ophelia obeys, but her action sends Hamlet into a fit of misogynistic rage. Soon after, Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius. The combination of her former lover's cruelty and her father's death sends Ophelia into a fit of grief. In Act Four, she spirals into madness and dies under ambiguous circumstances. Ophelia's tragedy lies in the way she loses her innocence through no fault of her own.

4. Discuss Hamlet as a revenge tragedy.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a complex and multifaceted play bringing together many themes. It is evident that in writing *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, to some extent, adopted the dramatic conventions of revenge tragedy. Revenge proved to be a popular theme for Elizabethan dramatists and the audience. Although it was a wild justice, the Elizabethan audience considered vengeance to be a pious duty laid upon the next of kin. The old law claimed an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; vengeance demanded both the eyes, a jaw full of teeth, and above all the victim should go direct to hell there to live in everlasting torment. An act of perfect revenge, therefore, needed great artistry.

Hamlet is a play that very closely follows the dramatic conventions of revenge tragedy. All revenge tragedies originally stemmed from the Greeks, who wrote and performed the first plays. After the Greeks, came Seneca who was particularly influential to all Elizabethan playwrights including Shakespeare. The two most famous English

revenge tragedies written in the Elizabethan era were Hamlet, written by Shakespeare, and *The Spanish Tragedy*, written by Thomas Kyd. These two plays used almost all of the conventions for revenge tragedies in one way or the other. Hamlet especially incorporated all revenge conventions which truly made Hamlet a typical revenge play.

During the Elizabethan era, revenge plays were well acclaimed. Most of them were a typical revenge tragedy, a melodrama with so many turns and twists to keep the audience spell-bound. *Hamlet* as well as *The Spanish Tragedy* tackled almost all those areas that were essential for the consummation of a great revenge tragedy.

Shakespeare in *Hamlet* employs the framework of Senecan Tragedy to convey the revenge theme. But underneath the outer framework of Senecan Revenge Tragedy, lie key Shakespearean themes of -

- human condition,
- social indoctrination,
- the morality of the ghost's injunction, and
- the ethics of revenge.

The opening scene sets the tone of the play shrouded in mystery and horror. The ghost appears to the night guards, a shadowy figure resembling much in the dress and the armor of the late king. The appearance of the dead king's ghost has a profound effect upon the night guards as Marcellus remarks: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Although Horatio will not believe in the ghost until witnesses his eyes; its appearance "harrows him with fear and

wonder". It is not made to speak rather "stalks away majestically". The ghost appears twice in the opening scene but does not vouchsafe a reply to Horatio's questions. Hamlet is amazed at the idea of his father's apparition:

"My father's spirit in arms! All is not well/ I doubt some foul play."

Hamlet himself is dumbfounded at the sight of the ghost. The ghost makes the shocking revelation of its murder to Hamlet. It further enjoins on Hamlet the sacred duty of avenging his "foul and the most unnatural murder". The ghost's injunctions are very clear:

"Let not the royal bed of Denmark be/A couch for luxury and damned incest".

The awful revelation of the ghost forms the soul of the tragedy and drives the entire action.

Verity points out:

"Without the ghost's initial revelation of truth to Hamlet, there would be no occasion for revenge; in other words no tragedy of Hamlet."

Hamlet's mind is assailed with doubt whether or not this apparition is a demon sent from hell, or if it is truly his father's spirit which has come from purgatory, to divulge the horrors of his murder, in the hope of revenge:

"The spirit that I have seen/ May be the devil and the devil hath power/To assume a pleasing shape."

To verify the truth of the ghost's statement, Hamlet first feigns madness, and then gets enacted mousetrap play to "catch the conscience of the king". During the play Hamlet closely watches Claudius' reaction when the actors perform the murder scene. Hamlet's plan works and his uncle in a fit of discomfort runs out of the room, where Hamlet goes after him. Now, Hamlet knows that Claudius is guilty.

Afterward, Hamlet finds Claudius at prayer, confessing his sins:

"O, my offense is rank it smells to heaven/It hath primal eldest curse upon it/A brother's murder."

He pulls out his sword and gets ready to kill Claudius. But suddenly Hamlet changes his mind because if he kills his uncle while he is praying he will go to heaven, and Hamlet wants him to go to hell. So Hamlet postpones the execution of his uncle at this point in the play.

The next confrontation between Hamlet and Claudius does not happen till the end of the book. Claudius hatches a plan according to which Hamlet and Laertes will have a mock sword fight, but Laertes will be using a real poisoned sword. Laertes stabs him with the poisoned sword then Hamlet takes hold of the poisoned sword, and stabs Laertes with it. Meanwhile, Queen Gertrude dies from the poisoned drink intended for Hamlet. As Laertes lays down dying he reveals to Hamlet that his uncle King Claudius was behind it all. Hamlet then in a fit of rage runs his uncle through with the poisoned sword. Hamlet

has now finally revenged his father but too late and at the cost of so many lives.

Hamlet fulfills all the conventions of typical revenge tragedy: there is murder, adultery, insanity, incestuous marriage, and faithfulness. Besides these, there is a melodramatic element also – violence and bloodshed, terrible and blood-chilling scenes – which is in line with the revenge tragedy conventions.

Hamlet is not a simple revenge tragedy. Shakespeare has woven complex threads of the contrasting characters. Shakespeare has introduced characters like Laertes and Fortinbras that foil Hamlet. Fortinbras, the son of the slain king of Norway, is all hot for action. He finds "a quarrel in a straw" and intends to risk his life even for an "egg-shell". He travels many miles to take his revenge and ultimately succeeds in conquering Denmark. When Hamlet murders Polonius, another revenge is ready to begin. Laertes is a typical revenger who is capable of direct and headstrong revenge even at the cost of damnation.

"To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil." he declares.

If Hamlet feels

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all",

Laertes consigns conscience to the devil, and will "cut his throat in the church". Hamlet, on the other hand, has to convert the external action of revenge into one that is internal, free, and truly moral.

Summing up, to say *Hamlet* is merely a revenge tragedy would be to do a great injustice. It would ignore the play's artistic superiority over other plays of this genre.

1.10 Suggested Readings

- Hibbard, G. R., ed. (1987). Hamlet. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-283416-9.
- Irace, Kathleen O., ed. (1998). The First Quarto of Hamlet. New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-65390-8.
- Jenkins, Harold, ed. (1982). Hamlet. The Arden Shakespeare,

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Subject : MA (English)	
Course Code: 201	Author: Dr.NutanYadav
Unit :02 (1550-1660) Sem-2	
Volpone by Ben Jonson	

Lesson Structure

2.1 Learning objectives

- To develop critical thinking among students towards literature.
- To enhance their knowledge of literature.
- To let them enjoy different genres of literature.
- To make them good in the English language.

2.2 Introduction

Introduction of Age (Elizabethan Age)

The **Elizabethan Age** is the period associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and is often considered to be a golden age in English history. It was an age considered to be the height of the English Renaissance and saw the full flowering of English literature and English poetry. In Elizabethan theater, William Shakespeare, among others, composed and staged plays in a variety of settings that broke away from England's past style of plays. It was an age of expansion and exploration abroad, while at home the Protestant Reformation was established and successfully defended against the Catholic powers of the Continent.

The Elizabethan Age is viewed so highly because of the contrasts with the periods before and after. It was a brief period of largely internal peace between the English Reformation, with battles between Protestants and Catholics, and the battles between the parliament and the monarchy that would engulf the seventeenth

century. The Protestant-Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement and parliament was still not strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

2.3 Main Body of the Text

2.3.1 About the age

The renaissance period of literature (Elizabethan period) was marked by a strong national spirit, patriotism, religious tolerance, social content, intellectual progress, and unbounded enthusiasm. Such an age of thought, feeling & vigorous action, finds its best expression in drama. Theater and poetry were the dominant forms of literature during this period. The drama was at its heyday during the Elizabethan era, and the English people developed a sense of appreciation for plays.

Although historians have delineated the eras of British literature in different ways over time, common divisions are outlined below.

- Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Period (450–1066)
- Middle English Period (1066–1500)
- The Renaissance (1500–1660)
- The Neoclassical Period (1600–1785)
- The Romantic Period (1785–1832)

2.3.2 About the Author

Ben Jonson was a towering literary figure, and his influence was enormous for he has been described as 'One of the most vigorous minds that ever added to the strength of English literature'. He popularized the comedy of manner. He is best known for his satire plays. Ben Jonson is among the best-known writers and theorists of English Renaissance literature, second in reputation only to Shakespeare. A prolific dramatist and a man of letters who highly learned the classics, he profoundly influenced the Augustan age through his emphasis on the precepts of Horace, Aristotle, and other classical Greek and Latin thinkers. While he is now remembered primarily for his satirical comedies, he also distinguished himself as a poet, pre-eminent writer of masques, erudite defender of his work, and the originator of English literary criticism. Jonson's professional reputation is often obscured by that of the man himself: bold, independent, and aggressive. He fashioned for himself an image as the sole arbiter of taste, standing for erudition and the supremacy of

classical models against what he perceived as the general populace's ignorant preference for the sensational. While his direct influence can be seen in each genre he undertook, his ultimate legacy is considered to be his literary craftsmanship, his strong sense of artistic form and control, and his role in bringing, as Alexander Pope noted, "critical learning into vogue."

His famous plays are:

- *Every Man in Humour(1598)*
- *Volpone or The Fox (1606)*
- *The Alchemist(1610)*
- *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and for his lyric and epigrammatic poetry.

Ben Jonson proved himself a great master in the decoration of "masks" – court balls, masquerades. He flourished as a dramatist during the first decade of the reign of James. By 1616, he had written all the plays on which his reputation as a playwright depended, including Catiline, Volpone,

- Epicoene
- The Silent Woman,
- The Alchemist,
- Bartholomew Fair,
- The Devil is an Ass.

The Satyr and *The Masque of Blackness* were among the two dozen plays, which he wrote for Jacob and Queen Anne. He was recognized as an honorary citizen of Edinburgh and was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree from Oxford University and lectured on rhetoric.

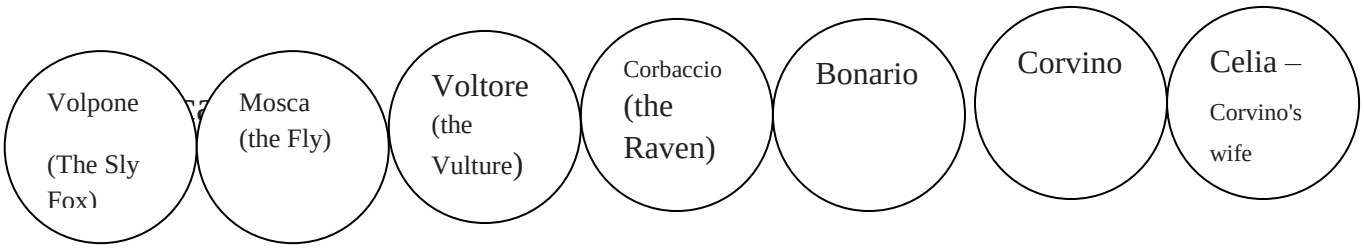
Ben Jonson died on August 6, 1637. He is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey with the inscription "O Rare Ben Jonson" embossed on his tombstone.

There are many legends about the rivalry between Jonson and Shakespeare, some of which may be true.

2.3.3 About the Book

Volpone is a comedy by Ben Jonson, first produced in 1605–1606, drawing on elements of city comedy and beast fable. A merciless satire of greed and lust, it remains Jonson's most-performed play, and it is ranked among the finest Jacobean-era comedies.

2.3.3Character List



- Volpone (the Sly Fox) – a greedy and rich childless Venetian *magnifico*
- Mosca (the Fly) – his servant
- Voltore (the Vulture) – a lawyer
- Corbaccio (the Raven) – an avaricious old miser
- Bonario – Corbaccio's son
- Corvino (the Carrion Crow) – a merchant
- Celia – Corvino's wife
- Sir Politic Would-Be – ridiculous Englishman
- Lady Would-Be (the parrot) – English lady and wife of Sir Politic-Would-Be

- Peregrine ("Pilgrim") – another, more sophisticated, an English traveler
- Nano – a dwarf, companion of Volpone
- Androgyno – companion of Volpone
- Castrone – a companion of Volpone
- The Avocatori – the judges of Venice

2.4 Further Body of the Text

Volpone *(The Fox)* is a Venetian gentleman who pretends to be on his death bed after a long illness to dupe Voltore *(The Vulture)*, Corbaccio *(The Raven)*, and Corvino *(The Crow)*, three men who aspire to inherit his fortune. In their turns, each man arrives at Volpone's house bearing a luxurious gift, intent upon having his name inscribed to the will of Volpone, as his heir. Mosca *(The Fly)*, Volpone's parasite servant, encourages each man, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, to believe that he has been named heir to Volpone's fortune; in the course of which, Mosca persuades Corbaccio to disinherit his son in favor of Volpone.

To Volpone, Mosca mentions that Corvino has a beautiful wife, Celia. Disguised as Scoto the Mountebank, Volpone goes to see Celia. Corvino drives away "Scoto" (Volpone), who then becomes insistent that he must possess Celia as his own. Mosca deceives Corvino into believing that the moribund Volpone will be cured of his illness if he lies in bed beside a young woman.

Believing that Volpone has been rendered impotent by his illness, Corvino offers his wife so that, when he is revived, Volpone will recognize Corvino as his sole heir.

Just before Corvino and Celia are due to arrive at Volpone's house, Corbaccio's son Bonario arrives to catch his father in the act of disinheriting him. Mosca guides Bonario to a side room, and Volpone and Celia are left alone. Upon failing to seduce Celia with fantastic promises of luxury and wealth, Volpone attempts to rape her. Bonario comes forward to rescue Celia. In the ensuing trial at court, the truth of the matter is well-buried by Voltore, using his prowess as a lawyer to convince the Avocatori, with false evidence given by Mosca, Volpone, and the other dupes.

There are episodes involving the English travelers Sir and Lady Politic Would-Be and Peregrine. Sir Politic constantly talks of plots and his outlandish business plans, while Lady Would-Be annoys Volpone with her ceaseless talking. Mosca coordinates a mix-up between them which leaves Peregrine, a more sophisticated traveler, feeling offended. He humiliates Sir Politic by telling him he is to be arrested for sedition and making him hide inside a giant tortoiseshell.

Volpone insists on disguising himself and having it announced that he has died and willed his wealth to Mosca, which enrages the would-be heirs Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, and everyone returns to court to dispute the will of Volpone, who becomes entangled in the circumstances of the plots that he and Mosca devised. Despite

Volpone's pleas, Mosca refuses to relinquish his new role as a rich man. Volpone reveals himself and his deceits to topple the rich Mosca. In the event, Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, Mosca, and Volpone himself finally are punished.

2.4.2 Act- Wish a summary of the play

Act -1 preface

Volpone takes place in seventeenth-century Venice, over one day. The play opens at the house of Volpone, a Venetian nobleman. He and his "parasite" Mosca—part slave, part servant, part lackey—enter the shrine where Volpone keeps his gold. Volpone has amassed his fortune, we learn, through dishonest means: he is a con artist. And we also learn that he likes to use his money extravagantly.

Soon, we see Volpone's latest con in action. For the last three years, he has been attracting the interest of three legacy hunters: Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old gentleman; and Corvino, a merchant—individuals interested in inheriting his estate after he dies. Volpone is known to be rich, and he is also known to be childless, have no natural heirs. Furthermore, he is believed to be very ill, so each of the legacy hunters lavishes gifts on him, in the hope that Volpone, out of gratitude, will make him his heir. The legacy hunters do not know that Volpone is actually in excellent health and merely faking illness to collect all those impressive "get-well" gifts.

Act -1

In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to Volpone, except for Corbaccio, who offers only a worthless (and probably poisoned) vial of medicine. But Corbaccio agrees to return later in the day to make Volpone his heir so that Volpone will return the favor. This act is a boon to Volpone, since Corbaccio, in all likelihood, will die long before Volpone does. After each hunter leaves, Volpone and Mosca laugh at each gullible. After Corvino's departure Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight living in Venice, arrives at the house but is told to come back three hours later. And Volpone decides that he will try to get a close look at Corvino's wife, Celia, who Mosca describes as one of the most beautiful women in all of Italy. She is kept under lock and key by her husband, who has ten guards on her at all times, but Volpone vows to use disguise to get around these barriers.

Act -2

The second act portrays a time just a short while later that day, and we meet Sir Politic would-be, Lady Politic's husband, who is conversing with Peregrine, a young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain. The two are walking in the public square in front of

Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua," actually Volpone in disguise as an Italian mountebank, or medicine-show man. Scoto engages in a long and colorful speech, hawking his new "oil", which is touted as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. Corvino arrives, just as she does this, and flies into a jealous rage, scattering the crows in the square. Volpone goes home and complains to Mosca that he is sick with lust for Celia, and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone. Meanwhile, Corvino berates his wife for tossing her handkerchief, since he interprets it as a sign of her unfaithfulness, and he threatens to murder her and her family as a result. He decrees that, as punishment, she will now no longer be allowed to go to Church, she cannot stand near windows (as she did when watching Volpone), and, most bizarrely, she must do everything backward from now on–she must even walk and speak backward. Mosca then arrives, implying to Corvino that if he lets Celia sleep with Volpone (as a "restorative" for Volpone's failing health), then Volpone will choose him as his heir. Suddenly, Corvino's jealousy disappears, and he consents to the offer.

Act -3

The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his power and his independence from Volpone. Mosca then runs into Bonario, Corbaccio's son, and informs the young man of his father's plans to disinherit him. He has

Bonario come back to Volpone's house with him, to watch Corbaccio sign the documents (hoping that Bonario might kill Corbaccio then and there out of rage, thus allowing Volpone to gain his inheritance early). Meanwhile Lady Politic again arrives at Volpone's residence, indicating that it is now mid-morning, approaching noon. This time, Volpone lets her in, but he soon regrets it, for he is exasperated by her talkativeness. Mosca rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that Sir Politic has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan (a high-class prostitute). Volpone then prepares for his seduction of Celia, while Mosca hides Bonario in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. But Celia and Corvino arrive first—Celia complains bitterly about being forced to be unfaithful, while Corvino tells her to be quiet and do her job. When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone greatly surprises Celia by leaping out of bed. Celia had expected an old, infirm man, but what she gets instead is a lothario who attempts to seduce her with a passionate speech. Always the good Christian, Celia refuses Volpone's advances, at which point Volpone says that he will seduce her. But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia. Bonario wounds Mosca on his way out. Corbaccio finally arrives, too late, as does Voltore. Mosca plots, with Voltore's assistance, how to get Volpone out of this mess.

A short while later, in the early afternoon, Peregrine and Sir Politic are still talking. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on

living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under consideration for making a great deal of money. They are soon interrupted by Lady Politic, who is convinced that Peregrine is the prostitute Mosca told her about—admittedly, in disguise. But Mosca arrives and tells Lady Politic that she is mistaken; the courtesan he referred to is now in front of the Senate (in other words, Celia). Lady Politic believes him and ends by giving Peregrine a seductive goodbye with a coy suggestion that they see each other again. Peregrine is incensed at her behavior and vows revenge on Sir Politic because of it. The scene switches to the Scrutineo, the Venetian Senate building, where Celia and Bonario have informed the judges of Venice about Volpone's deceit, Volpone's attempt to seduce Celia, Corbaccio's disinheritance of his son, and Corvino's decision to prostitute his wife. But the defendants make a very good case for themselves, led by their lawyer, Voltore. Voltaire portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son. The judges are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and (set up perfectly by Mosca) identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judge ordered that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.

Final Act

In the final act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is growing ill, for he is now feeling some of the symptoms he has been faking. To dispel his fears, he decides to engage in one final prank on the legacy hunters. He spreads a rumor that he has died and then tells Mosca to pretend that he has been made his master's heir. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three legacy hunters are fooled. Volpone then disguises himself as a Venetian guard, so that he can gloat in each legacy hunter's face over their humiliation, without being recognized. But Mosca lets the audience know that Volpone is dead in the eyes of the world and that Mosca will not let him "return to the world of the living" unless Volpone pays up, giving Mosca a share of his wealth.

Meanwhile, Peregrine is in disguising himself, playing his prank on Sir Politic. Peregrine presents himself as a merchant to the knight and informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the Turks. Politic, who once mentioned the idea in jest, is terrified. When three merchants who are in collusion with Peregrine knock on the door, Politic jumps into a tortoise-shell wine case to save him. Peregrine informs the merchants when they enter that he is looking at a valuable tortoise. The merchants decide to jump on the tortoise and demand that it crawl along the floor. They remark loudly upon its leg-garters and fine hand-gloves, before turning it over to reveal Sir Politic. Peregrine and the merchants go off, laughing at their prank,

and Sir Politic moans about how much he agrees with his wife's desire to leave Venice and go back to England.

