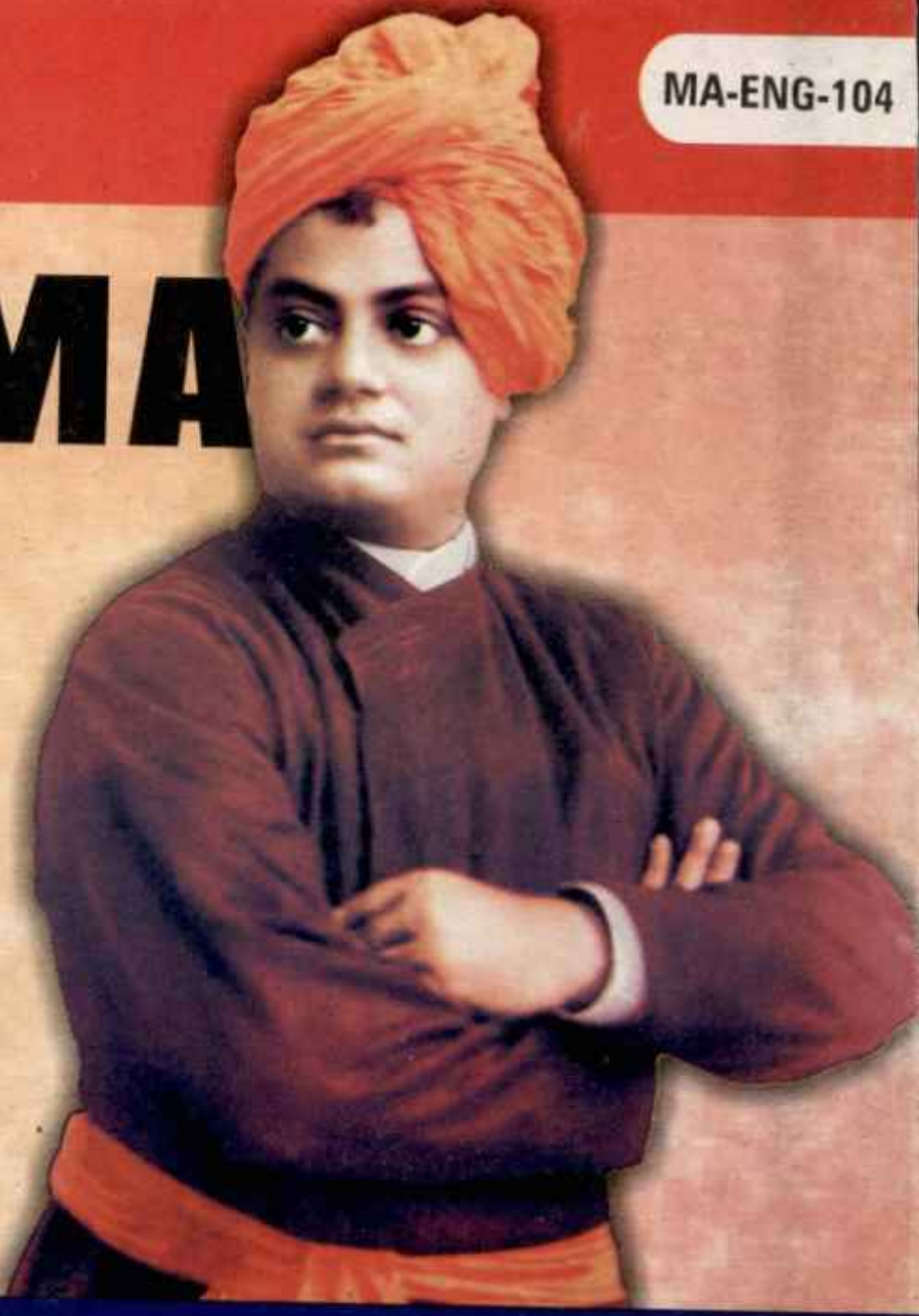
MA-ENG-104

DRAMA



DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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PREFACE

In this course, we shall deal with various aspects of DRAMA

- Sophocles: Oedipus the King.
- Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus.
- William Shakespeare: Hamlet.
- Henrik Ibsen : Doll's House.

SYLLABUS

Drama (MA-Eng.-104)

Course Content

Unit-I Sophocles: Oedipus the King.

Unit-II Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus.

Unit-III William Shakespeare: Hamlet.

Unit-IV Henrik Ibsen : Doll's House.

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OEDIPUS THE KING-SOPHOCLES

STRUCTURE

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- Major Characters—An intensive study.
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to :

- Know about the Greek tragedy, "Sophocles"
- Have a broad understanding of his works.
- Narrate the story of the play, "Oedipus the King"
- Understand and discus the themes that occur in 'Oedipus the king'.

INTRODUCTION

Oedipus the King is an Athenian tragedy by Sophocles that was first performed c. 429 BC. It was the second of Sophocles' three Threban plays to be produced, but it comes first in the internal chronology, followed by Oedipus at Colonus and then Antigone. Over the centuries, it has come to be regarded by many as the Greek tragedy par excellence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophocles was the second of the three ancient Greek tragedians whose work has survived. His first plays were written later than those of Aeschylus and earlier than those of Euripides. According to Suda, a 10th century encyclopedia, Sophocles wrote 123 plays during the course of his life, but only seven have survived in a

complete form: Ajax, Antigone, Trachinian Women, Oedipus the King, Electra, Philoctetes and Oedipus at Colonus. For almost 50 years, Sophocles was the most-feted playwright in the dramatic competitions of the city-state of Athens that took place during the religious festivals of the Lenaea and the Dionysia. Sophocles competed in around 30 competitions; he won perhaps 24 and was never judged lower than second place; in comparison, Aeschylus won 14 competitions and was defeated by Sophocles at times, while Euripides won only 4 competitions. Sophocles' fame and many works earned him a crater on the surface of Mercury named after him.

The most famous of Sophocles' tragedies are those concerning Oedipus and Antigone: these are often known as the Theban plays, although each play was actually a part of different tetralogy, the other members of which are now lost. Sophocles influenced the development of the drama, most importantly by adding a third actor and thereby reducing the importance of the chorus in the presentation of the plot. He also developed his characters to a greater extent than earlier playwrights such as Aeschylus.

Life

Sophocles, the son of Sophilos, was a wealthy member of the rural tribe, small community of Colonus Hippius in Attica, which would later become a setting for one of his plays, and he was probably born there. His birth took place a few years before the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC: the exact year is unclear, although 497/6 is perhaps most likely. Sophocles' first artistic triumph was in 468 BC, when he took first prize in the Dionysia theatre competition over the reigning master of Athenian drama, Aeschylus. According to Plutarch the victory came under unusual circumstances. Instead of following the custom of choosing judges by lot, the archon asked Cimon and the other strategic present to decide the champior of the contest. Plutarch further contends that Aeschylus soon left for Sicily following this loss to Sophocles. Although Plutarch says that this was Sophocles' first production, it is now thought that this is an embellishment of the truth and that his first production was most likely in 470 BC. Triptolemus was probably one of the plays that Sophocles presented at this festival.

Sophocles became a man of importance in the public halls of Athens as well as in the theatres. At the age of 16, he was chosen to lead the eulogy, a choral chant to a god, celebrating the decisive Greek sea victory over the Persians at the Battle of Salamis. The rather insufficient information about Sophocles' civic life implies he was a well-liked man who participated in activities in society and showed remarkable artistic ability. He was also elected as one often strategic, high executive officials that commanded the armed forces, as a junior colleague of Pericles. Sophocles was born extremely wealthy and was highly educated throughout his entire life. Early in his career, the politician Cimon might have been

one of his patrons, although if he was there was no ill will borne by Pericles, Cimon's rival, when Cimon was ostracized in 461 BC In 443/2 he served as one of the Hellenotamiai, or treasurers of Athena, helping to manage the finances of the city during the political ascendancy of Pericles. According to the Vita Sophoclis he served as a general in the Athenian campaign against Sainos, which had revolted in 441 BC; he was supposed to have been elected to his post as the result of his production of Antigone.

In 420 he welcomed and set up an altar for the image of Asclepius at his house, when the deity was introduced to Athens. For this he was given the posthumous epithet Dexion by the Athenians. He was also elected, in 413 BC, to be one of the commissioners crafting a response to the catastrophic destruction of the Athenian expeditionary force in Sicily during the Peloponnesian War.

Sophocles died at the age of ninety or ninety-one in the winter of 406/5 BC, having seen within his lifetime both the Greek triumph in the Persian Wars and the terrible bloodletting of the Peloponnesian War. As with many famous men in classical antiquity, Sophocles' death inspired a number of apocryphal stories about the cause. Perhaps the most famous is the suggestion that he died from the strain of trying to recite a long sentence from his Antigone without pausing to take a breath. Another account suggests he choked while eating grapes at the Anthesteria festival in Athens. A third account holds that he died of happiness after winning his final victory at the City Dionysia. A few months later, the comic poet wrote this eulogy in his play titled The Muses: "Blessed is Sophocles, who had a long life, was a man both happy and talented, and the writer of many good tragedies; and he ended his life well without suffering any misfortune." This is somewhat ironic, for according to some accounts his sons tried to have him declared incompetent near the end of his life; he is said to have refuted their charge in court by reading from his as yet unproduced Oedipus at Colonus. One of his sons, Iophon, and a grandson, also called Sophocles, both followed in his footsteps to become playwrights.

Works and Legacy

Among Sophocles' earliest innovations was the addition of a third actor, which further reduced the role of the chorus and created greater opportunity for character development and discord between characters. Aeschylus, who dominated Athenian play righting during Sophocles' career, followed suit and adopted the third character into his own work towards the end of his life. Aristotle credits Sophocles with the introduction of skiagophia, or scenery-painting. It was not until after the death of the old master Aeschylus in 456 BC that Sophocles became the prominent playwright in Athens.

Thereafter, Sophocles emerged victorious in dramatic competitions at 18 Dionysia and 6 Lenaia festivals. In addition to innovations in dramatic structure, Sophocles' work is also known for its deeper development of characters than earlier

playwrights. His reputation was such that foreign rulers invited him to attend their courts, although unlike Aeschylus who died in Sicily, or Euripides who spent time in Macedon, Sophocles never accepted any of these invitations. Aristotle used Sophocles' Oedipus the King in his Poetics (c. 335 BC) as an example of the highest achievement in tragedy, which suggests the high esteem in which his work was held by later Greeks.

Only two of the seven surviving plays can be dated securely: Philoctetes (409 BC) and Oedipus at Colonus (401 BC, staged after Sophocles' death by his grandson). Of the others, Electra shows stylistic similarities to these two plays, which suggests that it was probably written in the latter part of his career. Ajax, Antigone and The Trachiniae are generally thought to be among his early works, again based on stylistic elements, with Oedipus the King coining in Sophocles' middle period. Most of Sophocles' plays show an undercurrent of early fatalism and the beginnings of Socratic logic as a mainstay for the long tradition of Greek tragedy.

The Theban Plays

The Theban plays consist of three plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King (also called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus Rex), and Oedipus at Colonus. All three plays concern the fate of Thebes during and after the reign of King Oedipus. They have often been published under a single cover. Sophocles, however, wrote the three plays for separate festival competitions, many years later. Not only are the Theban plays a true trilogy (three plays presented as a continuous narrative) but they are not even an intentional series and contain some inconsistencies among them. He also wrote other plays having to do with Thebes, such as The Progeny, of which only fragments have survived.

Subjects

Each of the plays relates to the tale of the mythological Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother without knowledge that they were his parents. His family is luck to be doomed for three generations.

In Oedipus the King, Oedipus is the protagonist. Oedipus infanticide is planned by his parents, Laius and Jocasta, to avert him fulfilling a prophecy; in truth, the servant entrusted with the infanticide passes the infant on through a series of intermediaries to a childless couple, who adopt him not knowing his history. Oedipus eventually learns of the Delphic Oracle's prophecy of him, that he would kill his father and marry his mother ; Oedipus attempts to flee his fate without harming his parents (at this point, he does not know that he is adopted). Oedipus: meets a man at a crossroads accompanied by servants; Oedipus and the man fought, and Oedipus killed the man. (This man was his father, Laius, not that anyone apart from the gods knew this at the time). He becomes the ruler of Thebes after solving

the riddle of the sphinx and in the process, marries the widowed Queen, his mother Jocasta. Thus the stage is set for horror. When the truth comes out, following another true but confusing prophecy from Delphi, Jocasta commits suicide, Oedipus blinds himself and leaves Thebes, and the children are left to sort out the consequences themselves (which provides the grounds for the later parts of the cycle of plays).

The banished Oedipus and his daughters Antigone and Ismene arrive at the town of Colonus where they encounter Theseus, King of Athens. Oedipus dies and contrariety begins between his sons Polyneices and Eteocles.

In Antigone the protagonist is Oedipus' daughter. Antigone is faced with the choice of allowing her brother Polyneices' body to remain unburied, outside the city walls, exposed to the ravages of wild animals, or to bury him and face death. The king of the land, Creon, has forbidden the burial of Polyneices for he was a traitor to the city. Antigone decides to bury his body and face the consequences of her actions. Creon sentences her to death. Eventually, Creon is convinced to free Antigone from her punishment, but his decision comes too late and Antigone commits suicide. Her suicide triggers the suicide of two others close to King Creon: his son, Haemon, who was to wed Antigone, and his wife who commits suicide after losing her only surviving son.

Consonance and Inconsistencies

The plays were written across thirty-six years of Sophocles' career and were not composed in chronological order, but instead were written in the order Antigone, Oedipus the King, and Oedipus at Colonus. Nor were they composed as a trilogy -a group of plays to be performed together, but are the remaining parts of three different groups of plays. As a result, there are some inconsistencies: notably, Creon is the undisputed king at the end of Oedipus the King and, in consultation with Apollo, single-handedly makes the decision to excommunicable Oedipus from Thebes. Creon is also instructed to look after Oedipus' daughters Antigone and Ismene at the end of Oedipus the King. By collate, in the other plays there is some struggle with Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polynices with regard to the succession. In Oedipus at Colonus, Sophocles attempts to work these inconsistencies into a tenacious whole: Ismene explains, that, in light of their flawed family genealogy, her brothers were at first willing to cede the throne to Creon. Nevertheless, they eventually decided to take charge of the monarchy, with each brother disputing the other's right to succeed. In addition to being in a clearly more powerful position in Oedipus at Colonus, Eteocles and Polynices are also blameworthy: they condemn their father to exile, which is one of his bitterest charges against them.

Other Plays

Other than the three Theban plays, there are four surviving plays by Sophocles: Ajax, The Trachiniae, Electra, and Philoctetes, the last of which won first prize.

Ajax focuses on the proud hero of the Trojan War, Telamonian Ajax, who is driven to treachery and eventually suicide. Ajax becomes gravely upset when Achilles' armor is presented to Odysseus instead of himself. Despite their enmity toward him, Odysseus persuades the kings Menelaus and Agamemnon to grant Ajax a proper burial.

The Trachiniae (named for the Trachinian women who make up the chorus) dramatizes Deianeira's accidentally killing Heracles after he had completed his famous twelve labours. Tricked into thinking it is a love charm, Deianeira applies poison to an article of Heracles' clothing; this poisoned robe causes Heracles to die an tormenting death. Upon learning the truth, Deianeira commits suicide.

Electra Corresponds roughly to the plot of Aeschylus' Libation Bearers. It details how Electra and Orestes' avenge their father Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Philoctetes retells the story of Philoctetes, an archer who had been forlorn on Lemnbs by the rest of the Greek armada while on the way to Troy. After learning that they cannot win the Trojan War without Philoctetes' bow, the Greeks send Odysseus and Neoptolemus to retrieve him; due to the Greeks' earlier treason, however, Philcctetes refuses to rejoin the army. It is only Heracles' intimately machina appearance that persuades Philoctetes to go to Troy.

OEDIPUS THE KING

Plot

The myth of Oedipus takes place before the opening scene of the play. In his youth, Laius was a guest of King Pelops of Elis, and became the tutor of Chrysippus, youngest of the king's sons, in chariot racing. He then breached the sacred laws of comradeship by seizure and raping Chrysippus, who according to some versions killed himself in shame. This cast a doom over him and his descendants.

The protagonist of the tragedy is the son of King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes. After Laius learns from an oracle that "he is doomed to perish by the hand of his own son", he tightly binds the feet of the infant Oedipus together with a pin and orders Jocasta to kill the infant. Hesitant to do so, she orders a servant to commit the act for her. Instead, the servant takes baby Oedipus to a mountain top to die from exposure. A shepherd rescues the infant and names him Oedipus. The shepherd carries the baby with him to Corinth, where Oedipus is taken in and raised in the court of the childless King Polybus of Corinth as if he were his own.

As a young man in Corinth, Oedipus hears a rumour that he is not the biological son of Polybus and his wife Merope. When Oedipus questions the King and Queen, they deny it, but, still suspicious, he asks the Delphic Oracle who his

parents really are. The Oracle seems to ignore this question, telling him instead that he is destined to "Mate with his own mother, and shed/With his own hands the blood of his own procreator". Desperate to avoid his foretold fate, Oedipus leaves Corinth in the belief that Polybus and Merope are indeed his true parents and that, once away from them, he will never harm them.

On the road to Thebes, he meets Laius, his true father. Unaware of each other's identities, they quarrel over whose chariot has right-of-way. King Laius moves to strike the disdainful youth with his sceptre, but Oedipus throws him down from the chariot and kills him, thus fulfilling part of the oracle's apocalypse. He kills all but one of the other men. Shortly after, he solves the riddle of the Sphinx, which has baffled many a diviner: "What is the creature that four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?"

To this Oedipus replies, "Man", who crawls on all fours as an infant, walks upright later, and needs a walking stick in old age, and the wacky enigma throws herself off the Cliffside. Oedipus's reward for freeing the kingdom of Thebes from her curse is the kingship and the hand of Queen Dowager Jocasta, his biological mother. The apocalypse is thus fulfilled, although none of the main characters know it.

ACTION OF THE PLAY

A priest and the chorus of Thebans arrive at the palace to call upon their King, Oedipus, to aid them with the contagion. Oedipus had sent his brother-in-law Creon to ask help of the oracle at Delphi, and he returns at that moment. Creon says the contagion is the result of religious pollution, caused because the murderer of their former King, Laius, had never been caught. Oedipus vows to find the murderer and curses him for the contagion that he has caused.

Oedipus summons the blind prophet Tiresias for help. When Tiresias arrives he claims to know the answers to Oedipus's questions, but refuses to speak, instead telling Oedipus to relinquish his search. Oedipus is enraged by Tiresias's refusal, and says the prophet must be deceitful in the murder. Infuriate, Tiresias tells the king that Oedipus himself is the murderer. Oedipus cannot see how this could be, and concludes that the prophet must have been paid off by Creon in an attempt to undermine him. The two argue fervently and eventually Tiresias leaves, mumbling darkly that when the murderer is discovered he shall be a native citizen of Thebes; brother and father to his own children; and son and husband to his own mother.

Creon arrives to face Oedipus's asseverations. The King demands that Creon be executed, however the chorus convince him to let Creon live. Oedipus's wife Jocasta enters, and attempts to comfort Oedipus, telling him he should take no notice of prophets. Many years ago she and Laius received an answer which never

came true. It was said that Laius would be killed by his own son, but, as all Thebes knows, Laius was killed by bandits at a crossroads on the way to Delphi.

The mention of this crossroads causes Oedipus to pause and ask for more details. He asks Jocasta what Laius looked like, and suddenly becomes worried that Tiresias's asseverations were true. Oedipus then sends for the one surviving witness of the attack to be brought to the palace from the fields where he now works as a shepherd. Jocasta, confused, asks Oedipus what is the matter, and he tells her.

Many years ago, at a fete in Corinth, a man drunkenly cites Oedipus of not being his father's son. Bothered by the comment Oedipus went to Delphi and asked the answer about his parentage. Instead of answers he was given a apocalypse that he would one day murder his father and sleep with his mother. Upon hearing this he resolved to quit Corinth and never return. While travelling he came to the very crossroads where Laius was killed, and encountered a carriage which attempted to drive him off the road. An argument ensued and Oedipus killed the travellers, including a man who matches Jocasta's description of Laius.

Oedipus has hope, however, because the story is that Laius was murdered by several robbers. If the shepherd confirms that Laius was attacked by many men, then Oedipus is in the clear.

A man arrives from Corinth with the message that Oedipus's father has died. Oedipus, to the surprise of the messenger, is made elated by this news, for it proves one half of the apocalypse false, for now he can never kill his father. However he still fears that he may somehow commit oedipal love with his mother. The messenger, eager to ease Oedipus's mind, tells him not to worry, because Merope the Queen of Corinth was not in fact his real mother.

It emerges that this messenger was formerly a shepherd on Mount Cithaeron, and that he was given a baby, which the childless Polybus then adopted. The baby, he says, was given to him by another shepherd from the Laius household, who had been told to get purge of the child. Oedipus asks the chorus if anyone knows who this man was, or where he might be now. They respond that he is the same shepherd who was witness to the murder of Laius, and whom Oedipus had already sent for. Jocasta, who has by now realized the truth, forlornly begs Oedipus to stop asking questions, but he refuses and Jocasta runs into the palace.

When the shepherd arrives Oedipus questions him, but he begs to be allowed to leave without answering further. Oedipus presses him however, finally threatening him with torture or capital or death penalty. It emerges that the child he gave away was Laius's own son, and that Jocasta had given the baby to the shepherd to secretly be manifested upon the mountainside. This was done in fear of the apocalypse that Jocasta said had never come true: that the child would kill its father.

Everything is at last revealed, and Oedipus curses himself and fate before leaving the stage. The chorus bewails how even a great man can be demolished by fate, and following this, a servant exits the palace to speak of what has happened inside. When Jocasta enters the house, she runs to the palace bedroom and hangs herself there. Shortly afterward, Oedipus enters in a wrath, calling on his servants to bring him a sword so that he might kill himself. He then rages through the house, until he comes upon Jocasta's body. Giving a cry, Oedipus takes her down and removes the long gold pins that held her dress together, before spree them into his own eyes in despair.

A blind Oedipus now exits the palace and begs to be exiled as soon as possible. Creon enters, saying that Oedipus shall be taken into the house until oracles can be consulted regarding what is best to be done. Oedipus's two daughters (and half-sisters), Antigone and Ismene, are sent out, and Oedipus bewail that they should be born to such a cursed family. He asks Creon to watch over them and Creon agrees, before sending Oedipus back into the palace.

On an empty stage the chorus repeats the common Greek maxim, that no man should be considered fortunate until he is dead.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MYTHIC TRADITION

The two cities of Troy and Thebes were the major focus of Greek epic poetry. The events surrounding the Trojan War were journal in the Epic Cycle, of which much remains, and those about Thebes in the Theban Cycle, which have been lost. The Theban Cycle recounted the sequence of tragedies that emerge the house of Laius, of which the story of Oedipus is a part.

Homer's Odyssey contains the earliest account of the Oedipus parable when Odysseus encounters Jocasta, named Epicaste in the underworld. Homer briefly summarises the story of Oedipus, including the oedipal love parricide and Jocasta's subsequent suicide. However in the Homeric version Oedipus remains King of Thebes after the divulgence and neither blinds himself, nor is sent into exile. In particular, it is said that the gods made the matter known, whilst in Oedipus the King Oedipus very much discovers the truth himself.

In 467 BC, Sophocles's fellow tragedian Aeschylus won first prize at the City Dionysia with a trilogy about the House of Laius, comprising Laius, Oedipus and Seven against Thebes (the only play which survives). Since he did not write connected trilogies as Aeschylus did, Oedipus the King focuses on the ceremonial character while hinting at the larger myth athwart, which was already known to the audience in Athens at the time.

DRAMATIC PERSONAL

Oedipus

Oedipus is the protagonist of the play, "Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus". Oedipus becomes the king of Thebes before the action of Oedipus the King begins. He is eminent for his intelligence and his ability to solve riddles—he saved the city of Thebes and was made its king by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, the supernatural being that had held the city captive. Yet Oedipus is stubbornly blind to the truth about himself. His name's literal meaning ("swollen foot") is the clue to his identity—he was taken from the house of Laius as a baby and left in the mountains with his feet prance together. On his way to Thebes, he killed his biological father, not knowing who he was, and proceeded to marry Jocasta, his biological mother.

Jocasta

Jocasta is Oedipus's wife and mother, and Creon's sister. Jocasta appears only in the final scenes of Oedipus the King. In her first words, she attempts to make peace between Oedipus and Creon, entreating with Oedipus not to expatriate Creon. She is comforting her husband and calmly tries to hankering him to flotsam Tiresias's terrifying prophecies as false. Jocasta solves the riddle of Oedipus's identity before Oedipus does, and she expresses her love for her son and husband in her desire to protect him from this knowledge.

Antigone

Antigone is the child of Oedipus and Jocasta, and therefore she is both Oedipus's daughter and his sister. Antigone appears briefly at the end of Oedipus the King, when she says goodbye to her father as Creon prepares to expatriate Oedipus. She appears at greater length in Oedipus at Colonus,. leading and caring for her old, blind father in his exile. But Antigone comes into her own in Antigone. As that play's protagonist, she demonstrates a courage and lucidity of sight unparalleled by any other character in the three Theban plays. The other characters—Oedipus, Creon, Polynices—are circumspect to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, Antigone is blatant in her assuredness onviction that she has done right.

Creon

Creon is Oedipus's brother-in-law, Creon appears more than any other character in the three plays combined. In him more than anyone else we see the continuous rise and fall of one man's power. Early in Oedipus the King, Creon avouch to have no inclination for kingship. Yet, when he has the opportunity to clutch power at the end of that play, Creon seems quite eager. We learn that Oedipus at Colonus is willing to fight with his nephews for this power, and in

Antigone Creon rules Thebes with a tenacious blindness that is similar to Oedipus's rule. But Creon never has our sympathy in the way Oedipus does, because he is bossy and legislative, intent on avouch his own authority.

Polynices

Polynices is son of Oedipus. Polynices appears only very briefly in Oedipus at Colonus. He arrives at Colonus seeking his father's blessing in his battle with his brother, Eteocles, to capture the power of Thebes. Polynices tries to point out the similarity between his own situation and that of Oedipus, but his words seem urbane rather than complaint, a fact that Oedipus points out.

Tiresias

Tiresias is the blind sibyl of Thebes, appears in both Oedipus the King and Antigone. In Oedipus the King, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he is the murderer he hunts, and Oedipus does not believe him. In Antigone, Tiresias tells Creon that Creon himself is bringing catastrophe upon Thebes, and Creon does not believe him. Yet, both Oedipus and Creon claim to trust Tiresias deeply. The literal blindness of the soothsayer points to the metaphorical blindness of those who refuse to believe the truth about themselves when they hear it spoken.

Haemon

Haemon is Creon's son, who appears only in Antigone. Haemon is engaged to marry Antigone. Stimulated by his love for her, he argues with Creon about the concluding decision to punish her.

Ismene

Ismene is Oedipus's another daughter. Ismene appears at the end of Oedipus the King and to a limited extent in Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. Ismene's minor part underscores her sister's grandeur and courage. Ismene fears helping Antigone bury Polynices but offer to die beside Antigone when Creon sentences her to die. Antigone, however, refuses to allow her sister to be immolated for something she did not have the courage to stand up for.

Theseus

Theseus is the king of Athens in Oedipus at Colonus. He is a eminent and powerful warrior, Theseus takes commiseration on Oedipus and defends him against Creon. Theseus is the only one who knows the spot at which Oedipus descended to the underworld-a secret he promises Oedipus he will hold forever.

Chorus

Chorus is sometimes comically lumpish or capricious or fickle, sometimes stance, sometimes hokey, and the Chorus reacts to the events arena. The Chorus's reactions can be lessons in how the audience should elucidate what it is seeing, or how it should not elucidate what it is seeing.

MAJOR CHARACTERS—AN INTENSIVE STUDY

Oedipus

Oedipus is a man of abrupt action and great discernment. At the opening of Oedipus the King, we see that these qualities make him an excellent ruler who anticipates his subjects' needs. When the citizens of Thebes beg him to do something about the influx, for example, Oedipus is one step ahead of them—he has already sent Creon to the answer at Delphi for advice. But later, we see that Oedipus's habit of acting swiftly has a dangerous side. When he tells the story of killing the sash of travellers who attempted to impel him off the three-way crossroads, Oedipus shows travelers that he has the capacity to behave impetuously.

At the beginning of Oedipus the King, Oedipus is hugely confident, and with good reason. He has saved Thebes from the curse of the Sphinx and become king virtually overnight. He proclaims his name proudly as though it were itself a assuage charm: "Here I am myself—you all know me, the world knows my fame: / I am Oedipus" (7-9). By the end of this tragedy, however, Oedipus's name will have become a curse, so much so that, in Oedipus at Colonus, the Leader of the Chorus is petrified even to hear it and cries: "You, you're that man?" (238).

Oedipus's celerity and confidence continue to the very end of Oedipus the King. We see him probe Creon, call for Tiresias, threaten to expatriate Tiresias and Creon, call for the servant who escaped the attack on Laius, call for the shepherd who brought him to Corinth, rush into the palace to skewer out his own eyes, and then demand to be exiled. He is constantly in motion, seemingly trying to keep pace with his fate, even as it goes well beyond his reach. In Oedipus at Colonus, however, Oedipus seems to have begun to accept that much of his life is out of his control. He spends most of his time sitting rather than acting. Most mournful are lines 825-960, where Oedipus fumbles blindly and helplessly as Creon takes his children from him. In order to get them back, Oedipus must reckon wholly on Theseus.

Once he has given his trust to Theseus, Oedipus seems ready to find peace. At Colonus, he has at last hammered out a bond with someone, found a kind of home after many years of exile. The single most significant action in Oedipus at Colonus is Oedipus's deliberate move offstage to die. The final scene of the play has the

haste and drive of the beginning of Oedipus the King, but this haste, for Oedipus at least, is toward peace rather than horror.

Antigone

Antigone is very much her father's daughter, and she begins her play with the same swift conclusiveness with which Oedipus began his. Within the first fifty lines, she is planning to defy Creon's order and bury Polynices. Unlike her father, however, Antigone bewitchs a remarkable ability to remember the past. Whereas Oedipus flouts Tiresias, the prophet who has helped him so many times, and whereas he seems almost to have forgotten his encounter with Laius at the three-way crossroads, Antigone begins her play by talking about the many griefs that her father handed down to his children. Because of her drastic awareness of her own history, Antigone is much more dangerous than Oedipus, especially to Creon. Aware of the kind of fate her family has been allacated, Antigone feels she has nothing to lose. The thought of death at Creon's hands but it terrifies Ismene but it does not even faze Antigone, who looks forward to the kudos of dying for her brother. Yet even in her expression of this noble sentiment, we see the way in which Antigone continues to be jinxed by the travesty that has destroyed her family. Speaking about being killed for burying Polynices, she says that she will lie with the one she loves, loved by him, and it is difficult not to hear at least the hint of sexual connotation, as though the mélange whim of the Oedipus family always tend toward the incestuous.

Antigone draws attention to the difference between divine law and human law. More than any other character in the three plays, she casts serious doubt on Creon's authority. When she points out that his edicts cannot override the will of the gods or the unshakable traditions of men, she places Creon's edict against Polynices' burial in a perspective that makes it seem shameful and ridiculous. Creon sees her words as merely a passionate, wild outburst, but he will ultimately be swayed by the words of Tiresias, which echo those of Antigone. It is important to note, however, that Antigone's motivation for burying Polynices is more complicated than simply reverence for the dead or for tradition. She says that she would never have taken upon herself the responsibility of defying the edict for the sake of a husband or children, for husbands and children can be replaced; brothers, once the parents are dead, cannot. In Antigone we see a woman so in need of familial connection that she is desperate to maintain the connections she has even in death.

Creon

Creon spends more time onstage in these three plays than any other character except the Chorus. His presence is so constant and his words are so pivotal to many parts of the plays that he cannot be dismissed as simply the legislative fool he sometimes seems to be. Rather, he represents the very real power of human law and of the human need for an orderly, mooned society. When we first see Creon in

Oedipus the King, Creon is shown to be separate from the citizens of Thebes. He tells Oedipus that he has brought news from the answer and suggests that Oedipus hear it inside. Creon has the secretive, businesslike air of a politician, which stands in sharp contrast to Oedipus, who tells him to speak out in front of everybody. While Oedipus insists on hearing Creon's news in public and builds his power as a political leader by upholding a rhetoric of openness, Creon is a master ofadministration. While Oedipus is aim on saying what he means and on hearing the truth—even when Jocasta begs and petition with him not to—Creon is happy to dissemble and eludes.

At lines 651-690, Creon argues that he has no desire to usurp Oedipus as king because he, Jocasta, and Oedipus rule the kingdom with equal power—Oedipus is merely the king in name. This argument may seem assuring, partly because at this moment in the play we are disposed to be sympathetic toward Creon, since Oedipus has just ordered Creon's expatriation. In response to Oedipus's hotheaded foolishness, Creon sounds like the voice of reason. Only in the final scene of Oedipus the King, when Creon's short lines expose his eagerness to exile Oedipus and separate him from his children, do we see that the title of king is what Creon desires above all.

Creon is at his most dissimulate in Oedipus at Colonus, where he once again needs something from Oedipus. His honey-tongued speeches to Oedipus and Theseus are made all the more ugly by his cowardly attempt to kidnap Antigone and Ismene. In Antigone, we at last see Creon comfortable in the place of power. Eteocles and Polynices, like their father, are dead, and Creon holds the same unquestioned preponderance that Oedipus once held. Of course, once Creon achieves the cohesion and power that he foraged and Oedipus possessed, he begins to replication Oedipus's mistakes. Creon reprobate Tiresias, for example (1144-1180), obviously echoing Oedipus's denunciation in Oedipus the King (366-507). And, of course, repentant penitent waitings in the final lines of Antigone echo those of Oedipus at the end of Oedipus the King. What can perhaps most be said most in favour of Creon is that in his final lines he also begins to sound like Antigone, waiting for whatever new catastrophe fate will bring him. He cries out that he is "nothing," "no one," but it is his suffering that makes him seem human in the end.

The Chorus

The Chorus reacts to events as they happen, generally in a foreseeable, though not consistent, way. It generally expresses a longing for calm and stability. For example, in Oedipus the King, it asks Oedipus not to expatriate Creon (725-733); fearing a curse, it attempts to send Oedipus out of Colonus in Oedipus at Colonus (242-251); and it questions the sagacity of Antigone's actions in Antigone (909-962). In moments like these, the Chorus seeks to maintain the status quo, which is

generally seen to be the wrong thing. The Chorus is not quaking so much as nervous and smug—above all, it hopes to prevent disruption.

The Chorus is given the last word in each of the three Theban plays, and perhaps the best way of understanding the different ways in which the Chorus can work is to look at each of these three speeches briefly. At the end of Oedipus the King, the Chorus conflates the people of "Thebes" with the audience in the theater. The message of the play, delivered directly to that audience, is one of complete despair: "count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last" (1684). Because the Chorus, and not one of the individual characters, delivers this message, that the play ends by giving the audience a false sense of closure. That is, the Chorus makes it sound like Oedipus is dead, and their final line suggests there might be some relief. But the audience must immediately realize, of course, that Oedipus is not dead. He cruise, blind and miserable, somewhere outside of Thebes. The audience, like Oedipus, does not know what the future holds in store. The play's ability to universalize, to make the audience feel incriminated in the emotions of the Chorus as well as those of the protagonist, is what makes it a particularly harrowing tragedy, an archetypal story in Western culture.

The Chorus at the end of Oedipus at Colonus seems genuinely to express the thought that there is nothing left to say, because everything rests in the hands of the gods. As with Oedipus's death, the Chorus expresses no great struggle here, only a willing resignation that makes the play seem hopeful—if equivocally so—rather than despairing. Oedipus's wandering has, it seems, done some good. The final chorus of Antigone, on the other hand, seems on the surface much more hopeful than either of the other two but is actually much more ominous and ambivalent. Antigone ends with a hope for knowledge—specifically the knowledge that comes out of suffering. This ending is quite different from the endings of the other two plays, from a mere banality about death or the fact that fate lies outside human control. The audience can agree with and believe in a statement like "Wisdom is by far the greatest part of joy," and perhaps feel that Creon has learned from his suffering, like Antigone seemingly did at the beginning of the play.

While the Chorus may believe that people learn through suffering, Sophocles may have felt differently. Antigone represents the last events in a series begun by Oedipus the King, but it was written before either of the other two Oedipus plays. And in the two subsequent plays, we see very little evidence in Antigone that suffering teaches anyone anything except how to sustain it.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas traversed in a literary work.

Fate and Free Will

Fate is a theme that often occurs in Greek writing, tragedies in particular! The idea that attempting to avoid an oracle is the very thing which brings it about is a common notion in many Greek myths, and similarities to Oedipus can for example be seen in the parable of the birth of Perseus.

Two oracles in particular dominate the plot of Oedipus the King. In lines 711 to 714, Jocasta relates the apocalypse that was told to Laius before the birth of Oedipus. Namely :

(The oracle) told him that it was his fate that he should die a victim at the hands of his own son, a son to be born of Laius and me. The oracle told to Laius tells only of the parricide; the oedipal love is missing. Prompted by Jocasta's recollection, Oedipus reveals the apocalypse which caused him to leave Corinth (791-93): that I was fated to lie with my mother, and show to daylight an jinxed breed which men would not endure, and I was doomed to be murderer of the father that engender me.

The implication of Laius's oracle is dubious. A prominent school of thought argues that the presentation of Laius's answer in this play differs from that found in (e.g.) Aeschylus's Oedipus trilogy produced in 467 BC. Helaine Smith argues:

Sophocles had the option of making the oracle to Laius conditional (if Laius has a son, that son will kill him) or unconditional (Laius will have a son who will kill him). Both Aeschylus and Euripides write plays in which the answer is conditional; Sophocles... chooses to make Laius's oracle unconditional and thus removes culpability for his sins from Oedipus, for he could not have done other than what he did, no matter what action he took.