Meanwhile, Volpone gloats in front of each legacy hunter, deriding them for having lost Volpone's inheritance to a parasite such as Mosca, and he successfully avoids recognition. But his plan backfires nonetheless. Voltore, driven to such a state of distraction by Volpone's teasing, decides to recant his testimony in front of the Senate, implicating both himself and more importantly Mosca as a criminal. Corvino accuses him of being a sore loser, upset that Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate upon his death, and the news of this death surprises the Senators greatly. Volpone nearly recovers from his blunder by telling Voltore, in the middle of the Senate proceeding, that "Volpone" is still alive. Mosca pretends to faint and claims to the Senate that he does not know where he is, how he got there, and that he must have been possessed by a demon during the last few minutes when he was speaking to them. He also informs the Senators that Volpone is not dead, contradicting Corvino. All seems good for Volpone until Mosca returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it. Mosca, after all, has a will, written by Volpone and in his signature, stating that he is Volpone's heir. Now that Volpone is believed to be dead, Mosca legally owns Volpone's property, and Mosca tells Volpone that he is not going to give it back by telling the truth. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his

wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Volpone ends up being sent to prison, while Mosca is consigned to a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. In the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the audience, simply asking them to applaud if they enjoyed the play they just saw.

2.4.3 Character Analysis

Volpone

The play's title character is its protagonist, though an inconsistent one. He disappears in Act IV, seemingly replaced by Mosca, and is first an instrument and then a victim of Jonson's satire of money-obsessed society. He is an instrument of it because it is through his ingenuity and cleverness that Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are duped and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events, But the satire eventually turns back on him, when he becomes a victim of Mosca's "Fox-trap." The reason he is ensnared by Mosca is that he cannot resist one final gloat at his dupes, oblivious to the fact that in doing so, he hands over his entire estate to Mosca. This lack of rational forethought and commitment to his sensual impulses is characteristic of Volpone. He enjoys entertainment, banquets, feasts, and love-making. He hates having to make money through honest labour or cold, heartless banking, but he loves making it in clever,

deceitful ways, especially as a means toward food and love-making. He is a creature of passion, an imaginative hedonist continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. This dynamic in his character shapes our reaction to him throughout the play. At times, this hedonism seems fun, engaging, entertaining, and even morally valuable, such as when he is engaged in the con on his fortune hunters. But his attempted seduction of Celia reveals a darker side to his hedonism when it becomes an attempted seduction. The incident makes him, in the moral universe of the play, a worthy target for satire, which is what he becomes in Act V when because of his lack of restraint he ends up on his way to prison, the most un-pleasurable situation imaginable.

Mosca

In a play that revolves around disguises, Mosca is the ultimate master of disguise. He is the person who continually executes Volpone's ideas and the one who comes up with the necessary lie whenever needed. The lie could be made to save Volpone from the charges laid against him by Bonario and Celia or to convince Corvino to let his wife sleep with the Fox—either way, Mosca seems to have no scruples about deceit. But his most important deception is the one he affects on Volpone and the audience, hiding his true nature and intentions from both Fox and us. In the opening acts, Mosca appears to be exactly what he is described as a clinging, servile parasite, which only exists for Volpone and through Volpone. In other words, he exists to serve Volpone, and all that Volpone wants he wants. This

impression is reinforced by several cringing speeches that he gives, all in praise of Volpone. But in Act III, we have the beginning of what seems an assertion of self-identity by Mosca, when he begins to grow confident in his abilities. But then this confidence again is left unvoiced, and Mosca seems to go back to being Volpone's faithful servant, helping him get out of the troublesome situation with Bonario and Celia. But it turns out that Mosca's aid in this situation may have been motivated as much by personal interest as it was by a desire to aid Volpone, for when he is presented with an opportunity to seize Volpone's wealth, he takes it. Mosca himself is possessed by greed, and he attempts to move out of his role as parasite—a harmless fly, circling a great beast—to the role of the great beast himself. But his attempt fails, as Volpone exposes them both. An interesting question is what significance his failure has in the context of the play and whether it is just punishment for his greed, his deceit, or his attempt to usurp the powers and privileges of the nobility and move above his social class.

Celia

While Volpone says "yes" to every single pleasure he can find—and pursues those pleasures vigorously—Celia is defined by her self-denial. This makes her a perfect foil for Volpone; since her self-restraint exposes his complete lack thereof, no more clearly than in Volpone's attempted seduction of her. The turning point of the play comes when she says "no" to Volpone's advances, thus denying him the lascivious pleasures he describes in his seduction speech. Celia

seems willing to do anything to avoid dishonor, and this makes her character flat and predictable, too ready to sacrifice herself to be believable. Her willingness to subject herself to Corvino's harsh dictates and abuse may make her seem more weak than strong. But she has an inner moral sense, (even if it is dictated by seventeenth-century conventions on femininity) indicated by the fact that she refuses Volpone against her husband's express wishes. The fact that Jonson sides with her can be seen in his decision to put one of the strongest statements of the play's thesis in her mouth:

"Whither, whither / Is shame fled human breasts?
Is that, whichever was a cause for life,
Now placed beneath the basest circumstance?
And modesty an exile made, for money?

Jonson again chooses a name with symbolic meaning for Celia. It derives from the Latin word *caelum,* meaning "sky" or "heaven".

2.5 Check Your Progress

1. **Discuss *Volpone* as an animal fable.**
2. **What are the various themes in the play *Volpone*?**
3. **What is the symbolic significance of various characters in the play?**
4. **Draw the brief character sketch of Volpone.**

2.6 Summary

Volpone, a Venetian nobleman, has no relative to make his heir; he must name someone his beneficiary. Several rivals try to attain his favor by bringing the sick Volpone gifts that they hope will be returned tenfold. Mosca, a clever parasite to Volpone, encourages the three major gulls to give until it hurts. These birds of prey are Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old miser about to die himself; and Corvino, a rich merchant and husband to Celia, a beautiful lady of Venice. Also naively competing for Volpone's wealth is Lady Would-be, the affected wife of an English knight, Sir Politic Would-be. After each gull is fleeced before our eyes, Mosca encourages Volpone to think of seeking a greater treasure than gold: the wife of Corvino. After a sensuous description by Mosca, Volpone resolves to see this paragon of beauty.

As the second act begins, Volpone appears beneath Celia's window disguised as a mountebank. Jealous Corvino drives him away upon discovering his wife in an upper window. While Corvino threatens his wife with closer incarceration, Volpone sings to Mosca of her beauty and his desire. Mosca hatches a plot to secure Celia for his master. He tells Corvino that the mountebank's oil, purchased for Volpone by Corbaccio, has revived the flagging health of the fox. However, if Volpone is to live on, he must sleep with some young woman. The others are seeking the cure for Volpone, and Corvino must hurry or lose his investment. Corvino wisely suggests a courtesan, but Mosca

slyly rejects this plan, reasoning that an artful quean might cheat them all. Finally, Corvino offers his wife. He is convinced that she is safe, and Mosca is sent to tell Volpone the good news.

Act III reveals Mosca and Bonario conversing in the street. For some reason, Mosca is telling Bonario of Corbaccio's intention to disinherit him and inviting the son to witness the deed at Volpone's house. Meanwhile, Lady Would-be visits Volpone and nearly talks him to death. Mosca gets rid of her by saying that Sir Politic was lately seen rowing in a gondola with a cunning courtesan. Corvino arrives, dragging his unwilling wife into the fox's lair; Volpone, left alone with the shrinking lady, is not successful in his persuasive attempts to seduce her. Just as he is about to take her by force, Bonario leaps from his hiding place and denounces Volpone and spirits the lady to safety.

Mosca saves Volpone from the police by explaining the incident to the three gulls and persuading them to tell his contrived story in court. Mosca says that Bonario, impatient to see Volpone, discovered the fox with Celia, seized the lady, and made her swear that Volpone had attempted to seduce her. The plan is to get an injunction against Bonario.

Act IV begins with the subplot of Sir Politic Would-be and Peregrine. Sir Politic is discovered entertaining his fellow Englishman with his naive understanding of politics. Lady Would-be interrupts the conversation and mistakes Peregrine for the courtesan. She apologizes

upon discovering her mistake, but Peregrine leaves in a huff and promises to take his revenge for the affront.

At the court, Voltore succeeds in making Celia and Bonario look like lovers. Mosca persuades Lady Would-be to testify that Celia was the bawd in the gondola with her husband. Volpone makes his entrance on a stretcher to demonstrate his impotence.

All augurs well for the rogues as the fifth act begins. But Volpone cannot leave well enough alone. He sends his servants to announce his demise and waits for the gulls to come to claim their inheritance. Mosca is the heir! The parasite flaunts his knowledge of their wrongdoing to the birds of prey and they leave in despair. Disguised as a police officer, Volpone follows them to taunt them further.

Meanwhile, Peregrine, disguised as a merchant, comes to Sir Politic's house and tells the knight that the police are seeking him because he has plotted to overthrow the Venetian state. When Sir Politic hides in a tortoiseshell, Peregrine calls in some other merchants to mock and humiliate the foolish Englishman.

At the court, the three gulls, enraged by Mosca and Volpone and the loss of their hopes, decide to tell the truth. They accuse Mosca of being the lying villain who created the whole plot. Mosca is summoned and arrives with another plot in mind. He will extricate Volpone from this predicament, but the fox must remain dead and he,

Mosca, must continue as the heir. Volpone throws off his disguise and the entire intrigue is revealed.

The court sentences Mosca to the galleys; Volpone is deprived of his goods and sent to a hospital for incurables. The gulls are deprived of legal practice, a wife, and a fortune. Celia returns to her father with her dowry trebled, and Bonario is his father's heir immediately.

2.7 Keywords

- Fable--association of character's name creates with animal
- Association--related
- Parasitism--interaction between two organism
- Symbolism-- meaning through symbols
- Appropriate--proper
- Didactic –Instructive

2.8 Self -Assessment Questions (SAQs)

1. Discuss *Volpone* as an animal fable.
2. What are the various themes in the play *Volpone*?
3. What is the symbolic significance of various characters in the play?
4. Draw the brief character sketch of Volpone.

2.9 Answers to Your Progress

Discuss *Volpone* as an animal fable.

There is a "fable" running throughout the play, through the associations the characters' names create with animals. It is very simple and tells the tale of a cunning "Fox" (*Volpone* in Italian), encircled by a mischievous "Fly" (*Mosca* in Italian), who helps the Fox trick several carrion-birds—a vulture (*Voltore*), a crow (*Corvino*) and a raven (*Corbaccio*) into losing their feathers (their wealth). The animal imagery emphasizes the theme of "parasitism" in the play, where one life-form feeds off of another. And it should also be remembered that fables are tales with simple moral messages, told for a didactic purpose. Though much more complex, *Volpone,* at its heart shares the same purpose, making the use of "fable-like" symbolism appropriate and helpful in understanding the meaning of the play.

What is the symbolic significance of various characters in the play?

Symbols

As the seat of greed, corruption, and decadence, at least according to the prevailing prejudices, Venice was the beneficiary of years of stereotype in English drama. Italians, in general, were seen as sensuous, decadent beings, thanks to their extremely sophisticated culture, history of Machiavellian politicians, and beautiful love poetry. Though not things considered particularly awful today, this type of decadence made English people wary of being infected with immorality, and Venetians were seen as the worst of the bunch. The direct influence of the "power of Venice" to corrupt can best be seen

in the Sir Politic Would-be subplot, where the English knight Sir Politic "goes Venetian" and becomes a lying would-be thief. But the Venetian setting probably made the story more believable for most English audiences, signifying the fascination of the play with disguise and deceit, though also, perhaps against Jonson's intentions, distancing them from the play's moral message, by placing the greed in a historic far away place traditionally associated with greed, instead of right in the heart of London.

What are the various themes in the play Volpone?

There are various themes in the play.

- The themes of Greed
- The Power of Stagecraft
- Parasitism
- Gender Roles and Women

Greed

Volpone's irony is aimed at "greed", which can be considered a kind of greed that extends not only to money but also to all objects of human desire. The main argument of the play is what Walpen himself said, "What a rare punishment is greed to oneself. The punishment and main irony of the play are that although greed drives people to seek money, power, and respect, it ultimately makes everyone in the play mentally and financially stupid, despicable, and poorer.

Celia asked a similar question “Where does the shame escape from the human breast? And at the end of the drama, the judge pleaded with the audience to “learn” from the drama what happens to those who succumb to greed, and emphasized that the drama’s position on greed is a kind of preaching, aiming to teach the audience what the real consequences of greed. Volpone himself was originally used as a tool for this class.

He deceived Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore to give up their property, hoping to inherit his property, but eventually became the object of the class because he succumbed to his greedy desire for sensory pleasure.

The Power of Stagecraft

Between the means of stage art and the transmission of moral truth, there is a dichotomy in the drama that has never been completely resolved. In other words, there is a tension between the drama itself (Jonson hopes that this drama has moral value for those who have seen it) and what happens in the drama.

The actual production of the stage art installation drama involved is deceit and chaos. And the root cause of moral corruption. In other words, Volpone is not just lying or deceiving; he used his game to make a complete work, using a special eye ointment to simulate eye infections and creating a character using a wardrobe, makeup, and

props.

He also seems to share with the playwright Jonson his intention to expose moral stupidity. But this is another illusion after all. Similarly, Mosca and Voltore produced work to convince judges that they were innocent. They use rhetoric and poetry to tell a story, with shocking "surprise testimony" and graphic use of images (the appearance of the "powerless" Volpe).

Therefore, this drama exposes us to many different forms of theatrical illusion as a method of lying, perhaps in the hope that we can better distinguish which drama forms are sensational, useless, and inaccurate in depicting reality.

Parasitism

"Everyone is a parasite" says Mosca and prove him right in the play seems the purpose of life. In a sense, everyone tries to make a living on the wealth or livelihood of others without doing anything. "Honest toil" of their own. Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore all tried to inherit a fortune from a dying man.

And Volpone himself made a fortune by relying on the shortcomings he is playing now. The parasitism so described is not a form of laziness or despair, but a sense of superiority. Parasites live on their wisdom and feed on others by cleverly manipulating the credibility and kindness of others.

Gender Roles and Women

Most of the characters in the play are men who operate in the traditional male business sector. When the play is set, men are solely responsible for finances. They are expected to have power over women in their interpersonal relationships. Most male characters in the play firmly occupy these roles. However, the play also compares male authority, love, sex, and courtship with social expectations by cleverly manipulating their gullibility and kindness.

The Sacred and the Profane

Volpone, both in his initial speech in Act I and in his seduction speech in Act III mixes religious language and profane subject matter to a startling poetic effect. In Act I the subject of his worship is money; in Act III it is Celia, or perhaps her body, that inspires prayer-like language. As a foil against this, Celia pleads for a distinction to be restored between the "base" and the "noble," (in other words, between the profane—that which is firmly rooted in our animal natures, and the sacred—that which is divine about humans. Through their respective fates, the play seems to endorse Celia's position, though Jonson invests Volpone's speeches with a great deal of poetic energy and rhetorical ornamentation that make his position attractive and rich, which is again, another source of tension in the play.

Disguise, Deception, and Truth

Jonson creates a complex relationship between disguise, deception, and truth in the play. Disguise sometimes serves simply to conceal, as it does when Peregrine dupes Sir Politic Would-be. But sometimes it reveals inner truths that a person's normal attire may conceal. Volpone, for example, publicly reveals more of his "true self" (his vital, healthy self) when he dresses as Scoto Mantua; and Scoto's speeches seem to be filled with authorial comments from Jonson himself. Furthermore, disguise is seen to exert a certain force and power all of its own; by assuming one, people run the risk of changing their identity, of being unable to escape the disguise. This is certainly the case for Mosca and Volpone in Act V, whose "disguised" identities almost supersede their actual ones.

"Gulling"

Gulling means "making someone into a fool." The question that the play teaches us to ask is who is being made a fool by whom? Volpone plays sick to make the legacy-hunters fools, but Mosca plays the "Fool" (the harmless assistant and entertainer) to make Volpone into a fool. To make someone else into a fool is both the primary method characters have for asserting power over one another and the primary way Jonson brings across his moral message: the characters in the play who are made into fools—Corbaccio, Corvino, Voltore, Volpone—are the characters whose morality we are supposed to criticize.

- **Draw the brief character sketch of Volpone.**

Volpone

The play's title character is its protagonist, though an inconsistent one. He disappears in Act IV, seemingly replaced by Mosca, and is first an instrument and then a victim of Jonson's satire of money-obsessed society. He is an instrument of it because it is through his ingenuity and cleverness that Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are duped and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events, But the satire eventually turns back on him, when he becomes a victim of Mosca's "Fox-trap." The reason he is ensnared by Mosca is that he cannot resist one final gloat at his dupes, oblivious to the fact that in doing so, he hands over his entire estate to Mosca. This lack of rational forethought and commitment to his sensual impulses is characteristic of Volpone. He enjoys entertainment, banquets, feasts, and love-making. He hates having to make money through honest labour or cold, heartless banking, but he loves making it in clever, deceitful ways, especially as a means toward food and lovemaking. He is a creature of passion, an imaginative hedonist continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. This dynamic in his character shapes our reaction to him throughout the play. At times, this hedonism seems fun, engaging, entertaining, and even morally valuable, such as when he is engaged in the con on his fortune hunters. But his attempted seduction of Celia reveals a darker side to his hedonism when it

becomes an attempted seduction. The incident makes him, in the moral universe of the play, a worthy target for satire, which is what he becomes in Act V when because of his lack of restraint he ends up on his way to prison, the most un-pleasurable situation imaginable.

2.10 Suggested Readings

- Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*.
- MacLean, Hugh, editor. *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets*. New York: Norton Press, 1974
- Bednarz, James P. (2001), *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, New York: Columbia University Press, ISBN 978-0-2311-2243-6.
- Bentley, G. E. (1945), *Shakespeare and Jonson: Their Reputations in the Seventeenth Century Compared*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0-2260-4269-5.

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Subject : MA (English)	
Course Code: 201	Author: Dr.NutanYadav
Unit :03 (1550-1660) Sem-2	
Duchess of Malfi by John Webster	

Lesson Structure

3.1 Learning objectives

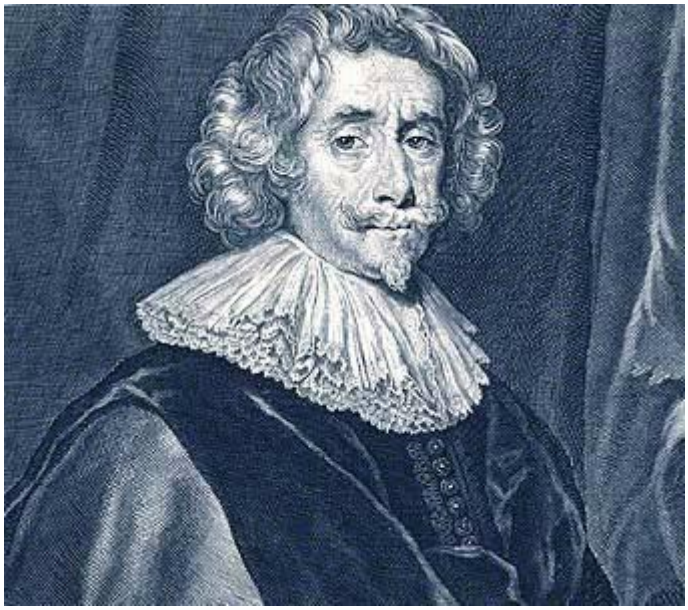
- To develop critical thinking among students towards literature.
- To enhance their knowledge of literature.
- To let them enjoy different genres of literature.
- To make them proficient in the use of English language.

3.2 Introduction of Age (Jacobean Period)

The **Jacobean Era** was the period in English and Scottish history that coincides with the reign of James VI of Scotland who also inherited the crown of England in 1603 as James I. The Jacobean era succeeds the Elizabethan era and precedes the Caroline era. The term "Jacobean" is often used for the distinctive styles of Jacobean architecture, visual arts, decorative arts, and literature that characterized that period. In literature, some of Shakespeare's most prominent plays, including *King Lear* (1605), *Macbeth* (1606), and *The Tempest* (1610), were written during the reign of James I. Also during this period were powerful works by John Webster, Thomas Middleton, John Ford, and Ben Jonson. Ben Jonson also contributed to some of the era's best poetry, together with the Cavalier poets and John Donne. In prose, the most representative works are found in those of Francis Bacon and the King James Bible.