This exposition has a long thoroughbred and several anthusiast. It finds support in Jocasta's repetition of the answer at lines 854-55: "Loxias declared that the king should be killed by/ his own son." In the Greek, Jocasta uses the verb chrenai: "to be fated, necessary." This monotony of the answer seems to suggest that it was unconditional and inexorable. Other scholars have nonetheless argued that Sophocles follows tradition in making Laius's answer conditional, and thus avoidable. They point to Jocasta's initial disclosure of the answer at lines 711-14. In the Greek, the answer cautions: hos auton hexoi moira pros paidos thanein/ hostis genoit emou the kakeinou para. The two verbs in agate indicate what is called a "future more vivid" condition: if a child is born to Laius, his fate to be killed by that child will overtake him.

Whatever may be the meaning of Laius's answer, the one delivered to Oedipus is clearly unconditional. Given our modern conception of fate and fatalism, readers of the play have a tendency to view Oedipus as a mere puppet controlled by greater forces, a man crushed by the gods and fate for no good reason. This, however, is

not an entirely accurate reading. While it is a mythological truism that oracles exist to be fulfilled, oracles do not cause the events that lead up to the outcome. In his landmark essay "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex", E.R. Dodds draws a comparison with Jesus's prophecy at the Last Supper that Peter would deny him three times. Jesus knows that Peter will do this, but readers would in no way suggest that Peter was a puppet of fate being forced to deny Christ. Free will and predestination are by no means mutually exclusive, and such is the case with Oedipus.

The oracle delivered to Oedipus what is often called a "self-fulfilling apocalypse", in that the apocalypse itself sets in motion events that conclude with its own fulfillment. This, however, is not to say that Oedipus is a victim of fate and has no free will. The answer inspires a series of specific choices, freely made by Oedipus, which lead him to kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus chooses not to return to Corinth after hearing the oracle, just as he chooses to head toward Thebes, to kill Laius, to marry and to take Jocasta specifically as his bride; in response to the plague at Thebes, he chooses to send Creon to the Answer for advice and then to follow that advice, initiating the investigation into Laius's murder. None of these choices is predetermined.

Another characteristic of answers in parable is that they are almost always misunderstood by those who hear them; hence OedipUs's misunderstanding the significance of the Delphic Answer. He visits Delphi to find out who his real parents are and assumes that the Answer refuses to answer that question, offering instead an unrelated apocalypse which forecasts parricide and Oedipal love. Oedipus's assumption is incorrect: the Oracle does answer his question. Stated less concisely, the answer to his question reads thus :

Polybus and Merope are not your parents. You will one day kill a man who will turn out to be your real father. The woman you will eventually marry is your real mother.

State Control

The exploration of this theme in Oedipus the King is paralleled by the examination of the strife between the individual and the state in Antigone. The dilemma that Oedipus faces here is similar to that of the dictatorial Creon: each man has, as king, made a decision that his subjects question or disobey; each king also perverts both his own role as a sovereign and the role of the agiolator. When informed by the blind prophet Tiresias that religious forces are against him, each king claims that the priest has been fraudulent. It is here, however, that their similarities come to an end: while Creon, seeing the devastation he has imposed, tries to amend his mistakes, Oedipus refuses to listen to anyone.

The Power of Unwritten Law

After defeating Polynices and taking the throne of Thebes, Creon commands that Polynices be left to blight unburied, his flesh eaten by dogs and birds, creating an "indecency" for everyone to see (Antigone, 231). Creon thinks that he is justified in his treatment of Polynices because the concluding was a traitor, an enemy of the state, and the security of the state makes all of human life-including family life and religion. Therefore, to Creon's way of thinking, the good of the state comes before all other duties and values. However, the subsequent events of the play demonstrate that some duties are more fundamental than the state and its laws. The duty to bury the dead is part of what it means to be human, not part of what it means to be a citizen. That is why Polynices' rotting body is an "indecency" rather than a crime. Moral duties—such as the duties owed to the dead-make up the body of unwritten law and tradition, the law to which Antigone appeals.

The Willingness to Ignore the Truth

When Oedipus and Jocasta begin to get close to the truth about Laius's murder, in Oedipus the King, Oedipus fastens onto a detail in the hope of vindicating himself. Jocasta says that she was told Laius was killed by "strangers," whereas Oedipus knows that he acted alone when he killed a man in similar circumstances. This is an extraordinary moment because it calls into question the entire truth-seeking process Oedipus believes himself to be undertaking. Both Oedipus and Jocasta act as though the servant's story, once spoken, is inarguable history. Neither can face the possibility of what it would mean if the servant were wrong. This is perhaps why Jocasta feels she can tell Oedipus of the prophecy that her son would kill his father, and Oedipus can tell her about the similar prophecy given him by an answer (867-875), and neither feels compelled to remark on the coincidence; or why Oedipus can hear the story of Jocasta binding her child's ankles (780-781) and not think of his own swollen feet. While the information in these speeches is largely intended to make the audience painfully aware of the tragic humour, it also emphasizes just how desperately Oedipus and Jocasta do not want to speak the obvious truth: they look at the circumstances and details of everyday life and pretend not to see them.

The Limits of Free Will

Apocalypse is a central part of Oedipus the King. The play begins with Creon's return from the answer at Delphi, where he has learned that the influx will be lifted if Thebes banishes the man who killed Laias. Tiredas prophesies is the capture of one who is both father and brother to his own children. Oedipus tells Jocasta of a apocalypse he heard as a youth, that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother, and Jocasta tells Oedipus of a similar apocalypse given to Laius, that her son would grow up to kill his father. Oedipus and Jocasta debate the extent to which prophecies should be trusted at all, and when all of the prophecies come true,

it appears that one of Sophocles' aims is to justify the powers of the gods and prophets, which had recently come under attack rp. fifth-century B.C. Athens.

Sophocles' audience would, of course, Lave known the story of Oedipus, which only increases the sense of complete inexorable about how the play would end. It is difficult to say how justly one can acciwe Oedipus of being "blind" or foolish when he seems to have no choice about fulfilling the apocalypse: he is sent away from Thebes as a baby and by a remarkable coincidence saved and raised as a prince in Corinth. Hearing that he is fated to kill his father, ho flooa Corinth uiid, by a still more remarkable coincidence, ends up back in Thebes, now king and husband in his actual father's place. Oedipus seems only to desire to flee his fate, but his fate continually catches up with him. Many people have tried to squabble that Oedipus brings about his disaster because of a "tragic flaw," but nobody has managed to create a consensus about what Oedipus's blemish actually is. Perhaps his story is meant to show that error and disaster can happen to anyone, that human beings are relatively powerless before fate or the gods, and that a cautious humility is the best attitude toward life.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Suicide

Almost every character who dies in the three Theban plays does so at his or her own hand (or own will, as is the case in Oedipus at Colonus). Jocasta hangs herself in Oedipus the King and Antigone hangs herself in Antigone. Eurydice and Haemon incision themselves at the end of Antigone. Oedipus wreaks horrible violence on himself at the end of his first play, and willingly goes to his own mysterious death at the end. Polynices and Eteocles die in battle with one another, and it could be argued that Polynices' death at least is premeditative in that he has heard his father's curse and knows that his cause is ill-fated oedipablave. Incest motivates or indirectly brings about all of the deaths in these plays.

Sight and Blindness

References to eyesight and vision, both literal and metaphorical, are very frequent in all three of the Theban plays. Quite often, the image of clear vision is used as a metaphor for knowledge and discernment. In fact, this metaphor is so much a part of the Greek way of thinking that it is almost not a metaphor at all, just as in modern English: to say "I see the truth" or "I see the way things are" is a perfectly ordinary use of language. However, the references to eyesight and insight in these plays form a meaningful pattern in combination with the references to literal and metaphorical blindness. Oedipus is eminent for his clear-sightedness and

quick comprehension, but he discovers that he has been blind to the truth for many years, and then he blinds himself so as not to have to look on his own children/siblings. Creon is prone to a similar blindness to the truth in Antigone. Though blind, the aging Oedipus finally acquires a limited prophetic vision. Tiresias is blind, yet he sees farther than others. Overall, the plays seem to say that human beings can demonstrate remarkable powers of intellectual penetration and insight, and that they have a great capacity for knowledge, but that even the smartest human being is liable to error, that the human capability for knowledge is ultimately quite limited and unreliable.

Graves and Tombs

The plots of Antigone and Oedipus at Colonus both revolve around burials, and beliefs about burial are important in Oedipus the King as well. Polynices is kept above ground after his death, repudiated a grave, and his rotting body chafes the gods, his relatives, and ancient traditions. Antigone is sepulchered alive, to the horror of everyone who watches. At the end of Oedipus the King, Oedipus cannot remain in Thebes or be buried within its territory, because his very person is polluted and derogatory to the sight of gods and men. Nevertheless, his choice, in Oedipus at Colonus, to be buried at Colonus confers a great and mystical gift on all of Athens, promising that nation victory over future attackers. In Ancient Greece, quisling/renegade and people who murder their own relatives could not be buried within their city's territory, but their relatives still had an obligation to bury them. As one of the basic, inevitable duties that people owe their relatives, burials represent the obligations that come from kindred, as well as the conflicts that can arise between one's duty to family and to the city-state.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Oedipus's Swollen Foot

Oedipus gets his name, as the Corinthian messenger tells us in Oedipus the King, from the fact that he was left in the mountains with his ankles pinned together. Jocasta explains that Laius abandoned him in this state on a barren mountain shortly after he was born. The injury leaves Oedipus with a evocative scar for the rest of his life. Oedipus's injury symbolizes the way in which fate has marked him and set him apart. It also symbolizes the way his movements have been cramped and stilled since birth, by Apollo's prophecy to Laius.

The Three-way Crossroads

In Oedipus the King, Jocasta says that Laius was slaughtered at a place where three roads meet. This crossroads is referred to a number of times during the play,

and it symbolizes the crucial moment, long before the events of the play, when Oedipus began to fulfil the dreadful prophecy that he would murder his father and marry his mother. A crossroads is a place where a choice has to be made, so crossroads usually symbolize moments where decisions will have important consequences but where different choices are still possible. In Oedipus the King, the crossroads is part of the distant past, dimly remembered, and Oedipus was not aware at the time that he was making a fateful decision. In this play, the crossroads symbolizes fate and the awesome power of prophecy rather than freedom and choice.

Antigone's Entombment

Creon condemns Antigone to a horrifying fate as she is being walled alive inside a tomb. He intends to leave her with just enough food so that neither he nor the citizens of Thebes will have her blood on their hands when she finally dies. Her imprisonment in a tomb symbolizes the fact that her loyalties and feelings lie with the dead-her brothers and her father-rather than with the living, such as Haemon or Ismene. But her imprisonment is also a symbol of Creon's lack of judgment and his affronts to the gods. Tiresias points out that Creon commits a horrible sin by lodging a living human being inside a grave, as he keeps a rotting body in daylight. Creon's actions against Antigone and against Polynices' body show him attempting to invert the order of nature, defying the gods by asserting his own control over their territories.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Oedipus the King, lines 1-337

Summary

Oedipus steps out of the royal palace of Thebes and is greeted by a procession of priests, who are in turn surrounded by the barren and sorrowful citizens of Thebes. The citizens carry branches swathed in wool, which they offer to the gods as gifts. Thebes has been struck by a influx, the citizens are dying, and no one knows how to put an end to it. Oedipus asks a priest why the citizens have gathered around the palace. The priest responds that the city is dying and asks the king to save Thebes. Oedipus replies that he sees and understands the terrible fate of Thebes, and that no one is more sorrowful than he. He has sent Creon, his brother-in-law and fellow ruler, to the Delphic answer to find out how to stop the influx. Just then, Creon arrives, and Oedipus asks what the oracle has said. Creon asks Oedipus if he wants to hear the news in private, but Oedipus insists that all the citizens hear. Creon then tells that he has learned from the god Apollo, who spoke through the answer: the murderer of Laius, who ruled Thebes before Oedipus, is in Thebes. He must be driven out in order for the influx to end.

Creon goes on to tell the story of Laius's murder. On their way to consult an answer, Laius and all but one of his fellow travellers were killed by thieves. Oedipus asks why the Thebans made no attempt to find the murderers, and Creon reminds him that Thebes was then more concerned with the curse of the Enigma. Hearing this, Oedipus resolves to solve the mystery of Laius's murder.

The Chorus enters, calling on the gods Apollo, Athena, and Artemis to save Thebes. Apparently, it has not heard Creon's news about Laius's murderer. It bemoans the state of Thebes, and finally beseeches Dionysus, whose mother was a Theban. Oedipus returns and tells the Chorus that he will end the influx himself. He asks if anyone knows who killed Laius, promising that the informant will be rewarded and the murderer will receive no discordance punishment than exile. No one responds, and Oedipus frenziedly curses Laius's murderer and anyone who is protecting him. Oedipus curses himself, proclaiming that should he discover the murderer to be a member of his own family, that person should be struck by the same exile and harsh treatment that he has just wished on the murderer. Oedipus castigates the citizens of Thebes for letting the murderer go unknown so long. The Leader of the Chorus suggests that Oedipus call for Tiresias, a great prophet, and Oedipus responds that he has already done so.

Analysis

Oedipus is notable for his compassion, his sense of justice, his swiftness of thought and action, and his candor. At this early stage in the play, Oedipus represents all that an Athenian audience-or indeed any audience-could desire in a citizen or a leader. In his first speech, which he delivers to an old priest whose suffering he seeks to attenuate, he continually voices his concern for the health and well-being of his people. He insists upon allowing all his people to hear what the answer has said, despite Creon's suggestion that Oedipus hear the news in private. When Creon retells the story of Laius's murder, Oedipus is shocked and confounded that the investigation of the murder of a king was so briskly dropped (145-147). Oedipus quickly devises plans to deal with both his people's suffering and Laius's unsolved murder, and he has even antedated the Chorus's suggestions that he send someone to the oracle and call forth Tiresias. Finally, Oedipus is emphatic in his promises of appalling punishment for Laius's murderer, even if the murderer turns out to be someone close to Oedipus himself.

Sophocles' audience knew the ancient story of Oedipus well, and would therefore interpret the greatness Oedipus emanates in the first scene as a tragic prelude of his fall. Sophocles seizes every opportunity to escapade this dramatic irony. Oedipus frequently implies to sight and blindness, creating many moments of dramatic irony, since the audience knows that it is Oedipus's metaphorical blindness to the relationship between his past and his present situation that brings about his ruin. For example, when the old priest tells Oedipus that the people of

Thebes are dying of the influx, Oedipus says that he could not fail to see this (68-72). Oedipus eagerly attempts to uncover the truth, acting decisively and scrupulously refusing to shield himself from the truth. Although we are able to see him as a mere puppet of fate, at some points, the sarcasm is so magnified that it seems almost as if Oedipus brings disaster upon himself willingly. One such examples of this irony is when Oedipus proclaims proudly-but, for the audience, painfully-that he possesses the bed of the former king, and that marriage might have even created "blood-bonds" between him and Laius had Laius not been murdered (294-300).

Although the Chorus's first balled (168-244) piously calls to the gods to save Thebes from the plague, the answer they get to their prayer arrives in human form. Immediately following the ode, Oedipus enters and says that he will answer the Chorus's prayers. For a moment, Oedipus takes upon himself the role of a god-a role the Chorus has been both reluctant and eager to allow him (see 39-43). Oedipus is so competent in the affairs of men that he comes close to dismissing the gods, although he does not actually blaspheme, as Creon does in Antigone. At this early moment, we see Oedipus's dangerous pride, which explains his willful blindness and, to a certain extent, justifies his downfall.

Oedipus the King, Lines 338-706

Summary

A boy leads in the blind prophet Tiresias. Oedipus begs him to reveal who Laius's murderer is, but Tiresias answers only that he knows the truth but wishes he did not. Puzzled at first, then angry, Oedipus insists that Tiresias tell Thebes what he knows evoked by the anger and insults of Oedipus, Tiresias begins to hint at his knowledge. Finally, when Oedipus furiously accuses Tiresias of the murder, Tiresias tells Oedipus that Oedipus himself is the curse. Oedipus dares Tiresias to say it again, and so Tiresias calls Oedipus the murderer. The king criticizes Tiresias's powers wildly and insults his blindness, but Tiresias only responds that the insults will eventually be turned on Oedipus by all of Thebes. Driven into a fury by the indictment, Oedipus proceeds to concoct a story that Creon and Tiresias are conspiring to overthrow him.

The leader of the Chorus asks Oedipus to calm down, but Tiresias only gibes Oedipus further, saying that the king does not even know who his parents are. This statement both antagonize and man oeuvre Oedipus, who asks for the truth of his parentage. Tiresias answers only in riddles, saying that the murderer of Laius will turn out to be both brother and father to his children, both son and husband to his mother. The characters exit and the Chorus takes the stage, confused and unsure whom to believe. They resolve that they will not believe any of these indictments against Oedipus unless they are shown proof.

Creon enters, soon followed by Oedipus. Oedipus cites Creon of trying to overthrow him, since it was he who recommended that Tiresias come. Creon asks Oedipus to be rational, but Oedipus says that he wants Creon murdered. Both Creon and the leader of the Chorus try to get Oedipus to understand that he's assembling fantasies, but Oedipus is adamant in his conclusions and his fury.

Analysis

As in Antigone, the entrance of Tiresias signals a pivotal turning point in the plot. But in Oedipus the King, Tiresias also serves an additional role-his blindness augments the dramatic irony that governs the play. Tiresias is blind but can see the truth; Oedipus has his sight but cannot. Oedipus claims that he longs to know the truth; Tiresias says that seeing the truth only brings one pain. In addition to this unspoken irony, the conversation between Tiresias and Oedipus is filled with references to sight and eyes. As Oedipus grows angrier, he gibes Tiresias for his blindness, confusing physical sight and insight, or knowledge. Tiresias matches Oedipus insult for insult, mocking Oedipus for his eyesight and for the brilliance that once allowed him to solve the riddle of the Enigma-neither quality is now helping Oedipus to see the truth.

In this section, the characteristic swiftness of Oedipus's thought, words, and action begins to work against him. When Tiresias arrives at line 340, Oedipus praises him as an all-powerful seer who has shielded Thebes from many a influx. Only forty lines later, he refers to Tiresias as "froth," and soon after that accuses him of treason. Oedipus sizes up a situation, makes a judgment, and acts-all in an instant. While this confident expedience was meritorious in the first section, it is inflated to a point of near absurdity. Oedipus asks Tiresias and Creon a great many questions-questions are his typical mode of address and frequently a sign of his quick and intelligent mind-but they are merely oratorical, for they accuse and presume rather than seek answers. Though Tiresias has laid the truth out plainly before Oedipus, the only way Oedipus can elucidate the prophet's words is as an attack, and his quest for information only seeks to confirm what he already believes.

The Chorus seems terrified and helpless in this section, and its speech at lines 526-572 is fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. Though, like Oedipus, the Chorus cannot believe the truth of what Tiresias has said, the Chorus does not believe itself to be untouchable as Oedipus does, consisting as it does of the plague-stricken, innocent citizens of Thebes. The Chorus's speech is full of images of caves, darkness, lightning, and wings, which suggest darkness, the unknown, and, most significantly, terror striking from the skies. The Chorus's supplications to the benevolent gods of lines 168-244 are long past. The gods are still present in this speech, but they are no longer of any help, because they know truths that they will not reveal. Thebes is menaced rather than protected by the heavens.

Oedipus the King, lines 707–1007

Summary

Oedipus's wife, Jocasta, enters and convinces Oedipus that he should neither kill nor exile Creon, though the reluctant king remains convinced that Creon is guilty. Creon leaves, and the Chorus reassures Oedipus that it will always be loyal to him. Oedipus explains to Jocasta how Tiresias condemned him, and Jocasta responds that all prophets are false. As proof, she offers the fact that the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would be murdered by his son, while actually his son was cast out of Thebes as a baby and Laius was murdered by a band of thieves. Her narrative of his murder, however, sounds familiar to Oedipus, and he asks to hear more.

Jocasta tells him that Laius was killed at a three-way crossroads, just before Oedipus arrived in Thebes. Oedipus, stunned, tells his wife that he may be the one who murdered Laius. He tells Jocasta that, long ago, when he was the prince of Corinth, he heard at a banquet that he was not really the son of the king and queen, and so went to the oracle of Delphi, which did not answer him but did tell him he would murder his father and sleep with his mother. Hearing this, Oedipus fled from home, never to return. It was then, on the journey that would take him to Thebes, that Oedipus was confronted and harassed by a group of travellers, whom he killed in self-defense, at the very crossroads where Laius was killed.

Hoping that he will not be identified as Laius's murderer, Oedipus sends for the shepherd who was the only man to survive the attack. Oedipus and Jocasta leave the stage, and the Chorus enters, announcing that the world is ruled by destiny and denouncing prideful men who would defy the gods. At the same time, the Chorus worries that if all the prophecies and oracles are wrong-if a proud man can in fact, triumph-then the gods may not rule the world after all. Jocasta enters from the palace to offer a branch wrapped in wool to Apollo.

Analysis

Whatever sympathy we might have lost for Oedipus amid his ranting in the second section, we regain at least partially in the third. After Jocasta intercedes in the fight between Oedipus and Creon, Oedipus calms down and recalls that there is a riddle before him that he, as the ruler of Thebes, has a responsibility to solve. Consequently, his incessant questions become more purposeful than they were in his conversations with Tiresias and Creon. We see that Oedipus logically and earnestly pursues the truth when he does not have a preconceived idea of what the truth is. When Oedipus seizes upon the detail of the three-way crossroads (805-822), he proves that he was not merely grandstanding in the first scene of the play when he expressed his desire to be forthright with his citizens and to subject himself to the same laws he imposes upon others. In his speech at lines 848-923,

Oedipus shows that he truly believes he killed Laius and is willing to accept not only the responsibility but the punishment for the act. The speech is heartbreaking because we know that Oedipus has arrived at only half the truth.

In this section, Jocasta is both careless and maternal. She tells Oedipus that prophecies do not come true, and she uses the fact that an oracle incorrectly prophesied that Laius would be killed by his own son as evidence. Jocasta's mistake is similar to Oedipus's in the previous section: she confuses conclusions and evidence. As Oedipus assumed that Tiresias's unpleasant claims could only be treason, so Jocasta assumes that because one prophecy has apparently not come to pass, prophecies can only be lies. While Oedipus's hasty and imperfect logic in the second section has much to do with his pride, Jocasta's in this section seem attached to an unwitting desire to soothe and mother Oedipus. When Jocasta is not answering Oedipus's questions, she is calming him down, asking him to go into the palace, telling him that he has nothing to worry about-no need to ask more questions-for the rest of his life. Jocasta's casual attitude upsets the Chorus, which continues to be loyal to Oedipus throughout this section (see 761-767). The Chorus's ode at lines 954-997 serves as a reminder that neither Oedipus, Jocasta, nor the sympathetic audience should feel calm, because oracles speak to a purpose and are inspired by the gods who control the destiny of men. Throughout the play, the Chorus has been miserable, desperate for the plague to end and for stability to be restored to the city. Nevertheless, the Chorus holds staunchly to the belief that the prophesies of Tiresias will come true. For if they do not, there is no order on earth or in the heavens.

Oedipus the King, lines 1008 - 1310

And as for this marriage with your mother— have no fear. Many a man before you, in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed. Take such things for shadows, nothing at all— Live, Oedipus, as if there's no tomorrow!

Summary

A messenger enters, looking for Oedipus. He tells Jocasta that he has come from Corinth to tell Oedipus that his father, Polybus, is dead, and that Corinth wants Oedipus to come and rule there. Jocasta rejoices, convinced that since Polybus is dead from natural causes; the apocalypse that Oedipus will murder his father is false. Oedipus arrives, hears the messenger's news, and rejoices with Jocasta; king and queen concur that prophecies are worthless and the world is ruled by chance. However, Oedipus still fears the part of the prophecy that said he would sleep with his mother. The messenger says he can rid himself of that worry, because Polybus and his wife, Merope, are not really Oedipus's natural parents.

The messenger explains that he used to be a shepherd years ago. One day, he found a baby on Mount Cithaeron, near Thebes. The baby had its ankles pinned

together, and the former shepherd set them free. That baby was Oedipus, who still walks with a limp because of the injury to his ankles so long ago. When Oedipus inquires who left him in the woods on the mountain, the messenger replies that another shepherd, Laius's servant, gave him baby Oedipus. At this, Jocasta turns sharply, seeming to sense some horrible revelation on the horizon.

Oedipus wants to find this shepherd, so he can find out who his natural parents are. Jocasta begs him to abandon his search immediately, but Oedipus is insistent. After screaming and pleading some more to no avail, Jocasta finally flees back into the palace. Oedipus dismisses her concerns as snobbish fears that he may be born of poor parents, and Oedipus and the Chorus rejoice at the possibility that they may soon know who his parents truly are.

The other shepherd, who turns out to be the same shepherd who witnessed Laius's murder, comes onto the stage. The messenger identifies him as the man who gave him the young Oedipus. Oedipus interrogates the new arrival, asking who gave him the baby, but the shepherd refuses to talk. Finally, after Oedipus threatens him with torture, the shepherd answers that the baby came from the house of Laius. Questioned further, he answers that it was Laius's child, and that Jocasta gave it to him to destroy because of a prophecy that the child would kill his parents. But instead, the shepherd gave him to the other shepherd, so that he might be raised as a prince in Corinth. Realizing who he is and who his parents are, Oedipus screams that he sees the truth, and flees back into the palace. The shepherd and the messenger slowly exit the stage.

Analysis

Sophocles makes the scene in which Oedipus and Jocasta learn that Polybus is dead. Oedipus digests the news of Polybus's death without showing the slightest sign of grief. The moment becomes, in fact, an occasion for near ascendancy, as Oedipus believes his doubts about prophecies have been confirmed. He is now convinced that prophecies are useless. He even says, "Polybus/packs [all the prophecies] off to sleep with him in hell!" (1062-1063). Oedipus's strange elation reveals the extent to which he has withdrawn into himself after obtaining the knowledge that he killed his father. He and Jocasta elation in the smallest and most eccentric details in order to diminish some of the guilt Oedipus feels (for another example, see Oedipus and Jocasta's discussion at lines 938-951).

Oedipus's own perseverance, however, means that he will not allow his understanding to remain incomplete. When he learns that there is still a piece of the puzzle left unsolved—the identity of the man from whom the messenger received the baby Oedipus—Oedipus seems indubitably driven to ask questions until the whole truth is out. Thus, he gradually bereaves himself of dubious details that could alleviate his guilt. Jocasta, of course, solves the riddle before Oedipus-she realizes she is his mother while he is still imagining himself to be the child of slaves.

Oedipus must realize that something is amiss when Jocasta leaves the stage screaming, but his speech at lines 1183-1194 is strangely joyful. Chance, he says in this speech, is his mother, and the waxing and waning moon his brothers. Overwhelmed by an onslaught of new information, Oedipus re-envisions his earthly relationships as celestial ones as he announces his intent to uncover his true identity. It seems that he is unable to face directly the reality of his origins-reconceiving his identity allows him to feel a sense of control over it, but it also keeps that identity ambiguous. He basically identifies himself as someone who must search for his identity. Oedipus, who is famous for his skill at solving riddles, thus makes his own life into a riddle.

The messenger and shepherd are both similar to and different from the messenger characters who enter at the end of Greek tragedies to announce the terrible events that have occurred offstage (as will happen at the end of Oedipus the King [lines 1365-1422]). Like the typical final-scene messenger, these characters bear important news that is largely concerned with events that have not happened onstage. But unlike the typical final-scene messenger, these characters bear news not only to the audience but also to the man whom the news directly affects.

Because Oedipus receives news of his own tragedy, his substantial actions near the play's conclusion become an aggrandize model of how the audience is expected to react to the words of the messenger characters, who narrate the catastrophes in the final scenes of Greek plays. Throughout the play, Oedipus has been concerned with precise words—of the oracle (102), of Jocasta when she mentions the three-way crossroads (805), of the messenger who escaped death in Laius's traveling party (932-937). After learning the truth of his origins, however, Oedipus travelling gives words physical consequence. He transforms the messenger's statement into a tangible, life-changing, physical horror, in a manner that shows the audience what its reaction should be.

Oedipus the King, Lines 1311–1684

Summary

The Chorus enters and cries that even Oedipus, greatest of men, was brought low by destiny, for he unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother. The messenger enters again to tell the Chorus what has happened in the palace. Jocasta is dead, by suicide. She locked herself in her bedroom, crying for Laius and weeping for her grotesque fate. Oedipus came to the door in a fury, asking for a sword and cursing Jocasta. He finally hurled himself at the bedroom door and burst through it, where he saw Jocasta hanging from a lariat. Seeing this, Oedipus sobbed and enclasp Jocasta. He then took the gold pins that held her robes and, with them, stabbed out his eyes. He kept lacerating the pins down his eyes, crying that he could not bear to see the world now that he had learned the truth.

Just as the messenger finishes the story, Oedipus emerges from the palace. With blood streaming from his blind eyes, he effluvium and rants at his fate, and at the infinite darkness that embraces him. He claims that though Apollo ordained his destiny, it was he alone who pierced his own eyes. He asks that he be banished from Thebes. The Chorus shrinks away from Oedipus as he curses his birth, his marriage, his life, and in turn all births, marriages, and lives.

Creon enters, and the Chorus expresses hope that he can restore order. Creon forgives Oedipus for his past accusations of treason and asks that Oedipus be sent inside so that the public display of shame might stop. Creon agrees to exile Oedipus from the city, but tells him that he will only do so if every detail is approved by the gods. Oedipus embraces the hope of exile, since he believes that, for some reason, the gods want to keep him alive. He says that his two sons are men and can take care of themselves, but asks that Creon take care of his girls, whom he would like to see one final time.

The girls, Antigone and Ismene, come forth, crying. Oedipus enclasps them and says he weeps for them, since they will be ostracized from society, and no man will want to marry the offspring of an interbred marriage. He turns to Creon and asks him to promise that he will take care >f them. He reaches out to Creon, but Creon will not touch his hand. Oedipus asks his daughters to pray that they may have a better life than his. Creon then puts an end to the farewell, saying that Oedipus has wept shamefully long enough. Creon orders the guards to take Antigone and Ismene away from Oedipus, and tells Oedipus that his power has ended. Everyone exits, and the Chorus comes onstage once more. Oedipus, the greatest of j man, has fallen, they say, and so all life is miserable, and only death can bring peace.

Analysis

The speech of the Chorus, with which this section begins (1311-1350), turns the images of the plowman and ship's captain, which formerly stood for Oedipus's success and ability to manage the state, into images of his failure. And the wayin which it does so is quite extreme, focusing particularly on the sexual aspect of Oedipus's actions. Oedipus and his father have, like two ships in one port, shared! the same "wide harbor," and Oedipus has plowed the same "lurrows" his father] plowed (1334-1339). The harbour image apparently refers to Jocasta's bedchamber, but both images also quite obviously refer to the other space Oedipus and his father have shared: Jocasta's vagina.

Images of earth and soil continue throughout the scene, most noticeably in one of Oedipus's final speeches, in which he talks to his children about what he has done (see 1621-1661). These images of earth, soil, and plowing are used to suggest the metaphor of the hefty plowman harrowing the soil of the state, but they also suggest the image of the soil drinking the blood of the family members Oedipus has killed (see in particular 1531-1537). Oedipus's crimes are presented as a kind of

infestation on the land, a plague-symbolized by the plague with which the play begins-that infects the earth on which Oedipus, his family, and his citizens stand, and in which all are buried as a result of Oedipus's violence.

After we learn of Oedipus's self-inflicted blinding, Oedipus enters, led by a boy (1432)-a clear visual echo of the Tiresias's entrance at line 337. Oedipus has become like the blind prophet whose words he scorned. Unable to see physically, he is now possessed of an insight, or an inner sight, that is all too piercing and revealing. Though the Chorus is fascinated with the amount of physical pain Oedipus must be in after performing such an act, Oedipus makes no mention of physical pain. Like Tiresias, he has left the concerns of the physical world behind to focus on the psychological torment that accompanies contemplation of the truth.

Once the mystery of Laius's murder has been solved, Creon quickly transfers the power to himself. Even in his newfound humbleness, Oedipus still clings to some trappings of leadership, the most pathetic example is his command to Creon to bury Jocasta as he sees fit. Oedipus finds it difficult to leave the role of commander, which is why he tries to preempt Creon's power by asking Creon to expatriate him. Creon, however, knows that Oedipus no longer has any real control. Creon is erustly and just as efficient a leader as Oedipus was at the beginning of the play. Just as Oedipus anticipated the Chorus's demand for a consultation with the answer in the first scene, so Creon has anticipated Oedipus's request for banishment now: when Oedipus requests banishment, Creon says that he's already consulted "the god" about it (1574). Creon has also anticipated Oedipus's desire to see his daughters, and has them brought onstage and taken away again.

Mostly because he clashed with Creon, Oedipus becomes a tragic figure rather frran a monster in the play's final moments. Though throughout the play Oedipus has behaved willfully and proudly, he has also been earnest and forthright in all of his actions. We trust Oedipus's judgment because he always seems to mean what he says and to try to do what he believes is right. His punishment of blindness and exile seems just, therefore, because he inflicted it upon himself. Creon, on the other hand, has the outward trappings of Oedipus's candid, frank nature, but none of its substance. "I try to say what I mean; it's my habit," Creon tells Oedipus in the play's final lines, but the audience perceives this to be untrue (1671). Creon's earlier protestations that he lacked the desire for power are proved completely false by his eagerness to take Oedipus's place as king, and by the cutting ferocity with which he silences Oedipus at the end of the play. At the end of the play, one kind of pride has merely replaced another and all men, as the Chorus goes on to say, are destined to be miserable.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Theban plays consist of three plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King (also called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus Rex), and Oedipus at Colonus. All three plays concern the fate of Thebes during and after the reign of King Oedipus. They have often been published under a single cover. Sophocles, however, wrote the three

plays for separate festival competitions, many years apart. Not only are the Theban plays not a true trilogy.

2. Each of the plays relates to the tale of the mythological Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother without knowledge that they were his parents. His family is fated to be doomed for three generations.

3. Oedipus's two daughters (and half-sisters), Antigone and Ismene, are sent out, and Oedipus laments that they should be born to such a cursed family. He asks Creon to watch over them and Creon agrees, before sending Oedipus back into the palace.

4. Homer's Odyssey contains the earliest account of the Oedipus myth when Odysseus encounters Jocasta, named Epicaste in the underworld. Homer briefly summarises the story of Oedipus, including the incest, patricide, and Jocasta's subsequent suicide. However in the Homeric version Oedipus remains King of Thebes after the revelation and neither blinds himself, nor is sent into exile.

5. Polynices is son of Oedipus, and thus also his brother. Polynices appears only very briefly in Oedipus at Colonus. He arrives at Colonus seeking his father's blessing in his battle with his brother, Eteocles, for power in Thebes. Polynices tries to point out the similarity between his own situation and that of Oedipus, but his words seem opportunistic rather than filial, a fact that Oedipus points out.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Write down the summary of the play, "Oedipus the King".
2. Describe the themes and motifs used in the play, "Oedipus the King".
3. Sketch the character of Oedipus in the play. "Oedipus the King".
4. Justify the title of the play, "Oedipus the King".
5. Discuss the life and literary career of Sophocles.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Sophocles the Playwright —S.M. Adams.
2. Greek Tragedy : A Literary Study —H.D.F. Kitto.
3. Oedipus at Thebes : Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time—Knox Bernard.
4. Oedipus Tyrannus : Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge—Charles Segal.
5. Greek Tragedy in Action—Oliver Taplin.

2

DOCTOR FAUSTUS-CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

STRUCTURE

- Learning goals
- Introduction
- About the author
- Plot of doctor Faustus
- Dramatis Personal
- Major characters—An intensive study
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
- Summary and analysis
- Important quotations
- Review questions
- Suggested Readings

LEARNING GOALS

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Know about the English Dramatist, "Christopher Marlowe"
- Have a broad understanding of his works.
- Narrate the story of the play, "Doctor Faustus"
- Understand and discuss the themes that occur in 'Dr. Jaustus.'

INTRODUCTION

'The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus', commonly referred to simply as Doctor Faustus, is a play by Christopher Marlowe, based on the Faust's story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. Doctor Faustus was first published in 1604, eleven years after Marlowe's death and at least twelve years after the first performance of the play.

"No Elizabethan play outside the Shakespeare canon has raised more controversy than Doctor Faustus. There is no agreement concerning the nature of the text and the date of composition... and the

centrality of the Faust legend in the history of the Western world preclude any definitive agreement on the interpretation of the play..."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Marlowe (baptised 26 February 1564-30 May 1593) was an English dramatist, poet and translator of the Elizabethan era. As the highly acclaimed Elizabethan tragedian, next, to William Shakespeare, he is known for his blank verse, his overreaching protagonists, and his mysterious death.

A warrant was issued for Marlowe's arrest on 18 May 1593. No reason for it was given, though it was thought to be connected to allegations of blasphemy—a manuscript believed to have been written by Marlowe was said to contain "vile heretical concepts." He was brought before the Privy Council for questioning on 20 May, after which he had to report to them daily. Ten days later, he was stabbed to death by Ingram Frizer. Whether the stabbing was connected to his arrest has never been resolved.

Early Life

Marlowe was born to a shoemaker in Canterbury named John Marlowe and his wife Catherine. His date of birth is not known, but he was baptised on 26 February 1564, and likely to have been born a few days before. Thus he was just two months older than his contemporary Shakespeare, who was baptised on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Marlowe attended The King's School, Canterbury (where a house is now named after him) and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge on a scholarship and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1584. In 1587 the university hesitated to award him his master's degree because of a rumour that he had converted to Roman Catholicism and intended to go to the English college at Rheims to prepare for priesthood. However, his degree was awarded on schedule when the Privy Council intervened on his behalf, commending him for his "faithful dealing" and "good service" to the Queen. The nature of Marlowe's service was not specified by the Council, but its letter to the Cambridge authorities has provoked much speculation, notably the theory that Marlowe was operating as a secret agent working for Sir Francis Walsingham's intelligence service. No direct evidence supports this theory, although the Council's letter is evidence that Marlowe had served the government in some capacity.