3.3 Main Body of the Text

3.3.1 About the Playwright



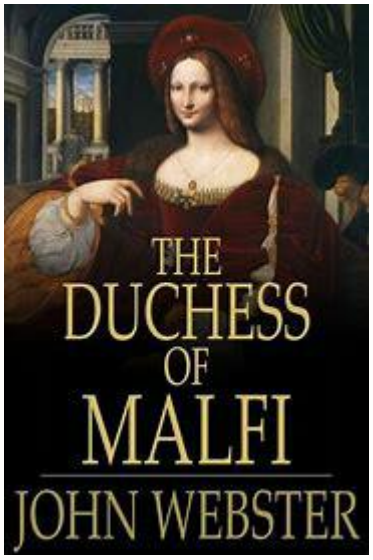
John Webster (1580 – 1632) was an English Jacobean dramatist best known for his tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, which are often regarded as masterpieces of the early 17th-century English stage. His life and career overlapped Shakespeare's. Webster's life is obscure and the dates of his birth and death are not known.

Despite his ability to write comedy, Webster is best known for his two best English tragedies based on Italian sources. *The White Devil,* a retelling of the intrigues involving Vittoria Accoramboni *The Duchess of Malfi,* first performed by the King's Men about 1614 and published nine years later, was more successful. Webster's plays are difficult but rewarding and are still frequently staged. Webster has received a

reputation for being the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist with the most unsparingly dark vision of human nature. Webster's tragedies present a horrific vision of humanity. T. S. Eliot says that Webster always saw "**the skull beneath the skin".**

Webster's title character in *The Duchess of Malfi* is presented as a figure of virtue by comparison to her male violent brothers and in facing death she shows courage. Her martyr-like death scene has been compared to that of the titular king in Christopher Marlowe's play Edward II. Webster's use of a strong, virtuous woman as his central character was rare for his time and represents a deliberate reworking of some of the original historical events on which his play was based. Webster's drama was generally dismissed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but many twentieth-century critics and theatergoers have found *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* to be brilliant plays of great poetic quality and dark themes.

3.3.2 About the play



Full Title: The Tragedy of the Duchess of Malfi

- **When Written:** 1612-13
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Literary Period:** Jacobean Drama
- **Genre:** Tragedy
- **Setting:** Roman Catholic Italy: Amalfi, Rome, Loreto, and Milan
- **Climax:** The Duchess is killed / Antonio, Duke Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and Bosola all kill each other

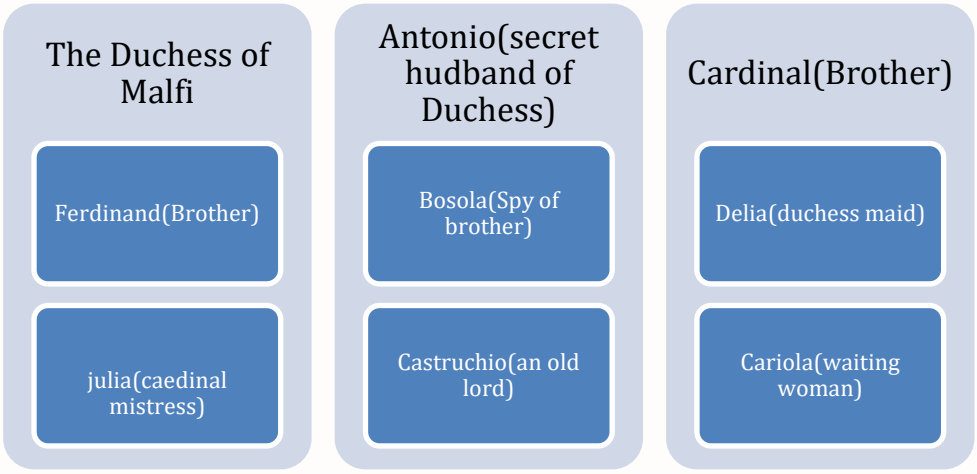
Antagonist: Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal

Webster wrote *The Duchess of Malfi* ten years into the Jacobean era in England and only a few years before Shakespeare's death. The play is based on an Italian novella, which in turn is based on true historical

events. The real Duchess, Giovanna d'Aragona, married Antonio Beccadelli in secret and bore him three children. She was murdered by her brothers, one of whom was a Cardinal, in 1510. Webster's main changes to the true story are that Antonio didn't die until a few years after the Duchess' death, and Bosola's repentance and ultimate betrayal and murder of the brothers are fictionalized, as the two were never accused or killed.

The Duchess of Malfi takes most of its plot from The Palace of Pleasure by William Painter, which is the translation of an adaptation of an Italian novella. Webster is known for his play The White Devil, which is also set in Roman Catholic Italy. The Duchess of Malfi contains echoes of other Elizabethan revenge tragedies, such as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and Shakespeare's Hamlet, Coriolanus, and King Lear.

3.3.3 Character List



Description of Characters

- **The Duchess** – The protagonist is sister to Ferdinand and the Cardinal. In the beginning, she is a widow whose brothers take every precaution to keep her away from marriage, though later she secretly marries Antonio. Due to the marriage, her brothers arrange to have her strangled. She is described as having a sweet countenance and noble virtue, unlike her brothers. She is also witty and clever, helping her keep up with her brothers' banter, and has a tenderness and warmth which they lack. She has three children, two sons and a daughter by Antonio.
- **Antonio Bologna** – Antonio returned from France, full of scorn for the Italian courtiers whom he sees as more corrupt than the French. Antonio is the steward of the Duchess of Malfi's palace. His honesty and good judgment of characters is quite deep. He accepts the Duchess' proposal of marriage because of her disposition rather than her beauty. Her marrying beneath her status is a problem, however, and their marriage has to remain a secret, as Antonio shares neither her title nor her money.
- **Delio** – A courtier, who tries to woo Julia. His purpose is to be the sounding board for his friend Antonio. Because he asks so many pertinent questions, he serves as a source of important information to the audience and is privy to the secrets of Antonio's marriage and children.

- **Daniel de Bosola** – A former servant of the Cardinal, now returned from a sentence in the galleys for murder. Publicly rejected by his previous employer the Cardinal, he is sent by Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess as her Provisor of Horse as Ferdinand hopes to keep her away from marriage. Bosola is involved in the murder of the Duchess, her children, Cariola, Antonio, the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and a servant. Witnessing the nobility of the Duchess and Antonio facing their deaths, he finally feels guilty and seeks to avenge them. This change of heart makes him the play's most complex character. A malcontent and cynic, he makes numerous critical comments on the nature of Renaissance society.
- **The Cardinal** – The brother to the Duchess and Ferdinand. A corrupt, icy cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who keeps a mistress. He has arranged a spy (Bosola) to spy upon his sister – all this on the quiet, however, leaving others ignorant of his plotting. Of remorse, love, loyalty, or even greed, he knows nothing, and his reasons for hating his sister are a mystery.
- **Ferdinand** – The Duke of Calabria and twin brother of the Duchess. Unlike his rational brother the Cardinal, Ferdinand has rages and violent outbursts disproportionate to the perceived offense. As a result of his regret for hiring Bosola to kill the Duchess, he gradually loses his sanity—he believes he is a wolf and digs up graves.

- **Castruchio** – An old lord. He's the conventional elderly man with a young, unfaithful wife (Julia). He is genial and easygoing, attempting to stay on good terms with all.
- **Roderigo** – A courtier(minor character)
- **Grisolan** – A courtier(minor character)
- **Silvio** – A courtier(minor character)
- **Pescara** – A marquis(minor character)
- **Cariola** – The Duchess's waiting-woman who is privy to her secrets. She witnesses the Duchess's wedding and delivers her children. She dies tragically by strangling following the murder of the Duchess and the youngest children.
- **Julia** – Castruchio's wife and the Cardinal's mistress. She dies at the Cardinal's hands from a poisoned Bible.
- **Doctor** – Sent for to diagnose Ferdinand's madness and his supposed "lycanthropia".

3.3.4 Critical Study of play

The Duchess of Malfi takes place in Roman Catholic Italy. It begins in the palace of the **Duchess**, a young widow and the ruler of the Italian town of Amalfi. Her steward, **Antonio**, has just returned from a visit to the French court, and **Bosola**, a murderer and former employee of her brother, the **Cardinal**, has just returned from his punishment. Soon Duke **Ferdinand**, the Duchess's other brother, enters with his whole retinue. In a private conversation with his friend **Delio**, Antonio reveals that though the Cardinal and Duke appear good, they

are jealous, conniving, and despicable. He adds that though her brothers are horrible, the Duchess is noble, temperate, beautiful, and intelligent.

Even though the Duchess is still young and beautiful, her brothers do not want her to remarry. They hope to both preserve their honor by ensuring ongoing sexual purity *and* to eventually inherit her fortune by forcing her to remain a widow. To make sure they have their way, Ferdinand gets Bosola a position on the Duchess's estate and hires him to be his spy. Bosola doesn't want to be a spy, but he feels that he has to obey the duke, even if doing so makes him corrupt. Ferdinand and the Cardinal then confront the Duchess with a rehearsed speech instructing her not to remarry. She agrees not to, but as soon as her brothers leave, she tells her maid **Cariola** that she will marry in secret. The Duchess then woos Antonio, inverting the traditional male and female roles in courtship. The two marry in secret.

Nine months later, the Duchess is pregnant with Antonio's child. Bosola, still spying for Ferdinand, notes the signs of her pregnancy and plans to give her apricots as a test, because they are known to induce labor. The Duchess eats the apricots and goes into labor, creating chaos in her palace. To try to maintain the secret, Antonio and the Duchess give out a story that the Duchess has fallen ill with some **disease**. Antonio confronts Bosola to ask if the apricots were **poisoned**. Bosola denies the accusation, but after the confrontation, he notices that Antonio has accidentally dropped a piece of paper: it is a horoscope for a baby, which provides Bosola

with concrete evidence that the Duchess had a child. He decides to send the paper in a letter to the Duchess's brothers in Rome. When Ferdinand and the Cardinal learn that the Duchess has disobeyed them, they are infuriated, thinking their noble **blood** has been tainted (and Ferdinand seems also to be overwhelmed with anger by the idea that the Duchess has been having sex at all), but they decide to wait to find out who the father is before taking action.

A few years later, the Duchess has had two more of Antonio's **children**. Ferdinand, who learned of the children from Bosola, decides to confront the Duchess in her bedchamber. Ferdinand sneaks in and frightens the Duchess, giving her a knife and suggesting that she kill herself. She admits that she is married, and he becomes enraged. He says that she has lost her reputation, and he swears that he will never see her again in his life. Antonio and the Duchess make a plan to flee: the Duchess announces that Antonio has been using his position to steel from her, and has been fired, as an excuse to get him out of Malfi. After Bosola privately defends Antonio to the Duchess as being honorable and worthy, the Duchess confides in Bosola that Antonio is innocent and is her husband. She plans to flee to join him.

Back in Rome, the Cardinal and Ferdinand find out from Bosola about the Duchess's plan. The Cardinal then formally banishes the Duchess, Antonio, and their children. Ferdinand invites Antonio to reconcile, but Antonio believes this is a trap, so instead of accepting the invitation he flees with his eldest son to Milan. After he leaves,

Bosola re-enters in disguise and takes the Duchess and her other two children captive under orders from the brothers.

The brothers imprison the Duchess in her Malfi palace. There, because Ferdinand has sworn never to see the Duchess, confronts her in the dark. He gives her his hand to hold but then reveals that it is the hand of a dead man to convince her that Antonio is dead. He then plays a trick with silhouettes to convince the Duchess that her children are also dead, at which point the Duchess wants to die. Ferdinand reveals to Bosola that he plans to torture her by exposing her to **mad men** from the local insane asylum. While Bosola feels bad for the Duchess and dislikes that he is participating in her torture, he continues to obey the duke.

In her prison, the madmen confront the Duchess and Cariola. Bosola then enters, disguised as an old man, and he tells the Duchess that he's going to kill her. The Duchess maintains her composure and is unafraid, but **executioners** enter and strangle her, her two children, and Cariola. Though Ferdinand does not pity the children, he immediately begins to feel remorse when he sees the Duchess's dead body. Ferdinand becomes maddened by guilt, and Bosola also acknowledges feeling a guilty conscience. Ferdinand then condemns Bosola for following his orders and refuses to pay him for his work. After Ferdinand has departed, the Duchess wakes up, but only long enough for Bosola to tell her that her husband is still alive; she dies for real almost immediately after waking up.

Now in Milan, Antonio doesn't yet know his wife's fate. He decides to wager everything and confront the Cardinal in person in an attempt to defuse the situation. Ferdinand, meanwhile, has been diagnosed with lycanthropia (werewolf disease), and he begins acting like a madman, even attacking his shadow, clearly plagued by guilt. The Cardinal wants his involvement in the murder to remain secret, and he instructs Bosola to murder Antonio. A woman named Julia, with whom the Cardinal has been having an affair becomes smitten with Bosola, and he convinces Julia to try and get a confession out of the Cardinal. Julia confronts the Cardinal and finds out his secret, so he forces her to kiss a poisoned book, thereby killing her. Bosola reveals to the Cardinal that he has overseen this murder and the Cardinal's confession. He agrees to help the Cardinal in return for payment, but this is a trick. He decides that he will do everything in his power to save Antonio and get revenge on the brothers.

In the Cardinal's palace, the Cardinal tells all of his courtiers to stay away from his room, no matter what they hear, even if he tests them with screams and shouts. Bosola sneaks into the palace and overhears that the Cardinal plans to kill him after he helps the Cardinal. Soon after, Antonio sneaks into the palace in his effort to find the Cardinal and end their quarrel. However, in the darkness, Bosola accidentally stabs Antonio, mistaking him for one of the brothers. Antonio lives just long enough for Bosola to inform him that the Duchess and two of their children have been murdered, at which point Antonio no longer wants to live. Bosola goes to find and kill the Cardinal, and

when the Cardinal starts screaming for help, no one comes because of his instruction that they stay away. In the chaos, Bosola stabs the Cardinal twice. Ferdinand then enters, and, mistaking, his brother for the devil, stabs both the Cardinal and Bosola. Bosola then stabs Ferdinand, who uses his dying words to say that our deaths are caused by our actions. While Bosola explains what happened, the Cardinal dies, and after Bosola makes a final speech, he dies as well. After all of the deaths, Delio enters with Antonio's son, announces his intention to help the son to receive his proper inheritance, and ends the play.

3.4 Further Body of the Text

Act 1

The Duchess's palace in Malfi- Antonio and Delio are discussing the former's return from France, and discussing how the French king runs his court, comparing it to an easily poisoned fountain. They are interrupted by the entry of Bosola and the Cardinal. Antonio and Delio hold their conversation, stepping to the background to watch as Bosola angrily tries to gain the Cardinal's pardon, speaking of the time he has spent in the galleys in penal servitude and the service of the Cardinal. Bosola declares that he is surely done with service, but the Cardinal is not interested in Bosola's new merit and takes his leave. Bosola compares himself to Tantalus, never able to acquire the thing he most desires, like an injured soldier who can only depend on his crutches for support of

any kind. When he leaves, Antonio and Delio comment on his past offense, and how he will surely come to no good if he is kept in neglect. Ferdinand comes into the palace, talking to his courtiers about a tournament that Antonio has just won. When the Cardinal, Duchess, and Cariola enter to speak with Ferdinand, Antonio and Delio have a moment to themselves to discuss the Cardinal's character; he is found to be a very dishonest, disagreeable person, as is his brother, Ferdinand. Only their sister, the Duchess, earns the approval of everyone, a very pleasant and gracious woman. After the two gentlemen leave, Ferdinand petitions his sister to make Bosola the manager of her horses; when everyone else leaves, Ferdinand and the Cardinal reveal that it is because Bosola is to spy on their sister. When Bosola is brought in and made aware of this plan, he at first refuses, but ultimately is given no choice. The Cardinal and Ferdinand then turn their attention to their sister, urging her not to marry again, now that she is a widow, going so far as to threaten her with death, in Ferdinand's case. She refuses to be bullied, and once her brothers are out of sight, she proposes to Antonio by giving him her wedding ring. Having Cariola, the Duchess's maid, as their witness, this private ceremony is legally binding and the Duchess and Antonio become husband and wife.

Act 2

- Scene 1—The Duchess's palace in Malfi, nine months later: Bosola and Castruchio enter, Bosola criticizing his companion's appearance, and telling him that he would make a ridiculous judge. When an old woman intrudes on their conversation, Bosola's insults turn on her, calling her hideous to the point that no amount of make-up would help. He also accuses her of being too like a witch; the old lady and Castruchio leave Bosola alone to muse on the mysterious way the Duchess is acting of late. He believes she is pregnant (no one but Delio and Cariola knows that the Duchess and Antonio are married), and aims to prove it by using apricots both to spark her pregnant appetite and to induce labor, as apricots were believed to do. The Duchess, when she enters, accepts the fruit from Bosola, and quickly starts going into labor. She then retires to her chamber claiming to be ill, with a worried Antonio following in her wake.
- Scene 2—same place and time as the previous scene: Bosola, alone, realizes that the Duchess is indeed pregnant. After accosting the hapless old lady again, he watches as Antonio and the servants in a commotion about a Swiss mercenary who had invaded the Duchess's room, and the loss of several jewels and gold utensils. Even with all the uproar, Antonio is not distracted from his wife's "illness"; she is actually in labour. Cariola, the lady's maid, enters with good news once Antonio is alone—he is the father of a son.

- Scene 3—Same place and time as the previous scene: Bosola re-enters in the empty room, having heard a woman (the Duchess) shriek. Antonio discovers him and questions his purpose in being there since everyone had been commanded to keep to their rooms. Antonio tells him to stay away from the Duchess since he doesn't trust Bosola. In Antonio's agitation, he accidentally drops a horoscope for his son's birth, which Bosola retrieves. He realizes what it means, and resolves to send it to the Duchess's brothers with Castruccio.
- Scene 4—The Cardinal's rooms: The Cardinal and his mistress, Julia, are discussing their rendezvous when a messenger calls the Cardinal away with an important message. Delio enters to find Julia alone. He was once a suitor of hers and offers her money. Julia leaves to meet her husband, Castruccio, and Delio fears that her husband's arrival means Antonio's secret marriage is about to be revealed.
- Scene 5—Rome, in Ferdinand's private apartments: An enraged Ferdinand, with the letter from Bosola, and his brother the Cardinal, meet to discuss what they think is awful treachery by their sister. Ferdinand is angry to the point of shouting about his sister's "whorish" behaviour (he knows of the child, but not of the marriage), and the Cardinal struggles to control his brother's temperamental outburst. Ferdinand resolves to discover the man his sister is seeing, threatening all and sundry.

Act 3

- Scene 1—The Duchess's palace in Malfi, after some time has passed: Antonio greets the returning Delio, who has come from Rome with Ferdinand. Antonio reveals that the Duchess has had two more children in the time Delio was gone. Antonio fears the wrath of the recently arrived Ferdinand, and Delio tells him the ordinary people think the Duchess is a whore. While they talk, the Duchess and Ferdinand enter. He tells her that he has found a husband for her, Count Malateste. She disregards this, as she is already married (still secretly of course) to Antonio. When left alone, Ferdinand consults with Bosola to discover the father of the three seemingly illegitimate children; Bosola has acquired a skeleton key to the Duchess's room, which Ferdinand takes, telling him to guess what will happen next.
- Scene 2—The Duchess's bed-chamber: Antonio comes up to the Duchess's bedroom to spend the night, and they banter back and forth about the point of lovers just sleeping together. Antonio and Cariola leave to allow the Duchess to complete her night-time preparations, but she is not alone; Ferdinand sneaks in and startles her. He gives her a knife, intending her to kill herself, and his fury increases when she tells him she is married without his knowledge. Ferdinand leaves, declaring he will never see her again. He exits just in time, for Antonio bursts in brandishing a pistol, but the Duchess forces him to leave again when Bosola knocks at the door. Bosola informs the Duchess that Ferdinand has left for Rome

again, and she tells him that Ferdinand's bills of exchange (he has so far dealt with her accounts) will no longer work since Antonio has been false with her accounts. This is, of course, a trick to get Antonio out of Malfi; she calls Antonio back in (once Bosola exits) to tell him to flee to Ancona, where she will send him all her treasure and valuables. The couple puts on a show argument for the benefit of the returning Bosola and officers, where she criticizes his faulty record-keeping and banishes him. Bosola does not believe the Duchess was justified in banishing Antonio and tells her that Antonio is a good, honest man. This speech prompts the Duchess to confide the secret marriage to Bosola. He is then left on stage to lament his role as a spy, for now, he must reveal all to Ferdinand.

- Scene 3—A room in a palace in Rome: The Cardinal, Ferdinand, Malateste, Pescara, Silvio, and Delio are discussing the new fortifications that are being made in Naples. Ferdinand and his men, leaving the Cardinal and Malateste to speak privately, are very harsh in their critique of Malateste, considering him too cowardly to fight in an upcoming battle. Bosola, meanwhile, interrupts the Cardinal's private conference with news of his sister. The Cardinal leaves to petition for her and her family's exile from Ancona, while Bosola goes to tell the Duchess's first child (from her first husband) what has happened with his mother. Ferdinand goes to find Antonio.