Literary Career

'Dido, Queen of Carthage' was Marlowe's first play. Marlowe's first play performed on stage in London was "Tamburlaine" (1587) about the conqueror Timur, who rises from shepherd to warrior. It is among the first English plays in blank verse, and, with Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy", generally is considered the beginning of the mature phase of the Elizabethan theatre. Tamburlaine was a success, and was followed with Tamburlaine Part II. The sequence of his plays is unknown; all deal with controversial themes.

"The Jew of Malta", about a Maltese Jew's barbarous revenge against the city authorities, has a prologue delivered by a character representing Machiavelli. "Edward the Second" is an English history play about the deposition of King Edward II by his barons and the Queen, who resent the undue influence the king's favourites have in court and state affairs. The Massacre at Paris is a short and luridly written work, the only surviving text which was probably a reconstruction from memory of the original, performance text, portraying the events of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, which English Protestants invoked as the blackest example of Catholic treachery. It features the silent "English Agent", whom subsequent tradition has identified with Marlowe himself and his connections to the secret service. Along with "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus", "The Massacre at Paris" is considered his most dangerous play, as anarchist in London seized on its theme to advocate the murders of refugees from the low countries and, indeed, it warns Elizabeth I of this possibility in its last scene.

"The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus", based on the German Faustbuch, was the first dramatised version of the Faust legend of a scholar's dealing with the devil. While versions of "The Devil's Pact" can be traced back to the 4th century, Marlowe deviates outstandingly by having his hero unable to "burn his books" or lament to a merciful God in order to have his contract abolish at the end of the play. Marlowe's protagonist is instead torn apart by demons and dragged off screaming to hell. Dr Faustus is a textual problem for scholars as it was highly edited (and possibly censored) and rewritten after Marlowe's death. Two versions of the play exist: the 1604 quarto, also known as the A text, and the 1616 quarto or B text. Many scholars believe that the A text is more representative of Marlowe's original because it contains irregular character names and idiosyncratic spelling: the hallmarks of a text that used the author's handwritten manuscript, or "foul papers", as a major source.

Marlowe's plays were gigantically successful, no doubt, to the grandiose stage presence of Edward Alleyn. He was unusually tall for the time, and the haughty roles of Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas were probably written especially for him. Marlowe's plays were the foundation of the repertory of Alleyn's company, the Admiral's Men, throughout the 1590s.

Marlowe also wrote "Hero and Leander" (published with a continuation by George Chapman in 1598), the popular lyric 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love', and translations of Ovid's Amores and the first book of Lucan's Pharsalia.

The two parts of Tamburlaine were published in 1590; all Marlowe's other works were published posthumously. In 1599, his translation of Ovid was banned and copies publicly burned as part of Archbishop Whitgift's crackdown on offensive material.

Spying

Marlowe is often imputed to have been a government spy. Park Honan's 2005 biography even had "Spy" in its title and the author Charles Nicholl speculates this is so, suggesting that Marlowe's recruitment took place when he was at Cambridge. Surviving college records from the period indicate Marlowe had a series of unusually lengthy absences from the university - much longer than permitted by university regulations - that began in the academic year 1584-1585. Surviving college buttery (dining room) accounts indicate he began spending extra vagrantly on food and drink during the periods he was in attendance - more than he could have bestowed on his known scholarship income.

As noted above, in 1587 the Privy Council ordered Cambridge University to award Marlowe his MA, repudiating scuttlebutt that he intended to go to the English Catholic college in Rheims, instead he had been engaged in unspecified "affaires" on "matters touching the benefit of his country". This is from a document dated 29 June 1587, from the Public Records Office-Acts of Privy Council.

It has sometimes been theorised that Marlowe was the "Morley" who was a tutor to Arbella Stuart in 1589. This possibility was first raised in a TLS letter by E. St John Brooks in 1937; in a letter to Notes and Queries, John Baker has added that only Marlowe could be Arbella's tutor due to the absence of any other known "Morley" from the period with an MA and not otherwise occupied. If Marlowe was Arbella's tutor, and some biographers think that the "Morley" in

question may have been a brother of the musician Thomas Morley it might indicate that he was a spy, since Arbella, niece of Mary, Queen of Scots, and cousin of James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, was at the time a strong candidate for the progression to Elizabeth's throne.

In 1592, Marlowe was arrested in the town of Flushing in the Netherlands for his purported involvement in the replicating of coins, presumably related to the activities of seditious Catholics. He was sent to be dealt with by the Lord Treasurer (Burghley) but no charge or imprisonment resulted. This arrest may have disrupted another of Marlowe's spying missions: perhaps by giving the resulting coinage to the Catholic cause he was to infiltrate the followers of the active Catholic co-conspiration William Stanley and report back to Burghley.

Arrest and Death

In early May 1593, several bills were posted about London threatening Episcopal fugitives from France and the Netherlands who had settled in the city. One of these, the "Dutch church libel, "written in blank verse, contained implication to several of Marlowe's plays and was signed, "Tamburlaine". On 11 May the Privy Council ordered the arrest of those responsible for the defamation. The next day, Marlowe's colleague Thomas Kyd was arrested. Kyd's lodgings were searched and a fragment of a dissident stretch was found. Kyd asserted that it had belonged to Marlowe, with whom he had been writing "in one chamber" some two years earlier. At that time they had both been working for an patrician frequenter, probably Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange. Marlowe's arrest was ordered on 18 May, when the Privy Council accidently knew that he might be found staying with Thomas Walsingham, whose father was a first cousin of the late Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's principal secretary in the 1580s and a man more deeply involved in state infiltration than any other member of the Privy Council. Marlowe duly appeared before the Privy Council on 20 May and was instructed to "give his daily attendance on their Lordships, until he shall be licensed to the contrary". On Wednesday, 30 May, Marlowe was killed.

Various accounts of Marlowe's death were current over the next few years. Francis Meres says Marlowe was "skewered to death by a risqué serving-man, a rival of his in his lewd love" as punishment for his "epicurism and atheism." In 1917, in the Dictionary of National Biography, Sir Sidney Lee wrote that Marlowe was killed in a drunken fight, and this is still often stated as fact today.

The official account came to light only in 1925 when the scholar Leslie Hotson discovered the coroner's report of the inquest on Marlowe's death, held two days later on Friday, 1 June, 1593. Marlowe had spent all day in a house in Deptford, owned by the widow Eleanor Bull, and together with three men: Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley. All three had been employed by one or other of the Walsinghams. Skeres and Poley hed helped snare the confederate in the Babington plot and Frizer was a servant of Thomas Walsingham. These witnesses deponed that Frizer and Marlowe had argued over the bill now famously known as the 'Reckoning' exchanging "divers malevolent words" while Frizer was sitting at a table between the other two and Marlowe was lying behind him on a couch. Marlowe snatched Frizer's poniard and wounded him on the head. In the ensuing struggle, according to the coroner's report. Marlowe was skewed above the right eye, killing him instantly. The jury concluded that Frizer acted in self-defence, and within a month he was condoned. Marlowe was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford immediately after theinquisition, on 1 June 1593.

Marlowe's death is purported by some to be an assassination for the following reasons:

1. The three men who were in the room with him when he died were all connected both to the state secret service and to the London underworld. Frizer and Skeres also had a long record as loan sharks and con-men, as shown by court records. Bull's house also had "links to the government's snoop network".

2. Their story that they were on a day's pleasure outing to Deptford is purported to be far-fetched. In fact, they spent the whole day together, deep in discussion. Also. Robert Poley was carrying urgent and confidential dispatches to the Queen, who was at her residence, Nonsuch Palace in Surrey, but instead of delivering them, he spent the day with Marlowe and the other two, and didn't in fact hand them in until well over a week later, on 8 June.

3. It seems too much of a coincidence that Marlowe's death occurred only a few days after his arrest, evidently for apostasy.

4. The manner of Marlowe's arrest is purported to suggest causes more entwine than a simple charge of apostasy would generally indicate. He was released in spite of ostensible facie evidence, and even though other asseveration about him received within a few days, as described below, unadulterated connected Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Northumberland with the apostasy. Thus, some contend it to be

probable that the investigation was meant primarily as a warning to the politicians in the "School of Night", or that it was connected with a power struggle within the Privy Council itself.

5. The various incidents that hint at a relationship with the Privy Council, and by the fact that his patron was Thomas Walsingham, Sir Francis's second cousin once removed, who had been actively involved in intelligence work.

For these reasons and others, Charles Nicholl, in his book "The Reckoning on Marlowe's death" argues there was more to Marlowe's death than emerged at the inquisition. There are different theories of some degree of probability. Since there are only written documents on which to base any conclusions, and since it is probable that the most pivotal information about his death was never committed to writing at all, it is unlikely that the full circumstances of Marlowe's death will ever be known.

Works

The dates of composition are approximate.

Plays

- Dido, Queen of Carthage (c.1586) (possibly co-written with Thomas Nashe)
- Tamburlaine, part 1 (c.1587)
- Tamburlaine, part 2 (c. 1587-1588)
- The Jew of Malta (c.1589)
- Doctor Faustus (c.1589, or, c.1593)
- Edward II (c. 1592)
- The Massacre at Paris (c.1593)

The play, "Lust's Dominion" was ascribed to Marlowe upon its initial publication in 1657, though scholars and critics have almost concordantly rejected the ascription.

Poetry

- Translation of Book One of Lucan's Pharsalia (date unknown)
- Translation of Ovid's Elegies (c. 1580s?)
- The Passionate Shepherd to His Love (pre-1593; because it is constantly referred to in his own plays we can conjecture an early date of mid-1580s)

- Hero and Leander (c. 1593, unfinished; completed by George Chapman, 1598)

Fictional Works About Marlowe

- Leo Host's Marlowe, stage musical based on Rost's book. 1981
- Louise Welsh's Tamburlaine Must Die, about the last two weeks of Marlowe's life. 2004 (Novel)
- Anthony Burgess' 'A Dead Man in Deptford' fictionalised account of Marlow's death. 1993 (Novel)
- Ged Parsons' The Christopher Marlowe Mysteries written by for BBC Radio 4 (1993) (Radio comedy series)
- Michael Butt's Unauthorized History: The Killing for BBC Radio 4 investigation into Marlowe's murder. Produced by Sasha Yevtushenko. 2010 (Play)
- Peter Whelan's The School of Night about Marlowe's playwriting career after his faked death at Deptford. (Play).

PLOT OF DOCTOR-FAUSTUS

Doctor Faustus, well respected German Scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and religion-and decides that he wants to learn to practise magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by mobilizing up Mephastophilis, a devil. Despite Mephastophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in banding for twenty-four years of service from Mephastophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and uses it to press a clown named Robin into his service.

Mephastophilis returns to Faustus with word that Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer. Faustus experiences some misgivings and wonders if he should lament and save his soul; in the end, though, he agrees to the deal, signing it with his blood. As soon as he does so, the words "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly," appear branded on his arm. Faustus again has second thoughts, but Mephastophilis vouchsafe rich gifts on him and gives him a book of incantation to learn. Later, Mephastophilis answers all of his questions about the nature of the world, refusing to answer only when Faustus asks him who made the universe. This refusal prompts yet another stint of misgivings in

Faustus, but Mephastophilis and Lucifer bring in incarnation of the Seven Deadly Sins to prance about in front of Faustus, and he is galvanized enough to quiet his doubts.

Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephastophilis, Faustus begins to travel. He goes to the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and plays a series of tricks. He derange the Pope's convivial by stealing food and boxing the Pope's ears. Following this incident, he travels through the courts of Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes. Eventually, he is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V, the enemy of the Pope, who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed fourth-century B.C. Macedonian king and conqueror. Faustus entreats up an image of Alexander, and Charles is suitably impressed. As in their perpetual separation from God and his repeated reflections on the pain that comes with perdition.

Chorus

Chorus is a character that stands outside the story, providing narration and commentary. The Chorus was prevailing in Greek tragedy.

Old Man

Old man is an inexplicable figure who appears in the final scene. The old man urges Faustus to lament and to ask God for clemency. He seems to replace the good and evil angels, who, in the first scene, try to ascendancy Faustus's behaviour.

Good Angel

Good Angel is a spirit that impulses Faustus to lament for his entente with Lucifer and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents, in many ways, Faustus's compunction and divided will between good and evil.

Evil Angel

Evil Angel is a spirit that serves as the analogue to the good angel and provides Faustus with reasons not to repent for sins against God. The evil angel represents the evil half of Faustus's compunction.

Lucifer

Lucifer is the prince of devils, the ruler of hell, and Mephastophilis's master.

Wagner

Wagner is Faustus's servant. Wagner uses his master's books to learn how to convene devils and work magic.

Clown

Clown is the character, who becomes Wagner's servant. The clown's antics provide comic relief; he is a diverting character, and his preposterous behavior initially disparity with Faustus's magnificance. As the play goes on, though, Faustus's behaviour comes to resemble that of the clown.

Robin

Robin is an ostler, or innkeeper, who, like the clown, provides a comic disparity to Faustus. Robin and his friend Rafe learn some basic illusion, demonstrating that even the least scholarly can possess skill in magic. Marlowe includes Robin and Rafe to illustrate Faustus's abasement as he submits to simple trickery such as theirs.

Rafe

Rafe is an ostler, and a friend of Robin. Rafe appears as Dick (Robin's friend and a clown) in B-text editions of Doctor Faustus.

Valdes and Cornelius

Valdes and Cornelius are two friends of Faustus, both magicians, who teach him the art of black magic.

Horse-Courser

A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus, which vanishes after the horse-courser rides it into the water, leading him to ransack revenge.

The Scholars

The Scholars are Faustus's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg. Loyal to Faustus, the scholars appear at the beginning and end of the play to express consternation at the turn Faustus's studies have taken, to gape at his achievements, and then to hear his brooded divulgence of his entente with Lucifer.

The Pope

The pope is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and a powerful political figure in Europe at Faustus's day. The Pope serves as both a

source of hilarity for the play's Episcopal audience and a symbol of the religious faith that Faustus has rejected.

Emperor Charles V

Emperor Charles V is the most powerful sovereign in Europe, whose court Faustus visits.

Knight

Knight is a German nobleman at the emperor's court. The knight is dubious of Faustus's power, and Faustus makes spike burgeon from his head to teach him a lesson. The knight is further developed and known as Tybalt in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus; Tybalt ransacks revenge on Faustus and plans to murder him.

Brun

Brun is a candidate for the papality, supported by the emperor. Bruno is captured by the pope and freed by Faustus. Bruno appears only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

Duke of Vanholt

Duke of Vanholt is a German nobleman whom Faustus visits.

Martino and Frederick

Martino and Frederick are friends of Benvolio who warily join his attempt to kill Faustus. Martino and Frederick appear only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

Faustus

Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe's play. He is a antithetical character, capable of prodigious enunciation and possessing stunning ambition, yet susceptible to a strange, almost willful blindness and a willingness to waste powers that he has gained at great cost. When we first meet Faustus, he is just preparing to commence on his career as a magician, and while we already precede that things will turn out badly (the Chorus's introduction, if nothing else, prepares us), there is nonetheless a magnificence to Faustus as he scrutinizes all the gapes that his magical powers will produce. He imagines accumulating up wealth from the four corners of the globe, reshaping the map of Europe (both politically and physically), and gaining access to every snippet of knowledge about the universe. He is

an haughty, self-augmenting man, but his ambitions are so grand that we cannot help being impressed, and we even feel commiserating toward him. He represents the spirit of the revivification, with its rejection of the gothic, God-centered universe, and its embrace of human possibility. Faustus, at least early on in his accretion of magic, is the quintessence of possibility.

But Faustus also enthrals an absurdity that becomes perceptible during his bargaining sessions with Mephastophilis. Having decided that a entente with the devil is the only way to fulfil his ambitions, Faustus then blinds himself happily to what such a entente actually means. Sometimes he tells himself that hell is not so bad and that one needs only "resilience"; at other times, even while conversing with Mephastophilis, he remarks to the disbelieving demon that he does not actually believe hell exists. Meanwhile, despite his lack of concern about the prospect of immutable perdition,-Faustus is also assail with doubts from the beginning, setting a pattern for the play in which he repeatedly approaches penitence only to pull back at the last moment. Why he fails to lament is unclear: -sometimes it seems a matter of pride and continuing ambition, sometimes a persuasion that God will not hear his plea. Other times, it seems that Mephastophilis simply persecutor him away from bewailing.

Compacting Faustus is less difficult than it might seem, because Marlowe, after setting his protagonist up as a grandly tragic figure of sweeping visions and immense ambitions, spends the middle scenes revealing Faustus's true, petty nature. Once Faustus gains his long-desired powers, he does not know what to do with them. Marlowe suggests that this precariousness stems, in part, from the fact that desire for knowledge leads indubitably toward God, whom Faustus has renounced. But, more generally, absolute power corrupts Faustus: once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything. Instead, he traipses around Europe, playing tricks on bumpkins and performing illusion acts to impress various heads of state. He uses his incredible gifts for what is substantially trifling entertainment. The fields of possibility narrow gradually, as he visits ever more minor nobles and performs ever more unimportant magic tricks, until the Faustus of the first few scenes is entirely devoured up in amateurism. Only in the final scene is Faustus rescued from amateurism, as the knowledge of his approaching annihilation restores his earlier gift of powerful diction, and he regains his panoramic sense of vision. Now, however, the vision that he sees is of hell looming up to emerging him. Marlowe uses much of his finest poetry to describe Faustus's final hours, during which

Faustus's desire for contrition finally wins out, although too late. Stillj Faustus is restored to his earlier grandeur in his closing speech, with its hurried rush from idea to idea and its despairing, revivification repudiating last line, 'Til burn my books!" He becomes once again a tragic hero, a great man undone because his intent have tuped up against the law of God.

Mephastophilis

The character of Mephastophilis (spelled Mephistophilis or Mephistopheles by other authors) is one of the first in a long tradition of congenial solemn literary devils, which includes figures like John Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost and Johann von Goethe's Mephistophilis in the nineteenth-century poem "Faust." Marlowe's Mephastophilis is particularly interesting because he has mixed tropes. On the one hand, from his first appearance he clearly intends to act as an agent of Faustus's damnation. Indeed, he openly admits it, telling Faustus that "when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the Scriptures and his savior Christ, / We fly in hope to get his sublime soul" (3.47-49). It is Mephastophilis who witnesses Faustus's pact with Lucifer, and it is he who, throughout the play, steps in whenever Faustus considers contribution to wheedle or threaten him into staying loyal to hell.

Yet there is an odd equivocation in Mephastophilis. He seeks to damn Faustus, but he himself is jinxed and speaks freely of the horrors of hell. In a famous passage, when Faustus remarks that the devil seems to be free of hell at a particular moment, Mephastophilis insists,

- why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
- Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
- And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
- Am not excruciated with ten thousand hells
- In being deprived of everlasting blise?

(3.76-80)

Again, when Faustus sunnily-and farcially, given that he is speaking to a demon-declares that he does not believe in hell, Mephastophilis mewls and insists that hell is, indeed, real and terrible, as Faustus comes to know soon enough. Before the entente is sealed, Mephastophilis actually warns Faustus against making the deal with Lucifer. In an odd way, one can almost sense that part of

Mephastophilis does not want Faustus to make the same mistakes that he made. But, of course, Faustus does so anyway, which makes him and Mephastophilis lineage spirits. It is appropriate that these two figures dominate Marlowe's play, for they are two overly proud spirits doomed to hell.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Sin, vindication, and Imprecation

In so far as Doctor Faustus is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts clashing to the will of God. In making a entente with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly repudiates obedience to him, choosing instead to swear adherence to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be forgiven through the extenuating power of Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do, theoretically, is ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12—both of whom can be seen either as legate of God, quintessence of Faustus's compunction, or both.

Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven. In the Christian framework, this turning away from God denounces him to spend an perpetuity in hell. Only at the end of his life does Faustus desire to repent, and, in the final scene, he cries out to Christ to redeem him. But it is too late for him to repent. In creating this moment in which Faustus is still alive but incapable of being retrained, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview in order to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene. Having inhabited a Christian world for the entire play, Faustus spends his final moments in a slightly different universe, where indication is no longer possible and where certain sins cannot be forgiven.

The Conflict between Medieval and Revivification Values

Scholar R.M. Dawkins famously remarked that Doctor Faustus tells "the story of a revivification man who had to pay the gothic price for being one." While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play's central themes: the skirmish between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the centre of existence and swerved aside man and the natural world. The revivification was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new accentuation on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the gothic academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the revivification, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In the medieval model, tradition and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this sermon, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full revivification spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play's attitude toward the skirmish between medieval and revivification values is dubious. Marlowe seems confrontational toward the intent of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero straightforwardly in the medieval world, where perpetual imprecation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no devout traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus—as many readers have—a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these obtrude on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his descendant will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and amateurism that follow Faustus's pact with the devil, as he subsides from grand intent to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contradictory expounding. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though pioneering and gleaning, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

Power as a Corrupting Influence

Early in the play, before he agrees to the entente with Lucifer, Faustus is full of ideas for how to use the power that he seeks. He imagines tumbling up great wealth, but he also aspires to rotund the mysteries of the universe and to remake the map of Europe. Though they may not be entirely admirable, these plans are ambitious and inspire awe, if not sympathy. They lend a magnificence to Faustus's schemes and make his quest for personal power seem almost heroic, a sense that is reinforced by the eloquence of his early sermons.

Once Faustus actually gains the practically limitless power that he so desires, however, his horizons seem to narrow. Everything is possible to him, but his intent is somehow eroded. Instead of the grand designs that he inspects early on, he contents himself with performing illusion tricks for kings and noblemen and takes a strange delight in using his magic to play practical jokes on simple folks. It is not that power has falsified Faustus by making him evil: indeed, Faustus's behaviour after he sells his soul hardly rises to the level of true wickedness. Rather, gaining absolute power corrupts Faustus by making him mediocre and by transforming his illimitable ambition into a meaningless delight in petty celebrity.

In the Christian framework of the play, one can argue that true greatness can be achieved only with God's blessing. By cutting himself off from the creator of the universe, Faustus is precarious/perilous to amateurism. He has gained the whole world, but he does not know what to do with it.

The Divided Nature of Man

Faustus is constantly dubious about whether he should repent and lament to God or continue to follow his entente with Lucifer. His internal struggle goes on throughout the play, as part of him of wants to do good and serve God, but part of him (the dominant part, it seems) fervor after the power that Mephastophilis promises. The good angel and the evil angel, both of whom appear at Faustus's shoulder in order to Yearning him in different directions, symbolize this struggle. While these angels may be intended as an actual pair of supernatural beings, they clearly represent Faustus's divided will, which compels Faustus to commit to Mephastophilis but also to question this commitment continually.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Magic and the Supernatural Elements

The supernatural elements permeates everywhere in the story. Angels and devils flit about, magic incantation are cast, dragons pull barouche (albeit offstage', and even fools like the two hostiers, Robin and Rafe, can learn enough magic to muster demons. Still, it is worth noting that nothing terribly significant is virtuoso through magic. Faustus plays tricks on people, entreats up grapes, and explores the macrocosm on a dragon, but he does not fundamentally reshape the world. The magic power that Mephastophilis vouchsafe him is more like a toy than an asbounding, earth-shaking ability. Furthermore, the real drama of the play, despite all the supernatural tucks and pageant, takes place within Faustus's indecisive mind and soul, as he first sells his soul to Lucifer and then considers repenting. In this sense, the magic is almost incidental to the real story of Faustus's struggle with himself, which Marlowe intentional not as a fantastical battle but rather as a pragmatic portrait of a human being with a will divided between good and evil.

Practical Jokes

Once he gains his awesome powers, Faustus does not use them to do great deeds. Instead, he delights in playing tricks on people: he makes horns sprout from the knight's head and sells the horse-courser an enraptured horse. Such magical practical jokes seem to be Faustus's chief hilarity, and Marlowe uses them to illustrate Faustus's decline from a great, prideful scholar into a bored, middling magician with no higher ambition than to have a laugh at the expense of a collection of ninny.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent notional ideas or concepts.

Blood

Blood plays multiple symbolic roles in the play. When Faustus signs away his soul, he signs in blood, connotizing the permanent and supernatural nature of this entente coagulates on the page, however, symbolizing, perhaps, his own body's revolt against what he intends to

do. Meanwhile, Christ's blood, which Faustus says he sees running across the sky during his terrible last night, symbolizes the sacrifice that Jesus, according to Christian belief, made on the cross; this sacrifice opened the way for humankind to lament its sins and be saved. Faustus, of course, in his proud injudiciousness, fails to take this path to deliverance.

Faustus's Rejection of the Ancient Authorities

In scene 1, Faustus goes through a list of the major fields of human knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and doctrine-and convoke for each an ancient authority (Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and Jerome's Bible, respectively). He then flotsam all of these figures in favor of magic. This declining symbolizes Faustus's break with the gothic world, which prized authority above all else, in favor of a more modern spirit of free scrunity, in which experimentation and upheaval upstage trump the assertions of Greek philosophers and the Bible.

The Good Angel and the Evil Angel

The angels appear at Faustus's shoulder early on in the play-the good angel beseeching him to lament and serve God, the evil angel beseeching him to follow his desires for power and serve Lucifer. The two symbolize his divided will, part of which wants to do good and part of which is sunk in sin.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Summary: Prologue

The Chorus, a single actor, enters and introduces the plot of the play. It will involve neither love nor war, he tells us. but instead will unearth the "form of Faustus' fortunes" (Prologue.8). The Chorus annals how Faustus was born to lowly parents in the small town of Rhode, how he came to the town of Wittenberg to live with his agnate, and how he was educated at Wittenberg, a famous German university. After earning the title of doctor of deity, Faustus became famous for his ability to discuss ecclesiastical matters. The Chorus adds that Faustus is "swollen with cunning" and has begun to practice sorcery, or black magic (Prologue. 20). The prelude concludes by stating that Faustus is seated in his study.

Analysis : Prelude

The Chorus's introduction to the play links Doctor Faustus to the tradition of Greek tragedy, in which a chorus traditionally comments on the action. Although we tend to think of a chorus as a group of people or singers, it can also be composed of only one character. Here, the Chorus not only gives us background information about Faustus's life and education but also peculiarly tells us that his swelling pride will lead to his downfall. The story that we are about to see is compared to the Greek parable of Icarus, a boy whose father, Daedalus, gave him wings made out of feathers and beeswax. Icarus did not deliberation his father's warning and flew too close the sun, causing his wings to melt and sending him showing to his death. Inj the same way, the Chorus tells us, Faustus will "mount above his reach" and suffer. the consequences (Prelude.21).

The way that the Chorus introduces Faustus, the play's protagonist, is significant, since it reflects a commitment to revivification values. The European revivification of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a rebirth of interest in classical learning and inaugurated a new emphasis uri the individual in painting and literature. In the gothic era that preceded the revivification, the focus of scholarship was on God and doctrine; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the focus turned toward the study of humankind and the natural world, concluding in the birth of modern science in the work of men like Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton.

The Prelude locates its drama squarely in the revivification world, where humanistic values hold oscillate. Classical and gothic literature typically focuses on the lives of the great and famous—saints or kings or ancient heroes. But this play, the Chorus insists, will focus not on ancient battles between Rome and Carthage, or on the "courts of kings" or the "pomp of proud unflinding deeds" (Prologue.4—5). Instead, we are to witness the life of an ordinary man, born to humble parents. The message is clear: in the new world of the revivification, an ordinary man like Faustus, a common-born scholar, is as important as any king or warrior, and his story is just as worthy of being told.

Summary: Scene 1

In a long serman, Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus's debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of

achieving inexplicable curative, is the most fruitful pursuit—yet he notes that he has achieved great prominence as a doctor already and that this renown has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with inconsequential matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and doctrine, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's contention that "[t]he reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are on their way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel admonish him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures instead; the evil angel uplifts him to go forward in his stalking of the black arts. After they evanesce, it is clear that Faustus is going to vigilance the evil spirit, since he rejoices at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge, and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

Valdes and Cornelius appear, and Faustus greets them, declaring that he has set aside all other forms of learning in favour of magic. They agree to teach Faustus the principles of the dark arts and describe the wondrous powers that will be his if he remains committed during his pursuit to learn magic. Cornelius tells him that "[t]he miracles that magic will perform/Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.136-137). Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are. Faustus invites them to dine with him, and they exit.

Analysis : Scene 1

The scene now shifts to Faustus's study, and Faustus's opening speech about the various fields of scholarship reflects the academic setting of the scene. In proceeding through the various intellectual disciplines and citing authorities for each, he is following the dictates of medieval scholarship, which held that learning was based on the authority of the wise rather than on experimentation and new ideas. This serman, then, marks Faustus's rejection of this gothic model, as he

sets aside each of the old authorities and resolves to strike out on his own in his quest to become powerful through magic.

As is true throughout the play, however, Marlowe uses Faustus's own words to expose Faustus's blind spots. In his initial speech, for example, Faustus establishes a hierarchy of disciplines by showing which are nobler than others. He does not want merely to protect men's bodies through medicine, nor does he want to protect their property through law. He wants higher things, and so he proceeds on to religion. There, he quotes selectively from the New Testament, picking out only those passages that make Christianity appear in a negative light. He reads that M[t]he reward of sin is death," and that "[i]f we say we that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us" (1.40-43). The second of these lines comes from the first book of John, but Faustus neglects to read the very next line, which states, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Thus, through selective quoting, Faustus makes it seem as though religion promises only death and not forgiveness, and so he easily rejects religion with a fatalistic "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!" (1.48). Meanwhile, he uses religious language—as he does throughout the play-to describe the dark world of wizards that he enters. "These metaphysics of magicians /And clairvoyant books are heavenly" (1.49-50), he declares without a trace of irony. Having gone upward from medicine and law to theology, he envisions magic and wizards as the crowning discipline, even though by most standards it would be the least noble.

Faustus is not a villain, though; he is a tragic hero, a protagonist whose character blemishes lead to his downfall. Marlowe endues him with tragic grandeur in these early scenes. The logic he uses to reject religion may be flawed, but there is something imposing in the breadth of his ambition, even if he pursues it through diabolical means. In Faustus's long speech after the two angels have whispered in his ears, his rhetoric outlines the modern quest for control over nature (albeit through magic rather than through science) in glowing, inspiring language. He offers a long list of imposing goals, including the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, and political power, that he believes he will achieve once he has mastered the dark arts. While the reader or playgoer is not expected to approve of his quest, his intents are imposing, to say the least. Later, the actual uses to which he puts magical powers are disappointing and gaudy. For now, however, Faustus's reams to inspire wonder.

Summary: Scene 2

to scholars come to see Faustus. Wagner makes jokes at their expense and then Is them that Faustus is meeting with Valdes and Cornelius. Aware that Valdes id Cornelius are infamous for their involvement AI the black arts, the scholars ive with heavy hearts, fearing that Faustus may also be falling into "that damned t" as well (2.29).

Summary: Scene 3

lat night, Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and ards, and he chants in Latin. Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him am the shadows. Faustus repudiates heaven and God, swears fealty to hell, id demands that Mephastophilis rise to serv? him. The devil Mephastophilis then apears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a ranciscan friar, since "[t]hat holy shape becomes a devil best" (3.26). lephastophilis vanishes, and Faustus reni.irks on his obedience. Mephastophilis len reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus lands his obedience, but Mephastophilis says that he is Lucifer's servant and obey only Lucifer. He adds that he came because he heard Fau&lus deny lience to God and hoped to capture his soul.

Faustus quizzes Mephastophilis halt Lucifer and hell and learns that Lucifer id all his devils were once angels who rebelled against God and have been damned hell forever. Faustus points out that Mephastophilis is not in hell now but on th; Mephastophilis insists, however, that he and his fellow demons are always hell, even when they are on earth, because being impoverished of the presence of)d, which they once enjoyed, in hell enough. Faustus dismisses this sentiment as lack of courage on Mephastophilis's part and then declares that he will offer his to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephastophilis's service. IMephastophilis agrees to take this offer to his master and departs. Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had his many souls as there be stars," he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephastophilis offers him. He eagerly awaits Mephastophilis's return.

Summary: Scene 4

Antipodes with a clown and tries to coax him to become his servant seven years. The clown is poor, and Wagner jokes that he would probably sell soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton; the clown answers that it would have i be well-seasoned mutton. After first

agreeing to be Wagner's servant, however, tie clown abruptly changes his mind. Wagner threatens to cast a spell on him, and he then conjures up two devils, who he says will carry the clown away to hell unless he becomes Wagner's servant. Seeing the devils, the clown becomes terrified and agrees to Wagner's demands. After Wagner dismisses the devils, the clown [asks his new master if he can Jearn to entreat as well, and Wagner promises to teach him how to turn himself into any kind of animal—but he insists on being called "Master Wagner."

Analysis: Scenes 2-4

Having learned the necessary arts from Cornelius and Valdes, Faustus now takes the first step toward selling his soul when he entreats up a devil. One of the central questions in the play is whether Faustus damns himself entirely on his own or whether the princes of hell somehow enmesh him. In scene 3, as Faustus makes the magical marks and carols the magical words that muster Mephastophilis, he is watched by Lucifer and four lesser devils, suggesting that hell is waiting for him to make the first move before dashing on him. Mephastophilis replicates this idea when he insists that he came to Faustus of his own vouchsafe when he heard Faustus curse God and renominate heaven, hoping that Faustus's soul was available for the taking. But while the demons may be active agents eagerly seeking to clutch Faustus's soul, Faustus himself makes the first move. Neither Mephastophilis nor Lucifer forces him to do anything against his will.

Indeed, if anything, Mephastophilis seems far less eager to make the contract than Faustus himself. He willingly tells Faustus that his master, Lucifer, is less powerful than God, having been thrown "by aspiring pride and impertinent, from the face of heaven" (3.67—68). Furthermore, Mephastophilis offers a powerful portrait of hell that seems to warn against any entente with Lucifer. When Faustus asks him how it is that he is allowed to leave hell in order to come to earth, Mephastophilis famously says :

- Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
- Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
- And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
- Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
- In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

(3.76-80)

Mephastophilis exposes the horrors of his own experience as if offering sage guidance to Faustus. His honesty in mentioning the "ten thousand hells" that anguish him shines a negative light on the action of committing one's soul to Lucifer. Indeed, Mephastophilis even tells Faustus to abandon his "puerile demands" (3.81).

But Faustus refuses to leave his desires. Instead, he exhibits the blindness that serves as one of his defining characteristics throughout the play. Faustus sees the world as he wants to see it rather than as it is. This eschewing of reality is symbolized by his insistence that Mephastophilis, who is veburably hideous, reappear as a Franciscan friar. In part, this episode is a dig at Catholicism, modulated at Marlowe's ferociously evangelical English audience, but it also shows to what lengths Faustus will go in order to diminish the horrors of hell. He sees the devil's true shape, but rather than flee in terror he tells Mephastophilis to change his appearance, which makes looking upon him easier. Again, when Mephastophilis has finished telling him of the horrors of hell and urging him not to sell his soul, Faustus grudgingly dismisses what Mephastophilis has said, accusing him of lacking "manly bravery" (3.85). There is a desperate innocence to Faustus's approach to the demonic: he cannot seem to accept that hell is really as bad as it seems, which propels him forward into darkness.

The pranks of Wagner and the clown provide a comic contrast to the Faustus-Mephastophilis scenes. The clown jokes that he would sell his soul to the devil for a well-seasoned shoulder of mutton, and Wagner uses his newly gained illusion skill to frighten the clown into serving him. Like Faustus, these clownish characters (whose scenes are so different from the rest of the play that some writers have suggested that they were written by a colleague rather than by Marlowe himself) use magic to muster demons. But where Faustus is grand and ambitious and tragic, they are low and common and farcical, seeking mutton and the ability to turn into a mouse or a rat rather than world power or fantastic wealth. As the play progresses, though, Faustus's grandeur diminishes, and he sinks down toward the level of the clowns, suggesting that degradation precedes damnation.

Summary: Scene 5

Faustus begins to waver in his persuasion to sell his soul. The good angel tells him to abandon his plan and "think of heaven, and heavenly things," but he dismisses the good angel's words, saying that God does not love him (5.20). The good and evil angels make another appearance, with the good one again urging Faustus to think of heaven,

but the evil angel convinces him that the wealth he can gain through his deal with the devil is worth the cost. Faustus then calls back Mephastophilis, who tells him that Lucifer has accepted his offer of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service. Faustus asks Mi'ohastophilis why Lucifer wants his soul, and Mephastophilis tells him that Lucifer seeks to enlarge his kingdom and make humans suffer even as he suffers.

Faustus decides to make the bargain, and he stabs his arm in order to write the deed in blood. However, when he tries to write the deed his blood congeals, making writing impossible. Mephastophilis goes to fetch fire in order to loosen the blood, and, while he is gone, Faustus endures another stint of indecision, as he wonders if his own blood is attempting to warn him not to sell his soul. When Mephastophilis returns, Faustus signs the deed and then discovers an inscription on his arm-that reads "Homo fuge," Latin for "0 man, fly" (5.77). While Faustus wonders where he should fly Mephastophilis presents a group of devils, who cover Faustus with crowns and rich garments. Faustus puts aside his doubts. He hands over the deed, which premises his body and soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of constant service from Mephastophilis.

After he turns in the deed, Faustus asks his new servant where hell is located, and Mephastophilis says that it lias no exact location but exists everywhere. He continues explaining, saying thai, hell is everywhere that the damned are cut off from God eternally. Faustus remarks that he thinks hell is a myth. At Faustus's request for a wife, Mephastophilis offers Faustus a she-devil, but Faustus refuses. Mephastophilis then gives him a book of magic spells and tells him to read it carefully.

Faustus once again wavers and leans toward contribution as he envisage the wonders of heaven from which he has cut himself off. The good and evil angels.

Faustus could still be saved, if he lamented in spite of everything. Faustus's reply— "Bell, book and candle; candle, book, and bell / Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell"—is fraught with prognosticating (7,83-84). Hell, of course, is exactly where Faustus is "curse [d]" to go, but through his own injudiciousness and not the curses of monks or the pope.