- Scene 4—The shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, Italy, in the Ancona province: Two pilgrims are visiting the shrine in Ancona, and witness the Cardinal being symbolically prepared for war. The Cardinal then proceeds to take the Duchess's wedding ring, banish her, Antonio, and their children, while the pilgrims muse over the reason for what they have just seen.
- Scene 5—Near Loreto: The newly banished family, and the maid Cariola, enter Loreto. Shortly after their arrival, Bosola comes and presents the Duchess with a letter from Ferdinand, which indirectly states that Ferdinand wants Antonio dead. Antonio tells Bosola that he will not go to Ferdinand, and the Duchess urges him to take the oldest child and go to Milan to find safety, which he promptly does. Bosola and masked guards then take the Duchess and her remaining children captive, on the orders of her brothers.

Act 4

- Scene 1—A prison (or the Duchess's lodgings serving as a prison) near Loreto: Ferdinand comes in with Bosola, who is describing to him how the Duchess is dealing with her imprisonment. It seems she is not affected by Ferdinand's satisfaction, and he leaves angrily. Bosola greets the Duchess, telling her that her brother wishes to speak with her, but will not do so where he can see her. She agrees to meet with her brother in the darkness. Once the lights are out, Ferdinand returns. He presents her with a dead

man's hand, leading her to believe that it is Antonio's, with her wedding ring on it. He then exits, leaving Bosola to show the Duchess lifelike figures of her husband and children, made to appear as though her family was dead. The Duchess believes them to be the genuine articles, and resolves to die—her despair is so deep it affects Bosola. When she leaves, Ferdinand re-enters; Bosola pleads with him to send his sister to a convent, refusing to be a part of the plot anymore. Ferdinand is beyond reason at this point and tells Bosola to go to Milan to find the real Antonio.

- Scene 2—Same place and time as the previous scene: The Duchess and her maid, Cariola, come back, distracted by the noises being made by a group of madmen (Ferdinand brought them in to terrorize her). A servant tells her that they were brought for sport, and lets in several of the madmen. Bosola, too, sneaks in with them, disguised as an old man, and tells the Duchess that he is there to make her tomb. When she tries to pull rank on him, executioners with cords and a coffin come in. Cariola is removed from the room, leaving Bosola and the executioners with the Duchess. The Duchess makes a brave show, telling the executioners to "pull, and pull strongly", welcoming her strangulation. Cariola is brought back, and after struggling fiercely, she too is strangled. Ferdinand comes to view the scene, and is also shown the bodies of his sister's children, who were murdered as well. Ferdinand reveals that he and the Duchess were twins and that he had hoped, if she had remained a widow, to

inherit all her wealth. Bosola, sensing that Ferdinand is ready to turn on him next, demands payment for his atrocities. Ferdinand, distracted, leaves him alone with the bodies. Astonishingly, the Duchess is not dead. A shocked Bosola has no time to call for medicine; he manages to tell the Duchess that Antonio is not dead; that the figures she saw were fake before she finally dies. Bosola, remorseful at last, takes her body to the care of some good women, planning to leave immediately thereafter for Milan.

Act 5

- Scene 1—Outside Ferdinand and the Cardinal's palace in Milan: Antonio returns to see if he can reconcile with Ferdinand and the Cardinal, but Delio is dubious as to the wisdom of this. Delio asks Pescara, a marquis, to give him possession of Antonio's estate for safekeeping, but Pescara denies him. Julia presents Pescara with a letter from the Cardinal, which states that she should receive Antonio's property, and which Pescara grants to her. When Delio confronts him about this, Pescara says that he would not give an innocent man a property that was taken from someone by such vile means (the Cardinal took the property for himself once Antonio was banished), for it will now become an appropriate place for the Cardinal's mistress. This statement impresses the hidden Antonio. When Pescara leaves to visit an ill Ferdinand, Antonio decides to pay a night-time visit to the Cardinal.

- Scene 2—Inside the same palace: Pescara, come to visit Ferdinand, is discussing his condition with the doctor, who believes Ferdinand may have lycanthropia: a condition whereby he believes he is a wolf. The doctor thinks there is a chance of a relapse, in which case Ferdinand's diseased behaviour would return; namely, digging up dead bodies at night. Pescara and the doctor make way for the mad Ferdinand, who attacks his own shadow. The Cardinal, who has entered with Ferdinand, manages to catch Bosola, who has been watching Ferdinand's ravings. The Cardinal assigns Bosola to seek out Antonio (by following Delio) and then slay him. After the Cardinal leaves, Bosola does not even make it to the door before he is stopped by Julia, who is brandishing a pistol. She accuses him of having given her a love potion and threatens to kill him to end her love. Bosola manages to disarm her and convince her to gather intelligence for him about the Cardinal. Bosola then hides while Julia uses all of her persuasive powers to get the Cardinal to reveal his part in the death of his sister and her children. The Cardinal then makes Julia swear to keep silent, forcing her to kiss the poisoned cover of a bible, causing her to die almost instantly. Bosola comes out of hiding to confront the Cardinal, although he declares that he still intends to kill Antonio. Giving him a master key, the Cardinal takes his leave. However, once he is alone, Bosola swears to protect Antonio, and goes off to bury Julia's body.

- Scene 3—A courtyard outside the same palace: Delio and Antonio are near the Duchess's tomb; as they talk, an echo from the tomb mirrors their conversation. Delio leaves to find Antonio's eldest son, and Antonio leaves to escape the distressing echo of his wife's resting place.
- Scene 4—The Cardinal's apartments in Milan: The Cardinal enters, trying to dissuade Pescara, Malateste, Roderigo, and Grisolan from staying to keep watch over Ferdinand. He goes so far as to say that he might feign mad fits to test their obedience; if they come to help, they will be in trouble. They unwillingly exit, and Bosola enters to find the Cardinal planning to have him killed. Antonio, unaware of Bosola, sneaks in while it is dark, planning to seek an audience with the Cardinal. Not realizing who has entered, Bosola attacks Antonio; he is horrified to see his mistake. He manages to relate the death of the Duchess and children to the dying Antonio, who is glad to be dying in sadness, now that life is pointless for him. Bosola then leaves to bring down the Cardinal.
- Scene 5—The same apartments, near Julia's lodging: The Cardinal, unaware of what has just happened, is reading a book when Bosola enters with a servant, who is bearing Antonio's body. He threatens the Cardinal, who calls for help. Help is not forthcoming, for the gentlemen from the beginning of the previous scene, while they can hear him calling, have no desire to go to his aid (because of his previous order to not at any cost try to help Ferdinand). Bosola kills the servant of the Cardinal first and then stabs the Cardinal.

Ferdinand bursts in, also attacking his brother; in the fight, he accidentally wounds Bosola. Bosola kills Ferdinand and is left with the dying Cardinal. The gentlemen who heard the cries now enter the room to witness the deaths of the Cardinal and Bosola. Delio enters too late with Antonio's eldest son and laments the unfortunate events that have passed.

3.5 **Check Your Progress**

- Bring out the themes in The Duchess of Malfi?
- Discuss The Duchess of Malfi as a revenge tragedy.
- What is the role of Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*?
- Discuss the line "Ambition, madam, is a great man's madness" from *The Duchess of Malfi*.

3.6 Summary

The play is set in the court of Malfi (Amalfi), Italy, from 1504 to 1510. The recently widowed Duchess falls in love with Antonio, a lowly steward. Her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal forbid her from remarrying, seeking to defend their inheritance and desperate to avoid a degrading association with a social inferior. Suspicious of her, they hire Bosola to spy on her. She elopes with Antonio and bears him three children secretly. Bosola eventually discovers that the Duchess is pregnant but does not know who the father is.

Ferdinand, shown by now to be a depraved lunatic, threatens and disowns the Duchess. In an attempt to escape, she and Antonio

concoct a story that Antonio has swindled her out of her fortune and must flee into exile. The Duchess takes Bosola into her confidence, unaware that he is Ferdinand's spy, and arranges for him to deliver her jewellery to Antonio at his hiding-place in Ancona. She will join them later while pretending to make a pilgrimage to a nearby town. The Cardinal hears of the plan, instructs Bosola to banish the two lovers, and sends soldiers to capture them. Antonio escapes with their eldest son, but the Duchess, her maid, and her two younger children are returned to Malfi and die at the hands of Bosola's executioners, who are under Ferdinand's orders. This experience leads Bosola to turn against the brothers, and he decides to take up the cause of “revenge for the Duchess of Malfi” (5.2).

The Cardinal confesses his part in the killing of the Duchess to his mistress, Julia, then murders her with a poisoned Bible. Bosola overhears the Cardinal plotting to kill him, so he visits the darkened chapel to kill the Cardinal at his prayers. Instead, he mistakenly kills Antonio, who has just returned to Malfi to attempt reconciliation with the Cardinal. Bosola then stabs the Cardinal, who dies. In the brawl that follows, Ferdinand and Bosola stab each other to death.

Antonio's elder son by the Duchess appears in the final scene and takes his place as the heir to the Malfi fortune. The son's decision is despite his father's explicit wish that he "fly the court of princes", a corrupt and increasingly deadly environment.

The conclusion is controversial for some readers because they find a reason to believe the inheriting son is not the rightful heir of the Duchess. The play briefly mentions a son who is the product of her first marriage and would therefore have a stronger claim to the duchy.[4] Other scholars believe the mention of a prior son is just a careless error in the text.

3.7 Keywords

- Court-gall - a bitter figure of the court
- Durance- imprisonment
- Engendering- propagating, reproducing
- Envious -cunning, crafty
- Equivocation- misleading use of, in this case, an example. Familiars evil spirits, or, at the time of the play, officers of the Catholic Church who arrested heretics
- Wrack – devastated
- Gossips - free chats
- Galleries- trickery
- Lecherous- exhibiting excessive sexual desire or lewdness

- Lenitive – soothing
- Lycanthropic- a form of insanity in which the patient believes himself to be a wolf
- Mortification- the state preceding death
- Osier- a willow tree
- Physiognomy -the art of understanding a person’s character by their features
- Poniard- a long knife with a crossed handle, historically worn by the upper classes
- Radica- a technical term from astrology meaning fit to be judged or decided
- Scourge- whip, or instrument used to inflict pain or punishment
- Seize- to take possession of, legally
- Spanish jennet- a small Spanish horse
- Suborned- bribed, coerced with money

- Suppuration- support
- Switzer a Swiss mercenary, a common figure at the time
- Sycophants suck-ups, flatterers
- Unbeneficial- unprivileged, poor

3.8 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)

- Discuss *Duchess of Malfi* as a séance revenge tragedy
- Bosala is the most complicated character sketched by John Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi.* Discuss.

3.9 Answers to Your Progress

There are various themes in the Duchess of Malfi. Some of them are

- The problem of evil in life,
- Law and justice
- Concept of knowledge
- Appearance and reality
- Crime and punishment
- **The theme of Guilt, Death, and Suffering**

This play is filled with death and suffering. In a tragedy, the deaths of most of the main characters are pretty much guaranteed, but Webster achieves a spectacular level of horror with the way that characters are killed and the tortures they undergo beforehand. In light of the **Duchess** being subjected to imprisonment, torture, and execution, it's notable that death itself doesn't frighten her. The Duchess possesses composure and dignity in the moments leading up to her death, even to the point of asking for her violent death to put her to sleep. In this way, death is shown as an escape that is preferable to a life of suffering. Death, no matter how gruesome, leads to "excellent company in the other world," and it frees the Duchess from the control and torture of her brothers. We can also note that the Duchess'

death showcases the play's exploration of the permanence of death, as an echo rises from her grave in an attempt to tell **Antonio** of her fate.

While Ferdinand and the **Cardinal** are directly responsible for much of the suffering and death in the play (including and beyond what's mentioned above), the suffering they create does not lead to satisfaction or pleasure. Instead, it leads to guilt, as well as to more suffering and more death. Ferdinand, for example, begins to regret his actions immediately after seeing that the Duchess has died; he shows signs of guilt right away when he sees the Duchess' body. Soon this guilt progresses so far as to drive him mad. He acts so strangely that the doctor believes he has the **disease** of lycanthropic (that he is a werewolf), and at one point he starts attacking his own shadow. He shows himself to be obsessed with the crime of the Duchess's death, saying to himself "Strangling is a very quiet death." Guilt, therefore, has the power to drive someone insane (and ultimately to his death).

As the Cardinal is a religious figure, his guilt (which, in a way, also leads him to death) is expressed in terms of faith instead of insanity. After killing **Julia**, he is plagued by guilt. He cries out, "Oh, my conscience!" and says that he would pray, but the devil is preventing him. Thus we see that guilt has the power to stop even a Catholic Cardinal from offering prayer. Since he cannot pray, he cannot be forgiven, and he later offers a brief soliloquy in which he explains that he has been thinking about hell, a symptom of his guilty conscience. The association with hell continues, as, in his insanity, Ferdinand

becomes convinced that his brother is the devil, and he stabs the Cardinal. Guilt transforms a Cardinal into the devil and indicates that he will go to hell. It's among the severe consequences of murder and evil.

Finally, **Bosola** is in a unique situation, as he is forced into killing and experiences guilt throughout the play. In all of his actions, he feels guilty, but this guilt is overwhelmed by a sense of duty to the Duke, emphasizing the play's suggestion that guilt or preemptive guilt is not enough to deter murder or bad behavior. Ultimately, though, guilt and desire for revenge take precedence over duty. Overwhelmed by guilt for the suffering he has caused, Bosola seeks to right his wrongs. Since he is guilty, however, he also suffers the fate of the diabolical brothers.

Another important theme discussed in the play is the theme of Love and Male Authority

The Duchess of Malfi explores love and male authority in a traditional society in which women are subjected to the wills of men. The **Cardinal**'s illicit relationship with **Julia** provides an example of a woman successfully controlled by a man. Julia is depicted according to the stereotype of a fickle woman, while the Cardinal is the constant figure of authority. Webster even uses animal imagery to describe their relationship: the Cardinal is metaphorically a falconer who tames Julia, the falcon. Later, when Julia becomes infatuated with **Bosola**,

she begs for him to tell her to do something so that she can prove that she loves him—clearly, she understands love and experience controlled by men.

The Cardinal and **Ferdinand** also try to exert their male authority over the **Duchess**. To preserve her honor and reputation (supposedly) and to take her fortune, the brothers seek to prevent her from remarrying. They deliver a rehearsed argument, in which they characterize marriage as a prison and forbid her from marrying again. Once she does so behind their backs, they use all of their power to correct the situation and get revenge on her. We should also note that Ferdinand's initial argument for the Duchess not to marry has undertones of incest.

The Duchess, however, inverts the pattern of male authority over love. Refusing to remain a widow, she covertly goes against her brothers' order and marries for love. What's more, she does so outside of the normal confines of courtship in which the man pursues the woman; in part due to her high birth, she is "forced to woo" **Antonio**. This marriage between Antonio and the Duchess is figured as a true partnership; the Duchess married Antonio purely out of love, despite custom and opposition, as he had no special status or nobility.

Throughout the play, the Duchess continues to defy male authority and assert her agency, for love, for the sake of her children, and for her own self interest. Even facing her own execution, she remains proud and unafraid, and she undercuts the power of the men executing

her by ensuring that her body will be cared for by women after her death. Even so, the Duchess's final, dying thought is that her husband is still alive. The Duchess, then, can be seen both as a proud example of a woman exerting her will and a tragic example of society's refusal to relinquish the power of male authority.

Finally, the death of all of the play's major figures of political power leaves a vacuum at the end of the play; there is no new leader to take over. To show this, the play's final lines, often reserved for the highest-ranking character, are spoken by a mere courier. Ferdinand and the Cardinal's positions aren't filled but are merely left vacant at the play's end. Thus political corruption and duplicitous behavior have the potential to lead to dire personal and religious consequences, and possibly to the collapse of government itself.

Qus. Discuss *The Duchess of Malfi* as a revenge tragedy

The Latin play writes Seneca is considered to be one who established the revenge play tradition.

Horror and violence predominated in Senecan tragedies. Thomas Kyd brought the tradition of revenge tragedy in English drama with his tragedy' The Spanish Tragedy' later this tradition was followed by Shakespeare's Hamlet and other writers. Other characteristics features too began to appear in English revenge plays. The inclusion of

- Supernatural elements
- Deaths of cruelty and horror
- Violence and imagery etc.

Thus the English revenge plays became melodrama where terrifying actions and dreadful events became dominating.

The Duchess of Malfi is one of the best revenge tragedies of the Jacobean period.

The last two acts are full of horror scenes. The duke to horrify the duchess gives a dead body hand to the duchess and the duchess kissed it taking it to be Duke's hand. The unruly dance of madmen before the duchess, the appearance of Bosola as a tomb maker, the appearance of executioners with bells create a horrifying atmosphere in the play. The Duchess of Malfi, in displaying all this horror is presenting itself to be a typical revenge play of its time.

The rascally servant

Another feature of a revenge tragedy is the presence of a rascal servant, a rogue usually known as the malcontent. In presenting Bosola, who indulges in criticism of evils of society and obscene jokes with old women, Webster is keeping up that tradition. He is the cause of the Duchess and her children's death.

Webster rise of melodrama into tragedy

Though Webster is greatly influenced by revenge tragedy, he succeeds in considering improving upon this tradition. The emphasis, in melodrama, is on action and events, but in man tragedy, it is on character portrayal and revelation of human nature and human motif. Webster succeeds in character portrayal and revealing human nature to a great extent.

The supernatural elements

Webster does not present any conventional ghost and objects of typical revenge tragedy. The supernatural in the play is to be found only in some fancies. Webster shows vital concern for an artistic atmosphere.

Madness shown on the stages

Webster presents the chorus of madmen according to revenge tradition. However, there is some psychological interest is also in this.

So Duchess of Malfi is the best revenge tragedy of its time

4. The character of Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi

Bosola is a somewhat Machiavellian character, used by Duke Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess of Malfi. He is the stable manager of duchess but, he is there to keep tabs on her movements at the behest of his royal patron.

This isn't the first time that Bosola has been involved in such secret, clandestine business. Back in the day, he carried out the dirty work of another high-placed personage, murdering a man at the behest of the Cardinal, Duke Ferdinand's brother. After what Bosola did for his brother, the Duke felt that Bosola was just the man to spy on the Duchess.

Yet Bosola proves not to be a willing lackey. He develops moral qualms about doing the dirty work for evil aristocrats. If he obeys the Duke, it is only out of a sense of loyalty; he is not in it for the money.

After participating in the torture of the Duchess, Bosola's guilt is such that he can no longer work for Duke Ferdinand. Thus, Bosola switches sides and helps Antonio kill the Duke and the Cardinal. He is the most complicated character in the play. It enhances the beauty of this play.

5. Discuss the line "Ambition, madam, is a great man's madness" from *The Duchess of Malfi*.

By the line "Ambition, madam is a great man's madness," Antonio, the Duchess of Malfi's steward, expresses his concerns about being raised to her level of wealth and power by marrying her. Antonio believes that being raised to the level of such greatness will cause him to suffer the same madness of ambition that he sees in others, including the Duchess's brothers, the violent and unstable Frederick, and the corrupt, emotionless, immoral Cardinal.

Essay Type Questions (500-1000 words)

- Discuss various themes in The Duchess of Malfi.
- Discuss Duchess of Malfi as a séance revenge tragedy.

The Duchess of Malfi reflects various themes.

Hell on Earth

The Duchess of Malfi is a play replete with darkness, both literal and figurative. There are good figures, and these characters are associated with light. On the other hand, the brothers, who exhibit unrelenting evil, are associated with motifs of darkness, fire, the devil, and sin.

The idea that the brothers have unleashed hell on Earth is most apparent in the fourth act, which includes utter horrors like fake corpses, a severed hand, a plethora of madmen, and most centrally, the vicious murders of the Duchess and her children. The Duchess, a symbol of motherhood and light, is unfazed by these horrors because she believes her family is already dead, but she does explain that “the earth” seems made “of flaming sulfur” (4.2.26). And when Bosola tells her she must keep living, she makes it clear that hell is truly on Earth—

“That’s the greatest torture souls feel in hell,/In hell: that they must live, and cannot die”,

The Cardinal and Ferdinand are particularly responsible for bringing this fire to her world. Ferdinand is constantly associated with fire, by others, and in his language. He says only the Duchess’s “whore’s blood” can put out his “wild-fire” he imagines killing her children by having them “burning in a coal-pit”, lighting “them like a match” after dipping them in “sulfur”. Additionally, he is associated with salamanders—at the time of the play, thought to live in fire—multiple times.