The absurd behaviour of Robin and Rafe, meanwhile, once again contrasts with Faustus's relationship to the mephistophelian. Robin and Rafe entreat up Mephastophilis in order to scare off a vintner, and even

when he threatens to turn them into animals (or actually does so temporarily—the text is unclear on this matter), they treat it as a great joke. Yet the contrast between Faustus on the one hand and the ostlers and the clown on the other, the high and the low, is not so great as it is originally, since Faustus too has begun using magic in tracking of practical jokes, like boxing the pope's ear. Such foolishness is quite a step down for a man who earlier speaks of using his magic to become ruler of Germany. Although Faustus does step into the political demesne when he frees Bruno and sends him back to Germany, this action seems to be carried out as part of the cruel practical joke on the pope, not as part of any real political tracking. The ignoming of Faustus's initially heroic aims continues as the play proceeds, with Faustus coming to resemble a clown more and more.

Summary: Chorus 3

The Chorus enters to inform us that Faustus has returned home to Germany and developed his fame by explaining what he learned during the course of his journey. The German emperor, Charles V, has heard of Faustus and invited him to his palace, where we next concurrence him.

Summary: Scene 9

At the court of the emperor, two gentlemen, Martino and Frederick, discuss the impending arrival of Bruno and Faustus. Martino remarks that Faustus has promised to entreat up Alexander the Great, the famous conquistador. The two of them wake another gentleman, Benvolio, and tell him to come down and see the new arrivals, but Benvolio declares that he would rather watch the action from his window, because he has a hangover.

Faustus comes before the emperor, who thanks him for having freed Bruno from the clenched of the pope. Faustus acknowledges the magnificence and then says that he stands ready to fulfil any wish that the emperor might have. Benvolio, watching from above, remarks to himself that Faustus looks nothing like what he would expect a conjurer to look like.

The emperor tells Faustus that he would like to see Alexander the Great and his lover. Faustus tells him that he cannot produce their actual bodies but can create spirits resembling them. A knight present in the court (Benvolio in the B text) is dubious, and asserts that it is as untrue that Faustus can perform this feat as that the goddess Diana has transformed the knight into a hart.

Before the eyes of the court, Faustus creates a vision of Alexander embracing his lover (in the B text, Alexander's great rival, the Persian king Darius, also appears; Alexander defeats Darius and then, along with his lover, salutes the emperor). Faustus entreats a pair of antlers onto the head of the knight (again, Benvolio in the B text). The knight petitions for mercy, and the emperor supplicates Faustus to remove the horns. Faustus complies, warning Benvolio to have more respect for scholars in the future.

With his friends Martino and Frederick and a group of soldiers, Benvolio plots an attack against Faustus. His friends try to faze him, but he is so vehement at the damage done to his reputation that he will not listen to reason. They resolve to ambuscade Faustus as he leaves the court of the emperor and to take the treasures that the emperor has given Faustus. Frederick goes out with the soldiers to scout and returns with word that Faustus is coming toward them and that he is alone. When Faustus enters, Benvolio skewers him and cuts off his head. He and his friends elation, and they plan the further snubs that they will visit on Faustus's cadaver. But then Faustus rises with his head restored. Faustus tells them that they are fools, since his life belongs to Mephastophilis and cannot be taken by anyone else. He musters Mephastophilis, who arrives with a group of lesser devils, and orders the devils to carry his attackers off to hell. Then, reconsidering, he orders them instead to punish Benvolio and his friends by tugging them through barbs and flinging them off of ridges, so that the world will see what happens to people who attack Faustus. As the men and devils leave, the soldiers come in, and Faustus musters up another precipice of demons to drive them off.

Benvolio, Frederick, and Martino reappear. They are contused and bloody for they been quiets and harried by the devils, and all three of them now have horns burgeoning from their heads. They greet one another unhappily, express horror at the fate that has befallen them, and agree to camouflage themselves in a castle rather than face the scorn of the world.

Analysis: Chorus 3-Scene 9

Twenty-four years pass between Faustus's entente with Lucifer and the end of the play. Yet, for us, these decades sweep by remarkably quickly. We see only three main events from the twenty-four years: Faustus's visits to Rome, to the emperor's court, and then to the Duke of Vanholt in scene 11. While the Chorus assures us that Faustus visits many other places and learns many other things that we are not shown,

we are still left with the sense that Faustus's life is being expedite at a speed that tensits belief. But Marlowe uses this spurring to his advantage. By making the years pass so swiftly, the play makes us feel what Faustus himself must feel—namely, that his too-short lifetime is slipping away from him and his ultimate, hellish fate is drawing ever closer. In the world of the play, twenty-four years seems long when Faustus makes the entente, but both he and we come to realize that it passes rapidly.

Meanwhile, the use to which Faustus puts his powers is prosaic. In Rome, he and Mephastophilis box the pope's ears and disrupt a discombobulate party. At the court of Emperor Charles V (who ruled a vast stretch of territory in the sixteenth century, including Germany, Austria, and Spain), he essentially performs illusion tricks to entertain the monarch. Before he makes the entente with Lucifer, Faustus speaks of rearranging the geography of Europe or even making himself emperor of Germany. Now, though, his sights are set considerably lower. His involvement in the political realm extends only to freeing Bruno, Charles's candidate to be pope. Even this action (which occurs only in the B text) seems largely a lark, without any larger political goals behind it. Instead, Faustus occupies his energies mustering up Alexander the Great, the heroic Macedonian conquistador. This trick would be extremely impressive, except that Faustus tells the emperor that "it is not in my ability to present / before your eyes the true hefty bodies of those two deceased /princes" (Q.39–41). In other words, all of Mephastophilis's power can, m Faustus's hands, produce only impressive illusions. Nothing of substance emerges from Faustus's magic, in this scene or anywhere in the play, and the man who earlier swagger that he will divert the River Rhine and reshape the map of Europe now occupies himself with revenging a trifling insult by placing horns on the head of the foolish knight.

The B-text scene outside the emperor's court, in which Benvolio and his friends try to kill Faustus, is utterly devoid of suspense, since we know that Faustus is too powerful to be murdered by a gang of incompetent noblemen. Still, Faustus's way of dealing with the threat is telling: he plays a kind of practical joke, making the noblemen think that they have cut off his head, only to come back to life and send a collection of devils to hound them. With all the power of hell behind him, he takes pleasure in sending Mephastophilis out to hunt down a collection of fools who pose no threat to him and insists that the devils disgrace the men publicly, so that everyone will see what happens to those who threaten him. This command shows a hint of Faustus's old

pride, which is so impressive early in the play; now, though, Faustus is entirely concerned with his reputation as a fearsome wizard and not with any higher goals. Trudging from court to court, doing tricks for royals, Faustus has become a kind of sixteenth-century celebrity, more concerned with his public image than with the dreams of greatness that earlier animate him.

Summary: Scene 10

Faustus, meanwhile, meets a horse-courser and sells him his horse. Faustus gives the horse-courser a good price but warns him not to ride the horse into the water. Faustus begins to reflect on the pending expiration of his contract with Lucifer and falls asleep. The horse-courser reappears, sopping wet, complaining that when he rode, his horse into a stream it turned into a stack of silage. He decides to get his money back and tries to wake Faustus by bellowing in his ear. He then pulls on Faustus's leg when Faustus will not wake. The leg breaks off, and Faustus wakes up, screaming bloody murder. The horse-courser takes the leg and runs off. Meanwhile, Faustus's leg is immediately restored, and he laughs at the joke that he has played. Wagner then enters and tells Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt has mutened him. Faustus agrees to go, and they depart together.

Robin and Rafe have stopped for a drink in a alchouse. They listen as a consigner, or wagon-driver, and the horse-courser discuss Faustus. The carter explains that Faustus stopped him on the road and asked him to buy some hay to eat. The consigner agreed to sell him all he could eat for three farthings, and Faustus proceeded to eat the entire consignment of forage. The horse-courser tells his own story, adding that he took Faustus's leg as revenge and that he is keeping it at his home. Robin declares that he intends to seek out Faustus, but only after he has a few more drinks.

Summary: Scene 11

At the court of the Duke of Vanholt, Faustus's skill at illusion up beautiful illusions wins the duke's favor. Faustus comments that the duchess has not seemed to enjoy the show and asks her what she would like. She tells him she would like a dish of ripe grapes, and Faustus has Mephastophilis bring her some grapes. (In the B text of Doctor Faustus, Robin, Dick, the carter, the horse-courser, and the hostess from the alehouse burst in at this moment. They confront Faustus, and the horse-courser begins making jokes about what he assumes is Faustus's wooden leg. Faustus then shows them his leg, which is whole and healthy, and they are amazed. Each then launches into a complaint

about Faustus's treatment of him, but Faustus uses magical charms to make them silent, and they depart.) The duke and duchess are much pleased with Faustus's display, and they promise to reward Faustus greatly.

Analysis: Scenes 10-11

Faustus's downward spiral, from tragic greatness to self-indulgent mediocrity, continues in these scenes. He continues his journey from court to court, arriving this time at Vanholt, a minor German duchy, to visit the duke and duchess. Over the course of the play we see Faustus go from the seat of the pope to the court of the emperor to the court of a minor nobleman. The power and importance of his hosts decreases from scene to scene, just as Faustus's feats of magic grow ever more prosaic. Just after he seals his entente with Mephastophilis, Faustus soars through the heavens on a chariot pulled by dragons to learn the secrets of astronomy; now, however, he is reduced to playing pointless tricks on the horse-courser and fetching out-of-season grapes to impress a bored noblewoman. Even his antagonists have grown increasingly hilarious. In Rome, he faces the curses of the pope and his monks, which are strong enough to give even Mephastophilis pause; at the emperor's court, Faustus is opposed by a collection of noblemen who are brave, if unintelligent. At Vanholt, though, he faces down an absurd collection of comical rogues, and the worst of it is that Faustus seems to have become one of them, a clown among clowns, taking pleasure in using his unlimited power to perform practical jokes and cast simple charms.

Selling one's soul for power and glory may be foolish or wicked, but at least there is magnificence to the idea of it. Marlowe's Faustus, however, has lost his hold on that doomed magnificence and has become pathetic. The meaning of his decline is cryptic: perhaps part of the nature of a pact with Lucifer is that one cannot gain all that one hopes to gain from it. Or perhaps Marlowe is criticizing worldly ambition and, by extension, the entire modern project of the revivification, which pushed God to one side and sought mastery over nature and society. Along the lines of this interpretation, it seems that in Marlowe's worldview the desire for complete knowledge about the world and power over it can ultimately be reduced to fetching grapes for the Duchess of Vanholt—in other words, to nothing.

Earlier in the play, when Faustus queries Mephastophilis about the nature of the world, Faustus sees his desire for knowledge reach a dead end at God, whose power he denies in favour of Lucifer. Knowledge of

God is against Lucifer's kingdom, according to Mephastophilis. But if the pursuit of knowledge leads indubitably to God, Marlowe suggests, then a man like Faustus, who tries to live God can ultimately go nowhere but down, into mediocrity.

There is no sign that Faustus himself is aware of the gulf between his earlier ambitions and his current state. He seems to take joy in his petty amusements, laughing clamorously when he perplexes the horse-courser and leaping at the chance to visit the Duke of Vanholt. Still, his imminenting doom begins to weigh upon him. As he sits down to fall asleep, he remarks, "What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?" (10.24). Yet, at this moment at least, he seems convinced that he will lament at the last minute and be saved—a significant change from his earlier attitude, when he either denies the existence of hell or assumes that damnation is inescapable. "Christ did call the thief upon the cross," he comforts himself, referring to the New testimony story of the thief who was condemned alongside Jesus Christ, repented for his sins, and was promised a place in paradise (10.28). Thus he compares himself to this figure shows that Faustus assumes topic can wait until the last moment and still escape hell. In other words, he wants to renounce Mephistopheles, but not just yet. We can easily anticipate that his willingness to delay will prove fatal.

Summary: Chorus 4

Wagner announces that Faustus must be about to die because he has given Wagner all of his wealth. But he remains unsure, since Faustus is not acting like a dying man—rather, he is out roistering with scholars.

Summary: Scene 12

Faustus enters with some of the scholars. One of them asks Faustus if he can produce Helen of Greece (also known as Helen of Troy), who they have decided was "the admirablest lady / that ever lived" (12.3-4). Faustus agrees to produce her, and gives the order to Mephastophilis: immediately, Helen herself crosses the stage, to the delight of the scholars.

The scholars leave, and an old man enters and tries to persuade Faustus to repent. Faustus becomes distraught, and Mephastophilis hands him a dagger. However, the old man persuades him to appeal to God for mercy, saying, "I see an angel hovers o'er thy head / And with a vial full of precious grace / Offers to pour the same into thy soul!" (12.44-46). Once the old man leaves, Mephastophilis threatens to shred

Faustus to pieces if he does not reconfirm his vow to Lucifer. Faustus complies, sealing his vow by once again stabbing his arm and archaic it in blood. He asks Mephastophilis to punish the old man for trying to divert him from continuing in Lucifer's service; Mephastophilis says that he cannot touch the old man's soul but that he will menace his body. Faustus then asks Mephastophilis to let him see Helen again. Helen enters, and Faustus makes a great speech about her beauty and kisses her.

Summary : Scene 13

The final night of Faustus's life has come, and he tells the scholars of the deal he has made with Lucifer. They are horrified and ask what they can do to save him, but he tells them that there is nothing to be done. Reluctantly, they leave to pray for Faustus. A vision of hell opens before Faustus's horrified eyes as the clock strikes eleven. The last hour passes by quickly, and Faustus adjures the clocks to slow and time to stop, so that he might live a little longer and have a chance to lament. He then begs God to reduce his time in hell to a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, so long as he is eventually saved. He wishes that he were a beast and would simply cease to exist when he dies instead of facing perdition. He curses his parents and himself, and the clock strikes midnight. Devils enter and carry Faustus away as he screams, "Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books—ah, Mephastophilis!" (13.112-113).

Summary: Epilogue

The Chorus enters and warns the wise "[o]nly to wonder at unlawful things" and not to trade their souls for forbidden knowledge (Epilogue.6).

Analysis: Chorus 4-Epilogue

The final scenes contain some of the most noteworthy speeches in the play, especially Faustus's speech to Helen and his final serman. His address to Helen begins with the famous line "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships," referring to the Trojan War, which was fought over Helen, and goes on to list all the great things that Faustus would do to win her love (12.81). He compares himself to the heroes of Greek folklore, who went to war for her hand, and he ends with a lengthy praise of her beauty. In its flowery language and emotional power, the speech marks a return to the eloquence that marks Faustus's words in earlier scenes, before his language and behavior become mediocre and petty. Having dissipated his powers in spoofs behaviour

and childish entertainments, Faustus regains his eloquence and tragic magnificence in the final scene, as his ruination approaches. Still, as impressive as this speech is, Faustus maintains the same blind spots that lead him down his dark road in the first place. Earlier, he seeks paramountly through magic instead of religion. Now, he seeks it through sex and female beauty, as he asks Helen to make him "immortal" by kissing him (12.83). Moreover, it is not even clear that Helen is real, since Faustus's earlier conjuring of historical figures evokes only illusions and not physical beings. If Helen too is just an illusion, then Faustus is wasting his last hours dallying with a fantasy image, an apt symbol for his entire life.

Faustus's final speech is the most emotionally powerful scene in the play, as his despairing mind rushes from idea to idea. One moment he is begging time to slow down, the next he is imploring Christ for mercy. One moment he is crying out in fear and trying to hide from the wrath of God, the next he is begging to have the eternity of hell lessened somehow. He curses his parents for giving birth to him but then owns up to his responsibility and curses himself. His mind's various attempts to escape his doom, then, lead inexorably to an understanding of his own guilt.

The passion of the final speech points to the central question in Doctor Faustus of why Faustus does not repent. Early in the play, he deceives himself into believing either that hell is not so bad or that it does not exist. But, by the close, with the gates of hell literally opening before him, he still ignores the warnings of his own compunction and of the old man, a physical incarnation of the compunction that influxes him. Faustus's loyalty to Lucifer could be explained by the fact that he is afraid of having his body torn apart by Mephastophilis. But he seems almost eager, even in the next-to-last scene, to reseal his vows in blood, and he even goes a step further when he demands that Mephastophilis punish the old man who learning him to lament. Marlowe suggests that Faustus's self-misapprehension persists even at the end. Having served Lucifer for so long, he has reached a point at which he cannot imagine breaking free.

In his final speech, Faustus is clearly afflicted with remorse, yet he no longer seems to be able to repent. Christian doctrine holds that one can lament for any sin, however grave, up until the moment of death and be saved. Yet this principle does not seem to hold for Marlowe's protagonist. Doctor Faustus is a Christian tragedy, but the logic of the final scene is not Christian. Some critics have tried to deal with this problem by claiming that Faustus does not actually lament in the final

speech but that he only speaks nostalgically about the possibility of contrition. Such an argument, however, is difficult to propitiate with lines such as:

O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?. . .

One drop of blood would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ—

(13.69-71)

Faustus appears to be calling on Christ, seeking the precious drop of blood that will save his soul. Yet some unseen force—whether inside or outside him— prevents him from giving himself to God.

Ultimately, the ending of Doctor Faustus represents a clash between Christianity, which holds that contrition and salvation are always possible, and the dictates of tragedy, in which some character flaw cannot be corrected, even by alluring to God. The idea of Christian tragedy, then, is contradictory, as Christianity is ultimately elevating. People may suffer—as Christ himself did—but for those who lament, deliverance eventually awaits. To make Doctor Faustus a true tragedy, then, Marlowe had to set down a moment beyond which Faustus could no longer lament, so that in the final scene, while still alive, he can be damned and conscious of his perdition.

The unhappy Faustus's last line returns us to the skirmish between revivification values and gothic values that dominates the early scenes and then diminishes as Faustus pursues his mediocre amusements in later scenes. His cry, as he alleges for salvation, that he will burn his books suggests, for the first time since early scenes, that his entente with Lucifer is primarily about a thirst for limitless knowledge-a thirst that is presented as incompatible with Christianity. Scholarship can be Christian, the play suggests, but only within limits. As the Chorus says in its final speech :

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

(Epilogue. 4-8)

In the duel between Christendom and the rising modern spirit, Marlowe's play seems to come down squarely on the side of

Christianity. Yet Marlowe, himself egregious, indicated of secpticism and various other sins, may have had other ideas, and he made his Faustus sympathetic, if not necessarily admirable. While his play shows how the unhindered pursuit of knowledge and power can be corrupting, it also shows the magnificence of such a quest. Faustus is damned, but the gates that he opens remain standing wide, waiting for others to follow.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

1. The reward of sin is death? That's hard. Si peccasse negamus, fallimur, etnulla est in nobis veritas. If we say that we have no sin, We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us. Why then belive we must sin, and so consequently die. Ay, we must die an everlasting death. What doctrine call you this? Che sara, sara: What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu! These metaphysics of magicians, and necromantic books are heavenly. (1.40-50)

Faustus speaks these lines near the end of his opening sermon. In this speech, he considers various fields of study one by one, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine and law. Seeking the highest form of knowledge, he arrives at theology and opens the Bible to the New Testament, where he quotes from Romans and the first book of John. He reads that "[t]he reward of sin is death," and that "[i]f we say we that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us." The logic of these quotations—everyone sins, and sin leads to death—makes it seem as though Christianity can promise only death, which leads Faustus to give in to the cynical "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!" However, Faustus neglects to read the very next line in John, which states, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquitous" (1 John 1:9). By ignoring this passage, Faustus ignores the possibility of vindication, just as he ignores it throughout the play. Faustus has blind spots; he sees what he wants to see rather than what is really there. This blindness is discernible in the very next line of his speech: having turned his back on heaven, he pretends that "[these metaphysics of magicians/and necromantic books are heavenly." He thus inverts the cosmos, making black magic "heavenly" and religion the source of "everlasting death."

2. **Mephastophilis :** Why this is hell, nor am I out of it. Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God, And tasted the eternal joys of heaven, Am not tormented with ten thousand hells. In being deprived of everlasting bliss? O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands, Which strike a terror to my fainting soul. FAUSTUS: What, is great Mephastophilis so passionate For being deprived of the joys of

heaven? Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude, And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess. (3.76-86)

This exchange shows Faustus at his most willfully blind, as he listens to Mephastophilis who describes how awful hell is for him even as a devil, and as he then proceeds to dismiss Mephastophilis's words blithely, yearning him to have "manly perseverence." But the dialogue also shows Mephastophilis in a bizarre light. We know that he is committed to Faustus's perdition—he has appeared to Faustus because of his hope that Faustus will repudiate God and swear adherence to Lucifer. Yet here Mephastophilis seems to be urging Faustus against selling his soul, telling him to "leave these frivolous demands, / Which strike a terror to my fainting soul." There is a parallel between the experience of Mephastophilis and that of Faustus. Just as Faustus now is, Mephastophilis was once prideful and rebelled against God; like Faustus, he is damned forever for his sin. Perhaps because of this connection, Mephastophilis cannot accept Faustus's cheerful dismissal of hell in the name of "manly fortitude." He knows all too well the terrible reality, and this knowledge drives him, in spite of himself, to warn Faustus away from his t-errible course.

3. **Mephastophilis :** Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed In one self-place; for where we are is hell, And where hell is, there must we ever be. All places shall be hell that is not heaven.

Faustus: Come, I think hell's a fable.

- MEPHASTOPHILISS.: Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind.
- FAUSTUS: Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine That after this life there is any pain? Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales.

(5.120-135)

This exchange again shows Mephastophilis warning Faustus about the horrors of hell. This time, though, their exchange is less significant for what Mephastophilis says about hell than for Faustus's response to him. Why anyone would make a pact with the devil is one of the most vexing questions surrounding Doctor Faustus, and here we see part of Marlowe's explanation. We are constantly given indications that Faustus doesn't really understand what he is doing. He is a secular revivification, so disdainful of traditional religion that he believes hell to be a "parable" even when he is conversing with a devil. Of course, such a belief is difficult to maintain when one is trafficking in the supernatural, but Faustus has a fallback position. Faustus takes Mephastophilis's assertion that hell will be "[a]ll places ... that is not heaven" to mean that hell will just be a continuation of life on earth, He fails to understand the difference between him and Mephastophilis: unlike Mephastophilis, who has lost heaven permanently, Faustus, despite his pact with Lucifer, is not yet confounded and still has the possibility of contrition. He cannot

yet understand the torture against which Mephastophilis warns him, and imagines, lethally, that he already knows the worst of what hell will be.

4, Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss: Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies! Come Helen, come, give me my soul again. Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips, And all is dross that is not Helena! (12.81-87)

These lines come from a speech that Faustus makes as he nears the end of his life and begins to realize the terrible nature of the bargain he has made. Despite his sense of perturbation, Faustus enjoys his powers, as the delight he takes in illusion up Helen makes clear. While the speech marks a return to the rhetoric that he shows early in the play, Faustus continues to display the same blind spots and wishful thinking that characterize his behavior throughout the drama. At the beginning of the play, he dismisses religious predominance in favor of magic; now, after dissipating his powers in petty, self-permissive behaviour, he looks for predominance in a woman, one who may be an illusion and not even real flesh and blood. He seeks heavenly grace in Helen's lips, which can, at best, offer only earthly pleasure. "[M]ake me immortal with a kiss," he cries, even as he continues to keep his back turned to his only hope for escaping damnation-namely, repentance.

SUMMARY

The play is in blank verse and prose in thirteen scenes (1604) or twenty scenes (1616). Blank verse is largely reserved for the main scenes while prose is used in the comic scones. Modern texts divide the play into five acts; act 5 being the shortest. As in many Elizabethan plays, there is a chorus who does not interact with the other characters but rather provides an introduction and conclusion to the play and gives an introduction to the events that have transpired at the beginning of some acts.

Along with history and language style, scholars have appraisable and analyzed the structure of Doctor Faustus and its effects on the play as a whole. Leonard H. Frey wrote a document entitled "In the Opening and Close of Doctor Faustus," which mainly focuses on Faustus's opening and closing discourse. He stresses the importance of the discourse in the play, saying: "the semon, perhaps more than any other dramatic device, involved the audience in an imaginative concern with the happenings on stage". By having Doctor Faustus deliver these soliloquies at the beginning and end of the play, the focus is drawn to his inner thoughts and feelings about succumbing to the devil. The soliloquies have parallel concepts. In the introductory soliloquy, Faustus begins by contemplating the fate of his life and what he wants his career to be. He ends his sermon with the solution and decision to give his soul to the devil. Similarly in the closing sermon, Faustus begins contemplating and finally comes to terms with the fate he created for himself. Frey

also explains: "The whole pattern of this final sermon is thus a grim burlesque of the opening one, where decision is reached after, not prior to, the survey".

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does Faustus use the magical gifts that he has received? What do they suggest about his character or about the nature of unlimited power?
2. What is the role of the comic characters-Robin, Rafe, the horse-courser, and the clown, How does Marlowe use them to illuminate Faustus's decline?
3. When does Faustus have misgivings about his entente with Lucifer? What makes him desire to lament? Why do you think he fails to lament?
4. Discuss the role of Faustus's discourse-particularly his speeches about the different kinds of knowledge.
5. Is Faustus misled by the devils, or is he willfully blind to the reality of his situation?

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Christopher Marlowe- Harold Bloom.
2. Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Doctor Faustus. — Willard Farnham
3. Marlowe: The Critical Heritage. — Millar Macular
4. Doctor Faustus. — Christopher Marlowe
5. Doctor Faustus: Text and Performance — William Tydeman

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3

HAMLET–WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

STRUCTURE

- Learning goals
- Introduction
- About the author
- The Enigmatic Shakespeare
- Hamlet—plot
- Dramatis Personable
- Major characters—an intensive study
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
- Summary and Analysis
- Important Questions
- Review Questions
- Suggested Readings

LEARNING GOALS

After reading this lesson, you will be able to :

- Know the English poet and playwright, "William Shakespeare"
- Have a broad understanding of the works of Shakespeare
- Narrate the story of the play, "Hamlet"
- Understand and discuss the themes that occur in the play, "Hamlet"

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, baptized on 26 April 1564; died 23 April 1616 was an English poet and playwright. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's most pre-eminent dramatist. He is fondly referred to as the "Bard of Avon". His surviving works, including some collaborations, consist of about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and several other poems. Such is his wide and universal appeal that his plays have been

translated into every major language of the world and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Between 1585 and 1592, he is believed to have moved to the big city of London where he began a successful career as an actor, writer, and part owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, and there has been considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were composed by his contemporaries.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the 16th century. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, which are regarded as some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights too.

Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, two of his former colleagues from theatre published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognized as Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare had built a formidable reputation in his time, but his reputation did not soar to its present heights until the 19th century. The Romantics, in particular, commended Shakespeare's genius, and the Victorians worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence that George Bernard Shaw called "bardolatry". In the 20th century, with the resurgence of new movements in scholarship and performance, Shakespeare's works were read and rediscovered with renewed earth version.

His plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Early Life

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, a successful glover and alderman originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born at Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual birthdate remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, St George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died 23 April 1616. He was the third of eight children and the eldest surviving son.

Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, some distance from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but the curriculum was dictated by law throughout England, and the school would have provided an intensive education in Latin grammar and the classics.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare married the 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester issued a marriage license 27 November 1582. The next day two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste, since the Worcester chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

Nothing much is known about Shakespeare after the birth of the twins until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592, with scholars referring to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years". Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many apocryphal stories. Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer poaching. Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting career in the world of theatre minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster. Some 20th-century scholars have suggested that

Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire, a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshafte" in his will. No evidence substantiates such stories other than hearsay collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area.

London and Theatrical Career

"All the world's a stage,

and all the men and women merely players:

they have their exits and their entrances;

and one man in his time plays many parts..."

As You Like It, Act II, Scene 7, 139-42.

It is not known exactly when Shakespeare began writing, but contemporary allusions and records of performances show that several of his plays were on the London stage by 1592. He was well known in London by then. A contemporary of Shakespeare, Robert Greene attacked him in print thus :

'...there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.'

Scholars differ on the exact meaning of these words, but most agree that Greene is accusing Shakespeare of aspiring above his rank in trying to match university-educated writers, such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and Greene himself. The phrase parodying the line "Oh, tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" from Shakespeare's Henry VT, part 3, along with the pun "Shake-scene", identifies Shakespeare as Greene's target.

Incidentally, Greene's attack is the first recorded mention of Shakespeare's career in theatre. Biographers suggest that his career may have begun any time from the mid-1580s to just before Greene's remarks. Having established himself on the London theatre scene, Shakespeare was actively occupied in staging his plays through a company owned by a group of players, including Shakespeare, himself, the hard chamberlain's Men, that soon became the leading playing company in London. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the

company was awarded a royal patent by the new king, James I, and changed its name from Lord Chamberlain's Men to the King's Men.

In 1599, a group of company members built their own theatre on the south bank of the Thames, and named it. The Globe in 1608, the partnership also took over the Black friars indoor theatre. Records of Shakespeare's property purchases and investments indicate that Shakespeare accumulated a lot of wealth through this company. In 1597, he bought the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place, and in 1605, he invested in a share of the parish tithes in Stratford.

Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions from 1594. By 1598, his popularity had soared and his name began to appear on the title pages. Shakespeare continued to act in his own plays as well as others after his success as a playwright. The 1616 edition of Ben Jonson's Works names him on the cast lists for Every Man in His Humour (1598) and Sejanus, His Fall (1603). The absence of his name from the 1605 cast list for Jonson's Volpone is taken by some scholars as a sign that his acting career was nearing its end. The First Folio of 1623, however, lists Shakespeare as one of "the Principal Actor in all these Plays", some of which were first staged after Volpone, although it is not known for certain which roles he played. In 1610, John Davies of Hereford wrote that "good Will" played "kingly" roles. In 1709, Rowe says that Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father. Later traditions maintain that he also played Adam in 'As You Like It and the Chorus in Henry V, though scholars doubt the sources of the information.

Shakespeare divided his time between London and Stratford during his career. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, Shakespeare was living in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, north of the River Thames. He moved across the river to Southwark by 1599, the year his company constructed the Globe Theatre there. By 1604, he had moved north of the river again, to an area north of St Paul's Cathedral with many fine houses. There he rented rooms from a French Huguenot called Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear.

Later Years and Death

Rowe was the first biographer of Shakespeare who herded down the information that Shakespeare retired to Stratford some years before his death; but retirement as it means today from all work was uncommon at that time, and Shakespeare continued to visit London. In 1612 he was called as a witness in a court case concerning the marriage

settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613, he bought a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory; and from November 1614 he was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law, John Hall.

After 1606–1607, Shakespeare's productivity declined and these are no plays attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the in house playwright for the 'King's Men'.

Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and was survived by his wife and two daughters. His elder daughter Susanna had married a physician, John Hall, in 1607, and Judith, the younger had married Thomas Quiney, a vintner, two months before Shakespeare's death.

In his will, Shakespeare left the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna. The terms instructed that she pass it down intact to "the first son of her body". The Quineys had three children, all of whom died without marrying. The Halls had one child, Elizabeth, who married twice but died without children in 1670, ending Shakespeare's direct line. Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife, Anne, who was probably entitled to one third of his estate automatically. He did make a point, however, of leaving her "my second best bed", a bequest that has led to much speculation. Some scholars see the bequest as derogatory to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance.

Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death. The epitaph carved into the stone slab covering his grave includes a curse against moving his bones, and it seems the same which was carefully avoided during restoration of the church in 2008:

Sometime before 1623, a funerary monument was erected in his memory on the north wall, with a bust of him in the act of writing. Its plaque compares him to Nestor, Socrates, and Virgil. In 1623, in conjunction with the publication of the First -Folio, the Droeshout engraving was published.

Shakespeare has been commemorated in many statues and memorials around the world, including funeral monuments in Southwark Cathedral and Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Plays

In the period of study, it was the norm form play wrights to collaborate with others at some point, and critics agree that Shakespeare did the same, mostly early and towards the end of his

career. Some attributions, such as 'Titus Andronicus' and the early history plays, remain controversial, while 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' and the 'Lost Cardenio have well-attested contemporary documentation. Textual evidence also supports the view that several of the plays were revised by other writers after their original composition.

The first recorded works of Shakespeare are Richard III and the three parts of Henry VI, written in the early 1590s when historical drama was in vogue. Shakespeare's plays are difficult to date, however, and studies of the texts suggest that 'Titus Andronicus', "The Comedy of Errors", "The Taming of the Shrew" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" may also belong to Shakespeare's earliest period of creativity. His first histories, which draw heavily on the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, dramatise the destructive results of weak or corrupt rule and have been interpreted as a justification for the origins of the Tudor dynasty. The early plays were also influenced by the works of other Elizabethan dramatists, especially Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, by the traditions of medieval drama, and by the plays of Seneca. The 'Comedy of Errors' was also based on classical models, but "The Taming of the Shrew" has not been found, to be based on any such source though it is related to a separate play of the same name and may have derived from a folk story. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona", in which two friends appear to approve of rape and the Shrew's story of the taming of a woman's independent spirit by a man draw flak from modern critics for there content and gender insensibility.

Shakespeare's early classical and Italianate comedies, containing tight double plots and precise comic sequences, give way in the mid-1590s to the romantic atmosphere of his greatest comedies. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is a witty and delightful mixture of romance, fairy magic, pastoral simplicity and comic lowlife scenes. Shakespeare's next comedy, the equally romantic Merchant of Venice', contains a portrayal of the vengeful Jewish moneylender Shylock, which reflects Elizabethan views but is again out often with the to modern audience. The wit and wordplay of "Much Ado About Nothing", the charming rural setting of "As You Like It", and the lively merrymaking of "Twelfth Night'' complete Shakespeare's sequence of great comedies. After the lyrical Richard II, written almost entirely in verse, Shakespeare introduced prose comedy in "Henry IV, parts 1 and 2", and "Henry V" the histories written in the late 1590s. His characters assume more complying and varied in range as he switches deftly between comic and serious scenes, prose and poetry, and achieves tremendous maturity in his work. This period begins and ends with two

tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, the famous romantic tragedy of sexually charged adolescence, love, and death; and Julius Caesar-based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's Parallel Lives—which introduced a new kind of drama. According to Shakespearean scholar James Shapiro, in "Julius Caesar" "the various strands of politics, character, inwardness, contemporary events, even Shakespeare's own reflections on the act of writing, began to infuse each other".

In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the so-called "problem plays" "Measure for Measure", "Troilus and Cressida", and "All's Well That Ends Well" along with a number of his best known tragedies. Critics believe that Shakespeare reached the zenith of his excellence in writing the tragedies. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, Hamlet, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy "To be or not to be; that is the question". Unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is indecisiveness, the heroes of the tragedies that followed, "Othello" and "King Lear", are undone by hasty errors of judgement. The plots of Shakespeare's tragedies often hinge on such inherent but fatal errors or flaws, which overturn order and lead to the fall of the protagonist and those he loves. In "Othello", the villain lago stokes Othello's jealousy to the point where he murders the innocent wife who loves him. In King Lear, the old king commits the tragic error of giving up his power thus, initiating the events which lead to the murder of his daughter and the torture and blinding of the Earl of Gloucester. According to the critic Frank Kermode, "the play offers neither its good characters nor its audience any relief from its cruelty", In "Macbeth", the shortest and most compressed of Shakespeare's tragedies, by the titular charcter's own admission, 'unbridled ambition' incites Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, to murder the rightful king and usurp the throne, until their own guilt destroys them in turn. In this play, Shakespeare adds a supernatural element to the tragic structure. His last major tragedies, "Antony and Cleopatra" and "Coriolanus", contain some of Shakespeare's finest poetry and were considered his most successful tragedies by the poet and critic T. S. Eliot.

In his final creative burst, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy and completed three more major plays: 'Cymbeline', 'The Winter's Tale' and 'The Tempest', as well as the collaboration, 'Pericles', Prince of Tyre. Less bleak than the tragedies, these four plays are graver in tone than the comedies of the 1590s, but they end with reconciliation and the forgiveness of potentially tragic errors.

Some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day. Shakespeare collaborated on two more plays, "Henry VIII" and "The Two Noble Kinsmen", probably with John Fletcher.

Poems

In 1593 and 1594, when the theatres were closed because of plague, Shakespeare published two narrative poems on erotic themes, "Venus and Adonis' and "The Rape of Lucrece". He dedicated them to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. In "Venus and Adonis", an innocent Adonis rejects the sexual advances of Venus; while in "The Rape of Lucrece", the virtuous wife Lucrece is raped by the lustful Tarquin. Influenced by Ovid's "Metamorphoses", the poems focus the remorse and moral confusion that result from uncontrolled lust. Both proved popular and were often reprinted during Shakespeare's lifetime. A third narrative poem, 'A Lover's Complaint', in which a young woman laments her seduction by a persuasive suitor, was printed in the first edition of the Sonnets in 1609. Most scholars now concur that Shakespeare wrote 'A Lover's Complaint'. Critics opine that its fine qualities are marred by leaden effects. 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', printed in Robert Chester's 1601 'Love's Martyr', mourns the deaths of the legendary phoenix and his lover, the faithful turtle dove. In 1599, two early drafts of sonnets 138 and 144 appeared in 'The Passionate Pilgrim', published under Shakespeare's name but without his permission.

Sonnets

Published in 1609, the Sonnets were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership. Even before the two unauthorised sonnets appeared in "The Passionate Pilgrim" in 1599, Francis Meres had referred in 1598 to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends". Few analysts believe that the published collection follows Shakespeare's intended sequence. He seems to have planned two contrasting series: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one about conflicted love for a fair young man (the "fair youth"). It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals, or if the authorial "I" who addresses them represents Shakespeare himself, though Wordsworth believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his

heart". The 1609 edition was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.", credited as "the only begetter" of the poems. It is not known whether this was written by Shakespeare himself or by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, whose initials appear at the foot of the dedication page; nor is it known who Mr. W.H. was, despite numerous theories, or whether Shakespeare even authorised the publication. Critics are unanimous is their spines that the Sonnets are a profound meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time.

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate..."

Lines from Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

The creation of Shakespeare's Sonnets was in some way influenced by the Italian sonnet: it was popularised by Dante and Petrarch and refined in Spain and France by DuBellay and Ronsard. Shakespeare probably had access to these last two authors, and read English poets as Richard Field and John Davies. The French and Italian poets gave preference to the Italian form of sonnet—two groups of four lines, or quatrains (always rhymed a-b-b-a-b-b-a) followed by two groups of three lines, or tercets (variously rhymed c-c-d e-e-d or c-c-d e-d-e)—which created a sonorous music in the vowel rich Romance languages. However, it did not have the desired effect in English. To overcome this problem derived from the difference of language, Shakespeare chose to follow the idiomatic rhyme scheme used by Philip Sidney in his 'Astrophel and Stella' (published posthumously in 1591), where the rhymes are interlaced in two pairs of couplets to make the quatrain.

Style

Shakespeare's earliest plays were written in the conventional style of the day. He wrote them in a stylised language that does not always spring naturally from the needs of the characters or the drama. The poetry depends on extended, sometimes elaborate metaphors and conceits, and the language is often rhetorical—written for actors to declaim rather than speak. The grand speeches in 'Titus Andronicus', in the view of some critics, often hold up the action, for example; and the verse in 'Two Gentlemen of Verona' has been described as stilted.

Soon, however, Shakespeare began to modify the language to suit his needs. The opening soliloquy of Richard'III has its roots in the self-declaration of Vice in medieval drama. At the same time, Richard's vivid self-awareness looks forward to the soliloquies of Shakespeare's mature plays. No single play marks a change from the traditional to the

freer style. Shakespeare combined the two throughout his career, with "Romeo and Juliet" perhaps the best example of the mixing of the styles. By the time of "Romeo and Juliet", "Richard II", and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the mid-1590s, Shakespeare had begun to write a more natural poetry. He increasingly tuned his metaphors and images to the needs of the drama itself.

Shakespeare's standard poetic form was blank verse, composed in iambic pentameter. In practice, this meant that his verse was usually unrhymed and consisted often syllables to a line, spoken with a stress on every second syllable. The blank verse of his early plays is quite different from that of his later ones. It is often beautiful, but its sentences tend to start, pause, and finish at the end of lines, with the risk of monotony. Once Shakespeare mastered traditional blank verse, he began to interrupt and vary its flow. This technique releases the new power and flexibility of the poetry in plays such as "Julius Caesar" and "Hamlet". Shakespeare uses it, for example, to convey the turmoil in Hamlet's mind:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting

That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay

Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—

And prais'd be rashness for it—let us know

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well...

Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2, 4-8

After "Hamlet", Shakespeare varied his poetic style further, particularly in the more emotional passages of the late tragedies. The literary critic A. C. Bradley described this style as "more concentrated, rapid, varied, and, in construction, less regular, not seldom twisted or elliptical". In the last phase of his career, Shakespeare adopted many techniques to achieve these effects. These included run-on lines, irregular pauses and stops, and extreme variations in sentence structure and length. In Macbeth, for example, the language darts from one unrelated metaphor or simile to another: "was the hope drunk/ Wherein you dressed yourself?" (1.7.35-38); "...pity, like a naked new-born babe/ Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, hovers upon the sightless couriers of the air..." (1.7.21-25). The listener is challenged to complete the sense. The late romances, with their shifts in time and surprising turns of plot, inspired a last poetic style in which long and short sentences are set against one another, clauses are piled up, subject

and object are reversed, and words are omitted, creating an effect of spontaneity that delights.

Shakespeare's poetic genius and a practical sense of the theatre went hand in hand. Like all playwrights of the time, Shakespeare dramatised stories from sources such as Petrarch and Holinshed. He reshaped each plot to create several centres of interest and show as many sides of a narrative to the audience as possible. This strength of design ensures that a Shakespeare play can survive translation, cutting and wide interpretation without loss to its core drama. As Shakespeare's mastery grew, he gave his characters clearer and more varied motivations and distinctive patterns of speech. He preserved aspects of his earlier style in the later plays, however. In Shakespeare's late romances, he deliberately returned to a more artificial style, which emphasised the illusion of theatre.

Influence

Shakespeare's work has made a lasting impression on later theatre and literature. In particular, he expanded the dramatic potential of characterisation, plot, language, and genre. Until "Romeo and Juliet", for example, romance had not been viewed as a worthy topic for tragedy. Soliloquies had been used mainly to convey information about characters or events; but Shakespeare used them to explore characters' minds. His work heavily influenced later poetry. The Romantic poets attempted to revive Shakespearean verse drama, though with little success. Critic George Steiner described all English verse dramas from Coleridge to Tennyson as "feeble variations on Shakespearean themes."

Shakespeare seems to have exercised considerable influence on novelists such as Thomas Hardy, William Faulkner, and Charles Dickens. The American novelist Herman Melville's soliloquies owe much to Shakespeare; his Captain Ahab in Moby-Dick is a classic tragic hero, inspired by King Lear. Scholars have identified 20,000 pieces of music linked to Shakespeare's works. These include two operas by Giuseppe Verdi, Othello Falstaff, whose critical standing compares with that of the source plays. Shakespeare has also inspired many painters, including the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites. The Swiss Romantic artist Henry Fuseli, a friend of William Blake, even translated Macbeth into German. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud drew on Shakespearean psychology, in particular that of Hamlet, for his theories of human nature.

In Shakespeare's day, English grammar, spelling and pronunciation were less standardised than they are now, and his use of language

helped shape modern English. Samuel Johnson quoted him more often than any other author in his 'A Dictionary of the English Language', the first serious work of its type. Expressions such as "with bated breath" (Merchant of Venice) and "a foregone conclusion" (Othello) have found their way into everyday English speech.

THE ENIGNATIC SHAKESPEARE

Authorship

Around 150 years after Shakespeare's death, doubts began to emerge about the authorship of the works attributed to him. Proposed alternative candidates include Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Several "group theories" have also been proposed. Only a small minority of academics believe there is reason to question the traditional attribution, but interest in the subject, particularly the Oxfordian theory, continues into the 21st century.

Religion

Some scholars claim that members of Shakespeare's family were Catholics, at a time when Catholic practice was against the law. Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, certainly came from a pious Catholic family. The strongest evidence to this effect might be a Catholic statement of faith signed by John Shakespeare, found in 1757 in the rafters of his former house in Henley Street. The document is now lost, however, and scholars differ on its authenticity. In 1591, the authorities reported that John had missed church "for fear of process for debt", a common Catholic excuse. In 1606, William's daughter Susanna was listed among those who failed to attend Easter communion in Stratford. Scholars also find evidence both for and against Shakespeare's Catholicism in his plays, but the truth may be impossible to validate either way.

Portraiture

There is no written description of Shakespeare's physical appearance and no evidence that he ever commissioned a portrait, so the Droeshout engraving, which Ben Jonson approved of as a good likeness, and his Stratford monument provide the best evidence of his appearance. From the 18th century, the desire for authentic Shakespeare portraits fuelled claims that various surviving pictures depicted Shakespeare. That demand also led to the production of

several fake portraits, as well as mis attributions, repaintings and relabelling of portraits of other people.

Classification of the Plays

Shakespeare's works include the 36 plays printed in the First Folio of 1623, according to their folio classification as comedies, histories and tragedies. Two plays not included in the First Folio, "The Two Noble Kinsmen" and "Pericles, Prince of Tyre", are now accepted as part of the canon, with scholars agreed that Shakespeare made a major contribution to their composition. No Shakespearean poems were included in the First Folio.

In the late 19th century, Edward Dowden classified four of the late comedies as romances, and though many scholars prefer to call them tragicomedies, his term is often used. These plays and the associated Two Noble Kinsmen are marked with an asterisk (*). In 1896, Frederick S. Boas coined the term "problem plays" to describe four plays: 'All's Well That Ends Well', 'Measure for Measure', 'Troilus and Cressida' and 'Hamlet'. "Dramas as singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies", he wrote. "We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of today and class them together as Shakespeare's problem plays." The term, much debated and sometimes applied to other plays, remains in use, though Hamlet is definitively classed as a tragedy.

Plays thought to be only partly written by Shakespeare are marked with a dagger (†). Other works occasionally attributed to him are listed as apocrypha.

HAMLET

Plot

One 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. Urging Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who betrayed in and 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 behaviour and try to ascertain 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 with love for his daughter, Ophelia, Claudius agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with the girl. 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 travelling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He organizes have the players to 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 threatre, 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 inadequate revenge and decides to wait. Claudius is now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fears fearing for his own safety. Hence, he orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bedchamber 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 prinee has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, Claudius notches a conspiracy to in orange 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 in fact 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 through 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 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.

DRAMATIS PERSONAL

Hamlet

Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist of the play 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

Claudius is the King of Denmark. He is Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven

by his sexual appetite and his lust for power, but he occasionally shows signs of remorse and human feeling—his love for Gertrude, for instance, seems sincere.

Gertrude

Gertrude is the Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married to 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

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

Horatio

Horatio 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

Ophelia 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 to tell 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

Laertes 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 clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet.

Fortinbras

Fortinbras is 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 honour, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet.

The Ghost

Ghost is the spectre 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

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern 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

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

Voftimand and Cornelius

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

Marcellus and Bernardo

Marcellus and Bernardo 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

Francisco is a soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Reynaldo

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

MAJOR CHARACTERS–AN INTENSIVE STUDY

Hamlet

Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries. The first thing that draws attention to his personality 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 actually tells other characters that there is more to him than meets the eye—notably, his mother, and Roseiicrantz and Guildenstern—but his appeal and fascination involves much more than this. When he speaks, he sounds as if there's something important he's not saying, may be something even he is not aware of Shakespeare's ability to write soliloquies and dialogues that create this effect is one of his most impressive achievements.

A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death, Hamlet 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 melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in 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 a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.

But, despite all 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 own carelessness).

Claudius

Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, lustful, conniving king who stands in stark contrast to the other male characters in the play. Whereas most of the other important men in Hamlet are preoccupied with ideas of justice, revenge, and moral balance, Claudius is bent upon maintaining his own power. The old King Hamlet was apparently a stern warrior, but Claudius is a corrupt politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skilful use of language. Claudius's speech is compared to poison being poured in the ear—the method he used to murder Hamlet's father. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him snatch the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to still greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude could have been in danger, but that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade, Claudius insists on a third, the poisoned goblet. When Gertrude inadvertently drinks the poison and dies, Hamlet is at last able to bring himself to kill Claudius, and the king is felled by his own cowardly machination.

Gertrude

Few Shakespearean characters have caused as much uncertainty as Gertrude, the beautiful Queen of Denmark. The play seems to raise more questions about Gertrude than it answers, including: Was she involved with Claudius before the death of her husband? Did she love her husband? Did she know about Claudius's plan to commit the murder? Did she love Claudius, or did she marry him simply to keep her high station in Denmark? Does she believe Hamlet when he insists that he is not mad, or does she pretend to believe him simply to protect herself? Does she intentionally betray Hamlet to Claudius, or does she believe that she is protecting her son's secret?

These questions can be answered in numerous ways, depending upon one's reading of the play. The Gertrude who does emerge clearly in Hamlet is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as

well as by her tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self-preservation—which, of course, makes her extremely dependent upon the men in her life. Hamlet's most famous comment about Gertrude is his furious condemnation of women in general: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (I.II. 146). This comment is as much indicative of Hamlet's agonized state of mind as of anything else, but to a great extent Gertrude does seem morally frail. She never exhibits the ability to think critically about her situation, but seems merely to move instinctively toward seemingly safe choices, as when she immediately runs to Claudius after her confrontation with Hamlet. She is at her best in social situations (I.II and V.II), when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality. At times it seems that her grace and charm are her only characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Impossibility of Certainty

What separates Hamlet from other revenge plays (and maybe from every play written before it) is that the action we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually postponed while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. This play poses many questions that other plays would simply take for granted. Can we be sure about the existence of ghosts? Is the ghost really what it appears to be, or is it actually a misleading fiend? Does the ghost have reliable knowledge about its own death, or is the ghost itself deluded? Moving to more earthly matters: How can the audience/reader be certain about a crime that has no witnesses? Can Hamlet judge accurately the state of Claudius's soul by watching his behavior? Can Claudius (or the audience) know the state of Hamlet's mind by observing his behavior and listening to his speech? Can we know whether our actions will have the consequences we want them to have? Do we know anything about the afterlife?

Many people have seen Hamlet as a play about indecisiveness, and thus about Hamlet's failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon, how many unknown quantities are taken for granted when people act or when they evaluate one another's actions.

The Complexity of Action

Directly related to the theme of certainty is the theme of action. How is it possible to take reasonable, effective, purposeful action? In Hamlet, the question of how to act is affected not only by rational considerations, such as the need for certainty, but also by emotional, ethical, and psychological factors. Hamlet himself appears to distrust the idea that it's even possible to act in a controlled, purposeful way. When he does act, he prefers to do it blindly, recklessly, and violently. The other characters obviously think much about "action" in the abstract than Hamlet does, and are therefore less troubled about the possibility of acting effectively. They simply act as they feel is appropriate. But in some sense they prove that Hamlet is right, because all of their actions prove to be misadventures. Claudius possesses himself of queen and crown through bold action, but his conscience torments him, and he is beset by threats to his authority (and, of course, he dies). Laertes resolves that nothing will distract him from acting out his revenue, but he is easily influenced and manipulated into serving Claudius's ends, and his poisoned rapier is turned back upon himself.

The Mystery of Death

In the aftermath of his father's murder, Hamlet is obsessed with the idea of death, and in the course of the play he regards death with great interest and from a great many perspectives.

He ponders both the spiritual aftermath of death, embodied in the ghost, and the physical remainders of the dead, such as by Yorick's skull and the decaying corpses in the cemetery. Throughout, the idea of death is closely tied to the themes of spirituality, truth, and uncertainty in that death may bring the answers to Hamlet's deepest questions, ending once and for all the problem of trying to determine truth in an ambiguous world. And, since death is both the cause and the consequence of revenge, it is intimately tied to the theme of revenge and justice—Claudius's murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet's quest for revenge, and Claudius's death is the end of that quest.

It is also the question of his death that torments him continually as he broods over the idea of suicide being a morally legitimate action in an unbearably painful world. Hamlet's grief and misery is such that he frequently longs for death to end his suffering, but he fears that if he commits suicide, he will be consigned to eternal suffering in hell because his religions (Christianity) prohibits suicides. In his famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.i), Hamlet philosophically concludes that no one would choose to endure the pain of life if he or she were not

afraid of what will come after death, and that it is this fear of the positive sufferings of the afterlife which causes complex moral considerations to interfere with the capacity for action.

The Nation as a Diseased Body

Hamlet showcase a royal family in serious trouble and with its is associated the health or otherwise of the state as a whole. The play's early scenes explore the sense of anxiety and dread that surrounds the transfer of power from one ruler to the next. Throughout the play, characters draw explicit connections between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the nation. Denmark is frequently described as a physical body made ill by the moral corruption of Claudius and Gertrude, and many observers interpret the presence of the ghost as a supernatural omen indicating that "[Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.67). The dead King Hamlet is portrayed as a strong, forthright ruler under whose guard the state was in good health, while Claudius, a wicked politician, has brought is health to Demark as he is always in pursuit of the satisfaction of his own unholy appetites. At the end of the play, the rise to power of the upright Fortinbras suggests that Denmark will be restored to good health again.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform about the text's major themes.

Incest and Incestuous Desire

The motif of incest runs throughout the play and is frequently alluded to by Hamlet and the ghost, most obviously in conversations about Gertrude and Claudius, former brother-in-law and sister-in-law who are now man and wife. A subtle motif of incestuous desire can be found in the relationship of Laertes and Ophelia, as Laertes sometimes speaks to his sister in suggestively sexual terms and, at her funeral, leaps into her grave to hold her in his arms. However, the strongest overtones of incestuous desire arise in the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude, in Hamlet's concentration on Gertrude's sex life with Claudius and his preoccupation with her in general which is somewhat uncommon and rather strange.

Misogyny

Shattered by his mother's decision to marry Claudius so soon after her husband's death, Hamlet becomes cynical about women in general, showing a particular obsession with what he perceives to be a

connection between female sexuality and moral corruption. This motif of misogyny, or hatred of women, occurs sporadically throughout the play, but it is an important inhibiting factor in Hamlet's relationships with Ophelia and Gertrude. He urges Ophelia to go to a nunnery rather than experience the corruptions of sexuality and exclaims of Gertrude, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (LET. 146).

Ears and Hearing

One facet of Hamlet's exploration of the difficulty of attaining true knowledge is slipperiness of language. Words are used to communicate ideas, but they can also be used to distort the truth, manipulate other people, and serve as tools in corrupt quests for power. Claudius, the shrewd politician, is the most obvious example of a man who manipulates words to enhance his own power. The sinister uses of words are represented by images of ears and hearing, from Claudius's murder of the king by pouring poison into his ear to Hamlet's claim to Horatio that "I have words to speak in thine ear which will make thee dumb" (IV.VI.21). The poison poured in the king's ear by Claudius is used by the ghost to symbolize the corrosive effect of Claudius's dishonesty on the health of Denmark. Declaring that the story that he was killed by a snake is a lie, he says that "the whole ear of Denmark" is "Rankly abused ... " (I.V.36-38).

Symbols

Various are objects, characters, figures, and colors are used as symbols through out the play to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Yorick's Skull

In Hamlet, physical objects are rarely used to represent thematic ideas. One important exception is Yorick's skull, which Hamlet discovers in the graveyard in the first scene of Act V. As Hamlet speaks to the skull and about the skull of the king's former jester, he gravitates on death's inevitability and the disintegration of the body. He urges the skull to "get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come"—no one can avoid death (V.I.178-179). He traces the skull's mouth and says, "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft," indicating his fascination with the physical consequences of death (V.I. 174-175). This latter idea is an important motif throughout the play, as Hamlet frequently makes comments referring to every human body's eventual decay, noting that Polonius will be eaten by worms, that even kings are

eaten by worms, and that dust from the decayed body of Alexander, the Great might be used to stop a hole in a beer barrel.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Act I, Scene I Summary

On a dark winter night outside Elsinore Castle in Denmark, an officer named Bernardo comes to relieve the watchman Francisco. In the heavy darkness, the men cannot see each other. Bernardo hears a footstep near him and cries, "Who's there?" After both men ensure that the other is also a watchman, they relax. Cold, tired, and apprehensive from his many hours of guarding the castle, Francisco thanks Bernardo and prepares to go home and go to bed.

Shortly thereafter, Bernardo is joined by Marcellus, another watchman, and Horatio, a friend of Prince Hamlet. Bernardo and Marcellus have urged Horatio to stand watch with them, because they believe they have something shocking to show him. In hushed tones, the they discuss the apparition they have seen for the past two nights, and which they now hope to show Horatio: the ghost of the recently deceased King Hamlet, which they claim has appeared before them on the castle ramparts in the late hours of the night.

Horatio is skeptical, but then the ghost suddenly appears before the men and just as suddenly vanishes. Terrified, Horatio acknowledges that the specter does indeed resemble the dead King of Denmark, that it even wears the armor King Hamlet wore when he battled against the armies of Norway, and the same frown he wore when he fought against the Poles. Horatio declares that the ghost appearance is a warning of impending misfortune for Denmark, perhaps in the form of a military attack. He recounts the story of King Hamlet's conquest of certain lands once belonging to Norway, saying that Fortinbras, the young Prince of Norway, now seeks to reconquer those forfeited lands.

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

Analysis

Hamlet was written around the year 1600 in the final years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who had been the monarch of England for

more than forty years and was then in her late sixties. The prospect of Elizabeth's death and the question of who would succeed her was a subject of grave anxiety at the time, since Elizabeth had no children, and the only person with a legitimate royal claim, James of Scotland, was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, and therefore represented a political faction to which Elizabeth was opposed. (When Elizabeth died in 1603, James did inherit the throne, becoming King James I).

It is no surprise, then, that many of Shakespeare's plays from this period, including Hamlet, deal with the issue of transfer of power from one monarch to the next. These plays focus particularly on the uncertainties, conspiracies, betrayals, and upheavals that accompany such shifts in power, and the general sense of nervousness, or uncase about something with an uncertain outcome and fear that surround them. The situation Shakespeare presents at the beginning of Hamlet is that a strong and beloved king has died, and the throne has been inherited not by his son, as we might expect, but by his brother. Still grieving the old king, no one knows yet what to expect from the new one, and the guards outside the castle are fearful and showing a cautious distrust of the new one.

The supernatural appearance of the ghost on a chilling, hazy, foggy night outside Elsinore Castle indicates immediately that something is wrong in Denmark. The ghost serves to extensive the shadow King Hamlet casts across Denmark, indicating that something about his death has upset the stability of nature. The appearance of the ghost also gives physical form to the fearful anxiety that surrounds the transfer of power after the king's death, seeming to imply that the future of Denmark is a dark and frightening one. Horatio in particular sees the ghost as an ill omen boding violence and turmoil in Denmark's future, comparing it to the supernatural omens that supposedly presaged the assassination of Julius Caesar in ancient Rome (and which Shakespeare had recently represented in Julius Caesar). Since Horatio proves to be right, and the appearance of the ghost does presage the later tragedies of the play, the ghost functions as a kind of internal warning of future event implying a disaster not only to but to the spectators but to an individual as well.

The scene is an introduction of the character of Horatio, who, with the exception of the ghost, is the only crucial character in the scene. Without sacrificing the onward course of action or breaking the atmosphere great apprehension, Shakespeare demonstrates that Horatio is a good-humored man who is also educated, intelligent, and dubious of paranormal events. Before he sees the ghost, he insists, "Tush, tush,

'twill not appear" (I.i.29). Even after seeing it, he is reluctant to give full credence to stories of magic and mysticism. When Marcellus says that he has heard that the crowing of the cock has the power to dispel evil powers, so that "[n]o fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm," Horatio replies, "So have I heard, and do in part believe it," emphasizing the "in part" (I.i. 144-146).

But Horatio is not a pessinist, either, and when he sees the ghost, he does not deny its existence—on the contrary, he is submerged with terror. His ability to accept the truth at once even when his prophecy have been proved wrong indicates the fundamental trustworthiness of his character. His reaction to the ghost functions to overcome the audience's sense of disbelief, since for a man as skeptical, intelligent, and trustworthy as Horatio to believe in and fear the ghost is far more impressive and convincing than if its only witnesses had been a pair of superstitious watchmen. In this subtle way, Shakespeare uses Horatio to represent the audience's perspective throughout this scene. By overcoming Horatio's dubious resistance, the ghost gains the audience's suspension of disbelief as well.

Act I, Scene II Summary

The morning after Horatio and the guardsmen see the ghost, King Claudius gives a speech to his courtiers, explaining his recent marriage to Gertrude, his brother's widow and the mother of Prince Hamlet. Claudius says that he grieves his brother death he has picked out best of the alternatives but to balance Denmark's mourning to please greatly with his marriage. He mentions that young Fortinbras has written to him, daringly demanding the surrender of the lands King Hamlet won from Fortinbras's father, and dispatches Cornelius and Voltimand with a message for the King of Norway, Fortinbras's elderly uncle.

His speech as comes to an end, Claudius turns to Laertes, the son of the Lord Chamberlain, Polonius. Laertes communicates his fancies to return to France, where he was staying before his return to Denmark for Claudius's mauguration. Polonius gives his son permission, and Claudius jovially grants Laertes his consent as well.

Turning to Prince Hamlet, Claudius asks why "the clouds still hang" upon him, as Hamlet is still wearing black mourning (I.ii.66). Gertrude urges him to cast off his "nocturnal colour," but he replies bitterly that his inner sorrow is so great that his dour appearance is merely a poor mirror of it (I.ii.68). Affecting a tone of fatherly advice, Claudius declares that if all fathers die, it means all sons must lose their fathers. When a son loses a father, he is duty-bound to mourn, but to

mourn for too long is unmanly and inappropriate. Claudius urges Hamlet to think of him as a father, reminding the prince that he stands in line to succeed to the throne upon Claudius's death.

With this in mind, Claudius says that he does not wish for Hamlet to return to school at Wittenberg (where he had been studying before his father's death), as per Hemlet's desire. Gertrude echoes her husbands, sentiments' professing a desire for Hamlet to remain close to her. Hamlet stiffly agrees to obey her. Claudius claims to be so pleased by Hamlet's decision to stay that he will celebrate with festivities and cannon fire, an old custom called "the king's rouse." Ordering Gertrude to follow him, he escorts her from the room, and the court follows.

Alone, Hamlet exclaims that he wishes he could die, that he could evaporate and cease to exist. He wishes bitterly that God had not made suicide a sin. Anguished, he laments his father's death and his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle. He remembers how deeply in love his parents seemed, and he curses the thought that now, not yet two month after his father's death, his mother has married his father's far inferior brother.

O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason, Would have mourn'd longer,— married with mine uncle, My father's brother; but no more like my father Than I to Hercules: within a month; Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, She married:— O, most wicked speed, to post With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

Hamlet clams up suddenly as Horatio strides into the room, followed by Marcellus and Bernardo. Horatio was a close friend of Hamlet at the university in Wittenberg, and Hamlet, happy to see him, asks why he has left the school to travel to Denmark. Horatio says that he came to see King Hamlet's funeral, to which Hamlet curtly replies that Horatio came to see his mother's wedding. Horatio agrees that the one followed closely on the heels of the other. He then tells Hamlet that he, Marcellus, and Bernardo have seen what appears to be his father's ghost. Astonished, Hamlet agrees to keep watch with them that night, in the hope that he will be able to speak to the ghost like image of his father.

Analysis

Having established a dark, ghostly atmosphere in the first scene, Shakespeare devotes the second to the seemingly jovial court of the recently crowned King Claudius. If the area surrounding the castle is

due to thick mist with the aura of great apprehension and jittery, the rooms inside the castle are devoted to an energetic attempt to banish that aura, as the king, the queen, and the courtiers desperately pretend that nothing is out of the ordinary. It is difficult to imagine a more convoluted family dynamic or a more out-of-balance political situation, but Claudius notwithstanding preaches a code of balance to his courtiers, pledging to sustain and combine the sorrow he feels for the king's death and the joy he feels for his wedding in equal parts.

But despite Claudius's efforts, the merriment of the court seems apparent. This is largely due to the fact that the idea of balance Claudius pledges to follow is unnatural. How is it possible to balance sorrow for a brother's death with happiness for having married a dead brother's wife? Claudius's speech is full of inconsistent words, ideas, and phrases, beginning with "Though yet of Hamlet our late brother's death/The memory be green," which combines the idea of death and decay with the idea of greenery, growth, and renewal (I.ii. 1—2). He also speaks of "[o]ur sometime sister, now our queen," "defeated joy," "an auspicious and a dropping eye," "mirth in funeral," and "dirge in marriage" (I.ii.8-12). These ideas sit uneasily with one another, and Shakespeare uses this speech to give his audience an uncomfortable first impression of Claudius. The negative impression is furthered when Claudius affects a fatherly role toward the bereaved Hamlet, advising him to stop grieving for his dead father and adapt to a new life in Denmark. Hamlet obviously does not want Claudius's advice, and Claudius's motives in giving it are thoroughly suspect, since, after all, Hamlet is the man who would have succeeded the throne had Claudius not snatched it from him.

The result of all this flagrant dishonesty is that this scene portrays as dire a situation in Denmark as the first scene does. Where the first scene illustrated the fear and supernatural danger lurking in Denmark, the second hints at the corruption and weakness of the king and his court. The scene also furthers the idea that Denmark is somehow unsound as a nation, as Claudius declares that Fortinbras makes his battle plans "[h]olding a weak supposal of our worth, / Or thinking by our late dear brother's death / Our state to be disjoint and out of frame" (I.ii. 18-20).

Prince Hamlet, devastated by his father's death and betrayed by his mother's marriage, is introduced as the only character who is unwilling to play along with Claudius's gaudy attempt to mimic a healthy royal court. On the one hand, this may suggest that he is the only honest character in the royal court, the only person of high standing whose

sensibilities are offended by what has happened in the aftermath of his father's death. On the other hand, it suggests that he is a malcontent, someone who refuses to go along with the rest of the court for the sake of the greater good of stability. In any case, Hamlet already feels, as Marcellus will say later, that "[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.67). We also see that his mother's hasty remarriage has shattered his opinion of womanhood ("Frailty, thy name is woman," he cries out famously in this scene [I.ii. 146]), a motif that will develop through his unraveling romantic relationship with Ophelia and his worsening relationship with his mother.

His monologue about suicide ("O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!" [I.ii.129-1301) ushers in what will be a central idea in the play. The world is painful to live in, but, within the Christian framework of the play, if one commits suicide to end that pain, one damns oneself to everlasting suffering in hell. The question of the moral soundness of suicide in an under ably painful world will haunt the rest of the play; it reaches the height of its urgency in the most famous line in all of English literature: "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (III.i.58). In this scene Hamlet mainly focuses on the appalling conditions of life, railing against Claudius's court as "an unwedded garden,/ That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely" (I.ii. 135-137). Throughout the play, we watch the gradual crumbling of the beliefs on which Hamlet's worldview has been based. Already, in this first monologue, religion has failed him, and his twisted family situation can offer him no consolation in this time of great distress when be has completely lost his fanilyic his father died and lies mother remarried.

Act I, Scenes III - IV Summary

In Polonius's house, Laertes prepares to leave for France. Bidding his sister, Ophelia, farewell, he cautions her against falling in love with Hamlet, who is, according to Laertes, too far above her by birth to be able to love her honorably. Since Hamlet is responsible not only for his own feelings but for his position in the state, it may be impossible for him to marry her. Ophelia agrees to keep Laertes' advice as a "watchman" close to her heart but urges him not to give her advice that he does not practice himself. Laertes reassures her that he will take care of himself.

Polonius enters to bid his son farewell. He tells Laertes that he must hurry to his ship but then delays him by giving him a great deal of advice about how to behave with integrity and practicality. Polonius

urges Laertes to keep his thoughts to himself, restrain himself from acting on rash desires, and treat people with familiarity but not with inetecency. He advises him to hold on to his old friends but be slow to embrace new friends; to be slow to quarrel but to fight boldly if the need arises; to listen more than he talks; to dress richly but not gaudily; to refrain from borrowing or lending money; and, finally, to be true to himself above all things.

Laertes leaves, bidding farewell to Ophelia once more. Alone with his daughter, Polonius asks Ophelia what Laertes told her before he left. Ophelia says that it was "something touching the Lord Hamlet" (I.ii.89). Polonius asks her about her relationship with Hamlet. She tells him that Hamlet claims to love her. Polonius facial expressions were that of unrelenting echoes Laertes' advice, and outflow Ophelia to associate with Hamlet anymore. He tells her that Hamlet has hoaxed her in blashphening his love, and that she should see through his false vows and repudiate his affections. Ophelia vows to obey.

Summary: Act 1, Scenes iv

It is now night. Hamlet keeps watch outside the castle with Horatio and Marcellus, waiting in the cold for the ghost to appear. Shortly after midnight, trumpets and gunfire sound from the castle, and Hamlet explains that the new king is spending the night overindulging, as is the Danish custom. Nauseated, Hamlet declares that this sort of custom is better broken than kept, saying that the king's merrymaking makes Denmark a stooge among other nations and assuages the Danes' otherwise impressive achievements. Then the ghost appears, and Hamlet calls out to it. The ghost gesticulates Hamlet to follow it out into the night. His companions urge him not to follow, begging him to consider that the ghost might usher him toward harm.

Hamlet himself is unassertive whether his father's bodach is truly the king's spirit or an Beelzebub demon, but he declares that he cares nothing for his life and that, if his soul is perpetual, the ghost can do nothing to harm his soul. He follows after the bodach and disappears into the darkness. Horatio and Marcellus, stupefied, declares that the event bodes ill for the nation. Horatio manifests that heaven will oversee the upshot of Hamlet's come up against with the ghost, but Marcellus says that they should follow and try to fortify him themselves. After a moment, Horatio and Marcellus follow after Hamlet and the ghost.

Analysis: Act I, Scenes iii-iv

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be: For loan oft loses both itself and friend; And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry".

The active, unruly, and unselfish Laertes demarcates powerfully with the introspective Hamlet, becoming one of Hamlet's most important thwarts foils in the play. (A thwart is a character who by demarcation emphasizes the distinct characteristics of another character.) As the plot headways, Hamlet's hesitancy to undertake his father's vengeance will blatantly contrast with Laertes' furious willingness to avenge his father's death (III.iv). Act I, scene iii serves to introduce this contrast. Since the last scene portrayed the bitterly fractured state of Hamlet's family, by comparison, the bustling normalcy of Polonius's household appears all the more striking. Polonius's long speech advising Laertes on how to behave in France is self-consciously paternal, almost excessively so, as if to hammer home the contrast between the fatherly love Laertes enjoys and Hamlet's state of loss and estrangement. Hamlet's conversation with the ghost of his father in Act I, scene v will be a gnarled enumeration of the father-to-son speech, with vastly darker content.

As in the previous scene, when Claudius and Gertrude advised Hamlet to stay in Denmark and fling off his mourning, the third scene develops through a emblem of family members giving one another recommendation, or orders masked as recommendations. While Polonius and Laertes seem to have a relatively normal father-son relationship, their relationships with Ophelia seem somewhat troubling. They each conclude a position of unquestioned authority over her, Polonius treating his daughter as though her feelings are irrelevant ("Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl") and Laertes treating her as though her judgment is suspect (I.iii.101). Further, Laertes' speech to Ophelia is laced with authorities sexual imagery, referring to her "chaste treasure open" to Hamlet's "unmaster'd importunity" (I.iii.31-32). Combined with the extremely affectionate reciprocity between the brother and sister, this sexual imagery creates an incestuous undertone, echoing the inbreeding of Claudius's marriage to his brother's wife and Hamlet's fervent, conflicting feelings for his mother.

The short interim scene that follows serves a number of important purposes, as Shakespeare begins to construct a amalgamated world out of the various abodes of the play. Whereas the play up to this point has been divided into a number of separate settings, this scene begins to mingle together elements of different settings. Hamlet, for instance, has been analogous with the world inside Elsinore, but he now makes his appearance in the darkness outside it. Likewise, the trepidation outside

the castle so far has been quite separate from the merrymaking inside, but now the sound of Claudius's overruling leaks through the walls and reaches Hamlet and his companions in the night.

Act I, scene iv also continues the development of the motif of the ill health of Denmark. Hamlet views the king's overindulging as a further sign of the state's corruption, commenting that booze makes the bad strands of a person's character inundate all of his or her good qualities. And the appearance of the ghost is again seen as a sign of Denmark's putrefy, this time by Marcellus, who famously declares, "'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.67).

Finally, the reappearance of the still-silent ghost brings with it a return of the theme of spirituality, truth, and precariousness, or, more specifically, the precariousness of truth in a world of ethereal equivocacy. Since Hamlet does not know what lies beyond death, he cannot tell whether the ghost is truly his father's spirit or whether it is an Beelzebub come from hell to tempt him toward destruction. This uncertainty about the ethereal world will lead Hamlet to tugging considerations of moral truth. These considerations have already been raised by Hamlet's desire to kill himself in Act I, scene ii and will be explored more directly in the scenes to come.

Act I, Scene V - Act II, Scene I Summary :

In the darkness, the ghost speaks to Hamlet, avowing to be his father's spirit, come to rouse Hamlet to revenge his death, a "foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.25). Hamlet is distressed greatly at the revelation that his father has been murdered, and the ghost tells him that as he slept in his garden, a villain poured poison into his ear—the very villain who now wears his crown, Claudius. Hamlet's worst fears about his uncle are confirmed. "O my prophetic soul!" he cries (I.v.40). The ghost exhorts Hamlet to seek revenge, telling him that Claudius has suborned Denmark and corrupted Gertrude, having taken her from the pure love of her first marriage and depraved her in the foul lust of their lowed union. But the ghost hankers. Hamlet not to act against his mother in any way, telling him to "leave her to heaven" and to the scruples of her own ethics (I.v.86).

As dawn breaks, the ghost disappears. Intensely moved, Hamlet blasphemes to remember and obey the ghost. Horatio and Marcellus arrive upon the scene and deucedly ask Hamlet what has happened. Shaken and extremely perturbed he refuses to tell them, and insists that they swear upon his sword not to divulge what they have seen. He tells them further that he may pretend to be a madman, and he makes them

swear not to give the slightest hint that they know anything about his motives. Three times the ghost's voice echoes from beneath the ground, manifesting. "Swear." Horatio and Marcellus take the oath upon Hamlet's sword, and the three men exit toward the castle. As they leave, Hamlet bewails the responsibility he now carries: "The time is out of joint: 0 cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" (I.v. 189-190).

Summary: Act II, Scene i

Polonius dispatches his servant Reynaldo to France with money and written notes for Laertes, also ordering him to inquire about and spy on Laertes' personal life. He gives him explicit directions as to how to pursue his investigations, then sends him on his way. As Reynaldo leaves, Ophelia enters, visibly upset. She tells Polonius that Hamlet, scruffy and wild-eyed, has waylayed her. Hamlet grabbed her, held her, and suspired heavily, but did not speak to her. Polonius says that Hamlet must be mad with his love for Ophelia, for she has distanced herself from him ever since Polonius ordered her to do so. Polonius conjectures that this 'lovesickness might be the cause of Hamlet's moodiness, and he hurries out to tell Claudius of his idea.

Analysis: Act I, Scene v-Act II, Scene i

The ghost's demand for Hamlet to seek revenge upon Claudius is the swilled event of Act I. It sets the main intrigue of the play into motion and leads Hamlet to the idea of feigning madness, which becomes his primary mode of interacting with other people for most of the next three acts, as well as a major device Shakespeare uses to develop his character. Most important, it introduces the idea of retributive justice, the whim that sin must be returned with punishment. Claudius has obligated a sin, and now, to reimpore balance to the kingdom, the sin must be punished. The idea of namesis spooks and prods goads characters throughout the play, functioning as an important motivation for action, galvanizing Claudius to guilt, Hamlet to the avoidance of suicide, and Laertes to murderous rage after the deaths of Ophelia and Polonius.