Both brothers are also even more directly connected to hell through constant associations with the devil. Antonio says “the devil speaks in” the Cardinal’s lips and Bosola describes Ferdinand's manipulation as: “Thus the devil/Candies all sins o’er”. These are but two of several instances.

This hell on Earth serves to emphasize just how virtuous the Duchess is, and how much better for the world her kind of domestic love and child-rearing is than the greed and selfishness of her brothers. The hell that they create in the end destroys them, too—as Ferdinand says, “Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust”. Ferdinand goes mad, the Cardinal loses all hope, and both die, leaving no legacy behind them.

Disguise

Disguise—masking reality, hiding one’s true intentions, presenting a false front—is a major theme in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The most obvious symbol of this is Bosola. The distinction between what he says and how he acts is so vast that even the audience, who is given access to his private thoughts through soliloquies and asides, has trouble understanding his motivations.

He is a spy and is thus constantly disguising his motives and his true feelings. Further, in the fourth act, he disguises himself as an old man. However, he also repeatedly shows disgust for the act of disguising. He is reluctant to take on the role of spy, and notes that “the devil/Candies all sin o’er”, thus associating the act of disguising with evil, and he scorns how men “delight/to hide” their “rotten and dead body” “eaten up of lice and worms” “in rich tissue”. Thus, he is both the character who most thoroughly employs disguise and the one most aware of its sinful, unattractive nature.

Disguise is so prevalent in the play that even the Duchess, the paragon of light, must employ it. In her first appearance on stage, she tells her brothers, “I’ll never marry”, and then before the scene is even over, she has proposed to and married Antonio. She had disguised her true intentions from them. She then manages to have three children with Antonio without ever revealing their marriage, and even when the discovery of the marriage becomes imminent, she quickly devises an excuse to send Antonio out of harm’s way.

Yet this dishonesty is not meant to reflect poorly on the Duchess. Instead, it shows just how profoundly corrupt her brothers have made the world, in that the Duchess must disguise a good and pure love simply to survive. Her use of disguise reveals her energy and resourcefulness in her fight for what is good on this Earth.

The Fertile Woman

Evil in *The Duchess of Malfi* is a powerful and pervasive force that manages to destroy almost all that is good, but it is not all-powerful. At the end of the play, the Duchess's oldest son survives to carry on her and Antonio's legacy, which provides a symbol of hope tied in with the play's greatest force for good: the fertile and reproductive female.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal both express dark views on female sexuality. When they find out that the Duchess has a son, they cannot imagine this being the result of love or a legitimate marriage, but they

instead imagine the boy as a product of wanton lust. Ferdinand goes so far as to describe the men he imagines having sex with his sister.

The reality of a woman's fertility, though, is the complete opposite. After Antonio and the Duchess wed, she says they can remain chaste if he wants, suggesting that their marriage is not based on an all-consuming lust. They do sleep together and produce three children, but this reflects only the loving creation of a family. The scene in which Antonio, the Duchess, and Cariola tease each other reveals a comfortable domestic bliss, not a hotbed of fiery passion. And, also in this scene, the goodness of such a love is emphasized when Antonio berates Cariola for wanting to stay single. He argues that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, those women who scorned love and lovers were turned into barren plants or stones, while those who married became fruitful trees, bestowing gifts to the world.

Though Antonio's first description of the Duchess is arguably unrealistic, she is revealed through the play as a figure very much of the earth. She is fat with pregnancy in the second act, "an excellent/Feeder of pedigrees" and manages to birth three children over two acts. Even when she is about to die, rather than transition into a saintly figure, she retains her ties to the earth for one last moment, asking Cariola to give her son some cold medicine and to let her daughter say her prayers. Her domestic duties remain paramount to her, even as she prepares to leave the earth forever.

Once all the evil has been done, all that remains of this family that had epitomized domestic bliss is its eldest son. Amid all the destruction, this product of love and the reproductive woman will be raised as a testament to the goodness of his mother. Thus, her power as a good mother, in the end, is greater than her brothers' evil.

The Perversion of Justice

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, justice fails as a force for good; instead, it is corrupted into a tool for Ferdinand and the Cardinal. The rules that govern their world are perverse and immoral, so the justice they seek to enact inherently becomes perverse and immoral itself. Delio prepares the audience for this in the first act, when he says of Ferdinand,

Then the law to him
Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:
He makes it his dwelling, and a prison
To entangle those shall feed him.

The law, which should uphold peace and fairness, is instead a "foul" trap that Ferdinand uses to benefit himself.

Once the Duchess is dead and Ferdinand is overcome with regret, he points out how he has misused justice, when he asks,

"Did any ceremonial form of law/Doom her to not-being?"

Bosola, to assuage his guilt, has imagined the Duchess's murder as an officially sanctioned act. He describes himself as

“the common bellman/That usually is sent to condemned persons”

as if she had been condemned by a judge or jury. When Ferdinand disabuses this notion by arguing he (Ferdinand) holds no authority with which to condemn the Duchess to death, Bosola says,

“The office of justice is perverted quite/When one thief hangs another”.

Only now, when it corrupted justice is working directly against him, does he realize how perverted their system truly is.

Class

The importance of class and rank is questioned throughout *The Duchess of Malfi*. Those characters that place the most value on it are those who do the most damage to the world of the play, while the Duchess fights for the idea that a man’s worth is reflected by his actions and character, not by his title.

The Duchess’s marriage to Antonio is a happy one, at least until exposed to the machinations of her brothers. They have three children and a clearly-expressed love for each other. Ferdinand and the Cardinal’s disgust about her marriage is thus particularly repulsive, especially since their only specific complaint revolves around his lower class.

Ironically, Bosola is first to defend the Duchess’s choice to marry Antonio regardless of his class, although he is arguably lying when he does so. He takes it so far as to praise not just the Duchess, but their

progressive age for allowing such a union, and he says that her example will spread hope to all those who aspire to rise above their natural station. His speech is tempered by the dramatic irony, the audience's knowledge that he is being disingenuous, and indeed, his success in fooling the Duchess by lavishing such praise on Antonio is what inspires her to confess her secret to him, a confession that will cost her her life.

Once the need for deceit is gone, Bosola makes his true feelings known, and he, like the Cardinal and Ferdinand, thinks Antonio's class makes him an unworthy match for the Duchess. This gives the Duchess the chance to defend her choice, and in doing so she shows that not only does Antonio's worth greatly exceed many men of higher rank—Count Malateste, for one—but many noblemen are the "most wretch'd", like her brothers. Nobility is not inherently evil, as the Duchess herself is noble, but it has "neither heat, nor light", and this isn't inherently good, either.

The Costs of Evil

Evil is incontrovertibly destructive in *The Duchess of Malfi*, taking a loving family of five and reducing it to one young survivor. It is also, however, deeply destructive to those who perpetrate it, and not just their victims. Not only do the three pillars of evil in the play--the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and Bosola--all die by the end of the fifth act, but they also each pay a special penance that elucidates just how terrible evil can be to those who employ it.

Ferdinand is the most obvious example. Throughout the play, his anger is so intense that he seems almost deranged, but he does not truly lose his mind until the murder of his twin sister. The change comes so suddenly after her death--he leaves the stage to go hunt badger--that it is a result of the evil he has done. In addition, the form his lunacy takes--digging up corpses and believing himself to be a wolf--is also intricately connected to his guilt, as he says that “The wolf shall find her grave, and scrape it up” “to discover/The horrid murder”.

For the Cardinal, the costs are more subtle. He pays with his life, of course, but he also gives up what he values most throughout the play--his reputation. Whereas the cause of Ferdinand’s anger towards his sister is not entirely clear, the Cardinal's resentment is based around the family’s reputation-

-“Shall our blood/The royal blood of Aragon and Castile,/Be thus attainted?”.

When he dies, the state of their family is in such shambles that he wants to be blotted out completely--” I pray, let me/Be laid by, and never thought of”, and Delio makes it clear that he will get his wish since the evil brothers have left nothing behind to be remembered.

The price Bosola pays is more complicated, in the same way, that his participation in the evil is more complicated. By the end, he wants to redeem himself, at least partially, for all he has done. Instead, he

accidentally kills Antonio, destroying his last chance to perpetuate good. He does succeed in killing Ferdinand and the Cardinal, but arguably only because Ferdinand gets involved and wounds the Cardinal himself. Bosola has a small amount of peace in knowing that he loses his life in ending theirs, but because of the evil he has perpetrated, he finds no true peace, evidenced by his final speech, in which he reflects on the darkness he helped create in the world.

Thus, the characters who employ evil in the play ultimately pay for it with more than simply their lives.

Reputation and Legacy

The characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* are deeply concerned about reputation and legacy. Ferdinand and the Cardinal are obsessed with the Duchess's reputation, and how it affects their own. When they warn her not to be a "lusty widow" before leaving her alone in Malfi, they are driven by a fear that her behavior will "poison" her "fame". Later, when they discover that she has had a child; it is partially the tainting of their "royal blood" that concerns them. Ferdinand tells the Duchess that, having parted from her good reputation, he will never see her, his twin sister, again.

Yet because of their obsessive concern with their family's reputation, the brothers ironically leave no legacy. The Cardinal's very last words are a plea to be "never thought of" (5.5.89), and Delio explains that the brothers' legacy will last no longer than a print in the snow when the sun comes out. The Duchess, conversely, doesn't care about her

reputation or her family's name, and her goodness creates a lasting and positive legacy that might outlive her and her brothers, represented in the care Delio and the others will take to raise her surviving son in her honor. This idea is so central to the play that it gets the closing lines--" Integrity of life is fame's best friend/Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end". The Duchess needed no shallow concern with a reputation to ensure a noble legacy "beyond death," but rather simply the "integrity of life" that she reflected.

5. The Duchess of Malfi as a Revenge Tragedy

"The Duchess of Malfi" by John Webster is a kind of Revenge Tragedy modeled on Seneca, the Latin playwright of 1st century A.D. This play is considered as one of the best plays of Webster and as a Revenge Tragedy, it is considered as the best tragedy after Shakespeare's containing almost all the characteristics of Revenge Tragedy. This play contains the depth of extreme violence, plotting, and mostly revenge on the best part which are the chief elements of revenge tragedy. However, The Duchess of Malfi contains full of terrifying, hair-raising situations from the beginning to the end. However, if we want to consider The Duchess of Malfi as a Revenge Tragedy, we need to know what we mean by revenge tragedy and its major conventions.

The name Revenge Tragedy arose from the Senecan tradition of making revenge the motive force for the action that leads to the tragedy. The characteristics of Revenge Tragedy are:

1. The story should center on characters of noble birth.
2. The narrative should involve complex plotting.
3. There should be murder
4. There should be a desire for revenge
5. The plot should involve physical horrors such as poising and torture.
6. The order should be restored at the end of the play.
7. The presence of supernatural elements.
8. Brutal human desires are essential and become the climax of the play.

However, the Latin playwright, Seneca, is considered to be one who established the revenge play. All the elements of revenge tragedy are found in the duchess of Malfi.

This drama contains so many elements of horror which can be classified as a melodrama. The last two acts of the play have an abundance of them. The last two acts are full of horror scenes. The duke to horrify the duchess gives a dead body hand to the duchess and the duchess kissed it taking it to be Duke's hand. The unruly dance of madmen before the duchess, the appearance of Bosola as a tomb maker, the appearance of executioners with bell create a horrifying

atmosphere in the play. The Duchess of Malfi, in displaying all this horror is presenting itself to be a typical revenge play of its time.

The rascally servant

Another feature of a revenge tragedy is the presence of a rascal servant, a rogue usually known as the malcontent. In presenting Bosala, who indulges in criticism of evils of society and obscene jokes with old women, Webster is keeping up that tradition. He is the cause of Duchess and her children's death.

Webster rise of melodrama into tragedy

Though Webster is greatly influenced by revenge tragedy, he succeeds in considering improving upon this tradition. The emphasis, in melodrama, is on action and events, but in man tragedy, it is on character portrayal and revelation of human nature and human motif. Webster succeeds in character portrayal and revealing human nature to a great extent.

The supernatural elements

Webster does not present any conventional ghost and objects of typical revenge tragedy. The supernatural in the play is to be found only in some fancies. Webster shows vital concern for an artistic atmosphere.

Madness shown on the stages

Webster presents the chorus of madmen according to revenge tradition. however, there is some psychological interest is also in this.

So Duchess of Malfi is the best revenge tragedy of its time

3.10 References-

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Subject : MA (English)	
Course Code: 201	**Author: Dr. Nutan Yadav**
Unit :04 (1550-1660) Sem-2	
Selected poems of John Donne	

Lesson Structure

4.1 Learning objectives

- To develop critical thinking among students towards literature.
- To enhance their knowledge of literature.
- To let them enjoy different genres of literature.

- To make them good in the English language.

4.2 Introduction of Age (Metaphysical Period)

The period previous to Metaphysical poetry was the Elizabethan period. Elizabethan period in spite of its merits and popularity suffered from a number of inherent weaknesses. It was artificial and conventional. John Donne disliked the Petrarchan convention, the cruelty of the mistress, and the conceits of the Elizabethans. Thus he may be said to be the founder of a new type of poetry. Donne was the acknowledged master of metaphysical poets. Others who belonged to this school of poetry were Crashaw, Cowley, Herbert, and Vaughan. The poetry of all these poets was intellectual, analytical, psychological, bold, and their favorite themes were death, love, and religious devotion. They turned to analysis and form a healthy acceptance of the world to a somewhat morbid brooding on religion and probing of their soul. For smoothness, they substituted roughness of meter, and from conventional love, they substituted realistic and cynical treatment of physical passion.

Metaphysical poetry revolves around two broad divisions

- Love poetry
- Religious poetry

Donne wrote love poetry in the first period of his life and devotional lyrics in the later period, both with the same passion. Later in the middle of the 17^{th} century, Cavalier poets wrote only amorous verses. The devotional school of metaphysical poets, Herbert, Crashaw,

Vaghan dedicated their poetic gift to the service of the Christian religion.

4.3 Main Body of the Text

A contemporary of Marlowe and Shakespeare, Donne shares with them the spirit and quality of the Renaissance. The contradictions of the age are reflected in the career and achievement of Donne. The inconsistency of the Elizabethan is mirrored in the complex personality of Donne, a poet of intellectual ingenuity and theological ingeniousness. It is not difficult to explain the versatility and the varied achievements of the poet, in the light of the age to which he belonged.

The chief characteristic of Donne poetry-

- It is full of versatility and complexity
- He influences European literature
- Undoubtedly he was ambitious. He reflects multifarious activities.
- As a typical product of the Renaissance movement, he shows elements of humanism, both in his personality and in his poetry. His humanism finds its best outlet in his hunger for knowledge and thirst for unraveling the mystery of existence.
- Donne's intellectual curiosity enables him to challenge accepted beliefs and conventions.
- There is a strain of skepticism in his poetry. He realizes man's condition as not that of one fallen but redeemed.

- He represents the swing from the romantic to that sexual, in English love poetry.
- Donne is the master of the use of conceits in his poetry(a conceit is a pleasant, fantastic farfetched idea, image, or comparison)
- The quality of dissonance is beautifully depicted in his poetry (dissonance is something struck to produce a certain artistic effect in poetry.)
- For some critics, Donne's poetry is full of obscurity in style, which is due to excessive intellectualism in his poems.

4.3.1 About the Poet

John Donne is the most remarkable English poet. He has been classified both by Dryden and Samuel Johnson as a "metaphysical poet." This title has been conferred on him because of his sudden

flights from the material to the spiritual sphere and also because of his obscurity. His works abound in wit and conceits. Conceits are the very soul and stuff of his poetic diction. In addition to this, his style is overwhelmed with obscurity.

On account of philosophical allusions (references) and subtle and abstract references to science and religion, he set a fashion for metaphysical conceits and influenced several contemporary poets like Crashaw and Cowley

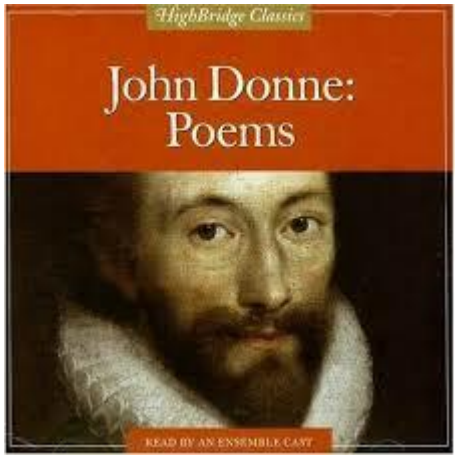
4.3.2 About the Poem

The best-known poems of John Donne are-

- **The Ecstasy**
- **The Sun Rising**
- **The canonization**
- **The Good Morrow**
- **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning**
- **Song (Go and Catch a falling star)**
- **Love's growth**
- **Batter My Heart, Three-Personed God**
- **Since She whom I**

4.4 Further Body of the Text

CRITICAL STUDY OF THE POEMS



1. THE CANONIZATION

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me, love,
Or chide my palsy or my gout,
My five gray hairs or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour or his grace,
Or the king's realm, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me, love …

These are the opening line of one of Donne's most famous poems, 'The Canonization.' It is a love poem, but like many of his other poems Donne fuses sexual or romantic love with religious motifs and imagery. After all, to 'canonize' someone is to declare them a saint. Love, indeed, becomes a sort of religion in itself – a sanctified thing.

We get some of the key features of John Donne's love poetry in 'The Canonization': the bragging, the sense that the sun shines out of the lovers' blinds because they have something the rest of the world will

never have: they have their love for each other, which is greater than anyone else's.

We can die by it, if not live by love,

And if unfit for tombs and hearse

Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;

And if no piece of chronicle we prove,

We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;

As well a well-wrought urn becomes

The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,

And by these hymns, all shall approve

We canonized for Love.

Explanation-

This poem is addressed by one friend to another. The speaker asks his friend to let him love and if his friend must criticize him, then let it be for his other faults. He argues that no harm has ever been done by his love and the world goes on unaffected by it. The speaker then describes how deeply he and his lover are in love claiming that their love will live on in legend, even if they die. He adds that such is the power of their love that *it will see them canonized* or *declared saints*. The speaker ends by stating that even whole countries, towns, and courts yearn to know such love. The Canonization is a widely acclaimed poem and it is seen as exemplifying Donne's wit and irony.

Despite its wit, it neither mocks religion by exalting love; nor does it aim to poke fun of love by comparing it to sainthood.

2. BATTER MY HEART, THREE-PERSONED GOD

Alternate Title: S*onnet XIV*

Published: *1633*

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Explanation-

“Batter My Heart” is part of John Donne’s series of 19 poems known as Holy Sonnets, Divine Meditations, or Divine Sonnets. The poems in the collection were written at different points of his life through all were first published in 1633. This poem was written after he became an Anglican priest. Despite that, it is full of the same erotic language we find in his earlier love poems. In it Donne employs violent and sexual imagery while he directly addresses God. He asks God to stop merely trying to persuade him and instead use his divine power to “break me and remold me into someone new.” The sonnet ends with a very daring declaration by the speaker for God to “ravish“ him. “Batter My Heart” is among the best-known poems of Donne’s Holy Sonnets and one of the most dramatic devotional lyrics in the English language.

3. A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING

As virtuous men pass mildly away,

And whisper to their souls to go,

Whilst some of their sad friends do say

The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,

No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;

‘Twere profanation of our joys

To tell the laity our love.

Explanation -

John Donne is perhaps most famous for his poetry that explores love, and this poem is one of his best-known works in the genre. It was written in 1611 or 1612 for his wife Anne More before he left on a trip to Continental Europe. The speaker of the poem is about to part from his beloved for a long duration and though he deeply loves her, he says she should not mourn their separation. He then uses a sequence of metaphors, each describing a way to look at the occasion of their separation without mourning. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is notable for its use of conceits and ingenious analogies to describe the couple's relationship. It is one of the most famous poems which describe the parting of lovers. Utilizing metaphors of compass points and alchemical processes to describe the relationship between the husband and wife, it is one of the finest examples of Metaphysical poetry.

In 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', Donne likens the relationship between him and his wife to a religious or spiritual bond between two souls: note that he uses the word 'laity' to describe other people who cannot understand the love the two of them bear one another.

This kinship between their souls means that they can transcend the physical basis of their relationship and so endure time apart from each other, while he is on the Continent and his wife remains back at home.

Other couples, who are bonded physically but don't have this deeper spiritual connection, couldn't bear to be physically apart like that.

4. The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do

Explanation

Since this flea has sucked blood from both me and you, the poet says to his would-be mistress, our blood has already been mingled in the flea's body; so why shouldn't we mingle our bodies (and their fluids) in sexual intercourse? Of course, this rather crude paraphrase is worlds away from the elegance and metaphorical originality of Donne's poem

No list of Donne's best poems would be complete without this one. Like many great metaphysical poems, 'The Flea' uses an interesting and unusual conceit to make an argument – in this case, about the nature of physical love. The Flea' is essentially a seduction lyric.

5. **The Good-Morrow**

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee

Explanation

It's a celebration of young love and a very candid depiction of two lovers sharing their bodies. Like so many of Donne's love poems, it takes us right into the bedroom, 'between the sheets'

This poem celebrates the feeling of newness which love can bring: the sense of your life having truly begun when you meet the person you love. The opening lines address this plainly: 'I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I / Did, till we loved?' Watch out, too, for the sly pun on a certain four-letter word in the third line's reference to 'country pleasures'.

6. **The Sun Rising**

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time

Explanation

This is how one of Donne's most celebrated poems begins. And it's gloriously frank – it begins with Donne chastising the sun for peeping through the curtains, rousing him and his lover as they lie in bed together of a morning. Donne's metaphors are clever: observe the way he takes the idea of being blinded by staring at the sun and turns it on its head, saying that the sun itself may well be blinded by looking upon the eyes of his beloved – they're that dazzling and beautiful.

It's impossible to be blinded by beauty, of course, but the cleverness of the conceit transforms it from a clichéd declaration of love.

7. Song: 'Go and catch a falling star

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind

This is one of Donne's most cynical poems: the speaker of the poem argues that finding a woman who will remain faithful is as impossible as catching a falling star from the sky

8. To His Mistress Going to Bed

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labour, I in labour lie.
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tir'd with standing though he never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heaven's Zone glistering,
But a far fairer world encompassing

Explanation

Also titled 'Elegy XIX', 'To His Mistress Going to Bed' (as it was originally spelled) is another seduction poem, in which a naked Donne undresses his mistress verbally, one item of clothing at a time. Donne's poem undoes, or at the very least develops, the usual idea of courtly love by confronting the fact that the courtly love poet, in praising the beautiful woman, ultimately wants to go to bed with her (though often he can't and never will get the chance).

Donne's poem argues that the unattainable woman shouldn't be unattainable: all that flattery of her looks and beauty is because the poet wants to sleep with her. So, Donne concludes, why don't we just do it? He also briefly introduces, and overturns, the idea of Neo-

Platonism (also seen elsewhere in his poetry): namely, that the body must be left behind to love the soul.

9. The Ecstasy

Where, like a pillow on a bed
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best;

Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string

Explanation

This love poem turns the idea of 'purity' on its head, arguing that truly pure love can only be founded on the physical union. Body and soul should not be seen as separate entities, but two complementary elements, both of which are essential for true love to be possible.

The title is from the Greek *ekstasis*, *ex stasis*, literally means 'outside standing' – i.e. standing outside of oneself, or apart from oneself. A truly 'ecstatic' experience is always, to some extent, an out-of-body experience. Donne's poem, then, is about the separation of the body and soul, which is immediately odd, since elsewhere his poetry

explores the idea that the soul and the body are, in fact, one. It begins:

4.5 Check Your Progress

Short answer type questions-

- **Critical appreciation of the poem "A valediction: Forbidding Mourning**

  This is a personal poem showing the pure love and devotion of the poet to his beloved. The poet shows the uniqueness of true love and it can stand separation on account of confidence and affection. This separation may be deemed like death, but as good men are not afraid of death, true lovers are not afraid of separation. This is not a farewell to love, but an exposition of true and devotion love which can stand the shock of temporary separation, because it is not based on sex or physical attraction. The poet offers her consolation for his short absence. He says that their love is so holy and pure that in spite of separation, they have no feeling of loneliness. Their love is not based on physical enjoyment. Donne employs the conceit of 'twin compasses. Their souls may be two but they are united at the center like the two sides of the compass. The joining of encircling foot suggests the return of the poet to his beloved. Another conceit is gold bitten to thinness.

The strength of the poem lies in its argument and use of appropriate conceits and images.

- **Critical appreciation of poem The Flea**

The flea has been the subject of love poetry. The argument used by the poet is that the flea has free access to the body of the beloved which is denied to the lover. Donne however makes a plea for physical union, which is necessary for spiritual love. Donne's originality and intensity make it a powerful lyric. The flea is a symbol of the poet's passionate plea for physical and sensuous love. The flea has brought the union of lover's blood. So the physical love is not considered to be a matter of sin and shame or loss of virginity. The flea is superior to the lover because it can enjoy physical union without the formality of marriage. Donne goes a step ahead. He compares the flea to a temple and a marriage bed. In the end, the killing of a flea is an act of triple murder--killing of a flea, killing of a lover, and the killing of herself. This is a sin according to the lover.

- **What does Donne want to convey in the poem "Go and Catch a Falling Star"**

This song was published after his death in1633. It was written in his youth when he saw a good deal of London life. His gay life in London and his association with different women in London only confirmed his view about woman faithlessness. Through different series of images, the poet shows the impossibility of discovering a true and faithful lady. The cynical attitude to the fair sex in the

early poems of Donne is in contrast with the rational attitude to love and sex to be found in his later poems.

- **What is Donne's contribution in English style and language**

Or

- **Comment on Donne's versification, diction, and language**

Donne has made a remarkable contribution to English poetic diction and versification. His poetry is based on individual techniques. His style is unconventional. His poems are like voyages of discovery, exploring new worlds of life, love, and spirits. In his poetry, we find that matter is more important than words. He laid principal stress on the management of thought. His love poems are explorations of types of love and friendship.

The basis of Donne's poetry is neither music nor imagery but the idea. There is a basic idea underlying each poem. The idea may be real or imaginative.

Donne's poetry possesses both structural and decorative peculiarities. Moreover, the greatest metrical variety in the form o syllables and stanza shows not only the fertility of his generosity but also his interest and ear of music. He uses simple and colloquial language. He plays with rhythm as he plays with conceits and phrases. Donne uses diction is remarkable.

- **Comment on the use of conceits and images of John Donne.**

Donne’s conceits are peculiar and novel. A conceit means a strained or farfetched comparison or literary figure. The Elizabethan conceits were decorative and ornamental, while metaphysical conceits were the products of the intellectual process of thinking in figures. For Donne, the flea who stuck their blood is the blessed go-between who has united the lover

4.6 Summary

John Donne is considered the preeminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His poetical works are noted for their metaphorical and sensual style and include sonnets, love poems, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, and satires. He is also known for his sermons. Donne's style is characterized by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies, and dislocations

Another important theme in Donne's poetry is the idea of true religion, something that he spent much time considering and about which he often theorized. He wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits. John Donne’s poetry is a curious mix of contradictions. At once spiritual and metaphysical, it is also deeply embedded in the physicality of bodies: love as a physical, corporeal experience as well as a spiritual high. His style can often be startlingly plain (‘For God’s sake hold your tongue, one of the poems on this list

begins), yet his imagery is frequently complex, his use of extended metaphors requiring some careful unpacking. Here we've condensed the complete poetical works of John Donne into ten of his best-known and most celebrated poems.

4.7 Keywords

- Conceit-a device used in poetry for distance comparison
- Dissonance-a poetic device to give musical effect to words
- Metaphysical-leading from physical to spiritual word
- Illusion- a poetic device to give imaginative effect
- Classification- division
- Paradox- to opposites come together in a poem
- Intellectualism extended to a wide range and scope

4.8 Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs)

Essay type questions (1000-1500 words)

- **Discuss John Donne as a Metaphysical poet.**
- **John Donne is a poet of love. Discuss with reference to the poems prescribed in syllabus.**

4.9 Answers to Your Progress

Qus. Discuss John Donne as a Metaphysical poet

John Donne was the most prominent of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century. His contemporaries include *Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, Richard Crashaw*, etc.

He is the most prominent of the metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets were the people of learning. Donne, in his early poems, has also expressed his knowledge of society. He has presented the problems in it using criticism and satire. However, the subject of religion was the most important to Donne. He also wrote erotic poetry in his early career with the unusual use of metaphors. His life has an obvious impact on his poetry and we can see him making references to his life, in his poetry. It is also believed that the death of his wife and friends made his poetry style kind of somber and gloomy.

Characteristics of John Donne's poetry

John Donne's poetry is metaphysical because of the uniqueness in his poetry and his search for questions. Wit is dominant in his poetry, and it is vague and makes use of improbable conceits. The themes of his poems include paradoxes, fidelity, religion, Death and the Hereafter, both physical and spiritual Love, Interconnection between humanity, etc. Let us look at the unique and interesting characteristics of Donne's poetry.

Donne was an intellectual and he has always used unique and new concepts in his poetry. He would ask questions in his poetry that people would not normally think about and prompt the reader to open his mind. In his '*Death Be Not Proud'*, he has talked to death as if it was a person and asked death upon death.

Because Donne provided such new philosophical ideas in his poetry, vagueness has become a prominent characteristic of his poetry too. There is no clear right or wrong, it is just that he would provide

with an idea, and it depends on the reader now, how he perceives it. Due to this, most of his poetry is obscure. One must read his writings several times to grasp a concept.

As wit is the most important part of metaphysical poetry, so it is of Donne's poetry too. He is, in fact, called the "*Monarch of Wit*". His wit goes in all directions, from seriousness to humour. His intellectual abilities, syllogism, exaggeration, and irony also make wit in his poetry great.

Conceit is plentiful in John Donne's poetry. *Conceit* is a comparison of the most improbable things. John Donne has compared two lovers to two opposite sides of a compass in his poetry. In his 'The Flea', he has compared a flea to a marriage bed. In 'The Sun Rising', he has said that he could eclipse the Sun as if he was a star. In 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', he says that parting should be happy, and it should not be a cause of sadness, and death should be calm.

John Donne was the person to introduce sayings and maxims into metaphysical poetry. He, flouting the age old maxim, says that death gives peace to people, whereas it is looked upon as evil.

Conclusion

As we have seen above, John Donne is a metaphysical poet at its finest. The subject matter he selected for his poems, the use of imagery, irony, farfetched concepts and all, contributes to making him a great metaphysical poet. He used his poetry to search for himself

and the questions he had. His poetry is more of a journey for him, a journey of love, self-discovery, understanding, and spirituality.

2.Discuss John Donne as a poet of love.

The variety and scope of Donne's love lyrics is truly remarkable. It oscillates between physical love and holy love, between cynicism and faith in love, and above all the sanctity and dignity of married life is beautifully shown in his poems. His earlier love poems are rather erotic and sensual and deal with the real intrigues of the lover. Moreover, he is quite original in presenting love situations and moods.

Another peculiar quality of Donne's love poems is their metaphysical strain. Donne does not lay stress on beauty or rather the aesthetic element in passion. His poems are sensuous and fantastic. He goes through the whole gamut of passion from lower to its highest forms. He perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy.

His poetry can be divided into three heads-

1. Poems of moods of a lover,
2. Seduction, and free love or fanciful relationship.
3. Poems address to his wife before and after marriage;
4. Poems addressed to noble ladies of his acquaintance.

There are three standards of his poems related to love.

- Firstly, there is the cynical that is anti-woman and hostile to the fair sex.
- Then some poems are dedicated to peace and fulfillment to be found in happy married life.
- Thirdly there is the platonic concept of love. Donne's treatment of love is realistic and not idealistic

Most of his poems were preserved in manuscript copies made by and passed among a relatively small but admiring coterie of poetry lovers. Most current scholars agree, however, that the elegies (which in Donne's case are poems of love, not of mourning), epigrams, verse letters, and satires were written in the 1590s, the *Songs and Sonnets* from the 1590s until 1617, and the "Holy Sonnets" and other religious lyrics from the time of Donne's marriage until his ordination in 1615. He composed the hymns late in his life, in the 1620s. Donne's *Anniversaries* were published in 1611–12 and were the only important poetic works by him published in his lifetime.

Donne's poetry is marked by strikingly original departures from the conventions of 16th-century English verse, particularly that of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Even his early satires and elegies, which derive from classical Latin models, contain versions of his experiments with genre, form, and imagery. His poems do not contain descriptive passages like those in Spenser, nor do his lines follow the smooth metrics and euphonious sounds of his predecessors. Donne

replaced their mellifluous lines with a speaking voice whose vocabulary and syntax reflect the emotional intensity of a confrontation and whose metrics and verbal music conform to the needs of a particular dramatic situation. One consequence of this is a directness of language that electrifies his mature poetry. “For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me, love,” begins his love poem “The Canonization,” plunging the reader into the midst of an encounter between the speaker and an unidentified listener. Holy Sonnet XI opens with an imaginative confrontation wherein Donne, not Jesus, suffers indignities on the cross: “Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side….”

From these explosive beginnings, the poems develop as closely reasoned arguments or propositions that rely heavily on the use of the conceit—i.e., an extended metaphor that draws an ingenious parallel between apparently dissimilar situations or objects. Donne, however, transforms the conceit into a vehicle for transmitting multiple, sometimes even contradictory, feelings and ideas. And, changing again the practice of earlier poets, he draws his imagery from such diverse fields as alchemy, astronomy, medicine, politics, global exploration, and philosophical disputation. Donne’s famous analogy of parting lovers to a drawing compass affords a prime example. The immediate shock of some of his conceits aroused Samuel Johnson to call them “heterogeneous ideas…yoked by violence together.” These conceits offer brilliant and multiple

insights into the subject of the metaphor and help give rise to the much-praised ambiguity of Donne's lyrics.

The presence of a listener is another of Donne's modifications of the Renaissance love lyric, Donne speaks directly to the lady or some other listener. The latter may even determine the course of the poem, as in "The Flea," in which the speaker changes his tack once the woman crushes the insect on which he has built his argument about the innocence of lovemaking.

Donne's poems maintain the verbal music and introspective approach that define lyric poetry. His speakers may fashion an imaginary figure to which they utter their lyric outburst, or, conversely, they may lapse into reflection amid an address to a listener. Donne also departs from earlier lyrics by adapting the syntax and rhythms of living speech to his poetry. Taken together, these features of his poetry provided an impetus for the works of such later poets as Robert Browning, William Butler Yeats, and T.S. Eliot.

Donne also radically adapted some of the standard materials of love lyrics. For example, even though he continued to use such Petrarchan conceits as "parting from one's beloved is death," a staple of Renaissance love poetry.

Donne's love lyrics provide keen psychological insights about a broad range of lovers and a wide spectrum of amorous feelings. His speakers range from lustful men so sated by their numerous affairs

that they denounce love as a fiction and women as objects—food, birds of prey, mummies—to platonic lovers who celebrate both the magnificence of their ladies and their miraculous abstention from consummating their love. Men whose love is unrequited feel victimized and seek revenge on their ladies, only to realize the ineffectuality of their retaliation. In the poems of mutual love, however, Donne's lovers rejoice in the compatibility of their sexual and spiritual love and seek immortality for an emotion that they elevate to an almost religious plane.

Donne's devotional lyrics, especially the "Holy Sonnets," "Good Friday 1613, The Hymns, passionately explore his love for God, sometimes through sexual metaphors, and depict his doubts, fears, and sense of spiritual unworthiness. None of them shows him spiritually at peace.

The most sustained of Donne's poems, the *Anniversaries,* were written to commemorate the death of Elizabeth Drury, the 14-year-old daughter of his patron, Sir Robert Drury. These poems subsume their ostensible subject into a philosophical meditation on the decay of the world. Elizabeth Drury becomes, as Donne noted, "the Idea of a woman," and a lost pattern of virtue. Through this idealized feminine figure, Donne in *The First Anniversarie: An Anatomie of the World* laments humanity's spiritual death, beginning with the loss of Eden and continuing in the decay of the contemporary world, in which men have lost the wisdom that connects them to God. In *The*

Second Anniversarie: Of the Progres of the Soule, Donne, partly through a eulogy on Elizabeth Drury, ultimately regains the wisdom that directs him toward eternal life.

The impression in his poetry is that thought and argument are arising immediately out of passionate feeling made Donne the master of both the mature Yeats and Eliot, who were reacting against the meditative lyricism of a Romantic tradition in decline. Indeed, the play of intellect in Donne's poetry, his scorn of conventionally poetic images, and the dramatic realism of his style made him the idol of English-speaking poets and critics in the first half of the 20th century. Readers continue to find stimulus in Donne's fusion of witty argument with passion, his dramatic rendering of complex states of mind, his daring and unhackneyed images, and his ability (little if at all inferior to William Shakespeare's) to make common words yield up rich poetic meaning without distorting the essential quality of English idiom.

4.10 Suggested Readings

- 1. Reeves, James. A Short History of English Poetry.
- 2. Sanders, Andrew. The Short Oxford History of English Literature.

Subject : MA (English)	
Course Code: 201 Sem.2	Author: Dr.NutanYadav
Unit :05 (1550-1660)	
Preparation of Examination	

Lesson Structure

- To develop critical thinking among students towards literature.
- To enhance their knowledge of literature.
- To let them enjoy different genres of literature.
- To make them good in the English language.
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Unit -1 Hamlet (William Shakespeare)

Q. 1 Discuss Hamlet as a Shakespearean tragedy

Arguably, the best piece of writing ever done by William Shakespeare, Hamlet published in 1603, is the classic example of a tragedy. In all tragedies, the hero suffers and usually dies at the end. Othello stabs himself, Romeo and Juliet commit suicide, Brutus falls on his sword, and like them, Hamlet dies by getting cut with a poison-tipped sword. But that is not all that is needed to consider a play as a tragedy. There are more elements to label a play as a tragedy. Aristotle defends that the purgative power of tragedy makes moral ambiguity the essence of tragedy. The tragic hero must be neither a villain nor a virtuous man but a "character between these two extremes, a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty"

The effect on the audience will be similarly ambiguous. A perfect tragedy, he says, should imitate actions that excite "pity and fear". The concept of catharsis provides **"Tragedy," says Aristotle, "is an imitation [*mimēsis*] of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude…through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions." Ambiguous means may be employed, Aristotle maintains in contrast to Plato, to a virtuous and purifying end.**

Aristotle insists that the principal element in the structure of tragedy is not character but plot. Since the erring protagonist is always in at least partial opposition to the state, the importance of tragedy lies not in the character but the enlightening event.

"Most important of all," Aristotle said, "is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men but action and life, and life consist in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality." Aristotle considered the plot to be the soul of a tragedy, with character in second place. The goal of tragedy is not suffering but the knowledge that issues from it, as the denouement issues from a plot. The most powerful elements of emotional interest in tragedy, according to Aristotle, are a reversal of intention or situation and recognition scenes, and each is most effective when it is coincident with the other.

Shakespeare's Hamlet as a Great Tragedy-

All of Shakespeare's tragedies contain at least one more of these elements:

· A tragic hero.

· A dichotomy of good and evil.

· A tragic waste.

· Hamartia (the hero's tragic flaw)

· Issues of fate or fortune.

· Greed.

· Foul revenge.

· Supernatural elements.

Hamlet is a great revenge tragedy written in the line of Roman Senecan tragedy. It is the tragedy of reflection and moral sensitivity. The protagonist is very reflective and too sensitive, thus unfit for taking revenge through action. He has to undo the past, but the paradox of guilt and justice baffles him.

The soliloquies of Hamlet help to bring out his complex mental state. When the play ends all the major characters are dead making the tragedy an absolute one.

Hamlet's father has been murdered by his uncle and his mother marries the criminal after her husband's death. As suggested by the ghost Hamlet has to take revenge on his father's murderer. As he is a person with a high degree of moral sensitivity and a philosophic bent of mind, he thinks about whether evil can undo evil and not remain evil. He wants to find out whether the ghost has told the truth or not. He thinks too much and cannot go into action without which revenge cannot be taken and the tragedy occurs. The soliloquies are given to him to help reveal his complex psychological state. It's the tragedy of moral frustration. The tension between Hamlet's need for revenge and the question of morality, guilt, justice as well as his uncle and mother's position is vividly dramatized. Inaction is the major tragic flaw that hastens his tragic downfall. Had Hamlet been Othello the tragedy wouldn't have occurred. His philosophical soliloquies make it a poetic play rather than a realistic one. Ophelia, her father, and her brother die primarily because of Claudius's conspiracy and Hamlet's

impulsiveness. Though the conspirator is killed many other innocent people lose their lives. It is a great disintegration. Since all the characters die at the end of the play the throne has to be given to a foreigner. It is an absolute tragedy in a way. The horror, violence, and bloodshed on the stage create a kind of unnerving scene. The readers cannot help feeling pity and fear for what has happened. To conclude, Hamlet is the great tragedy of William Shakespeare.