While Hamlet fits a genre called revenge tragedy, loosely following the form popularized by Thomas Kyd's earlier Spanish Tragedy, it is unlike any other revenge tragedy in that it is more concerned with thought and moral questioning than with bloody action. One of the central tensions in the play comes from Hamlet's inability to find any certain moral truths as he works his way toward revenge. Even in his first confront with the ghost, Hamlet questions the appearances of

things around him and worries whether he can trust his sapience, doubting the veracity of his father's ghost and its tragic claim. Because he is ruminative to the point of obsession,' Hamlet's decision to shan madness, intents and purposes in order to keep the other characters from guessing the motive for his behavior, will lead him at times precariously close to actual madness. In fact, it is impossible to say for certain whether or not Hamlet actually does go mad, and, if so, when his act becomes reality. We have already seen that Hamlet, though thoughtful by nature, also has an excitable fleck, which makes him erratic, nervous, and unpredictable. In Act I, scene v, as the ghost disappears, Hamlet seems to have too much nervous energy to deal competently with the curious Horatio and Marcellus. He is already unsure of what to believe and what to do, and the tension of his uncertainty comes out in sprawling wordplay that makes him seem already slightly mad, calling the ghost names such as "truepenny" and "old mole" as it rumbles, "Swear," from beneath the ground H.v.152, I.v. 164).

The short scene that begins Act II is divided into two parts, the first of which involves Polonius's conversation with Reynaldo about Laertes and the second of which involves Polonius's conversation with Ophelia about Hamlet. The scene serves to develop the character of Polonius, who is one of the most man oeuvre figures in Hamlet. Polonius can be interpreted as either a doddering fool or as a cunning puppet master, and he has been portrayed onstage as both. In this scene, as he carefully instructs Reynaldo in the art of poking around, he seems more the puppet master than the fool, though his obvious love of hearing his own voice leads him into some comical misphrasings ("And then, sir, does a this — a does — / what was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say some / thing. Where did I leave?" [II.i.49-51]).

In his advice to Reynaldo, Polonius unequivocally develops one of the themes of Hamlet, the idea that words can be used to bend and amend the truth. He explains to Reynaldo how to ask leading questions of Laertes' allys and how to phrase questions in a way that will seem innocupus. As with Claudius, who exploited the royal court with his speech in Act I, scene ii, words become a tool for influencing the minds of others and controlling their perception of the truth. Remember that Claudius killed King Hamlet by pouring poison into his ear. Shakespeare continually illustrates that words can function as poison in the ear as well. As the ghost says in Act I, scene v, Claudius has poisoned "the whole ear of Denmark" with his words (I.v.36). The

running imagery of ears and hearing serves as an important symbol of the power of words to exploit the truth.

Polonius's conversation with Ophelia is important for several reasons. First, it illustrates how Hamlet has been behaving since his running up into the ghost : he has made good on his promise to Horatio and is behaving as a madman. Though we learn about it only through her description, his emotional scene with Ophelia may stem in part from his general plan to shanlunacy, and in part from real distress at seeing Ophelia, since she has recently repudiated him. In addition, his mother's marriage to Claudius seems to have shattered his opinion of women in general. The conversation also informs the audience that she has obeyed her father's . orders and broken off her relationship with Hamlet, confirming her deferential nature and dependence on her father to tell her how to behave. And finally, the conversation on genders an important moment for the intrigue of the play: Polonius's sudden idea ; that Hamlet's desolation and strange behavior may be due to his lovesickness for Ophelia. Though Polonius's overly simple theory is obviously insufficient to explain Hamlet's behavior, it does lead to several plot developments in the next few scenes,: including Hamlet's catastrophic face-off with Ophelia and Gertrude and; Claudius's decision to spy on Hamlet.

Act II, Scene II Summary

Within the castle, Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's friends from Wittenberg. Increasingly concerned about Hamlet's behavior and his inability to recover from his father's death, the king and queen have his friends to Elsinore in the hope that they might be able to cheer Hamlet out of his or at least discover the cause of it.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to investigate, and the queen orders attendants to take them to her "too much changed" son (II.ii.36).

Polonius enters, announcing the return of the ambassadors whom Claudius sent to Norway. Voltimand and Cornelius enter and describe what took place with the aged and king of Norway: the king Fortinbras for attempting to make war on Denmark, and Fortinbras swore he would never again attack the Danes. The Norwegian king, overjoyed, upon Fortinbras a large, and hankered him to use the army he had assembled to attack the Poles instead of the Danes. He has therefore sent a request back to Claudius that Prince Fortinbras's armies be allowed safe passage through Denmark on their way to attack the Poles.

Relieved to have a war with Fortinbras's army, Claudius declares that he will see to this business later. Voltimand and Cornelius leave.

Turning to the subject of Hamlet, Polonius declares, after a wordy, that the prince is mad with love for Ophelia. He shows the king and queen letters and love poems Hamlet has given to Ophelia, and proposes a plan to test his theory. Hamlet often walks alone through the lobby of the castle, and, at such a time, they could hide behind an arras (a curtain or wall hanging) while Ophelia Hamlet, allowing them to see for themselves whether Hamlet's madness really from his love for her. The king declares that they will try the plan. Gertrude notices that Hamlet is approaching, reading from a book as he walks, and Polonius says that he will speak to the prince. Gertrude and Claudius exit, leaving Polonius alone with Hamlet.

Polonius attempts to converse with Hamlet, who appears; he calls the old man a and answers his questions. But many of Hamlet's seemingly statements hide observations about Polonius's and his old age. Polonius comments that while Hamlet is clearly mad, his replies are often "pregnant" with meaning (II.ii.206). He hurries away, determined to arrange the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia.

As Polonius leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet seems pleased to see them. They discuss Hamlet's unhappiness about recent affairs in Denmark. Hamlet asks why they have come. Sheepishly, the two men claim they have come merely to visit Hamlet, but he declares that he knows that the king and queen sent for them. They confess this to be true, and Hamlet says that he knows why: because he has lost all of his joy and descended into a state of in which everything (and everyone) appears and worthless.

Rosencrantz smiles and says he wonders how Hamlet will receive a theatrical that is currently traveling toward the castle. The blow, announcing the arrival of the actors (or "players"). Hamlet tells his friends they are welcome to stay at Elsinore, but that his "uncle-father and aunt-mother" are in his madness. He is mad only some of the time and at other times is.

Polonius enters to announce the arrival of the players, who follow him into the room. Hamlet welcomes them and one of them to give him a speech about the fall of Troy and the death of the Trojan king and queen, Priam and Hecuba. Impressed with the player's speech, Hamlet orders Polonius to see them to guestrooms. He announces that the next night they will hear The Murder of Gonzago performed, with an

additional short speech that he will write himself. Hamlet leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and now stands alone in the room.

He immediately begins cursing himself, bitterly commenting that the player who gave the speech was able to a depth of feeling and expression for figures who mean nothing to him, while Hamlet is unable to take action even with his far more powerful motives. He resolves to a for Claudius, forcing the king to watch a play whose intrigue closely resembles the murder of Hamlet's father; if the king is guilty, he thinks, he will surely show some visible sign of guilt when he sees his sin on stage. Then, Hamlet reasons, he will obtain definitive proof of Claudius's guilt. "The play's the thing," he declares, "wherein I'll catch the of the king" (II.ii.581-582).

Analysis

If Hamlet is merely pretending to be mad, as he suggests, he does an astounding job. His is so convincing that many critics contend that his already shatters at the sight of his dead father's ghost. However, the acute and cutting observations he makes while being supposedly mad support the view that he is only pretending. Importantly, he declares, "I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw" (II.ii.361-362). That is, he is only "mad" at certain calculated times, and the rest of the time he knows what is what. But he is certainly confused and upset, and his confusion translates into an extraordinarily state of mind of madness.

This scene, by far the longest in the play, includes several important and furthers the development of some of the play's main themes. The scene contains four main parts: Polonius's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, which includes the discussion with the; Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in which we see Hamlet consciously shaming madness for the first time; Hamlet's reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the scene with the players, followed by Hamlet's concluding on the theme of action. These separate intrigue developments take place in the same location and occur in rapid succession, allowing the ausdience to compare and contrast their thematic elements.

We have already seen the developing contrast between Hamlet and Laertes. The section involving the Norwegian ambassadors develops another important contrast, this time between Hamlet and Fortinbras. Like Hamlet, Fortinbras is the grieving son of a dead king, a prince whose uncle inherited the throne in his place. But where Hamlet has sunk into and indecision, Fortinbras has devoted himself to the pursuit

of. This contrast will be explored much more thoroughly later in the play. Here, it is important mainly to note that Fortinbras' uncle has forbidden him to attack Denmark but has given him permission to ride through Denmark on his way to attack Poland. This at least suggests the possibility that the King of Norway is trying to trick Claudius into allowing a army into his country. It is notable that Claudius appears indifferent to the fact that a powerful enemy will be riding through his country with a large army in tow. Claudius seems much more worried about Hamlet's madness, indicating that where King Hamlet was a powerful warrior who sought to expand Denmark's power abroad, Claudius is a politician who is more concerned about from within his state.

The arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstem, two of the most mystifying figures in Hamlet, is another important development. These two characters are explored by all of the members of the royal family and seem to exist in a state of fear that they will go astray the wrong person or give away the wrong secret at the wrong time. One of the strangest qualities of the two men is their extraordinary similarity. In fact, Shakespeare leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern almost entirely undifferentiated from one another. "Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern," Claudius says, and Gertrude replies, "Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz," almost as though it does not matter which is which (II.ii,33-34). The two men's questioning of Hamlet is a satireflskit of a Socratic dialogue. They propose possibilities, develop ideas according to impartial argument, and find their attempts to understand Hamlet's behavior entirely baffled by his disobliging replies.

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how unbounded in aptitudes in form and moving, how express and praiseworthy in action how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty; of the world! the perfect example of animals! And yet, to me, what is this expectance of dust?"

The other important event in this scene is the arrival of the players. The presence of players and play-acting within the play points to an important theme: that real life is in certain ways like play-acting. Hamlet to be by the player king's ability to engage with the story he is telling even though it is only an imaginative recreation. Hamlet is prevented from responding to his own situation because he doesn't have certain knowledge about it, but the player king, and theater audiences in general, can respond feelingly even to things they know to be untrue. In fact, most of the time people respond to their real-life situations with

feelings and actions that are not based on certain knowledge. This is what Hamlet refuses to do. His to act like he knows what he's doing when he really doesn't may be as heroic and, or quixotic and impossible. In either case, Hamlet's plan to trap the king by eliciting an emotional response is highly unsound: Claudius's feelings about a play could never be construed as a index of its truth.

Act 111, Scene I Summary

Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's behavior with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who say they have been unable to learn the cause of his. They tell the king and queen about Hamlet's for the players. Gertrude and Claudius agree that they will see the play that evening. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave, and Claudius orders Gertrude to leave as well, saying that he and Polonius intend to on Hamlet's with Ophelia. Gertrude exits, and Polonius directs Ophelia to walk around the lobby. Polonius hears Hamlet coming, and he and the king hide.

Hamlet enters, speaking thoughtfully and to himself about the question of whether to commit suicide to end the pain of experience: "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (III.i.58). He says that the of life are such that no one would willingly bear them, except that they are afraid of "something after death" (III.i.80). Because we do not know what to expect in the afterlife, we would rather "bear those ills we have," Hamlet says, "than fly to others that we know not of (Ill.i,83-84). In mid-thought, Hamlet sees Ophelia approaching. Having received her orders from Polonius, she tells him that she wishes to return the tokens of love he has given her. Angrily, Hamlet denies having given her anything; he the dishonesty of beauty, and claims both to have loved Ophelia once and never to have loved her at all, Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to enter a rather than become a "breeder of sinners" (III.i. 122-123). He criticizes women for making men behave like monsters and for contributing to the world's dishonesty by painting their faces to appear more beautiful than they are. Working himself into a rage, Hamlet denounces Ophelia, women, and humankind in general, saying that he wishes to end all marriages. As he storms out, Ophelia mourns the "noble mind" that has now into madness (III.i.149).

The king and Polonius from behind the Claudius says that Hamlet's strange behavior has clearly not been caused by love for Ophelia and that his speech does not seem like the speech of. He says that he fears that sits on something dangerous in Hamlet's soul like a bird sits on her egg, and that he fears what will happen when it hatches. He declares

that he will send Hamlet to England, in the hope that a change of scenery might help him get over his troubles. Polonius agrees that this is a good idea, but he still believes that Hamlet's agitation comes from loving Ophelia. He asks Claudius to send Hamlet to Gertrude's chamber after the play, where Polonius can hide again and watch unseen; he hopes to learn whether Hamlet is really mad with love. Claudius agrees, saying that "[n]adness in great ones" must be carefully watched (III.i.187).

Analysis

"To be, or not to be" is the most famous line in English literature. What does it mean? Why are these words and what follows special?

One reason is that they are a example of Shakespeare's ability to make his characters seem three-dimensional. The audience senses that there is more to Hamlet's words than meets the ear—that there is something behind his words that is never spoken. Or, to put it another way, the audience witnesses signs of something within Hamlet's mind that even he isn't aware of. Hamlet is a fictitious character who seems to possess a mind. How does Shakespeare manage to accomplish this?

In the first place, Hamlet doesn't talk directly about what he's really talking about. When he questions whether it is better "to be, or not to be," the obvious, "Should I kill myself?" The entire strongly suggests that he is toying with suicide and perhaps trying to work up his courage to do it. But at no point does he say that he is in pain or discuss why he wants to kill himself. In fact, he never says "I" or "me" in the entire speech. He's not trying to "express" himself at all; instead, he poses the question as a matter of debate. When he claims that everybody would commit suicide if they weren't uncertain about the afterlife, it sounds as if he's making an argument to convince an imaginary listener about an abstract point rather than directly addressing how the question applies to him. Now, it's perfectly ordinary for characters in plays to say something other than what they mean to other characters (this suggests that they are consciously hiding their true motives), but Hamlet does it when he's talking to himself. This creates the general impression that there are things going on in Hamlet's mind that he can't think about directly.

While we're on the subject of what's going on inside Hamlet's mind, consider his encounter with Ophelia. This conversation, closely watched by Claudius and Polonius, is, in fact, a test. It's supposed to establish whether Hamlet's madness stems from his lovesickness over Ophelia. Before we, the audience, see this encounter, we already think

we know more than Claudius does: we know that Hamlet is only acting crazy, and that he's doing it us to hide the fact that he's plotting against (or at least investigating) his uncle. Therefore, it can't be true that he's acting mad because of his love for Ophelia. But witnessing Hamlet's encounter with her throws everything we think we know into question.

Does Hamlet mean what he says to Ophelia? He says that he did love her once but that he doesn't love her now. There are several problems with concluding that Hamlet says the opposite of what he means in order to appear crazy. For one thing, if he really does love her, this is unnecessarily self-destructive behavior. It's unnecessary because it doesn't very much; that is, it doesn't make Claudius suspect him less. His professions of love make him appear fickle, or emotionally withdrawn, rather than crazy.

Is Hamlet really crazy or just protending? He announced ahead of time that he was going to act crazy, so it's hard to that he (coincidentally) really went mad right after saying so. But his behavior toward Ophelia is both self-destructive and with emotional intensity. It doesn't obviously further his plans. Moreover, his bitterness against Ophelia, and against women in general, with his general discontent edness about the state of the world, the same discontentedness that he expresses when he thinks no one is watching. There is a passionate intensity to his unstable behavior that keeps us from viewing it as fake.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to ask this question: if a person in a rational state of mind decides to act as if he is crazy, to abuse the people around him regardless of whether he loves those people or hates them, and to give free expression to all of his most thoughts, when he starts to carry those actions out, will it even be possible to say at what point he stops pretending to be crazy and starts actually being crazy?

Act III, Scene II Summary

That evening, in the castle hall now doubling as a theater, Hamlet anxiously lectures the players on how to act the parts he has written for them. Polonius shuffles by with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet dispatches them to hurry the players in their preparations. Horatio enters, and Hamlet, pleased to see him, praises him heartily, expressing his affection for and high opinion of Horatio's mind and manner, especially Horatio's qualities of self-control and reserve. Having told Horatio what he learned from the ghost—that Claudius murdered his father-he now asks him to watch Claudius carefully during the play so that they might compare their impressions of his

behavior afterward. Horatio agrees, saying that if Claudius shows any signs of guilt, he will detect them.

The trumpets play a Danish march as the audience of lords and ladies begins streaming into the room. Hamlet warns Horatio that he will begin to act strangely. Sure enough, when Claudius asks how he is, his response seems quite insane: "Excellent, i' faith; of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promise" (III.ii.84—86), Hamlet asks Polonius about his history as an actor and Ophelia with a string of puns.

The players enter and act out a brief, silent version of the play to come called a "dumbshow." In the dumbshow, a king and queen display their love. The queen leaves the king to sleep, and while he is sleeping, a man murders him by pouring poison into his ear. The murderer tries to seduce the queen, who gradually accepts his advances.

The players begin to enact the play in full, and we learn that the man who kills the king is the king's nephew. Throughout, Hamlet keeps up a running commentary on the characters and their actions, and continues to Ophelia with sexual references. When the murderer pours the poison into the sleeping king's ear, Claudius rises and cries out for light. Chaos ensues as the play comes to a sudden, the torches are lit, and the king flees the room, followed by the audience. When the scene quiets, Hamlet is left alone with Horatio.

Hamlet and Horatio agree that the king's behavior was telling. Now extremely excited, Hamlet continues to act and, speaking glibly and inventing little poems. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive to tell Hamlet that he is wanted in his mother's chambers. Rosencrantz asks again about the cause of Hamlet's "distemper," and Hamlet angrily accuses the pair of trying to play him as if he were a musical pipe. Polonius enters to escort Hamlet to the queen. Hamlet says he will go to her in a moment and asks for a moment alone. He steels himself to speak to his mother, resolving to be brutally honest with her but not to lose control of himself: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" (III.ii.366).

Analysis

In the first two scenes of Act III, Hamlet and Claudius both traps to catch one another's secrets: Claudius spies on Hamlet to discover the true nature of his madness, and Hamlet attempts to "catch the of the king" in the theater (III.i.582). The play-within-a-play tells the story of Gonzago, the Duke of Vienna, and his wife, Baptista, who marries his murdering nephew, Lucianus. Hamlet believes that the play is an

opportunity to establish a more reliable basis for Claudius's guilt than the claims of the ghost. Since he has no way of knowing whether to believe a member of the spirit world, he tries to determine whether Claudius is guilty by reading his behavior for signs of a psychological state of guilt.

Although Hamlet at the success of his interpreting Claudius's interruption isn't as simple as it seems. In the first place, Claudius does not react to the dumbshow, which exactly mimics the actions of which the ghost accuses Claudius. Claudius reacts to the play itself, which, unlike the dumbshow, makes it clear that the king is murdered by his nephew. Does Claudius react to being confronted with his own crimes, or to a play about uncle-killing sponsored by his crazy nephew? Or does he simply have indigestion?

Hamlet appears more in control of his own behavior in this scene than in the one before, as shown by his effortless manipulations of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and his frank conversation with Horatio. He even expresses admiration and affection for Horatio's calm level-headedness, the lack of which is his own weakest point: "Give me that man / That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, / As I do thee" (III.ii. 64-67). In this scene he seems to prove that he is not insane after all, given the effortlessness with which he alternates between wild, erratic behavior and focused, sane behavior. He is excited but coherent during his conversation with Horatio before the play, but as soon as the king and queen enter, he begins to act, a sign that he is only pretending. His only questionable behavior in this scene arises in his crude comments to Ophelia, which show him capable of real cruelty. His has crossed rational bounds, and his every comment is laced with sexual. For instance, she comments, "You are keen, my lord, you are keen," complimenting him on his sharp intellect, and he replies, "It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge" (III.ii.227-228). His interchange with Ophelia is a mere to the passionate rage he will unleash on Gertrude in the next scene.

Act III, Scene III Summary

Elsewhere in the castle, King Claudius speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Badly shaken by the play and now considering Hamlet's madness to be dangerous, Claudius asks the pair to escort Hamlet on a voyage to England and to depart immediately. They agree and leave to make preparations. Polonius enters and reminds the king of his plan to hide in Gertrude's room and observe Hamlet's confrontation with her.

He promises to tell Claudius all that he learns. When Polonius leaves, the king is alone, and he immediately expresses his guilt and grief over his sin. A brother's murder, he says, is the oldest sin and "hath the primal eldest curse upon't" (III.iii.37). He longs to ask for forgiveness, but says that he is unprepared to give up that which he gained by committing the murder, namely, the crown and the queen. He falls to his knees and begins to pray.

Hamlet slips quietly into the room and steels himself to kill the unseeing Claudius. But suddenly it occurs to him that if he kills Claudius while he is praying, he will end the king's life at the moment when he was seeking forgiveness for his sins, sending Claudius's soul to heaven. This is hardly an adequate revenge, Hamlet thinks, especially since Claudius, by killing Hamlet's father before he had time to make his last confession, ensured that his brother would not go to heaven. Hamlet decides to wait, resolving to kill Claudius when the king is sinning—when he is either drunk, angry, or lustful. He leaves. Claudius rises and declares that he has been unable to pray sincerely: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below" (III.iii.96).

Analysis

Thus ethics does make cowards of us all; And thus the native tinge of aspiration. Is frailed o'er with the pale cast of thought; And enterprises of great pith and moment, With this regard, their currents turn awry, And lose the name of action.

In Act III, scene iii, Hamlet finally seems ready to put his desire for revenge into action. He is satisfied that the play has proven his uncle's guilt. When Claudius prays, the audience is given real certainty that Claudius murdered his brother: a full, spontaneous confession, even though nobody else hears it. This only heightens our sense that the climax of the play is due to arrive. But Hamlet waits.

On the surface, it seems that he waits because he wants a more radical revenge. Critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge have been horrified by Hamlet's words here—he completely oversteps the bounds of Christian morality in trying to damn his opponent's soul as well as kill him. But apart from this ultraviolent posturing, Hamlet has once again avoided the imperative to act by involving himself in a problem of knowledge. Now that he's satisfied that he knows Claudius's guilt, he wants to know that his punishment will be sufficient. It may have been difficult to prove the former, but how can Hamlet ever hope to know the fate of Claudius's immortal soul?

Hamlet poses his desire to damn Claudius as a matter of fairness: his own father was killed without having cleansed his soul by praying or confessing, so why should his murderer be given that chance? But Hamlet is forced to admit that he doesn't really know what happened to his father, remarking "how his audit stands, who knows, save heaven?" (III.iv.82). The most he can say is that "in our circumstance and course of thought / 'Tis heavy with him" (III.iv.83-84). The Norton Shakespeare paraphrases "in our circumstance and course of thought" as "in our indirect and limited way of knowing on earth." Having proven his uncle's guilt to himself, against all odds, Hamlet suddenly finds something else to be uncertain about.

At this point, Hamlet has gone beyond his earlier need to know the facts about the crime, and he now craves metaphysical knowledge, knowledge of the afterlife and of God, before he is willing to act. The audience has had plenty of opportunity to see that Hamlet is fascinated with philosophical questions. In the case of the "to be, or not to be" monologue, we saw that his phantificating can be a way for him to avoid thinking about or acknowledging something more immediately important (in that case, his urge to kill himself). Is Hamlet using his speculations about Claudius's soul to avoid thinking about something in this case? Perhaps the task he has set for himself—killing another human being in cold blood—is too much for him to face. Whatever it is, the audience may once again get the sense that there is something more to Hamlet's behavior than meets the eye. That Shakespeare is able to convey this sense is a remarkable achievement in itself, quite apart from how we try to explain what Hamlet's unacknowledged motives might be.

Act III, Scene IV Summary

In Gertrude's chamber, the queen and Polonius wait for Hamlet's arrival. Polonius plans to hide in order to shoop on Gertrude's skirmish with her son, in the hope that doing so will enable him to determine the cause of Hamlet's bizarre and threatening behavior. Polonius urges the queen to be harsh with Hamlet when he arrives, saying that.she should berate him for his recent behavior. Gertrude agrees, and Polonius hides behind an drapery, or dosser.

Hamlet storms into the room and asks his mother why she has sent for him. She says that he has offended his father, meaning his stepfather, Claudius. He interrupts her and says that she has offended his father, meaning the dead King Hamlet, by marrying Claudius. Hamlet accosts her with an almost violent intensity and declares his

intention to make her fully aware of the profundity of her sin. Fearing for her life, Gertrude cries out. From behind the drapery, Polonius calls out for help. Hamlet, realizing that someone is behind the drapery and suspecting that it might be Claudius, cries, "How now! a rat?" (III.iv.22). He draws his sword and stabs it through the dosser, killing the unseen Polonius. Gertrude asks what Hamlet has done, and he replies, "Nay, I know not: / Is it the king?" (III.iv.24). The queen says his action was a "rash and bloody" deed, and Hamlet replies that it was almost as rash and bloody as murdering a king and marrying his brother (III.iv.26-28). Disbelieving, the queen exclaims, "As kill a king!" and Hamlet replies that she heard him correctly (III.iv.29).

Hamlet lifts the drapery and discovers Polonius's body: he has not killed the king and achieved his revenge but has murdered the relatively innocent Polonius. He bids the old man farewell, calling him an "intruding fool" (III.iv.30). He turns to his mother, declaring that he will wring her heart. He shows her a picture of the dead king and a picture of the current king, bitterly comments on the superiority of his father to his uncle, and asks her furiously what has driven her to marry a rotten man such as Claudius. She pleads with him to stop, saying that he has turned her eyes onto her soul and that she does not like what she sees there. Hamlet continues to boycott her and rail against Claudius, until, suddenly, the ghost of his father again appears before him.

Hamlet speaks to the dialect, but Gertrude is unable to see it and believes him to be mad. The ghost intones that it has come to remind Hamlet of his purpose, that Hamlet has not yet killed Claudius and must achieve his revenge. Noting that Gertrude is amazed and unable to see him, the ghost asks Hamlet to utter monotonously and repetitively with her. Hamlet describes the ghost, but Gertrude sees nothing, and in a moment the ghost disappears. Hamlet tries desperately to convince Gertrude that he is not mad but has merely counterfeited madness all along, and he urges her to forsake Claudius and regain her good moral sense. He urges her as well not to reveal to Claudius that his madness has been an act. Gertrude, still shaken from Hamlet's furious excoriation of her, agrees to keep his secret. He bids her goodnight, but, before he leaves, he points to Polonius's corpse and declares that heaven has "punished me with this, and this with me" (III.iv.158). Hamlet reminds his mother that he must sail to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he says he will regard with suspicion, as though they were poisonous snakes, since he assumes that their loyalties are with Claudius, not with him. Dragging Polonius's body behind him, Hamlet leaves his mother's room.

Analysis

What is Hamlet trying to do in his confrontation with his mother? It is possible that he wants her to confirm her knowledge of Claudius's crime, to provide further proof of his guilt. Or it may be that Hamlet wants to know whether she was complicit in the crime. Or he may feel that he needs her on his side if he is to achieve justice. While all of these are possibilities, what Hamlet actually does is urge his mother to repent choosing Claudius over his own father. More specifically, he repeatedly demands that she avoid Claudius's bed. Actually, he's much more specific: he tells her not to let Claudius arouse her by fondling her neck, not to stay within his semen-infested sheets, and other shockingly graphic details.

This is another point in the play where audiences and readers have felt that there is more going on in Hamlet's brain than we can quite put our fingers on. Sigmund Freud wrote that Hamlet harbors an unconscious desire to sexually enjoy his mother. Freud maintained that all men unconsciously desire their mothers in this way, and he called this the "Oedipus Complex," after the character in Sophocles' play who unwittingly murders his father and has several children by his own mother. Whether or not Freud was right about this is as difficult to prove as any of the problems that Hamlet worries about, but his argument in regard to Hamlet is quite remarkable. He says that while Oedipus actually enacts this fantasy, Hamlet only betrays the unconscious desire to do so. Hamlet is thus a quintessentially modern person, because he has repressed desires.

Though Gertrude's speech in this scene is largely limited to brief reactions to Hamlet's lengthy indictment of her, it is our most revealing look at her character. As the scene progresses, Gertrude goes through several states of feeling: she is haughty and accusatory at the beginning, then afraid that Hamlet will hurt her, shocked and upset when Hamlet kills Polonius, overwhelmed by fear and panic as Hamlet detains her, and disbelieving when Hamlet sees the ghost. Finally, she is apologetic toward her son and apparently willing to take his part and help him. For Gertrude, then, the scene progresses as a sequence of great shocks, each of which weakens her resistance to Hamlet's condemnation of her behavior. Of course, Gertrude is convinced mainly by Hamlet's insistence and power of feeling, illustrating what many readers have felt to be her central characteristic: her tendency to be dominated by powerful men and her need for men to show her what to think and how to feel.

This quality explains why Gertrude would have turned to Claudius so soon after her husband's death, and it also explains why she so quickly adopts Hamlet's point of view in this scene. Of course, the play does not specifically explain Gertrude's behavior. It is possible that she was complicit with Claudius in the murder of her husband, though that seems unlikely given her surprised reaction to Hamlet's reproach in this scene, and it is possible that she merely pretends to take Hamlet's side to placate him, which would explain why she immediately reports his behavior to Claudius after promising not to do so. But another interpretation of Gertrude's character seems to be that she has a powerful instinct for self-preservation and advancement that leads her to rely too deeply on men. Not only does this interpretation explain her behavior throughout much of the play, it also links her thematically to Ophelia, the play's other important female character, who is also submissive and utterly dependent on men.

Hamlet's rash, murderous action in stabbing Polonius is an important illustration of his inability to coordinate his thoughts and actions, which might be considered his tragic blemish. In his passive, thoughtful mode, Hamlet is too beset by moral considerations and uncertainties to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius, even when the opportunity is before him. But when he does choose to act, he does so blindly, stabbing his anonymous "enemy" through a curtain. It is as if Hamlet is so distrustful of the possibility of acting rationally that he believes his revenge is more likely to come about as an accident than as a willful act.

When he sees Polonius's corpse, Hamlet interprets his misdeed within the terms of repirsal, punishment, and retributive justice: "Heaven hath pleased it so / To punish me with this, and this with me" (III.iv. 157-158). Though Hamlet has not achieved his vengeance upon Claudius, he believes that God has used him as a tool of vengeance to punish Polonius's sins and punish Hamlet's sins by staining his soul with the murder.

Act IV, Scenes I - II Summary: Act IV, Scene i

After her confrontation with Hamlet, Gertrude hurries to Claudius, who is deliberating with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. She asks to speak to the king alone. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit, she tells Claudius about her encounter with Hamlet. She says that he is as mad as the sea during a violent storm; she also tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. Aghast, the king notes that had he been concealed behind the arras, Hamlet would have killed him. Claudius

wonders aloud how he will be able to handle this public crisis without damaging his hold on Denmark. He tells Gertrude that they must ship Hamlet to England at once and find a way to explain Hamlet's misdeed to the court and to the people. He calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, tells them about the murder, and sends them to find Hamlet.

Summary: Act IV, Scene ii

Elsewhere in Elsinore, Hamlet has just finished disposing Polonius's body, commenting that the corpse has been "safely stowed" (IV.ii.1). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear and ask what he has done with the body. Hamlet refuses to give them a straight answer, instead saying, "The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body" (IV.ii.25-26). Feigning offense at being questioned, he accuses them of being spies in the service of Claudius. He calls Rosencrantz a "sponge... that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities," and warns him that "when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again" (IV.ii.1 1-19). At last he agrees to allow Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to escort him to Claudius.

Analysis: Act IV, Scenes i-ii

The short first scene of Act IV centers around Gertrude's treachery of her son, turning him in to the king after having promised to help him. While she does keep her promise not to reveal that Hamlet was only pretending to be insane, the immediate and frank way in which she tells Claudius about Hamlet's behavior and his murder of Polonius implies that she sees herself as cognate to the king rather than to her son. Whether Gertrude really believes Hamlet to be mad, or has simply recognized that her best interest lies in allying herself with Claudius regardless of what she believes, is impossible to determine from this scene and is largely a matter of one's personal interpretation of the events. Whatever the case, it is Gertrude's speech to Claudius that cements the king's secret plan to have Hamlet electorate in England.

As brief as it is, Act IV, scene i is a glorious example of Shakespeare's skill at developing characters, illustrated by the subtle development of Claudius. Where most of the other male characters in the play, including Hamlet, King Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras, are infatuated with themes of honor, moral balance, and chastening justice, Claudius is a selfish, ambitious king who is more concerned with maintaining his own power and staving off political danger than achieving justice through his rule. His response to Gertrude's revelation that Hamlet has killed Polonius is extremely telling. Rather than

considering that Gertrude might have been in danger, he immediately remarks that had he been in the room, he would have been in danger. Hamlet must be sent away from Denmark, he thinks, not as punishment for committing murder but because he represents a danger to Claudius. And as soon as he hears of the murder, Claudius's mind begins working to find a way to characterize the killing so that it does not seem like a political crisis to his court and to the people of Denmark. To do this, he says, will require all his "majesty and skill" (IV.i.30). In this scene and the scenes to follow, Shakespeare creates in Claudius a convincing depiction of a conniving, ambitious politician. In this way, Claudius emerges as a figure of powerful contrast to the more outspoken men in the play, including Laertes, Fortinbras, and Horatio, and the far more morally conscious Prince Hamlet.

Hamlet's murder of Polonius at the end of Act III is one of the most disturbing moments in the play. If it was previously possible to consider Hamlet a "hero" or an idealized version of a human being, it is no longer possible after he kills Polonius. His sensitive, reflective nature—the trait that constantly interfered with his ability to take revenge on Claudius—now disappears in the vigil of its violent opposite: a impetuous, murderous explosion of activity. Hamlet leaps to the conclusion that Claudius is behind the dosser, or else he simply lashes out thoughtlessly. In any case, Hamlet's moral superiority to Claudius is now thrown into question. He has killed Polonius just as Claudius killed Hamlet's father, the only differences being that Hamlet's murder was not contrived and was not committed out of jealousy or ambition. Hamlet also eases his conscience with the fact that Polonius was dishonestly spying on Hamlet at the moment when he was killed. But the result of Hamlet's deed is very similar to that of Claudius's: Laertes and Ophelia have lost a father, just as Hamlet himself did.

Now, Hamlet hides the body. But rather than being overwhelmed with contrition, as we might expect of a hero who has committed such a terrible mistake, he seems craze, desperate, and self-righteous, especially in his censure of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Throughout Act IV, scene ii, as in the play-within-a-play scene (Act III, scene ii), Hamlet's biting, ironic wit is combined with his rash, brash trace, and his feigned madness seems very close to the real thing. Though Hamlet has many admirable qualities, scenes such as this one serve as powerful reminders that we are not meant to take the prince as an unqualified hero.

Act IV, Scenes III- IV Summary: Act IV, Scene iii

The king speaks to a group of attendants, telling them of Polonius's death and his intention to send Hamlet to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear with Hamlet, who is under guard. Pressed by Claudius to reveal the location of Polonius's body, Hamlet is by turns insame, coy, and clever, saying that Polonius is being eaten by worms, and that the king could send a messenger to find Polonius in heaven or seek him in hell himself. Finally, Hamlet reveals that Polonius's body is under the stairs near the castle lobby, and the king dispatches his attendants to look there. The king tells Hamlet that he must leave at once for England, and Hamlet fervently agrees. He exits, and Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to ensure that he boards the ship at once. Alone with his thoughts, Claudius states his hope that England will obey the sealed orders he has sent with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The orders call for Prince Hamlet to be put to death.

Summary: Act IV, Scene iv

On a nearby plain in Denmark, young Prince Fortinbras marches at the head of his army, traveling through Denmark on the way to attack Poland. Fortinbras orders his captain to go and ask the King of Denmark for permission to travel through his lands. On his way, the captain encounters Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern on their way to the ship bound for England. The captain informs them that the Norwegian army rides to fight the Poles. Hamlet asks about the basis of the conflict, and the man tells him that the armies will fight over "a little patch of land / That hath in it no profit but the name" (IV.iv.98-99). Boggle by the thought that a bloody war could be fought over something so insignificant, Hamlet marvels that human beings are able to act so violently and purposefully for so little gain. By comparison, Hamlet has a great deal to gain from seeking his own bloody revenge on Claudius, and yet he still delays and fails to act toward his purpose. Loathed with himself for having failed to gain his revenge on Claudius, Hamlet declares that from this moment on, his thoughts will be bloody,

Analysis: Act IV, Scenes iii-iv

As we saw in Act IV, scene ii, the murder of Polonius and the subsequent atrocious encounter with his mother seem to leave Hamlet in a panic-stricken, unstable frame of mind, the mode in which his excitable nature seems very similar to actual madness. He taunts Claudius, toward whom his hostility is now barely disguised, and makes light of Polonius's murder with word games. He also pretends to

be thrilled at the idea of sailing for England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

At some level he is prepared for what is to come. His farewell to his mother proved as much, when he told her that he would trust his old schoolfellows as if they were "adders fang'd," that is, poisonous snakes (III.iv.185.2). But although Hamlet suspects his friends' perfidy, he may not fully realize the maliciousness of Claudius's designs for him. Claudius's intrigue in asking the English to execute Hamlet reveals the extent to which he now fears Hamlet: whether Hamlet is sane or mad, he is a danger to Claudius, and Claudius wishes him to die. It is also revealing that one of Claudius's considerations in seeking to have Hamlet murdered in far-off England, rather than merely executing him in Denmark, is that he is beloved by the common people of Denmark—"loved of the distracted horde," as Claudius says (IV.iii.4). Again, where King Hamlet was a brave warrior, King Claudius is a guileful politician, constantly working to strengthen his own power, elude threats to his throne, and manipulate those around him to his own advantage.

Act IV, scene iv restores the focus of the play to the theme of human action. Hamlet's encounter with the Norwegian captain serves to remind the reader of Fortinbras's presence in the world of the play and gives Hamlet another example of the will to action that he lacks. Earlier, he was amazed by the player's evocation of powerful feeling for Hecuba, a legendary character who meant nothing to him (II.ii). Now, he is awestruck by the willingness of Fortinbras to devote the energy of an entire army, probably wasting hundreds of lives and risking his own, to reclaim a worthless scrap of land in Poland. Hamlet considers the moral ambiguity of Fortinbras's action, but more than anything else he is impressed by the forcefulness of it, and that forcefulness becomes a kind of ideal toward which Hamlet decides at last to strive. "My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" he declares (IV.iv.9.56). Of course, he fails to put this exclamation into action, as he has failed at every previous turn to achieve his revenge on Claudius. "My thoughts be bloody," Hamlet says. Tellingly, he does not say "My deeds be bloody."