Q. 2 Do an analytic study of the character of Hamlet in the play *Hamlet.*

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* tells the tale of a young prince who seeks revenge after the death of his father, the king. Prince Hamlet goes through several incidents including feigning madness to discover the identity of his father's murderer. His apparent behavior, however, is a major factor in the tragedy that takes place at the end of the play. Due to the nature of the play, Hamlet can be seen as a hero of the tragedy. Hamlet displays three distinct characteristics that are unique to tragic heroes including his tragic flaw, his partial fault leading to his fall, and his undeserved misfortune. Foremost, one of the characteristics that categorize Hamlet as a tragic hero is his tragic flaw. Hamlet, after going into his mother's chamber, hears

Initially, after talking to his father's ghost, Hamlet devises a plan to reveal the identity of King Hamlet's killer. To achieve this goal of revenge, Hamlet decides that he must feign madness.

Hamlet comments to Horatio,

“How strange or odd some I bear myself / (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on) / That you, at such times seeing me, never shall … to note / That you know aught of me” (1.5.190-201).

Hamlet lets know Horatio that at times he [Hamlet} is going to act mad for the sake of discovering the truth. This façade of madness, however, eventually leads to trouble. Hamlet only puts up an act to certain people, leading them to believe that he is gone mad. Consequently, Claudius is afraid of Hamlet and his erratic behavior leading Claudius to formulate a plot to kill the prince. Claudius talks to Laertes and lets him know of his scheme involving a sword fight between Hamlet and Laertes that will result in Hamlet’s death. To make sure that Hamlet dies, Claudius poisons a goblet as well and plans to give it to Hamlet. Claudius makes a toast to Hamlet and asserts,

“Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine. / Here’s to thy health. / Give him the cup” (5.2.306-308).

Unfortunately, Gertrude ends up drinking from the goblet instead and collapses. Hamlet is befuddled at the sight of his fall.

Hamlet, in the beginning, is filled with sadness due to his father’s death. Hamlet observes,

“But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe” (1.288-89).

Hamlet tells his mother that the clothes he wears only display the grief that he bears on the outside. On the inside, he comments, there is

more grief than can be seen at the surface. As a result of his father's death, Hamlet only wishes to discover the identity of the murderer, meaning that he does not wish to harm anybody else. Nevertheless, his lack of judgment led to the tragedy that takes place at the end of the play. Before he dies, Hamlet expresses to Horatio, "I cannot live to hear the news from England.

Qus.3 Discuss Hamlet as a revenge tragedy

Ans. Shakespeare is the best dramatist of English literature. *Hamlet* is his most popular play. It is called a Revenge tragedy. When we go through the whole play, it seems that it is a revenge play. Many critics approve of it. Revenge is a powerful, natural, and dangerous emotion. To satisfy the inner urge, an individual takes the law into his own hands. Sometimes the revenge appears as the source of political and domestic horror. It is a feeling that never sleeps. It appeals to dramatists because it provides a logical framework for the depiction of human passions. It also appealed to Shakespeare and he used it as a major theme in his Hamlet.

The Revenge Tragedy is especially associated with Seneca, an ancient Roman dramatist. Seneca produced the tragic effect by horrifying incidents, bloody actions. This type of tragedy reached England during the Elizabethan period. Kyd opened a new chapter in the history of the Revenge play. Shakespeare also adopted the dramatic tradition of the Revenge Tragedy. His Hamlet follows the major convention of Revenge tragedy. The story, from which its material is drawn, has a dominating revenge theme. The exciting plots of this

play fulfill the need for the theme of revenge. In a revenge tragedy, the role of the ghost is very important. The ghost urges the avenger to action. In this context, *Hamlet* has clear affinities with this type of tragedy. Here the ghost of the dead king urges the Prince of Denmark to wreak vengeance upon Claudius. He has ascended to the throne by foul means. His guilt is unknown to anybody. Hamlet stages a play to verify the ghost's story. Thus the central theme of *Hamlet* becomes revenge. Ultimately the revenge is taken. But in doing so the avenger has to lose his own life too.

Apart from the central theme, *Hamlet* has all the important characteristics of the Revenge play. Here we have violent, bloody, and terrifying scenes. Those scenes create a feeling of terror in the minds of the audience. The appearance of the ghost is one of them. Hamlet murders Polonius before our eyes. This unexpected murder creates panic. Ophelia becomes mad. She drowns and dies. Laertes leaps into her grave. Hamlet also follows him. All these events make it a revenge play. Murder is one of the important features of a revenge play. In *Hamlet*, we find this important feature. Hamlet kills Polonius. At the end of the play, there are several deaths on the stage. Firstly, the queen drinks the cup of poisoned wine and dies. Secondly, Hamlet kills Claudius, the king. Then Laertes and Hamlet also die. They die due to the wounds of the poisoned rapier. What a horrifying scene it is!

Thus *Hamlet* is a revenge play. Here we find all the important characteristics of the revenge play. Here we get horrifying incidents,

bloody actions, and ranting speeches. Here we have the ghost, madness, incest, violence, fighting, bloodshed, and murders too. It is said that *Hamlet* is a revenge play, yet it differs from a revenge play. Many critics approve of this comment. In the support of this comment, many arguments are given. Goggin argues that *Hamlet* is not to be regarded as a tragedy of revenge but as the tragedy of the human soul. He wants to say that *Hamlet* is a tragedy of humanity. It is the tragedy of the human soul also. Goggin is true because *Hamlet* holds the mirror of life. In that sense, every tragedy is the tragedy of human life. But the basic motive of the play is nothing but revenge. It cannot be denied.

Unit-2 Volpone (Ben Jonson)

Q. 1. Volpone is a villain hero. Discuss concerning the play 'Volpone'

Or

Volpone is a victim of his own evil devices. Discuss.

Or

Give the brief character sketch of Volpone.

Ans. Volpone is the most important character of the play. He is a Venetian nobleman of high stature enjoying the title Magnifico or Clarissimo. No doubt, he is very rich, certainly much more than the advocate Voltore, merchant Corvino, Corbaccio. He worships wealth for he knows wealth leads to the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. He

has a zest for beautiful things in life. He is very shrewd. He is a poet and a good actor. Volpone leads a life true to that of the magnitude of the Renaissance time. At the beginning of the play, Volpone addresses gold

"Dear saint, Rubies, the dumb god, that just all men tangos; The can't doe naught, and yet makes men do all things; The prince of souls; even hell, with three to boot, It made worth heaven."

Volpone is different from other rich men. He is not indulged in any trade like other capitalists, of the time who collects wealth by exploiting the weaker sections. He becomes rich by fooling the legacy hunters. He thinks that it is better than "grinding" men in factories. Further, for him duping the gullible rich is more enjoyable than mere amassing of wealth. Volpone says: "I glory more in the cunning purchase of my wealth than the gold possession. His parasites Mosca also support the idea that Volpone doesn't r make money by exploiting the poor. He will not 'swallow an inciting heir as glibly as your dutch will pills of butter. He does not "Tear forth the fathers of the poor families out of their beds and coffin them alive in some kind of clasping prison." Neither does he allow 'orphan's tears...wash—his pavement.' Mosca's words make the character of Volpone contrast with that of the greedy people who abuse the poor with inhuman severity. And all these make Volpone an attractive person at least at first sight.

Volpone is a man of artistic taste. He plays roles in the drama with all success. To each one of them, he presents himself differently. With

advocate Voltore the exchanges a few words in a weak voice. With old Corbaccio he appears dozing. And when merchant Corvino comes, he pretends to be without any feeling of sense. He acts successfully even when Corvino joins Mosca in abusing him. Later, when he'll be prompted by the desire to see the fabulous beauty of Celia, he goes to the street disguised as a mountebank. The knight does not notice any suspicion in the mountebank's words or deeds. Even Corvino who is familiar with Volpone does not find out the true identity. At the end of the play, we find him disguised as a commander teasing the legacy hunters.

Volpone has a natural Skill in acting and that skill is a part and parcel of his personality. Volpone hears about Corvino's wife, "a beauty, ripe as harvest". He asks Mosca to take his "keys, gold, plate and jewels" and use them to secure Celia for him. The sight of Celia appears, to have destroyed his balance of mind. In the heat of his passion for her, he thinks Celia will fall for his wealth and the sensual pleasures he offers and she will betray her husband. Volpone shows a complete understanding of the greedy lot. He is dispassionate in his attitude. He knows how far he can go in successfully duping them. But he completely misunderstands Celia's nature. When he realizes his mistake, he loses his temper and attempts to rape her. Indeed, his duping of the greedy does not make him a very bad person. But in his attempt to rape Celia, we find, lust overriding his sanity. Some critics may say that he attempts to rape her only when all appeals to her feeling fail and that those appeals were artistic. Still trying to use

force on an unwilling woman and that too one of the innocent and virtuous as Celia, is the villainous act. Volpone's attempt to save him from the charge leveled against him too is monstrous. In that attempt, a dutiful son is disinherited and an innocent wife is dishonored. Both the innocents were branded as an adulteress and sent to jail. There is an amount of deterioration of character taking place in Volpone as the play proceeds. In the beginning, we find him at his most attractive and most successful time. He worships gold but is not an inhuman usurer or a miser. He acts superbly in the role of a sick person in three different stages near one's death and dupes the greedy trio. This appears more like a practical joke than as a serious crime. After noticing the heinous nature of the greedy trio we are likely to admire Volpone for gulling them. No doubt we appreciate the cunning of Volpone without going into the ethics of his act. But his attempt to ravish the chaste Celia makes him a real villain in this play. It is very interesting to note that sublime poetry flows from the mouth of Volpone when some passion overtakes him. In his adoration of gold, he brings in beautiful images and allusion from classics and utters some of the the-best lines in English literature. The same outpouring of his poetry feeling can be seen in his attempt to seduce Celia. He tells her:

"For thy love in varying figure, I would have contended with the blue the horned flood." The two songs sing to persuade Celia to enjoy the pleasure shows him not only as a poet but also as a philosopher. The presence of Volpone and his superb acting skill makes that world of

which he too is a charming part. As he gulls the evil trio, we admire foil only a little contemplation will make us realize that he too is evil degree losses than the trio who is ridiculed. Except in his attempt to seduce Le and his enjoyment of seeing the innocents suffer, there is ambivalence in the portrayal of Volpone. He is partly admirable, partly despicable. We admire him for his good qualities and despise him for the devil in him. When nemesis reaches him in the form of a court verdict, we also feel that he deserves the punishment. Jonson wanted, for the success of the play, the audiences to enjoy the tricks Volpone plays. But before they identify with him, Jonson distances him from them. As a consequence, we partly admire Volpone though we find him a villain.

Q. 2. Write a brief characteristic of Mosca.

Ans. Mosca is a rare villain. He must please the whims of his master. He fulfills his duty with pleasure and other acts of the achievements. At the same time, he flatters the patron just to plea and also to get material benefits. We see Mosca supporting all pride during his adoration of gold to please the patron. Mosca also flatters Volpone's acting the role of Scotto saying that he could hardly have distinguished." Like a true parasite, he tries to fulfill the desires of Volpone no matter how bad those are. He is competent in getting all valuable gifts from the greedy trio. He helps Volpone to pretend a sick old man. When he comes to know that his patron is struck with Celia's beauty he starts planning to bring success to his desire. After some time he comes to Volpone and tells him: "You hopes, sir, are

like happy to see blossom in fair and promise timely fruit if you will say. He plays against Corbaccio to get more valuable objects for Volpone. He tells Carpaccio that Volture has given a gold plate. Then old Carpaccio was ready to give him a bag of gold coins as a present. Mosca's cunningness makes Corvino agree to prostitute his wife. It is an oil testimony to his resourcefulness and shrewdness. He makes up a story that one of the doctors is offering his daughter to Volpone with a twin intention. One is to show a potential threat to Corvino's hopes of inheriting Volpone's wealth. The other is to give an impression that the doctor is sure that Volpone is in-capable of doing Corvino is a person given to pathological jealousy. It is Mosca who with his knave makes him agree to prostitute his chaste wife. After this successful plan, Mosca reasons to gloat over his success and he says: 1 can feel a whimsy in my blood. I know not how success bath made me wanton. He feels that he is far above the ordinary parasites because he has superior skills. As he feels extraordinary, he is not ashamed of being a parasite. But he is proud of his profession. Generally, a parasite sob is a mean one. It is considered that a true parasite, "is a most precious thing drop from above, wonders why parasitism is not studied as a serious subject he glorifies his Position as a parasite by telling: All the wise world is little else, in nature by parasite or sub-parasites. Mosca is not an ignorant person. In his talk to Carpaccio about nature doctors, we find him as a knowledgeable man. "Doctors," he says, “flay a man but they kill him". They are "the greater danger and worse disease to escape." He tells about the professions of advocates to

Voltore: "Men of your large profession that could speak to every cause and things mere contraries." It is equally critical to church dignitaries; he tells Volpone, "Hood as ass with reverend purple So that you can hide his two ambition cats and he shall pass for a cathedral doctor," All these are the opinions of a worldly-wise man. Like Valpone, Mosca displays strong poetical imagination. When Volpone adores gold, he supports his patron saying; Rich are unfortunate a greater good than wisdom is in nature. The most poetic lines are those through which he describes the beauty of Celia to Volpone.

The blazing star of Italy! A wench of the first year! A beauty is ripe as harvest! Whose skin is whiter than a swan all over! Then silver, snow, or lilies! A soft lip would tempt you to an eternity of kissing! And the flesh that melts, in touch, to blood! Bright as you gold! and lovely as your gold!"

Surely Mosca shows a poetic temperament. Mosca is much more than a simple parasite or a melodramatic villain. He is evil incarnate without morals. Throughout the play, he goes on working for his selfish end. He is shrewd, sophisticated, well-informed, and has a good understanding and manners. In the end, he falls. He is punished to spend the remaining period of his life as a galley slave. He is punished because he lacks the knowledge of what Volpone might do in a tight situation. He thought that his patron would continue living incognito leaving control of his wealth to the former parasite. But there he proved himself to be in the wrong. It is his overconfidence

that led him to his nemesis. He indeed shows resourcefulness greater than the ordinary parasites. He is clever and more roughish. He considers himself as an "elegant rascal". When Volpone for a joke puts Mosca's name in the will, Mosca finds an opportunity to "Rise Like a star" and decides to "turn short as dots a shallow". Mosca is an opportunist, tinning enough to feed on other men to grow, fat in society. Through Mosca, Jonson wants to convey the inversion of values and a moral desire to grow rich at the expense of others. Jonson shows the heinous nature of this wealth-centered and inhuman Christian of capitalizing, where man devours man. Under capitalism man and the Christian in Ben Jonson through Mosca satires, the inhumanness found in the process.

Q. 3. How far can Volpone be considered a comedy of humor?

Or

What is Jonson's theory of Comedy? Does Volpone confirm the theory?

Or

Comment on the characterization in Volpone?

Ans. Ben Jonson's comedies were different from those of his contemporaries. His comedies have earned a name, 'Comedy of humor', Volpone is considered by the critics as his greatest and most intense comedy. It is a severe satire on the greedy capacity of human beings. The design and execution are brilliant.

Jonson's theory of comedy rested on the combination of realism, satire, and man theory. Realism demanded a well-knit plot that

observes all the classical items. Satire is motivated by a moral purpose, to improve society. Human theory sets the dramatis personae dominated by a single oddity in character. The Jonsonian comedy of Humour" came out of all these. In Volpone, Ben Jonson does not deal with different senses of humor in different characters. Instead, he deals with one master's passion affecting all the characters. This master passion can be called humor. So, the play becomes a study of one which is avarice (greed). The theme of the play is set in the opening scene where Volpone adores gold, raising gold to sainthood. It turns out that the whole story is dominated by the passion for gold by greed. Voltore the advocate, Carpaccio the merchant are different in circumstances, but all have agreed, as their noun Voltore throws away his profession, Carpaccio disinherits him, the merchant shows readiness to prostitute his innocent and chaste life. The is of law and justice, the institution of family and the bond of marriage are sacrificed the evil altar of greed. The two important characters of the play, Volpone and Mosca, are no mere humorous characters. They show complexities that go beyond the usual Johnsonian characters. "Volpone loves the cunning purchase of gold; he loves music, dance all delights, he is a consummate actor and likes to put on disguises; he is inflamed eminence charm; and whenever high passion seizes him, sublime poetry flows out. At the end of the play, he transcends the humor bounds and becomes a loving figure. Mosca also is a subtle artist in knavery and enjoys seeing his roguish turn out successfully.

The play displays remarkable realism. The frailties and follies showed in the rare found in a life around. Knaves like Volpone and Mosca and dupes like greedy may be found anywhere in the globe. The names are also significant-Volpone, the Mosca the flesh flie; Voltore the vulture; Carbaccio the raven; and Corvino . The last three are birds of prey, eagerly awaiting the carcasses of Volpone. With intention of exploiting the greed of the trio, Volpone pretends to be sick, and there Ives the impression that he may die at any moment. Each of the legacy hunters thinks that he alone will inherit the vast Volpone fortune. And Volplone enjoys: Letting the Cherry knock against their lips And draw it, by their mouths and back again. Mosca supports the patron's view and is ready to practice any roguery for singing the patron and for his selfish interests. In Volpone Jonson has observed the unities of time and place very strictly. Some critics think that the subplot to the unity of action of the play. however, its presence can be defended Pointing as that the theme of human folly found in the main plot is found repeated in the subplot The moral purpose of the play is absolutely clear, as dear as any classical work The crafty two, Volpone and Mosca are cunning amassing of wealth by exploiting three people. It is a story of crime and punishment. It is a matter of evil desires They flourish until they direct their knavery against innocence, symbolized by Celia. Here too in the beginning succeeds, with the help of other evil ones. However, that success is short-lived. The internal struggle in evil is self-destructive. We also witness the two innocents coming out blotless. There is a further

moral purpose in the play, to satirize the evils found in society. Jonson's success in putting to ridicule is seen. Jonson presents a true life picture of society- vices like greed, vanity, conceit, and many more. Thus the moral purpose of the play is depicted very clearly. Accordingly, we find a combination of realism, satire, and humor. Jonson wrote Volpone mostly following the principles be himself setting humor in the play. We find one and only one humor displayed in all the major characters of Volpone. Further, the two dramatic people are, Volpone and Mosca display a depth of character, which is much more than what we find in humor characters. Some critics believe that the atmosphere of the play is gloomy and murky with all the physical as well as mental deformities displayed. True, the chaste Celia an innocent Bonario brings in a little freshness, but they disappear as drops in as Jonshon had never portrayed so many forceful characters, so much depraved, together in a single play. Coleridge remarked, "After the third act this play becomes not a deal but a painful weight on the feeling." But then Jonson never had a notion that the comic characters should be likable. His aim to present characters who are foolishly despicable is to show how disgusting the world would be with many around. We find in Volpone a skillful combination of satire and comedies. It follows the tradition of classical comedy, where motifs, situations, and characters contribute to the fun in the play. The situations in the play, at times, become too much for comedy.

Q. 4. What are the themes in Volpone?

Ans. Volpone is a study of greed, one of the seven deadly sins. All the principal characters are shown in the grip of this major vice; Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Lady would-be. All the actions of these characters are influenced by tear greed. The play significantly starts with the worship of gold. Volpone calls gold his desire. Surely it is mock-ritualistic worship of gold, and none can miss the sublime poetry he utters in its praise. True he says that he likes "the cunning purchase of health" more than the mere possession of it. But he knows for certain, wealth is ended to enjoy the pleasures of senses and he enjoys them even like mad. His love for wealth is not less than that of the greedy trio. As soon as Corvino goes out, we see Volpone greedily handling all the presents he has received and says

'Let me see a pearl' a diamond?' Plate, churches? Good morning's purchase. Why this is better than rob churches yet.' I' Certainly he enjoys. Churches, the possession of wealth. And at the very end of the play when Mosca asks for half his wealth, to save Volpone from the predicament, the answer is :

'First I will be hanged'. The scene in which Volpone tries to ravish Celia is in the final analysis, results become Corvino's greed; greed of a different kind. The greedy trio may differ in circumstances, but they are alike in their humor, the moving passion, which is depicted. Voltore, the advocate does not care for honor and his profession. Corbaccio sacrifices his son for the sake of his love for wealth. Under the same passion, Corvino is even ready to prostitute his chaste wife;

"Honours is nothing more than a reality to him." The play shows the extremes of savagery. Man can indulge into, wider the influence of selfish materialism. There is such an inversion of values in the play that when Voltore is about, to tell the truth in Act V. Corvino tells the judges "grave fathers this man is distracted. Later in the scene cries out "the devil has entered him." Family bonds, marriage, and the rule of law are all destroyed by greed. True Ben Jonson by painting life so grotesquely, is satirizing the materialism the Renaissance has brought into England. The continual references to the evils in the various professions and the malpractices add realism to the picture. Trade, gold-centered life, distorted to grotesqueness by greed, are steeped in sensual issues is the world of play. To Volpone appeal to Celia again is gold-centered. He offers her all the sensual pleasures that wealth can purchase. He exhibits the fabulous wealth he has, before Celia and points out to her the possibility of a life of unparalleled glory. Together they enjoy the best food and enact the roles of gods and goddesses. In this play, we find this very clearly as the judges pass punishment on all the illnesses. In the first court scene, we find evil defeating good and establishing evil. But that is a temporary victory only. It is the nature of evil that it cannot rest. In doing more and more mischief until it gets destroyed. After the apparent the first court scene. Mosca tells Volpone not to indulge in any more schemes within a little while. Volpone devises a scheme to torture the fortune hunters. He helps Volpone in the scheme, maybe after finding scope for his evil fructify In this play we also find the two good characters,

Bonario and Celia finding themselves helpless under the clutches of evil, at first. But in the end, things turn out better for them. Celia is target back thrice the dowry she has brought. True, no amount of money will compensate for the shame and humiliation, she was subjected to, but her innocence is accepted by all. Bonario is given possession of his entire father's property and is also accepted as an honorable person. We find the play deals with greed and its influence on human beings. In other words, the main theme of the play is 'greed". Christian religion considers it as one of the seven deadly sins. the Hindu religion also considers "greed" as one of five deadly sins. Greed (avarice) is shown not only in the story of the two knaves, who dupe the avaricious people but also in the tone of the play. From the invocation of gold by Volpone in the opening scene to the very end we find the play moving on the theme of avarice and how avarice can deform human beings into a grotesque creatures. We may be able to find other themes like human folly, beast fable, and the ultimate success of good over evil emerging from the play. But the main theme undoubtedly is avarice or greed.