Act IV, Scenes V-VI Summary: Act IV, Scene v

Gertrude and Horatio discuss Ophelia. Gertrude does not wish to see the melancholy girl, but Horatio says that Ophelia should be pitied, explaining that her grief has made her disordered and incongruous. Ophelia enters. Adorned with flowers and singing strange songs, she

seems to have gone mad. Claudius enters and hears Ophelia's ravings, such as, "They say the owl was a baker's daughter" (IV.v.42). He says that Ophelia's grief stems from her father's death, and that the people have been suspicious and disturbed by the death as well: "muddied, / Thick and insalubrious in their thoughts and whispers / For good Polonius' death" (IV.v.77-79). He also mentions that Laertes has secretly sailed back from France.

A loud noise echoes from somewhere in the castle. Claudius calls for his guards, and a gentleman enters to warn the king that Laertes has come with a mob of common people. The mob calls Laertes "lord," according to the gentlemen, and the people whisper that "Laertes shall be king" (IV.v. 102-106). A furious Laertes storms into the hall, outraged in his desire to avenge his father's death. Claudius attempts to mitigate him by frankly acknowledging that Polonius is dead. Gertrude nervously adds that Claudius is innocent in it. When Ophelia reenters, obviously insane, Laertes sprees again into rage. Claudius claims that he is not responsible for Polonius's death and says that Laertes' desire for revenge is a credit to him, so long as he seeks revenge upon the proper person. Claudius convinces Laertes to hear his version of events, which he says will answer all his questions. Laertes agrees, and Claudius seconds his desire to achieve justice in the aftermath of Polonius's death: "Where th' offence is, let the great axe fall" (IV.v.213).

Summary: Act IV, Scene vi

In another part of the castle, Horatio is introduced to a pair of sailors bearing a letter for him from Hamlet. In the letter, Hamlet says that his ship was captured by pirates, who have returned him to Denmark. He asks Horatio to escort the sailors to the king and queen, for they have messages for them as well. He also says that he has much to tell of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Horatio takes the sailors to the king and then follows them to find Hamlet, who is in the countryside near the castle.

Analysis: Act IV, Scenes v-vi

As we have seen, one of the important themes of Hamlet is the connection between the health of a state and the moral lawfulness of its ruler. Claudius is rotten, and, as a result, Denmark is rotten too. Here, at the beginning of Act IV, scene v, things have palpably darkened for the nation: Hamlet is gone, Polonius is dead and has been buried in secret, Ophelia is raving mad, and, as Claudius tells us, the common i people are disturbed and murmuring among themselves. This baleful

turn of events leads to the abridged, miniature rebellion that accompanies Laertes' return to Denmark. Acting as the wronged son operating with open fury, Laertes has all the moral lawfulness that Claudius lacks the lawfulness that Hamlet has mulct through his murder of Polonius and his delay in avenging his father's death.

Laertes is Hamlet's best foil throughout the play, and in this scene the contrast between the two, each of whom has a dead father to avenge, reaches its peak. (A third figure with a dead father to avenge, Fortinbras, lurks on the horizon.) Whereas Hamlet is reflective and has difficulty acting, Laertes is active and has no use for thought. He has no interest in moral concerns, only in his consuming desire to avenge Polonius. When Claudius later asks Laertes how far he would go to avenge his father, Laertes replies that he would slit Hamlet's throat in the church (IV.vii.98). This statement, indicating his willingness to murder Hamlet even in a sacred place of worship, brings into sharp relief the contrast between the two sons: recall that Hamlet declined to kill Claudius as the king knelt in prayer Ull.iii).

As befits a scene full of anger and dark thoughts, Act IV, scene v brings a repetition of the motif of insanity, this time through the character of Ophelia, who has truly been driven mad by the death of her father. Shakespeare has demonstrated Ophelia's chaste dependence on the men in her life; after Polonius's sudden death and Hamlet's subsequent exile, she finds herself abruptly without any of them. Ophelia's lunatic ravings reveal a great deal about the nature of her mind at this stage in her young life. She is obsessed with depth, beauty, and an ambiguous sexual desire, expressed in startlingly frank imagery:

"Young men will do't, if they come to't, By Cock, they are to blame. Quoth she 'Before you tumbled me, You promised me to wed." (IV.v.59-62)

Some readers have interpreted passages such as these, combined with Hamlet's sexually crystal-clear deride of Ophelia in Act III, scene ii, as evidence that Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet was sexual in nature. Of course, this is impossible to conclude with any certainty, but from these lines it is apparent that Ophelia is scuffle with sexuality and that her sexual feelings, discouraged by her father, her brother, and her society, are close to the vanguard of her mind as she slips into insanity. But, most important, Ophelia's insanity is designed to contrast strongly with Hamlet's, differing primarily in its lawfulness: Ophelia does not dissimulate madness to achieve an end, but is truly driven mad by external pressures. Many of the worst elements in Denmark, including madness, fear, and rebellion, so far have been kept hidden under

various disguises, such as Hamlet's falsification and Claudius's court revelry, and are now beginning to emerge into the open.

After exiling Hamlet to England in Act IV, scene iv, Shakespeare now returns him to Denmark only two scenes later through the unorthodox contrivance—an improbable or unexpected device or character introduced to resolve a situation in a work of fiction or drama—of the pirate attack. The short Act IV, scene vi is primarily devoted to plot development, as Horatio reads Hamlet's letter narrating his adventure. The story of the pirate attack has little to do with the main themes of the play, but it does provide an interesting variation on the idea of retributive justice, since instead of punishing someone for doing something wrong, Hamlet states his intention to reward the pirates for the right they have done in returning him to Denmark. "They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy," he says, "but they knew what they did: I am to do a good turn for them" (IV.vi. 17-19). Additionally, Hamlet's letter features a return of the motif of ears and hearing, as the prince tells Horatio that "I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb," an open reference to the poison poured into King Hamlet's ear by the murderous Claudius (IV.vi.21).

Act IV, Scene VII Summary

As Horatio speaks to the sailors, Claudius and a calmer Laertes discuss Polonius's death. Claudius explains that he acted as he did, burying Polonius secretly and not punishing Hamlet for the murder, because both the common people and the queen love Hamlet very much. As a king and as a husband, he did not wish to upset either of them. A messenger enters with the letter from Hamlet to Claudius, which informs the king that Hamlet will return tomorrow. Laertes is pleased that Hamlet has come back to Denmark, since it means that his revenge will not be delayed.

Claudius agrees that Laertes deserves to be revenged upon Hamlet, and he is disposed to encourage Laertes to kill Hamlet, since Hamlet's turbulent behavior has made him a threat to Claudius's reign. The disreputable king begins to think of a way for Laertes to ensure his revenge without creating any appearance of foul play. He recalls that Hamlet has been jealous in. the past of Laertes' gallantry with a sword, which was recently praised before all the court by a Frenchman who had seen him in combat. The king speculates that if Hamlet could be tempted into a duel with Laertes, it might provide Laertes with the chance to kill him. Laertes agrees, and they settle on a plan. Laertes will use a sharpened sword rather than the customary dull fencing

blade. Laertes also proposes to poison his sword, so that even a scratch from it will kill Hamlet. The king concocts a backup plan as well, proposing that if Hamlet succeeds in the duel, Claudius will offer him a poisoned cup of wine to drink from in celebration.

Gertrude enters with tragic news. Ophelia, mad with grief, has drowned in the river. Anguished to have lost his sister so soon after his father's death, Laertes flees the room. Claudius summons Gertrude to follow. He tells her it was nearly impossible to quiet Laertes' rage, and worries that the news of Ophelia's death will reawaken it.

Analysis

The scheming Claudius encounters Laertes at approximately the same moment as he learns that Hamlet has survived and returned to Denmark. Claudius's behavior throughout this scene, as in Act IV, scene v, shows him at his most devious and calculating. Shakespeare shows Claudius's mind working overtime to derail Laertes' anger, which is thus far the greatest challenge his kingship has faced. In Act IV, scene v, Claudius decided that the way to appease Laertes was by appearing frank and honest. When Laertes asked furiously where his father was, Claudius replied, "Dead" (IV.v. 123), Additionally, in a masterful stroke of characterization, Shakespeare has the nervous Gertrude, unable to see Claudius's plan, follow this statement with a quick insistence on Claudius's innocence: "But not by him" (IV.v.123).

In this scene, Claudius has clearly decided that he can appease Laertes' anger and dispense with Hamlet in a single stroke: he hits upon the idea of the duel in order to use Laertes' rage to ensure Hamlet's death. The resulting plan brings both the theme of revenge and the repeated use of traps in the plot to a new height—Laertes and Claudius concoct not one but three covert mechanisms by which Hamlet may be killed.

Ophelia's tragic death occurs at the worst possible moment for Claudius. As Laertes flees the room in, Claudius follows, not to console or even to join him in mourning but because, as he tells Gertrude, it was so difficult to appease his anger in the first place. Claudius d'>es not have time to worry about the victiois of tragedy—he is too busy dealing with threats to his own power.

The image of Ophelia drowning amongst her garlands of flowers has proved to be one of the most images in the play, represented countless times by artists and poets throughout the centuries. Ophelia is associated with flower imagery from the beginning of the play. In her

first scene, Polonius presents her with a violet; after she goes mad, she sings songs about flowers; and now she drowns amongst long streams of them. The delicate beauty of the flowers resembles Ophelia's own delicate beauty, as well as her sexuality and her, doomed innocence.

Act V, Scene I Summary

In the churchyard, two gravediggers shovel out a grave for Ophelia. They argue whether Ophelia should be buried in the churchyard, since her death looks like a suicide. According to religious doctrine, suicides may not receive Christian burial. The first remains, who speaks cleverly and mischievously, asks the second remains a riddle: "What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?" (V.i.46-47). The second gravedigger answers that it must be the gallows-maker, for his frame outlasts a thousand tenants. The first gravedigger corrects him, saying that it is the gravedigger, for his "houses" will last until Doomsday.

Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work. Hamlet looks with wonder at the skulls they shovel to make room for the fresh grave and speculates darkly about what occupations the owners of these skulls served in life: "Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his mannerisms now... ?" (V.i.90-91). Hamlet asks the gravedigger whose grave he digs, and the gravedigger spars with him verbally, first claiming that the grave is his own, since he is digging it, then that the grave belongs to no man and no woman, because men and women are living things and the occupant of the grave will be dead. At last he admits that it belongs to one "that was a woman sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead" (V.i. 146). The gravedigger, who does not recognize Hamlet as the prince, tells him that he has been a gravedigger since King Hamlet defeated the elder Fortinbras in battle, the very day on which young Prince Hamlet was born. Hamlet picks up a skull, and the remains tells him that the skull belonged to Yorick, King Hamlet's jester. Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the sight of the skull. He realizes forcefully that all men will eventually become dust, even great men like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Hamlet imagines that Julius Caesar has disintegrated and is now part of the dust used to patch up a wall.

Suddenly, the funeral procession for Ophelia enters the churchyard, including Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, and many mourning courtiers. Hamlet, wondering who has died, notices that the funeral rites seem "maimed," indicating that the dead man or woman took his or her own

life (V.i.242). He and Horatio hide as the procession approaches the grave. As Ophelia is laid in the earth, Hamlet realizes it is she who has died. At the same moment, Laertes becomes aggravated with the priest, who says that to give Ophelia a proper Christian burial would lay the dead. Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave to hold her once again in his arms. Grief-stricken and writhed, Hamlet bursts upon the company, declaring in excruciate fury his own love for Ophelia. He leaps into the grave and fights with Laertes, saying that "forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / make up my sum" (V.i.254-256). Hamlet cries that he would do things for Ophelia that Laertes could not dream of—he would eat a crocodile for her, he would be buried alive with her. The antagonists are pulled apart by the funeral company. Gertrude and Claudius declare that Hamlet is mad. Hamlet storms off, and Horatio follows. The king urges Laertes to be patient, and to remember their plan for revenge.

Analysis

The gravediggers are designated as "clowns" in the stage directions and cue, and it is important to note that in Shakespeare's time the word clown referred to a pastoral or peasant, and did not mean that the person in question was funny or wore a costume.

The gravediggers represent a humorous type commonly found in Shakespeare's plays: the clever commoner who gets the better of his social superior through wit. At the Globe Theater, this type of character may have particularly appealed to the "groundlings," the members of the audience who could not afford seats and thus stood on the ground. Though they are usually figures of happiness, in this scene the gravediggers assume a rather macabre tone, since their jests and jibes are all made in a cemetery, among bones of the dead. Their conversation about Ophelia, however, furthers an important theme in the play: the question of the moral legitimacy of suicide under theological law. By giving this serious subject a darkly comic interpretation, Shakespeare essentially makes a fantastical parody of Hamlet's earlier "To be, or not to be" monologue (III.i), indicating the collapse of every lasting value in the play into uncertainty and absurdity.

Hamlet's confrontation with death, manifested primarily in his discovery of Yorick's skull, is, like Ophelia's drowning, an enduring image from the play. However, his solemn theorizing explodes in grief and rage when he sees Ophelia's funeral procession, and his assault on Laertes offers a glimpse of what his true feelings for Ophelia might

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

A notable minor motif that is developed in this scene is Hamlet's delusion with the physicality of death. Though many of his thoughts about death concern the spiritual consequences of dying—for instance, vex in the afterlife—he is nearly as fascinated by the physical decomposition of the body. This is nowhere more evident than in his preoccupation with Yorick's skull, when he envisions physical features such as lips and skin that have decomposed from the bone. Recall that Hamlet previously commented to Claudius that Polonius's body was at supper, because it was being eaten by worms (IV.iii). He is also fascinated by the equalizing effect of death and decomposition: great men and beggars both end as dust. In this scene, he imagines dust from the decomposed corpse of Julius Caesar being used to patch a wall; earlier, in Act IV, he noted, "A man may fish with the worm that have eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm," a metaphor by which he illustrates "how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (IV.iii.26-31).

Act V, Scene II Summary

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

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

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier. Osric tries to flatter Hamlet by agreeing with everything Hamlet says, even when he contradicts himself; in the space of seconds, he agrees first that it is cold, then that it is hot. He has come to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win. Then Osric begins to praise Laertes gushingly, though Hamlet and Horatio are unable to determine what point he is trying to make with his overly elaborate proclamations. Finally, a lord enters and asks Hamlet if he is ready to come to the match, as the king and queen are expecting him. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight, saying that "all's ill here about my heart," but that one must be ready for death, since it will come no matter what one does (V.ii.222). The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes says that he will not forgive Hamlet until an elder, an expert in the fine points of honor, has advised him in the matter. But, in the meantime, he says, he will accept Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (debilitate swords used in fencing), and the king says that if Hamlet wins the first or second hit, he will drink to Hamlet's health, then throw into the cup a valuable gem (actually the poison) and give the wine to Hamlet, The duel begins. Hamlet strikes Laertes but declines to drink from the cup, saying that he will play another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude rises to drink from the cup. The king tells her not to drink, but she does so anyway. In an aside, Claudius murmurs, "It is the poison'd cup: it is too late" (V.ii.235). Laertes remarks under his breath that to wound Hamlet with the poisoned sword is almost against his conscience. But they fight again, and Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet, drawing blood. Wrangling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, "I am justly kill'd with my own treachery" (V.ii.318). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies crying out for help. Hamlet tells Horatio

that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after exonerating Hamlet.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies.

Fortinbras marches into the room accompanied by the English ambassadors, who announce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio says that he will tell everyone assembled the story that led to the gruesome scene now on display. Fortinbras orders for Hamlet to be carried away like a soldier.

Analysis

In the final scene, the violence, so long delayed, erupts with confusing speed. Characters drop one after the other, poisoned, thrusted, and, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, executed, as the theme of revenge and justice reaches its conclusion in the moment when Hamlet finally kills Claudius. In the moments before the duel, Hamlet seems peaceful, though also quite sad. He says that he feels ill in his heart, but he seems reconciled to the idea of death and no longer troubled by fear of the supernatural. Exactly what has caused the change in Hamlet is unclear, but his desire to attain Laertes' forgiveness clearly represents an important shift in his mental state. Whereas Hamlet previously was obsessed almost wholly with himself and his family, he is now able to think sympathetically about others. He does not go quite so far as to take responsibility for Polonius's death, but he does seem to be acting with a broader perspective after the shock of Ophelia's death. Hamlet's death at the hands of Laertes makes his earlier declaration over Polonius's corpse, that God has chosen "to punish me with this and this with me," prophetic (III.iv.174). His murder of Polonius does punish him in the end, since it is Laertes' vengeful rage over that murder that leads to Hamlet's death.

That death is neither heroic nor shameful, according to the moral logic of the play. Hamlet achieves his father's vengeance, but only after being spurred to it by the most extreme circumstances one might consider possible: watching his mother die and knowing that he, too, will die in moments.

The arrival of Fortinbras effectively poses the question of political legitimacy once again. In marked contrast to the corrupted and weakened royal family lying dead on the floor, Fortinbras clearly represents a strong-willed, capable leader, though the play does not address the question of whether his rule will restore the moral authority of the state.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

1. O that this too solid flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead!—nay, not so much, not two: So excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother, That he might not beteem the winds of heaven Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him As if increase of appetite had grown By what it fed on: and yet, within a month,— Let me not think on't,—Frailty, thy name is woman!— A little month; or ere those shoes were old With which she followed my poor father's body Like Niobe, all tears;—why she, even she,— O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason, Would have mourn'd longer,—married with mine uncle, My father's brother; but no more like my father Than I to Hercules: within a month; Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, She married:— O, most wicked speed, to post With such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not, nor it cannot come to good; But break my heart,—for I must hold my tongue.

The above is Hamlet's first important soliloquy, that occurs in Act I, scene ii (129-158). Hamlet speaks these lines after enduring the unpleasant scene at Claudius and Gertrude's court, then being asked by his mother and stepfather not to return to his studies at Wittenberg but to remain in Denmark, presumably against his wishes. Here, Hamlet thinks for the first time about suicide (desiring his flesh to "melt," and wishing that God had not made "self-annihilation" a sin), saying that the world is "disgusted, stale, flat, and unprofitable." In other words, suicide seems like a desirable alternative to life in a painful world, but Hamlet feels that the option of suicide is closed to him because it is prohibited by religion. Hamlet then goes on to describe the causes of his pain, specifically his intense disgust at his mother's marriage to Claudius, He describes the haste of their marriage, noting that the shoes his mother wore to his father's funeral were not worn out before her marriage to Claudius. He compares Claudius to his father (his father was "so excellent a king" while Claudius is a thyroid "satyr"). As he runs through his description of their marriage, he touches upon the

important motifs of misogyny, crying, "Frailty, thy name is woman"; incest, commenting that his mother moved "[w]ith such dexterity to incestuous sheets"; and the ominous omen the marriage represents for Denmark, that "[i]t is not nor it cannot come to good." Each of these motifs recurs throughout the play.

2. Give thy thoughts no tongue, Nor any unproportion'd thought his act. Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar. Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried. Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel; But do not dull thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in, Bear*t that the opposed may beware of thee. Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice: Take each man's censure, but reserve your judgment. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy: For the apparel constantly proclaims the man; And they in France of the best rank and station Are most select and generous chief in that. Neither a borrower nor a lender be: For loan oft loses both itself and friend; And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. This above all,—to thine own self be true; And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.

This famous bit of fatherly advice is spoken by Polonius to Laertes shortly before Laertes leaves for France, in Act I, scene iii (59-80). Polonius, who is bidding Laertes farewell, gives him this list of instructions about how to behave before he sends him on his way. His advice amounts to a list of truisms. Keep your thoughts to yourself; do not act fireclay treat people with familiarity but not excessively so; hold on to old friends and be slow to trust new friends; avoid fighting but fight boldly if it is unavoidable; be a good listener; accept criticism but do not be judgmental; maintain a proper appearance; do not borrow or lend money; and be true to yourself. This long list of quite normal fatherly advice emphasizes the regularity of Laertes' family life compared to Hamlet's, as well as contributing a somewhat stereotypical father-son encounter in the play's exploration of family relationships. It seems to indicate that Polonius loves his son, though that idea is complicated later in the play when he sends Reynaldo to spy on him.

3. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

This line is spoken by Marcellus in Act I, scene iv (67), as he and Horatio debate whether or not to follow Hamlet and the ghost into the dark night. The line refers both to the idea that the ghost is an baleful prognostic for Denmark and to the larger theme of the connection between the moral lawfulness of a ruler and the health of the state as a whole. The ghost is a visible symptom of the rottenness of Denmark created by Claudius's crime.

4. I have of late—but wherefore I know not,—lost all my merriment, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my temperament that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a arid jetty; this most excellent awring, the air, look you, this brave overhanging the heaven, this majestically roof agenized with golden fire,—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! The epitome of animals! And yet, to me, what is this apotheosis of dust?

In these lines, Hamlet speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act II, scene ii (287-298), explaining the melancholy that has afflicted him since his father's death. Perhaps moved by the presence of his former university companions, Hamlet essentially engages in a rhetorical exercise, building up an elaborate and glorified picture of the earth and humanity before declaring it all merely a "apotheosis of dust." He examines the earth, the air, and the sun, and rejects them as "a sterile promontory" and "a foul and contagion gathering of vapors." He then describes human beings from several perspectives, each one adding to his extortion of them. Human beings' reason is noble, their faculties infinite, their forms and movements fast and admirable, their actions angelic, and their understanding godlike. But, to Hamlet, humankind is merely dust. This motif, an expression of his obsession with the physicality of death, recurs throughout the play, reaching its height in his speech over Yorick's skull. Finally, it is also telling that Hamlet makes humankind more impressive in "apprehension" (meaning understanding) than in "action." Hamlet himself is more prone to apprehension than to action, which is why he delays so long before seeking his revenge on Claudius.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Consider Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's role in the play. Why might Shakespeare have created characters like this? Are they there for comic relief, or do they serve a more serious purpose? Why does the news of their deaths come only after the deaths of the royal family in Act V, as if this news were not anticlimactic? Is it acceptable for Hamlet to treat them as he does? Why or why not?

2. Analyze the use of descriptions and images in Hamlet. How does Shakespeare use descriptive language to enhance the visual possibilities of a stage production? How does he use imagery to create a mood of tension, suspense, fear, and despair ?

3. Analyze the use of comedy in Hamlet, paying particular attention to the cremains, Osric, and Polonius. Does comedy serve merely to relieve the tension of the tragedy, or do the comic scenes serve a more serious confined purpose as well?

4. Suicide is an important theme in Hamlet. Discuss how the play treats the idea of suicide morally, religiously, and beautifully, with particular attention to Hamlet's two important statements about suicide: the "O, that this too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy (I.ii.129-158) and the "To be, or not to be" monologue (III.i.56-88). Why does Hamlet believe that, although capable of suicide, most human beings choose to live, despite the cruelty, pain, and injustice of the world?

SUGGESTED

1. Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human — Harold Bloom
2. Shakespearean Tragedy — A.C. Bradley
3. "Hamlet and His Problems" In the Sacred Wood — T.S. Eliot
4. Hamlet in Purgatory — Stephen Greebalt

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4

A DOLL'S HOUSE-HENRIK IBSEN

STRUCTURE

- Learning goals
- Introduction
- About the author
- Synopsis of the play
- Doll's house – plot
- Important characters
- Analysis of major characters
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
- Summary and analysis
- Important quotations
- Summary
- Key words
- Check your progress
- Answers to check your progress
- Review questions
- Suggested reading

INTRODUCTION

A Doll's House is an 1879 play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibser. Written one year after The Pillars of Society, the play was the first of Ibsen's to create a sensation and is now perhaps his most famous play, and required reading in many secondary schools and universities. The play was contentious when first published, as it is sharply critical of 19th century marriage norms. It follows the formula of well-made play up until the final act, when it breaks convention by ending with a discussion, not an unravelling. It is often called the first true feminist play. The play is also an important work of the naturalist movement, in which real events and situations are dilincated on stage in a departure

from previous forms such as romanticism. The influence of the play was recognized by UNESCO hi 2CO'.! when Henrik Ibsen's autographed manuscripts of A Doll's House wore inpcri the World Register in recognition of t-heir historical value.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At fifteen, Ibsen was forced to leave school. He mound to the small town of Grimstad to become an apprentice pharmacist and begun 'writing plays. In 1846, when Ibsen was age 18, a intermediary with a servant produced an illegitimate child, whose upbringing Ibsen had to pay for until the boy was in his teens, though Ibsen never saw the boy. Ibsen went to Christiania destine to inscribe at the university. He soon rejected the idea, preferring to commit himself to writing. His first play, the tragedy Catiline (1850), was published under the pseudonym "Brynjolf Bjarme", when he was only 20, but it was not performed. His first play to be staged, The Burial Mound (1850), received little attention. Still, Ibsen was determined to be a playwright, although the numerous plays he wrote in the following years remained unsuccessful. Ibsen's main inspiration in the early period, right up to Peer Gynt, was apparently Norwegian author Henrik Wergeland and the Norwegian folk tales as collected by Peter Christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe. In Ibsen's youth, Wergeland was the most extolled, and by far the most read, Norwegian poet and playwright.

Life and Writings

He spent the next several years employed at Det norske Theater (Bergen), where he was involved in the production of more than 145 plays as a writer, director, and producer. During this period, he did not publish any new plays of his own. Despite Ibsen's failure to achieve success as a playwright, he gained a great deal of practical experience at the Norwegian Theater, experience that was to prove valuable when he continued writing.

Ibsen returned to Christiania in 1858 to become the creative director of the Christiania Theatre. He married Suzannah Thoresen on 18 June 1858 and she gave birth to their only child Sigurd on 23 December 1859. The couple lived in very poor financial circumstances and Ibsen became very disenchanted with life in Norway. In 1864, he left Christiania and went to Sorrento in Italy in self-imposed exile. He was not to return to his native land for the next 27 years, and when he returned it was as a noted, but contentious, playwright.

His next play, Brand (1865), was to bring him the censorious applaud he sought, along with a measure of financial success, as was the following play, Peer Gynt (1867), to which Edvard Grieg famously composed incidental music and songs. Although Ibsen read snippets of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard and traces of the latter's influence are evident in Brand, it was not until after Brand that Ibsen came to take Kierkegaard seriously. Initially annoyed with his friend Georg Brandes for comparing Brand to Kierkegaard, Ibsen nevertheless read either/ or and Fear and Palipitate. Ibsen's next play Peer Gynt was consciously informed by Kierkegaard.

With success, Ibsen became more confident and began to introduce more and more of. his own beliefs and judgments into the drama, exploring what he termed the "drama of ideas". His next series of plays are often considered his Golden Age, when he entered the height of his power and influence, becoming the center of dramatic controversy across Europe.

Ibsen moved from Italy to Dresden, Germany in 1868, where he spent years writing the play he regarded as his main work, Emperor and Galilean (1873), dramatizing the life and times of the Roman emperor Julian the Heretic. Although Ibsen himself always looked back on this play as the cornerstone of his entire works, very few shared his opinion, and his next works would be much more acclaimed. Ibsen moved to Munich in 1875 and published A Doll's House in 1879. The play is a scathing criticism of the marital roles accepted by men and women which characterized Ibsen's society.

Ghosts followed in 1881, another coruscating exegesis on the morality of Ibsen's society, in which a widow reveals to her cleric that she had hidden the evils of her marriage for its duration. The pastor had advised her to marry her betrothed" despite his trifle, and she did so in the belief that her love would reform him. But his trifle continued right up until his death, and his vices are passed on to their son in the form of syphilis. The mention of venereal disease alone was discreditable, but to show how it could poison a respectable family was considered intolerable.

In An Enemy of the People (1882), Ibsen went even further. In earlier plays, controversial elements were important and even crucial components of the action, but they were on the small scale of individual households. In An Enemy, dissension became the primary focus, and the antagonist was the entire community. One primary message of the play is that the individual, who stands alone, is more often "right" than the mass of people, who are delineate as ignorant and

sheeplike. Contemporary society's belief was that the community was a noble institution that could be trusted, a notion Ibsen challenged. In An Enemy of the People, Ibsen upbraided not only the conservatism of society, but also the liberalism of the time. He illustrated how people on both aides of the social hue cycle could be equally self-serving. An Enemy of the People was written as a response to the people who had rejected his previous work, Ghosts. The plot of the play is a cloaked look at the way people reacted to the plot of Ghosts. The protagonist is a physician in a vacation spot whose primary draw is a public bath. The doctor discovers that the water is contaminated by the local tannery. He expects to be extolled for saving the town from the nightmare of infecting visitors with disease, but instead he is declared an 'enemy of the people' by the locals, who band against him and even throw stones through his windows. The play ends with his complete repudiation. It is obvious to the reader that disaster is in store for the town as well as for the doctor.

As audiences by now expected of him, his next play again attacked ingrained beliefs and assumptions; but this time, his attack was not against society's mores, but against overeager reformers and their idealism. Always an iconoclast, Ibsen was equally willing to tear down the ideologies of any part of the political spectrum, including his own.

The Wild Duck (1884) is by many considered Ibsen's finest work, and it is certainly the most complex. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after an extended exile and is reunited with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. Over the course of the play, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' apparently happy home are revealed to Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the "Summons of the Ideal". Among these truths: Gregers' father permeated his servant Gina, then married her off to Hjalmar to validate the child. Another man has been disgraced and imprisoned for a crime the elder Werle committed. Furthermore, while Hjalmar spends his days working on a wholly imaginary "invention", his wife is earning the household income.

Ibsen displays masterful use of irony: despite his peremptory insistence on truth, Gregers never says what he thinks but only insinuates, and is never understood until the play reaches its climax. Gregers hammers away at Hjalmar through implication and coded phrases until he realizes the truth; Gina's daughter, Hedvig, is not his child. Blinded by Gregers' insistence on absolute truth, he disavows the child. Seeing the damage he has wrought, Gregers determines to repair things, and suggests to Hedvig that she sacrifice the wild duck, her

wounded pet, to prove her love for Hjalmar. Hedvig, alone among the characters, recognizes that Gregers always speaks in code, and looking for the deeper meaning in the first important statement Gregers makes which does not contain one, kills herself rather than the duck in order to prove her love for him in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Only too late do Hjalmar and Gregers realize that the absolute truth of the "ideal" is sometimes too much for the human heart to bear.

Late in his career, Ibsen turned to a more inward-looking drama that had much less to do with denunciations of society's moral values. In such later plays as Hedda Gabler (1890) and The Master Builder (1892), Ibsen explored psychological conflicts that outstripped a simple rejection of current conventions. Many modern readers, who might regard anti-Victorian didacticism as dated, simplistic or overused, have found these later works to be of absorbing interest for their hard-edged, objective consideration of communal elash. Hedda Gabler is probably Ibsen's most performed play, with the title role regarded as one of the most challenging and rewarding for an actress even in the present day. Hedda Gabler and A Doll's House center on female protagonists whose almost fiendish energy proves both attractive and destructive for those around them, and while Hedda has a few similarities with the character of Nora in A Doll's House, many of today's audiences and theater critics feel that Hedda's intensity and drive are much more complex and much less comfortably explained than what they view as rather routine feminism on the part of Nora.

Ibsen had completely rewritten the rules of drama with a verisimilitude which was to be adopted by Chekhov and others and which we see in the theater to this day. From Ibsen forward, challenging assumptions and directly speaking about issues has been considered one of the factors that makes a play art rather than entertainment. He had a abstruse influence on the young James Joyce who adulates him in his early autobiographical novel "Stephen Hero". Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, but it was in many ways not the Norway he had left. Indeed, he had played a major role in the changes that had happened across society. The Victorian Age was on its last legs, to be replaced by the rise of Modernism not only in the theater, but across public life.

Death

On 23 May 1906, Ibsen died in his home at Arbins gade 1 in Christiania after a series of strokes in March 1900. When, on 22 May, his nurse assured a visitor that he was a little better, Ibsen spattered his

last words "On the contrary". He died the following day at 2:30 P.M. Ibsen was buried in Var Frelsers gravlund ("The Graveyard of Our Savior") in central Oslo.

Works

- 1850 Catiline
- 1850 The Burial Mound also known as The Warrior's Barrow
- 1851 Norma
- 1852 St. John's Eve
- 1854 Lady Inger of Oestraat
- 1855 The Feast at Solhaug
- 1856 Olaf Liljekrans
- 1857 The Vikings at Helgoland
- 1862 Digte
- 1862 Love's Comedy
- 1863 The Pretenders
- 1866 Brand
- 1867 Peer Gynt
- 1869 The League of Youth
- 1873 Emperor and Galilean
- 1877 Pillars of Society
- 1879 A Doll's House
- 1881 Ghosts
- 1882 An Enemy of the People
- 1884 The Wild Duck
- 1886 Rosmersholm
- 1888 The Lady from the Sea
- 1890HeddaGabler
- 1892 The Master Builder
- 1894 Little Eyolf
- 1896 John Gabriel Borkman

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Act I

A Doll's House opens as Nora Helmer gets back from Christmas shopping. Her husband Torvald comes out of his study to banter with her. They discuss how their finances will improve now that Torvald has a new job as a bank manager. Torvald expresses his horror of mortgage. With her husband, Torvald, Nora behaves very childishly, and he enjoys treating her like a child to beenjoined and satiated.

Soon an old friend of Nora's, Christine Linde, arrives. She is a childless widow who is moving back to the city. Her husband left her no money, so she has tried different kinds of work, and now hopes to find some work that is not tooherculean. Nora divulges to Christine that she once secretly borrowed money from a opprobrium lawyer, Nils Krogstad, to save Torvald's life when he was very ill, but she has not told him in order to protect his pride. She told everyone that the money came from her father, who died at about the same time. She has been repaying the mortgage from her housekeeping budget, and also from some work she got copying papers by hand, which she did secretly in her room, and took pride in her ability to earn money "as

- 1854 Lady Inger of Oestraat
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"as if she were a man." Torvald's new job promises to finally liberate her from this debt. Nora asks Torvald to give Christine a position as a secretary in the bank, and he agrees, as she has experience in bookkeeping. They leave the house together.

Krogstad arrives and tells Nora that he is worried he will be fired to create a position for Christine. He asks her to help him keep his job and says that he will fight perilously to keep it. Nora is grudging to commit to helping him, so Krogstad reveals that he knows she committed falsification on the bond she signed for her loan from him. As a woman, she needed an adult male co-signer, so she said she would have her father do so. However the signature is dated three days after his death, which suggests that it is a falsification. Nora admits that she did falsify the signature, so as to spare her dying father further worry about her (she was pregnant, poor, and had a seriously ill husband). Krogstad explains that the falsification deceive his trust and is also a serious crime. If he told others about it, her notoriety would be ruined, as was his after a similar "incaution," even though he was never arraign. He entail that what he did was in or to provide for his sick wife, who later died.

Krogstad leaves, and Nora tries to calm herself by decorating the Christmas tree. Torvald comes back home, having seen Krogstad, and guesses that he was there to ask Nora to negotiate on his behalf. Nora asks what Krogstad did in order to get a reputation as an immoral man. Torvald says that he committed a falsification, but was able to avoid accuser by using .1 "cunning trick." If Krogstad had ever admitted his guilt, Torvald would be willing to trust him, but by continuing to pretend that he never did anything wrong, Krogstad "has lost all moral character." Torvald further states that a parent wh '-> lives a lie "poisons" his or her children and causes them to become criminals. Nora is terribly agitated to learn of this notion, which she believes

credulous, and worries that she may be harming her children unknowingly.

Act II

Christine arrives to help Nora repair a dress for a costume party she and Torvald are going to tomorrow. Then Torvald comes home from the bank and Nora entreats with him to establish Krogstad at the bank. She claims she is worried that Krogstad will publish libellous articles about Torvald and ruin his career. Torvald dismisses her fears and explains that although Krogstad is a good worker and seems to have turned his life around, he insists on firing him because Krogstad is not reverential enough to him in front of other bank crew. Torvald goes into his study to do some work.

Next Dr. Rank, a family friend, arrives. Nora talks about asking him for a favor. Then he reveals that he has entered the terminal stage of tuberculosis of the spine (a contemporary floridness for innate syphilis), and that he has always been secretly in love with her. Nora tries to deny the- first divulgence and make light of it, but she is more disturbed by the second. tries clumsily to tell him that she is not in love with him, but loves him dearly as a friend.

Desperate after being fired by Torvald, Krogstad arrives at the house. Nora gets Dr. Rank to go in to Torvald's study, so he does not see Krogstad. When Krogstad comes in he declares he no longer cares about the remaining balance of Nora's loan, but that he will preserve the associated bond in order to blackmail Torvald into not only keeping him employed, but giving him a promotion. Nora explains that she has done her best to persuade her husband, but he refuses to change his mind. Krogstad informs Nora that he has written a letter detailing her crime (fabricate her father's signature of guarantor on the bond) and puts it in Torvald's mailbox, which is locked.

Nora tells Christine of her imbroglio. Christine says that she and Krogstad were in love before she married, and promises that she will try to convince him to acquiesce. Torvald comes in and tries to check his mail, but Nora diverts him by begging him to help her with the dance she has been rehearsing for the costume party, as she is so anxious about performing. She dances so badly and acts so worried that Torvald agrees to spend the whole evening coaching her. When the others go in to dinner, Nora stays behind for a few minutes and envisages suicide to save her husband from the shame of the divulgence of her crime, and more importantly to pre-empt any chivalrous gesture on his part to save her sobriety.

Christine tells Krogstad that she only married her husband because she had no other means to support her sick mother and young siblings, and that she has returned to offer him her love again. She believes that he would not have descended to unscrupulous behavior if he had not been devastated by her jilting and in awful financial inlets. Krogstad is moved and offers to take back his letter to Torvald. However, Christine decides that Torvald should know the truth for the sake of his and Nora's marriage.