Unit-3 John Webster-The Duchess of Malfi

Q-1. Give the brief characteristic of Duchess in the novel '*The Duchess of Malfi'*

Ans. 'The Duchess of Malfi' is fine and psychologically novel. John Webster,with great insight and poetic complexity portraits the female

character of Duchess of Malfi. She is young and beautiful but unfortunately becomes a widow in the prime of her life. She has a charming and fascinating personality. Her beauty reminds at once of Shakespearean heroines. The Duchess is noble, innocent, dignified, and graceful. All who looked at her are charmed by her. In Act I, Scene II Antonio describes her as completely different from her devilish brothers and praises her in glowing terms: "You never fixed your eyes on three medals Cast in one figure, of so different temper." Antonio has high words to praise the Duchess. He describes her as "the right noble Duchess". And "she strains the time past, lights the time to come." The Duchess reminds us of Shakespeare's Desdemona in her purity, innocence, and pathetic death. But she is a lady of great courage, resourcefulness, and heroic endurance. Her brothers warn her against a second marriage but she has already resolved that she would remarry with her steward Antonio whom she loves. Her love for Antonio is sincere, true, and profound. There are three objections against the Duchess' remarriage. In those times there was a general theoretic objection to the re-marriage of widows: "None wed the second but who killed the first" was the customary belief. To marry out of one's class was wrong, being contrary to the teaching of the Church. To marry secretly and without the advice of the relations was no light offense, however, it may appear today. Webster uses the conventional argument against the Duchess as the cause of the conflict in the play. She is a sovereign queen, the ruler of Math. At the same time, the Duchess is warm-hearted and willful too. She relies

exclusively on her liking and her immediate feeling. She shows directness in her choice of Antonio: Let old wives report I winked and chose a husband. And she asks Duke Ferdinand neglecting the first objection of her marriage: Why might not I marry I have not gone about in this to create any new world or custom. The charming humanity, displayed in the wooing scene shows the nobility of the Duchess. She says to Antonio: "This is flesh and blood, sir; “This is not the figure cut in alabaster kneels at my husband's tomb." The dark images she uses to show a tragic consciousness of a mature mind. She is not an inexperienced woman in her choice. She is also aware of the possible outcome. A combination situation and on the other, she is handling of maturity and inexperience is found in her. She tells Cariola: "I am going into wilderness Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clew to be my stride. The Duchess appears a human being, By temperament, she is different from her brothers, Cariola observes the situation of the Duchess pretty well: 'I have the spirit of greatness or I know not; but it shows, a fearful madness; I owe her much of pity. Ferdinand thinks that his sister is indulging in lechery. The Duchess has her justification. She says "Win/ should only I of all the other princes of the world am ceased up, like a holy relic? I have youth and a little beauty successfully.” The first objection, that she is a widow and cannot remarry, is neglected. All the objections of her remarriage have been answered by her again and again. The second is that she is of royal blood and cannot marry a person below her rank. This objection is answered in Act III Scene II when Basola says that it

is futile to examine `Men's pedigrees than virtues', and it sounds ‘excellent music to her ears. The third objection can be neglected as her two brothers are prejudiced in the matter of her marriage. So, it is inappropriate to seek advice from devilish brothers. Her attitude to conventional religion is that of a pragmatist. Edmund Gosse says that the Duchess, "In Webster's version she is presented before us as a woman of supreme rank and high spirit, whose power of mind and healthiness of purpose has kept her uncontaminated by the frivolous conventionality of court life. She dares to act for herself; though a sovereign, she does not forget she is a woman and sees nothing ignoble in the faithful love of a subject. She loves Antonio, a lord of her court, a man of utmost integrity and as high-minded as herself." The Duchess is comparatively an active person while Antonio remains passive throughout the play. In 'Wooing Scene' the Duchess shows that she knows how to be active, in pursuing her desires. Her resourcefulness and capacity for taking quick decisions are also highlighted in the play. When Duke Ferdinand visits her bedroom, she becomes apprehensive regarding the safety of her husband and her son, and therefore, at once she decides that they should leave her and go to Antonio where she would join them at a later stage. Then she gives out that Antonio has been dismissed from service because he was not honest. And while leaving Antonio she decides that she should be separated from her husband. She advises Antonio to go to Milan. With her quick intelligence, she at once understands that the letter which Basola has brought from her brothers is a mere trap.

When she sees the soldiers approaching, she realizes that she is in a trap. Then to her, she is prepared for her fate. Throughout her imprisonment and right up a death, she can control herself. She becomes practical when Duke Ferdinand the offer arrives in her room at midnight. She even begs his pardon and kisses not a hand, with declared affection, thinking it to be that of Duke's. The Duke did pardon her. She faces the madmen, the old man, the tomb-maker, and even death with dignity. When the executioner arrives with a coffin, cord, and bell and Basola tells her that a present from her brothers has arrived. She becomes a different person, for the woman and the Duchess are no longer present in her. She is ready to accept death very calmly. Her reaction to the impending death is neither panic like that of Cariola, nor pessimistic like that of the Cardinal, nor self-satisfy like that of Basola. Her agony and death constitute the very heart of the play. We witness a deliberate and calculated attempt not merely to terminate her life but first of all to break down in her the natural dignity, courage, and affectionate disposition that she has displayed throughout, to demoralize her, to "bring her to despair. The attempt fails. She dies submissively, proudly, piously, bravely; her thoughts immediately before yielding herself to her executioners concern her children; and as she expires, her last words have reference to her husband and her religious faith. Her innocence shines even after her death. The dead body of the Duchess makes the Duke's eyes dazzle. Surely his mind dazzles more by the innocence on her face. To Basola, her soul is as fair as that of any saint, who has the power

of leading a soul from the darkness of hell to the light of heaven. Her imprisonment was her purgatory and the torments she faced, chastened her into a pure soul fit to be in heaven. The Duchess, may not be a tragic heroine of the status of Desdemona, but she is very near to Cordelia. The tragic flaw in her is the sin of Adam and Eve. In law she may be innocent; measured by the social standard of her time, she is reckless; by the ethical standards. She is an instinctive lady who is roused to maturity by suffering. Her sin is original like King Lear's uncontrolled greed for affection. She faces torments similar to King Lear's torments. Worldly justice is denied to the Duchess as well as King Lear. Some critics think that the Duchess is not a 'person' at all. But this is ridiculous. In her brief moments of sunshine, before the night closes on her, the Duchess shows vivid colors; no doubt the colors are delicate ones. If at the end of her life she shows only the grey of fortitude, lit up at moments with the dull red of anger, there is surely no lack of reality in the charming, gay, spontaneous young queen of the earlier Acts, whose 'half blush' so gracefully becomes her. She loves the body as well as with soul. Some critics think that "the Duchess in some way blameworthy for wedding Antonio, and some degree deserving her fate." There are people whose mouths are always watering for poetic justice. But life is often poignant with injustice; why not poetry? No doubt it could be argued that the Duchess to some extent forgot her duty to her subjects in Malfi, but this aspect does not enter Webster's mind. No doubt she was rash, but life can bring crisis when he either fears his fate too much Or his

deserts are small, That dares not put it to the touch To gain or lose it all. Surely, since fairy-tales began, honest human sympathy has gone out to the degree. "adventurer who win his princess; even though he might be a squire of low her Webster's judgment of the Duchess is found in Cariola's remark about her "Whether the spirit of greatness or woman Reign most in her, I know not; but it shows A fearful madness :1 owe her much of pity."

Q. Give the brief character-sketch of Antonio

Ans. Antonio is the steward of the Duchess of Malfi. He is intelligent and has a keenly observant eye. In the very first scene of the play, we find that he has just returned from France and is a fashionable young man, who admires the French Court which has been purged of corruption. He acts as a spokesman for the dramatist. His intelligence is highlighted in his observations about Basola, Cardinal, and Ferdinand. His initial comment about Basola is worth-quoting: **"Indeed lie rails at those things which he wants would be as lecherous, covetous or proud, bloody, or envious as any man, If he had means to be so."** Similarly, his observations about the Cardinal and Duke Ferdinand on their true nature are interesting and revealing. Antonio is an honest and simple man. He does not know the court life of intrigue and counter intrigues. That is perhaps why the Cardinal does not find him a suitable choice for the job of a spy. When Duke Ferdinand says that Antonio would have been a better choice than Basola, the Cardinal corrects him immediately: "You are deceived in him. His nature is too honest for such business." He is a

good sportsman too. The Dukes gives him a jewel for doing excellently well in the ring contest. According to Basola, he is a good soldier. Despite all his qualities, he is a misfit husband of the vivacious Duchess of Malfi. In Act, I Scene I, when he praises the Duchess in superlative terms, we suspect that he is half in love with her, even before the Duchess' declares her love. In the wooing scene, he is struck dumb with surprise when the Duchess expresses her love for him and proceeds to marry him. Antonio suffers from weakness; and the play, as well as the Duchess, suffers because of Antonio's weakness. He remains a passive person throughout the play. In his relationship with Duchess, it is she who takes initiative. At the moments when sound judgments and quick action is needed, Antonio is found waiting. Basola insultingly dubs him king Pupkin. When he realizes that his wife is in labor pain, instead of arriving at some satisfactory schemes to save her honor, he loses his sense of balance and tells Delio, "I am lost in amazement. I know not what to think of." It is right that we do not expect that every character should possess heroic qualities. But we feel uncomfortable at the scene where Antonio enters, pistol in hand, after the Duke has safely retired, only to bluster when he should have acted. It was an opportunity for him, his manliness and courage to challenge the Duke for a deed over the issue. Had he done that he would have become a hero not only to the Duchess but to others too? The dagger left by Ferdinand has a handle, he cries to his mistress. But whose hand is to hold the handle if not Antonio's. Antonio could have organized the people of Malfi against

the tyrant brothers but he does not fit in with such heroic deeds. We feel that Antonio is not good enough for the woman he has won. He would have perhaps been a more suitable husband for Carolina. He does not suffer from Physical cowardice. Basola calls him a good soldier. It is the initiative, the generalship that he lacks. Antonio is better at managing horses than men.

The poet in Antonio does not disappoint us. In the bed-chamber scene, he surprises to marry late, by bringing in luscious stones from Greek mythology in poetry. When he finds himself facing his death the poet comes out. He says all our quest of greatness like wanton boys whose past has lost their case We follow after bubbles down in the air." There are some traits of Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet in Antonio. Antonio is a tender-hearted man. His conversation with Duchess and Cariola in the tie bed chamber scene is the best example of his tender heart. In "the echo scene" his philosophic vision along with his tenderness comes out clearly. He reminds his wife and children:

"My Duchess is asleep now, and her little ones, I hope sweetly: O heavens, shall I never see her. Some critics think that his passive character is a dramatic necessity. Fredrick Allen says, "The character of Antonio was largely determined by the exigencies of the story. The conditions of the original story demanded passivity rather than activity from Antonio and these conditions, the dramatist, in his delineation of the character, was careful to observe, even at the risk of depicting the steward as somewhat heroic." This interpretation

provides some justification for his unheroic behavior. In the end, we can say that the tender-hearted, poetical Antonio is not a man of action but he is admirable for her humaneness. His death also arouses a sense of pity in our hearts.

Unit-4 John Donne

Qus.1 Discuss John Donne as a love poet

Donne is one of the greatest English love poets. He expounds no 'coherent' system of philosophy in his love songs. His primary concern in his poetry is not thought but feeling. No scheme of thought, no interpretation of life became for him a complete and illuminating experience. The central theme of his poems is ever his own intense personal moods, as a lover, a friend, an analyst of his own experiences, worldly and religious.

The love experiences are expressed in Donne's poetry, were not based upon bookish conventions but on his observations and experience. Donne experienced all phases of love- Platonic or sensual, serene or cynical, conjugal or illicit, lusty and picturesque like Rosetti, sensual like Keats, he could also be grotesque, 'blending thought with passion' like Robert Browning.

Donne's genius, temperament, and learning gave to his love poems certain qualities of power and which have made them things of power and fascination. Elizabethan love poetry was written on the convention which though it was used with manliness and entire

sincerity with Sidney, did not escape the fate of its kind. Dante's love for Beatrice, Petrarch's for Laura, Sidney's adoration of Stella, became the models. All Elizabethan love poets used the same terms and wrote in fixed strained, epicureans and sensuous like Ronsard, ideal and intellectualized like Dante and sentimental and adoring like Petrarch.

The variety and scope of Donne's love lyrics are truly remarkable. It oscillates between physical love and holy love, between cynicism and faith in love, and above all the sanctity and dignity of married life is beautifully shown in his poems. His earlier love poems are rather erotic and sensual and deal with the real intrigues of the lover. Moreover, he is quite original in presenting love situations and moods.

Another peculiar quality of Donne's love poems is their metaphysical strain. Donne does not lay stress on beauty or rather the aesthetic element in passion. His poems are sensuous and fantastic. He goes through the whole gamut of passion from lower to its highest forms. He perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy.

His poetry can be divided into three heads-

1. Poems of moods of a lover,
2. Seduction, and free love or fanciful relationship.
3. Poems address to his wife before and after marriage;
4. Poems addressed to noble ladies of his acquaintance.

There are three standards of his poems related to love.

● Firstly, there is the cynical that is anti-woman and hostile to the fair sex.

● Then some poems are dedicated to peace and fulfillment to be found in happy married life.

● Thirdly there is the platonic concept of love. Donne's treatment of love is realistic and not idealistic

Most of his poems were preserved in manuscript copies made by and passed among a relatively small but admiring coterie of poetry lovers. Most current scholars agree, however, that the elegies (which in Donne's case are poems of love, not of mourning), epigrams, verse letters, and satires were written in the 1590s, the *Songs and Sonnets* from the 1590s until 1617, and the "Holy Sonnets" and other religious lyrics from the time of Donne's marriage until his ordination in 1615. He composed the hymns late in his life, in the 1620s. Donne's *Anniversaries* were published in 1611–12 and were the only important poetic works by him published in his lifetime.

Donne's poetry is marked by strikingly original departures from the conventions of 16th-century English verse, particularly that of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Even his early satires and elegies, which derive from classical Latin models, contain versions of his experiments with genre, form, and imagery. His poems do not contain descriptive passages like those in Spenser, nor do his lines follow the smooth metrics and euphonious sounds of his predecessors. Donne replaced their mellifluous lines with a speaking voice whose vocabulary and syntax reflect the emotional intensity of a

confrontation and whose metrics and verbal music conform to the needs of a particular dramatic situation. One consequence of this is a directness of language that electrifies his mature poetry. “For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me, love,” begins his love poem “The Canonization,” plunging the reader into the midst of an encounter between the speaker and an unidentified listener. Holy Sonnet XI opens with an imaginative confrontation wherein Donne, not Jesus, suffers indignities on the cross: “Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side….”

From these explosive beginnings, the poems develop as closely reasoned arguments or propositions that rely heavily on the use of the conceit—i.e., an extended metaphor that draws an ingenious parallel between apparently dissimilar situations or objects. Donne, however, transforms the conceit into a vehicle for transmitting multiple, sometimes even contradictory, feelings and ideas. And, changing again the practice of earlier poets, he draws his imagery from such diverse fields as alchemy, astronomy, medicine, politics, global exploration, and philosophical disputation. Donne’s famous analogy of parting lovers to a drawing compass affords a prime example. The immediate shock of some of his conceits aroused Samuel Johnson to call them “heterogeneous ideas…yoked by violence together.” These conceits offer brilliant and multiple insights into the subject of the metaphor and help give rise to the much-praised ambiguity of Donne’s lyrics.

Q. 2 Discuss John Donne as a great Metaphysical poet.

Donne (1572 – 1631) was the most influential metaphysical poet. His relationship with spirituality is at the center of most of his work, and the psychological analysis and sexual realism of his work marked a dramatic departure from the traditional, genteel verse. His early work, collected in *Satires* and *Songs and Sonnets*, was released in an era of religious oppression. His *Holy Sonnets*, which contains many of Donne's most enduring poems, was released shortly after his wife died in childbirth.

John Donne is the leader and founder of the Metaphysical school of poetry. His poetry is a revolt against the popular current. First of all, Dryden used the term ' Metaphysical' for Donne's poetry. He said,' Donne affects the metaphysics'. Later on, Dr. Johnson called Donne and his follower's metaphysical poets. Since then the word metaphysical has been used for Donne and his followers.

The term metaphysics means something supernatural and transcendental. Its sense is 'what is beyond physical'. It is concerned with fundamental problems of life and death and soul even after death. The term metaphysical poetry means poetry dealing with metaphysical subjects. These subjects are - the nature of the universe, movements of stars and planets, and the whole relationship of man to God.

Novel thought and expressions, conceit, wit, obscurity, and learning are the main characteristics of Metaphysical poetry. All these important characteristics are found in Donne's poetry. When Dryden, Johnson, and Dowden called Donne a metaphysical poet, they referred to the style of Donne. But when De Quincey disagreed with them, he toned up Donne's subject matter. His poetry is metaphysical because of his individualism and his quest for learning. His poetry is full of wit. It is obscure and it indulges in farfetched conceits. It fuses thought and emotion. It is logical, analytical, and mystical.

The Metaphysical poets were men of learning. Their poetry reveals their scholarship. From this point of view, Donne is a great metaphysical poet. To show his learning is his chief object. In his poetry, he has twisted his vast learning. Due to this, his poetry becomes very difficult to understand. In Donne's poetry, there is always an antithesis between natural and divine knowledge. Donne's pre-occupation with mortality and death fills his poetry with a macabre element. In his fine sonnet 'Death Be Not Proud' he hates death and says:

One short sleep passed, We wake eternally,

And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

Donne's poetry is purely intellectual and it appeals to the intellectuals. His thoughts are often new. He has uniquely expressed his thoughts. In short, he played with thoughts. In ' The Canonization' 'The Flea'

and " Death Be Not Proud' one can easily find Donne's new thoughts and expressions.

Obscurity is one of the important features of Donne's poetry. In his poetry, we find obscurity and vagueness of the subject. This is linked with the sensibility of literary wit and philosophical conceptions. He frequently combines dissimilar ideas. Thus his poetry is harsh, obscure, and puzzling. Saintsbury is right when he calls him a very great and very puzzling poet.

Wit is one of the chief characteristics of Metaphysical poetry. This important feature can be found everywhere in Donne's poetry. It fashions his feeling and thought. Passion sentiment and sensuality are subordinated to wit. His wit is unique in the discovery of comparison and analogies. It is realistic and straightforward. It looks to run side by side with humor and irony. The heterogeneous material is compelled into unity by the rapid association of thoughts. ‘The Flea' is a beautiful example of it.

Conceit is an important feature of Metaphysical poetry. Donne makes abundant use of conceits. It is an instrument to reveal wit. The conceit is a comparison between two unlike objects or things. In short, it is a far-fetched comparison. Donne's conceits are far- fetched and his imagery is obscure. We can easily point out some of the conceits in Donne's poetry. In his popular poem 'The Flea' the flea becomes a marriage bed. It is because it bites the beloved after biting the poet:

This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed and marriage temple are.

CONCLUSION: As a poet of love, too, Donne is a metaphysical poet. For him, love is not physical but spiritual. Thus it can be said that Donne plunged deep into Metaphysical pursuits. His selection of subject matter, his treatment, his diction, and style prove him to be a true and great metaphysical poet.

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