Act III

After literally dragging Nora home from the party, Torvald goes to check his mail, but is delayed by Dr. Rank, who has followed them. Dr. Rank chats for a while so as to convey diagonally to Nora that this is a final goodbye, as he has determined that his death is near, but in general terms so that Torvald does not suspect what he is referring to. Dr. Rank leaves, and Torvald recifys his letters. As he reads them Nora steels herself to take her life. Torvald tackles her with Krogstad's letter. UInfuriated, he declares that he is now completely in Krogstad's power—he must capitulate to Krogstad's demands and keep quiet about the whole affair. He rebukes Nora, calling her a fraudulent and unethical woman and telling her she is unfit to raise their children. He says that from now on their marriage will be only a matter of appearances.

A maid enters, delivering a letter to Nora. Krogstad has returned the implicating papers, saying that he contritions his actions. Torvald rejoices that he is saved as he burns the papers. He takes back his jarring words to his wife and tells her that he forgive her. Nora realizes that her husband is not the strong and chivalrous man she thought he was, and that far from loving her, Torvald only really loves himself. What has appeared to be his love for Nora is merely quenching at cognizant himself to be a wonderful husband.

Torvald explains that when a man has forgiven his wife it makes him love her all the more since it reminds him that she is totally dependent on him, like a child. He banishes Nora's excruciate choice made against her compunction for the sake of his health and her years of secret efforts to free them from the consequential obligations and danger of loss of reputation, while preserving his peace of mind, as a mere mistake that she made owing to her foolishness, one of her most captivating dainty dainty traits.

Nora tells Torvald that she is leaving him to live alone so she can find out who she is and what she believes and decide what to do with

her life. She says she has been treated like a doll to play with, first by her father and then by him. Concerned for the family reputation, Torvald insists that she fulfill her duty as a wife and mother, but Nora says that her first duties are to herself, and she cannot be a good mother or wife without learning to be more than a plaything. She affirms that she had expected that he would want to sacrifice his esteem for hers, and that she had planned to kill herself to prevent him from doing so. She now realizes that Torvald is not at all the kind of person she had believed him to be, and that their marriage has been based on mutual delusion and misunderstanding.

Torvald is unable to grasp Nora's point of view, since it so contradicts his own ideas about her mind. Furthermore, he is so egotistical that it would be impossible for him to bear to understand how he appears to her, as egocentric, sanctimonious and more concerned with public esteem than with actual morality. As Nora lets herself out, leaving behind her wedding ring and keys, Torvald remains utterly perplexed by what has happened.

Alternative Ending

It was felt by Ibsen's German agent that the original ending would not play well in German theatres; therefore, for the play's German debut, Ibsen was forced to write an alternative ending for it to be considered acceptable. In this ending, Nora is led to her children after having argued with Torvald. Seeing them, she slumps, and the curtain is brought down. Ibsen later called the ending a discredit to the original play and referred to it as a 'unsophisticated outrage'.

DOLL'S HOUSE – PLOT

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

A Doll's House opens on Christmas Eve. Nora Helmer enters her well-furnished living room—the setting of the entire play—carrying several packages. Torvald Helniei1-, Nora's husband, comes out of his study when he hears her arrive. He greets her playfully and tenderly, but then upbraids her for spending so much money on Christmas gifts. Their conversation affirms that the Helmers have had to be careful with money for many years, but that Torvald has recently obtained a new position at the bank where he works that will afford them a more comfortable lifestyle.

Helene, the maid, announces that the Helmers' dear friend Dr. Rank has come to visit. At the same time, another unknown visitor has

arrived. To Nora's great surprise, Kristine Linde, a former school friend, comes into the room. The two have not seen each other for years, but Nora mentions having read that Mrs. Linde's husband passed away a few years earlier. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that when her husband died, she was left with no money and no children. Nora tells Mrs. Linde about her first year of marriage to Torvald. She explains that they were very poor and both had to work long hours. Torvald became sick, she adds, and the couple had to travel to Italy so that Torvald could recover.

Nora probes further about Mrs. Linde's life, and Mrs. Linde explains that for years she had to care for hor sick mother and her two younger brothers. She states that her mother has passed away, though, and that the brothers are too old to need her. Instead of feeling relief, Mrs. Linde says she feels empty because she has no occupation; she hopes that Torvald may be able to help her prevail employment. Nora promises to speak to Torvald and then affirms a great secret to Mrs. Linde—without Torvald's knowledge, Nora illegally borrowed money for the trip that she and Torvald took to Italy; she told Torvald that the money had come from her father. For years, Nora reveals, she has worked and saved in secret, slowly repaying the mortgage and soon it will be fully repaid.

Krogstad, a low-level employee at the bank where Torvald works, arrives and proceeds into Torvald's study. Nora reacts uneasily to Krogstad's presence, and Dr. Rank, coming out of the study, says Krogstad is "morally sick." Once he has finished meeting with Krogstad, Torvald comes into the living room and says that he can probably employ Mrs. Linde at the bank. Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde then depart, leaving Nora by herself. Nora's children return with their nanny, Anne-Marie, and Nora plays with them until she notices Krogstad's presence in the room. The two antipodes and Krogstad is divulged to be the source of Nora's secret loan.

Krogstad states that Torvald wants to fire him from his position at the bank and implies to his own poor notoriety. He asks Nora to use her influence to assure that his position remains secure. When she refuses, Krogstad points out that he has in his possession a contract that contains Nora's falsification of her father's signature. Krogstad blackmails Nora, threatening to reveal her crime and to bring shame and disgrace on both Nora and her husband if she does not prevent Torvald from firing him. Krogstad leaves, and when Torvald returns, Nora tries to persuade him not to fire Krogstad, but Torvald will hear

nothing of it. He declares Krogstad an immoral man and states that he feels physically ill in the presence of such people.

Act Two opens on the following day, Christmas. Alone, Nora paces her living room, filled with anxiety. Mrs. Linde arrives and helps sew Nora's costume for the ball that Nora will be attending at her neighbors' home the following evening. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Dr. Rank has a mortal illness that he inherited from his father. Nora's sceptical behavior leads Mrs. Linde to guess that Dr. Rank is the source of Nora's loan. Nora denies Mrs. Linde's charge but refuses to affirm the source of her distress. Torvald arrives, and Nora again begs him to keep Krogstad employed at the bank, but again Torvald refuses. When Nora presses him, he admits that Krogstad's moral behavior isn't all that bothers him—he dislikes Krogstad's overly familiar attitude. Torvald and Nora argue until Torvald sends the maid to deliver Krogstad's letter of dismissal.

Torvald leaves. Dr. Rank arrives and tells Nora that he knows he is close to death. She attempts to cheer him up and begins to coquette with him. She seems to be preparing to ask him to intercede on her behalf in her struggle with Torvald. Suddenly, Dr. Rank reveals to Nora that he is in love with her. In light of this revelation, Nora refuses to ask Dr. Rank for anything.

Once Dr. Rank leaves, Krogstad arrives and demands an explanation for his redundancy. He wants respectability and has changed the terms of the extortion: he now insists to Nora that not only that he be recruited at the bank but that he be recruited in a higher position. He then puts a letter detailing Nora's mortgage and falsification in the -Helmers' letterbox. In a panic, Nora tells Mrs. Linde everything, and Mrs. Linde instructs Nora to detain Torvald from opening the letter as long as possible while she goes to speak with Krogstad. In order to distract Torvald from the letterbox, Nora begins to practice the tarantella she will perform at that evening's costume party. In her agitated emotional state, she dances wildly and violently, displeasing Torvald. Nora manages to make Torvald promise not to open his mail until after she performs at the party. Mrs. Linde soon returns and says that she has left Krogstad a note but that he will be gone until the following evening.

The next night, as the costume party takes place upstairs, Krogstad meets Mrs. Linde in the Helmers' living room. Their conversation affirms that the two had once deeply in love, but Mrs. Linde left Krogstad for a affluentier man who would enable her to support her family. She tells Krogstad that now that she is free of her own pert

opportunity, however, Torvald shows no intention of sacrificing anything for Nora, thinking only of himself and of appearances.

Ultimately, Torvald's selfishness becomes discernible in his lack of concern about his wife's fate, despite the fact that she committed a crime to save his life. He trepidations upon learning of Nora's crime not because he cares about what will happen to her but because he worries that his notoriety will be damaged if knowledge of Nora's crime becomes public. Instead of treating Nora with understanding and indebtedness for her noble insistent, he threatens and blames her and then immediately begins to think of ways to cover up the shame that she has heave on his family. His decree of "I'm saved" after Krogstad's letter of annulment arrives reflects that he has been thinking only of himself in his trepidation. He says nothing about Nora until she asks, "And me?" His casual response—"You too, naturally"—affians how much her well-being is an afterthought to him.

Torvald's egocentric reaction to Krogstad's letter opens Nora's eyes to the truth about her relationship with Torvald and leads her to rearrange her preeminence's and her course of action. Her shift from thinking about suicide to deciding to walk out on Torvald reflects an increased independence and sense of self. Whereas she earlier -perishes to pressure from Torvald to preserve the appearance of idealized family life (she lies about eating macaroons and considers suicide—the ultimate hecatomb of herself—in order to tuck away her felongs), she now realizes that she can exist outside Torvald's confined realm.

Act Three, Continued

"You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's because of you I've made nothing of my life."

Summary

Torvald tells Nora that they must forget what has happened. Seeing her face expressionless, Torvald attempts to assure Nora that although she may not believe him, he has completely forgiven her. He says that he understands that her actions stemmed from love and that he doesn't blame her for not understanding that "the ends didn't justify the means." He tells her to rely on him as her guardian and teacher, because he loves her and finds her all the more attractive for her dependence upon him.

Nora changes out of her costume and into everyday clothes. Torvald continues to assure her that everything will be okay. In fact, he proclaims that, by forgiving her, "it's as if [a man has] twice made [his wife] his own." He says that he feels he has given Nora a new life so that she is now both his wife and his child.

Nora replies that Torvald has never understood her and that, until that evening, she has never understood Torvald. She points out that—for the first time in their

Torvald refuses to allow Nora to leave and says that the family must pretend that all is as it was before, but he states that Nora should no longer be able to see the children. He says that he will try to silence Krogstad by paying him off and hopes that he and Nora can at least keep up the appearance of happiness.

By this point, Nora has become strangely calm, frozen with comprehension as she begins to recognize the truth about her marriage. The doorbell rings, and soon after, the maid Helene enters with a letter for Nora, Torvald seizes the letter from her hands, sees that it is from Krogstad, and reads it himself. Nora does not protest. To Torvald's solace, Krogstad writes that he has decided to stop blackmailing Nora. In his letter, Krogstad includes Nora's promissory note (the one on which she feign her father's signature). Torvald relaxes, wrenchs up the contract, throws it into the stove, and tells Nora that life can go back to normal now that this "bad dream" has ended.

"From now on, forget happiness.' Now it's just about saving the remains, the detritus, the appearance."

Analysis

For most of the play, we see Torvald delighting in Nora's dependence upon him but not in his control over her. Nora does refer to Torvald's restrictions of her actions— she mentions that he proscribe macaroons, for instance—but the side of Torvald we see is more pushover than tyrant. He seems to love his wife so much that he allows her to do whatever she pleases, as when he gives her more money to spend after she returns from buying gifts. In the scene following the party, however, Torvald's enjoyment of his control over Nora takes on a darker tone with his somewhat perverse sexual advances toward Nora. He treats her like his possession, like the young girl he first accomplished years ago. Contributing to the feeling of control that Torvald is exercising over Nora is that the evening has been of Torvald's design—he dresses Nora in a costume of his choosing and coaches her to dance the tarantella in the manner that he finds "desirable."

Torvald's impotence to understand Nora's difference of opinion when he attempts to beguile her stems from his belief that Nora, as his wife, is his property. Because he considers her simply an element of the life that he idealizes, her coldness and rebuff of his sexual advances leave him not perplexed but skeptical. He has so long believed in the hallucinatory relationship that Nora has helped him create over the years that he cannot apprehend the reality of the situation—that Nora is vexation with her life and willing to express it.

The inanity of Torvald's promises to save Nora shows how little he appreciates her hecatomb. Nora expects compassion from Torvald after he finds out about her quagmire, especially since, after learning of Dr. Rank's impending death, Torvald confesses that he fantasizes about risking his life to save Nora's. Once given the

compliments and teases Nora for Mrs. Linde's benefit, then leaves the room in search of a candle. While he is gone, Mrs. Linde tells Nora that she has spoken to Krogstad and that Nora must tell her husband everything. Nora says, "I knew," but then says that she will not tell Torvald. Mrs. Linde reminds her of the letter. Torvald returns, notices Mrs. Linde's knitting, and tells her that she should take up embroidery instead, saying that embroidery is a more graceful pastime than knitting. Mrs. Linde says goodnight and then departs.

Torvald expresses his relief that Nora's boring friend has gone, and he begins to move toward his wife. She tells him to stop watching her, but he protests that he is always designate to watch his "prize possession." He continues his sexual advances, telling Nora that when they are in public, he imagines her as his "secret betrothed" and "young bride." Nora continues to protest, saying she wishes to be alone.

Dr. Rank knocks on the door, annoying Torvald by calling so late. In front of Torvald, Nora and Dr. Rank speak in ciphered terms about the experiment that Dr. Rank was to do on himself; Dr. Rank says that the result is clear, then exits. Torvald thinks that Dr. Rank is simply drunk, but Nora understands that Dr. Rank has come to tell her that he is certain of his looming death.

Torvald goes to retrieve his mail and notices that someone has been meddling with the mailbox lock using one of Nora's hairpins. Nora blames the children. In the mail, Torvald finds that Dr. Rank has left two calling cards with black crosses on them. Nora explains to Torvald that this means that Dr. Rank has gone away to die. Torvald expresses sadness, but decides that Dr. Rank's death might be best for everyone, since it will make Torvald and Nora "quite dependent on each other." He tells Nora that he loves her so much that he has wished in the past that Nora's life were threatened so that he could risk everything to save her.

Nora emboldens Torvald to open his letters, but he argues that he would rather spend time with her. She reminds him that he must think of his dying friend, and he finally agrees that perhaps reading his letters will clear from his head the thoughts of "death and decay."

Torvald goes into the other room, and Nora paces for a while. She throws Torvald's cloak around her shoulders and her fichu on her head. She is envisaging suicide and is about to rush out of the house never to return when Torvald storms out of his study in a furor after reading Krogstad's letter. Nora confesses that everything Rrogstad has written is true and tells Torvald she has loved him more than anything. Torvald tells her to stop talking, bewails the ugliness of the falsification, and calls Nora a bigot and a falsifier. He then says that he should have seen such a thing coming—Nora's father was a morally reckless individual. Torvald blames Nora for ruining his life and his happiness by putting him at Krogstad's mercy.

some moral rectitude. Despite her desperate need, she realizes that she would be taking advantage of Dr. Rank by subsidizing on his solemn love for her.

When Nora explains that Dr. Rank's poor health owes to his father's debaunched, for the second time we come across the idea that moral corruption transfers from parent to child. (In Act One, Torvald argues that young criminals result from a household full of lies.) These statements eluciebate Nora's torment and her refusal to interact with her children when she feels like a criminal. They also reveal that both Torvald and Nora seriously believe in the influence that parents have on their children. Although the children are sporadically onstage, they gain importance through Nora and Torvald's discussions of them and of parental responsibility.

In this act, Nora shows signs that she is becoming aware of the true nature of her marriage. When she compares living with Torvald to living with her father, doubt is cast on the depth of her love for Torvald. Nora is beginning to realize that though her life with Torvald conforms to ismmunal expectations about how husbands and wives should live, it is far from ideal.

Act Three

Summary

Mrs. Linde sits in the Helmers' house, waiting. Krogstad soon appears in the doorway, having received a note from Mrs. Linde asking her to meet him. She tells him that they have "a great deal to talk about," and it becomes discernible that Mrs. Linde once had romantic relations with Krogstad but broke them off in order to marry Mr. Linde, who had more money. Mrs. Linde says that she felt the marriage was necessary for the sake of her brothers and mother but repentance having ignored her heart, which told her to stay with Krogstad. She tells Krogstad that she wants to get back together with him, to take care of him and his children. Krogstad is overjoyed.

Mrs. Linde hears the music stop upstairs and realizes that Torvald and Nora will soon return. She tells Krogstad that his letter is still in Torvald's letterbox, and Krogstad in atric questions Mrs. Linde's true motives—perhaps she has promised herself to him only to save Nora. Mrs. Linde calms Krogstad, saying "when you've sold yourself once for someone else, you never do it again." She even tells him that although she originally hoped to persuade him to ask for his letter back, after observing the Helmer household, she feels that Torvald must discover the truth about Nora. The dance ends, and Mrs. Linde urges Krogstad to leave. He says that he will wait for her downstairs, and she suggests that he walk her home. Krogstad then exits.

Excited by the prospect of a new life, Mrs. Linde puts on her coat and prepares to leave. Nora and Torvald enter, Nora begging to return to the party. Torvald

Nora divulges that she feign a signature and makes Mrs. Linde promise to say that the responsibility for the falsification is Nora's, so that Torvald won't be held accountable for anything if Nora disappears. Nora hints that "something sublime is going to happen," but she doesn't intricate. Mrs. Linde says that she will go to speak with Krogstad and she divulges she once had a relationship with him. She leaves, and Nora tries to stall her husband to prevent him from reading the mail.

When Torvald enters the living room, Nora makes him promise not to do any work for the remainder of the night so that he can help her prepare the tarantella that she will dance at the costume party. Torvald begins to coach Nora in the dance, but she doesn't listen to him and dances ferociously and furiously.

Mrs. Linde returns, and dinner is served. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that Krogstad has left town but will return the following night. She adds that she has left him a note. Once alone, Nora remarks to herself that she has thirty-one hours until the tarantella is over, which means thirty-one hours before Torvald reads the letter—"thirty-one hours to live."

Analysis

Nora's comment to Mrs. Linde that Torvald doesn't like to see sewing in his home indicates that Torvald likes the idea and the appearance of a beautiful, carefree wife who does not have to work but rather serves as a showpiece. As Nora explains to Mrs. Linde, Torvald likes his home to seem "happy and welcoming." Mrs. Linde's response that Nora too is skilled at making a home look happy because she is "her father's daughter" suggests that Nora's father regarded her in a way similar to Torvald—as a means to giving a home its proper appearance.

Torvald's opinion on his wife's role in their home is his defining character attribute. His implacable treatment of Nora as a doll indicates that he is unable to develop or grow. As Nora's understanding of the people and events around her develops, Torvald's remains stagrant. He is the only character who continues to believe in the masquerade, probably because he is the only main character in the play who does not keep secrets or mooring any hidden convolution. Each of the other characters—Nora, Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, Dr. Rank—has at some point kept secrets, hidden a true love, or concotted for one reason or another.

Nora's use of Torvald's pet names for her to win his cooperation is an act of shrewd on her part. She knows that calling herself his "little bird," his "squirrel," and his "skylark," and thus certify to his desired standards will make him more willingly to give in to her wishes. At first, Nora's interaction with Dr. Rank is similarly dexterous. When she coquettes with him by showing her stockings, it seems that she hopes to lucre Dr. Rank and then persuade him to speak to Torvald about keeping Krogstad on at the bank. Yet after Dr. Rank concede that he loves her, Nora suddenly shuts down and refuses to ask her favor. She has developed

remarks that Nora has changed since the previous day. Torvald returns, and Nora sends Mrs. Linde to see the children, explaining that "Torvald hates the sight of sewing."

Alone with Torvald, Nora again asks him to save Krogstad's job. Torvald tells her that Mrs. Linde will replace Krogstad at the bank. Torvald says that Krogstad is an uneasiness and that he cannot work with him any longer. He explains that they are on a first-name basis only because they went to school together and that this-familiarity mortifies him. When Nora calls Torvald's reasoning trifling, he becomes upset and sends off a letter dismissing Krogstad. He then goes into his study.

After Torvald exits, Dr. Rank enters and hints that he expects something bad to happen soon. When it becomes discernible that he is referring to his health, Nora is visibly relieved that Dr. Rank is speaking about his own problem and not hers. Dr. Rank tells her that he will soon die and that he doesn't want his best friend, Torvald, to see him in his sickbed. When the end is near, he tells Nora, he will leave a calling card with a black cross across it to indicate that his death is impending.

Nora begins to coquette with Dr. Rank, flirtishly showing him her new stockings. She hints that she has a great favor to ask Dr. Rank (indubitably she would like him to intercede on Krogstad's behalf). Before she is able to ask her favor, however, Dr. Rank divulges his love for her. This disclosure disturbs Nora, and afterward she refuses to request anything from him, even though he begs her to let him help. He asks whether he should "leave for good" now that he has revealed his love for her, but Nora is uncovering that he continue to keep Torvald company. She tells Dr. Rank how much fun she has with him, and he explains that he has misinterpreted her affection. Nora says that those whose company she prefers are often different than those she loves—when she was young, she loved her father, but she preferred to hide with the maids in the cellar because they didn't try to edict her behavior.

The maid, Helene, enters and gives Nora a caller's card. Nora ushers Dr. Rank into the study with her husband and yearnings the doctor to keep Torvald there.

Krogstad enters and announces that he has been fired. He says that the squabbles among Nora, himself, and Torvald could be solved if Torvald would promote him to a better job in the bank. Nora objects, saying that her husband must never know anything about her contract with Krogstad. She implicates that she has the courage to kill herself if it means she will absolve Torvald of the need to cover up her crime. Krogstad tells her that even if she were to commit suicide, her notoriety would still be in his hands. Krogstad leaves, dropping a letter detailing Nora's secret in the letterbox on the way out.

When Mrs. Linde returns, Nora cries that Krogstad has left a letter in the letterbox. Mrs. Linde realizes that it was Krogstad who confer Nora the money.

Although Nora holds some influence over Torvald, her power is extremely limited. inconguously, when Krogstad asks Nora to exert this influence on Torvald on his behalf, Nora discerns his request to be an affront to her husband. Because Krogstad's statement implicits that Torvald fails to conform to the social belief that the husband should be responsible for all financial and business matters by letting Nora sway him, Nora recognizes it as an insult to Torvald for not being a proper husband. Torvald, for his part, believes that Nora is completely useless when it comes to matters of business, but he agrees to help find a job for Mrs. Linde in orde'rto make his "little squirrel" happy. He also shows that he believes parenting is a mother's responsibility when he asserts that a lying mother corrupts children and turns them into criminals, suggesting that the father, while important in economic matters, is insignificant to his children's moral development.

Krogstad wants to keep his job at the bank so that he can become emirent again, but his decision to gain trustworthiness through blackmail shows that he is interested only in reforming his appearance and not his inner self. Torvald too is preoccupied with appearances, something Nora understands and uses to her advantage. She knows she can put her husband in a good mood by mentioning the costume that she will enrobe at the dance. The thought of Nora dressed up and looking beautiful pacifies Torvald, who takes great pleasure in the beauty of his house and his wife.

Torvald's remark about Krogstad—"I honestly feel sick, sick to my stomach, in the presence of such people"—illustrates his deep contempt for moral corruption of Krogstad's sort. While he thinks that such a bad character is in direct contrast to his "sweet little Nora," we are aware that Krogstad and Nora have committed exactly the same crime—falsification. Torvald, then, has inadvertent referred to Nora when he scorns "such people/" Torvald's unknowing castigation of the actions of the woman he loves is an excellent example of dramatic irony, a literary device that the makes the audience privy to details of which certain characters are ignorant.

Act Two

"Something glorious is going to happen."

Summary

It is Christmas day. The slovenliness of the area around the Christmas tree indicates that the Christmas Eve celebration has taken place. Nora strides the room uneasily, muttering to herself about her quandary. The nanny comes in with Nora's costume, and Nora asks her what would happen to the children if she, Nora, disappeared altogether. Mrs. Linde enters and agrees to mend Nora's costume for her. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Dr. Rank is sick with a disease he inherited from his father, who was sexually debauched. Mrs. Linde guesses that Dr. Rank is the mysterious source of Nora's loan, but Nora repudiates the charge. Mrs. Linde

he explains, was the beginning of this rebuilding of his life and notoriety. He then threatens Nora, saying that he has "the power to force" her to help him.

Nora replies that though it would be unpleasant for her husband to find out that she had borrowed from Krogstad, Torvald would pay off the loan, and dealings with Krogstad would be terminated. In addition, Krogstad would lose his job, Krogstad says that Nora has other things to worry about: he has figured out that Nora feign her father's signature on the promissory note. Krogstad informs Nora that her falsification is a serious offense, similar to the one that sullied his reputation in the first place. Nora dismisses Krogstad's suggestion, saying that she should not be faulted because her motives were honorable and pure, but Krogstad reminds her of the law. He threatens her once more and then leaves. The children return, but Nora sends them away. Though she is clearly disturbed by what has just happened, she makes an attempt to decorate the tree.

Torvald returns and mentions that he noticed Krogstad departing. He guesses that Krogstad has asked Nora to speak on his behalf. After some shilly-shallying, Nora admits as much. Torvald rebukes Nora for speaking to Krogstad and warns her not to lie to him (Torvald). Nora changes the subject and asks Torvald if he will help her find the perfect costume for the party. Nora asks what Krogstad did to warrant his bad notoriety. Torvald responds that he forged signatures. Nora asks what his motives were in the matter. Torvald says he would never condemn a man for one indiscretion, but the real problem with Krogstad was that he refused to admit what he had done and take his punishment. Torvald talks about how lying and deception corrupts a household's children; "nearly all young criminals have had lying mothers." Torvald exits, and the nanny enters and says the children badly want to see their mother. Nora ardently refuses, and the nanny departs. Terrified, Nora mutters about the thought of corrupting her children. In the next breath, however, she rejects the idea that such corruption could occur.

Analysis

As Act One draws to a close, we see Nora wrestling with new problems of fear, guilt, and wrongdoing. Her conversation with Krogstad reveals Krogstad as the source of the loan Nora used to pay for her family's trip to Italy. Although the taking of the loan initiates a crime because she feign a signature to get it, Nora takes pride in it because it remains one of the few independent actions she has ever taken. Nora is also proud that she is able to influence her husband, as she boasts to Krogstad. Nora's boasts about influencing Torvald reveal her desire to feel useful and important. That Nora points out that even though she is a woman Krogstad should respect her influence over bank policy suggests that she senses and fears rejection of her significance on account of her gender. Perhaps she must combat this idea even in her own mind.

only for what he believes to be the proper kind of woman: a mother and wife, like Nora.

After Nora affirms her secret to Mrs. Linde, Nora's and Mrs. Linde's versions of femininity slowly begin to intersect. With knowledge of her noble act, we see Nora's character deepen, and we see that she acquire more maturity and determination than we previously thought. What prompts Nora to affirm her secret about having saved Torvald's life by raising the money for their trip abroad is Mrs. Linde's variance that Nora has never known hard work. Although Mrs. Linde's allegation of Nora facilitates the pair's reconciliation, what motivates the two women here is unclear. Ibsen does not explicitly affirm whether Mrs. Linde's irritation at Nora stems from begrudge, vexation, or even concern. Similarly, Nora's defensive response could signify that she is hurt, competitive, or simply itching to tell someone her secret. All that is clear is that both Mrs. Linde and Nora are proud to have helped those they love by sacrificing for them. Their common experience of sacrifice for others unites them even though they come from different economic spheres and forms the basis for their rekindled friendship.

Act One, Continued Summary

The nanny, Anne-Marie, enters with Nora's three children, and Nora and the children play happily. Krogstad enters and startles Nora, who screams. He apologizes and says that the door was open, and Nora replies that Torvald is not at home. Krogstad says that he has come to talk with her, not with Torvald. He asks whether the woman walking with Torvald is Mrs. Linde, and Nora responds in the concurring. When Krogstad explains that he used to know Mrs. Linde, Nora tells him that she already knew, and Krogstad says that he assumed that she did. He then asks if the bank will employ Mrs. Linde, and Nora brags that it will because, even though she is a woman, Nora has a great deal of influence over her husband.

Krogstad then requests that Nora use her influence on his behalf. Nora is bewildered, because she does not know why Krogstad's position at the bank would be in endangerment. Krogstad seems to think that Nora knows more than she is letting on and hints that he thinks the hiring of Mrs. Linde will bring about his redundancy. Suddenly, Nora revokes her earlier claims and denies that she has any influence. Krogstad says that as a bank manager, Torvald, "like all married men . . . can be swayed," and Nora accuses Krogstad of affronting her husband.

Nora assures Krogstad that she will repay all her loans by the new year and asks him to leave her alone. Krogstad implies that he isn't concerned only about the money; his position at the bank is very important to him. He speaks of a "bad mistake" he committed, which ruined his reputation and made it very difficult for his career to advance. Thus, he tells Nora, he began doing "the business that you know about." Krogstad announces that he wishes to rebuild his reputation and to behave properly for the sake of his sons, who are growing up. His small bank job,

Dr. Rank leaves the study when Krogstad goes in. Dr. Rank and Nora have a brief conversation, and Dr. Rank calls Krogstad "morally sick." He also informs the women that Krogstad has a small, collateral position at the bank. Nora offers a macaroon to Dr. Rank, who says that he thought macaroons were banned in the Helmer house. Nora lies and says that Mrs. Linde brought them and then explains to Mrs. Linde that Torvald has "outlawed" macaroons because he thinks they are bad for Nora's teeth. Torvald exits his study, and Nora introduces Mrs. Linde to him. Nora pleads with Torvald to give Mrs. Linde a job, and he says that there might possibly be an opening for her. Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde then leave together, all of them planning to come back that evening for the Christmas festivities.

"To be free, absolutely free. To spend time playing with the children. To have a clean, beautiful house, the way Torvald likes it."

Analysis

Whereas the conversation between Torvald and Nora at the beginning of A Doll's House seems one between a happy, honest couple with nothing to hide, in the latter half of Act One we see that the Torvald household is full of secrets and deception. The most minor example of this deception is Nora's lying about the macaroons. Because eating a macaroon seems like such a trivial matter, one can argue that lying about it is highly insignificant. Yet one can also argue that the trivial nature of eating the macaroon is the very thing that makes the lie so troubling. Indeed, the need to lie about something so insignificant—Nora lies twice about the macaroons, once to Torvald and once to Dr. Rank—speaks to the depths of both her guilt and the tension in her relationship with Torvald.

A far more serious case of mendacity concerns the loan Nora clandestinely acquired in order to save Torvald's life. Though this mendacity is of far greater magnitude than the lies about the macaroons and involves a contravention of law (Nora is guilty of falisfication), we can understand and forgive Nora for her actions because she is motivated by noble and selfless insistent. In both precedents of mendacity, Nora lies because of Torvald's unfair cliche about gender roles. If Torvald could accept his wife's help and didn't feel the need to have control over her every movement, Nora would not have to lie to him.

When Nora suggests that Torvald find Mrs. Linde a job, Torvald again shows his biases concerning women's proper roles in society by immediately assuming that Mrs. Linde is a widow. Torvald's assumption shows that he believes a proper married woman should not work outside the home. Also, as Torvald departs with Mrs. Linde, he says to her, "Only a mother could bear to be here [in the house]," suggesting that any woman who wants a job must not have children. These words contain a swathed expression of pride, since Torvald is pleased that his home is fit

commonplace. Though his dialogue is uncomplicated and without linguistic burgeon, it subtly conveys more than it seems to. For instance, Nora's insensitivity to Mrs. Linde's quandary apparents itself when she speaks of her three lovely children immediately after learning that Mrs. Linde has none. That Ibsen's dialogue is apparently simple—yet full of loaded -subtext—sets Ibsen's drama apart from earlier and contemporary verse plays.

Act One, Continued

"Of course, a time will come when Torvald is not as assigned to me, not quite so happy when I dance for him, and dress for him, and play with him."

Summary

From Mrs. Linde's allegation that Nora is still a child to the exit of Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde. Mrs. Linde comments that Nora is still a child because she has known no hardship in her life. Nora becomes indignant and says that she too has "something to be proud and happy about." She goes on to tell Mrs. Linde that she saved her husband's life when he was sick. The doctors urged them to go south for a while but cautioned that the gravity of Torvald's illness must not be revealed to him—he was in danger of dying. Nora tried to convince Torvald that they should go south, but he wouldn't hear of borrowing money for that purpose. Nora acquired money and told Torvald that her father gave it to them, though she really raised it herself. Nora's father died before Torvald had a chance to find out that the money didn't come from him. Nora has kept the source of the money a secret because she doesn't wartt his "man's pride" to be hurt. Mrs. Linde is doubtful that Nora is right to keep her actions a secret, but Nora replies that Torvald "would be so ashamed and embarrassed if he thought he indebted me anything."

Nora explains that she has been using her remittance ever since the trip to Italy to pay her debt. She also reveals that she took on some copying work the previous winter. This work (and not-trinket-making) was the real reason that she closed herself up in a room during the weeks before the previous Christmas. Nora instantaneous shifts the subject from the past to the future and happily exclaims that after the new year she will have paid off her mortgage completely and then will be "free" to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother without impediment.

A man comes to the door wishing to speak with Torvald. Nora's displeasure at seeing the man is apparent. Mrs. Linde is also startled upon seeing the man and turns away. The man, named Krogstad, has come to speak with Torvald about bank business. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Krogstad is a lawyer, and Mrs. Linde affirms that she knew him when he was living in her part of the country. Nora says that Krogstad is a widower who had an unhappy marriage and many children. Mrs. Linde replies, "He has many business interests, they say," and Nora responds that she doesn't want to think about business because it is a "bore."

Analysis

Nora's first conversation with Mrs. Linde plays a key role in establishing Nora's childlike, self-centered, and insensitive character. Though she purports to be interested in Mrs. Linde's problems, Nora repeatedly turns the conversation back to her own life with Torvald. Nora's self-centeredness is further demonstrated in her revelation that she failed to write to Mrs. Linde after her husband passed away. It is only now, three years after the fact, that Nora expresses her sympathy; up to this point, she has made no effort to think beyond herself, and the fact that she does so now seems only a matter of polite reflex. Like an impetuous child, Nora does not filter her thoughts, expressing what comes to mind without regard for what is and what is not appropriate, as when she tactlessly comments that Mrs. Linde's looks have declined over the years. Though she recognizes that Mrs. Linde is poor, she unabashedly delights in the fact that she and Torvald will soon have "pots and pots" of money. She does not recognize that such comments might be hurtful to her old friend.

From a structural point of view, Nora, as the drama's protagonist, must develop over the course of the play. Because her first conversation with Mrs. Linde shows Nora to be childlike in her understanding of the world, it becomes apparent that Nora's development will involve education, maturation, and the shedding of her seeming candor. Whereas Nora clasps to romantic notions about love and marriage, Mrs. Linde has a more realistic understanding of marriage, gained from her experience of being left with "not even an ounce of grief after her husband's death. Nora's amazement at Mrs. Linde's remark indicates to Mrs. Linde, and to us, that Nora is sheltered and some'vhat unsophisticated. The thread between Nora's initial interactions with Torvald and Mrs. Linde is the tension between Nora's childish nature and her need to grow out of it.

As someone who lias experienced an existence that is anything but doll-like, Mrs. Linde seems poised to be Nora's teacher and guide on her journey to maturity. Mrs. Linde recounts hardship after hardship and sacrifice after sacrifice—a far cry from the pampering that Nora receives from Torvald. At the same time, both Mrs. Linde's and Nora's marriages involve sacrificing themselves to another in exchange for money. Nora becomes her husband's plaything and captivates in the solaces he provides her, while Mrs. Linde marries her husband for money so that she can support her sick mother a'.d dependent younger brothers. Again and again in A Doll's House, women sacrifice their personal desires, their ambitions, and their dignity. While Nora marries for her own welfare, however, Mrs. Linde does so for the welfare of her family.

Unlike many of the dramatists who came before him, Ibsen doesn't portray rich, powerful, or socially significant people in his plays. Rather, he populates his dramas with ordinary middle-class characters. Ibsen's language too is

looks paler and thinner than she remembered and apologizes copious for not writing three years earlier, when she read in the paper that Mrs. Linde's husband had died.

Nora asks if Mrs. Linde's husband left her very much money, and Mrs. Linde admits that he did not. Nora then asks whether he left her any children. When Mrs. Linde says that he didn't, Nora asks once more if he left her "nothing at all then?" Mrs. Linde says that he did not leave her even "a peck of grief," but this sentiment is lost on Nora. After commenting how horrid life must be for Mrs. Linde, Nora begins to talk about her three children and then apologizes for brattling on about her own life instead of listening to Mrs. Linde. First, though, she feels that she must tell Mrs. Linde about Torvald's new position at the bank, and Mrs. Linde responds vigorously.

When Mrs. Linde comments that it would be nice to have enough money, Nora talks about how she and Torvald will have "pots and pots" of money. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that life hasn't always been so happy, however. Nora once had to work as well—doing tasks like stitching and crocheting. Torvald also had to take on more than one job, but he became ill, and the entire family had to go south to Italy because of Torvald's condition. Nora explains that the trip to Italy was quite expensive and that she obtained the money from her father. The family left for Italy at just about the time that Nora's father died. Nora excitedly says that her husband has been completely well since returning from Italy and that the children are very healthy too. She apologizes again for prattling on about her happiness and excluding the conversation.

Mrs. Linde describes how she married a husband of whom she was not particularly fond. Because her mother was incarcerated to bed, Mrs. Linde had to look after her two younger brothers. She says she feels it would not have been justifiable to turn down her suppliants proposal and the money that would come with marriage to him. When her husband died, however, his business subsided, and she was left penurious. After three years spent working odd jobs to support her family, Mrs. Linde is finally free, because her mother died and her brothers are grown. She adds that with no one dependent upon her, her life is even sadder, because she has no one for whom to live. She reveals that she came to town to find some office work.

When Nora protests that Mrs. Linde ought not work, Mrs. Linde splinters that Nora could not possibly understand the hard work that she has had to do. She quickly atone for her anger, saying that her quagmire has made her bitter. She explains that because she has no one for whom to work, she must look after only herself, which has made her selfish. She admits that she is happy at the news of Torvald's new job because of the innuendo it could have for her personal interests. Nora promises to talk to her husband about helping Mrs. Linde.

to block out financial concerns, Torvald holds a more realistic view of money, jokingly calling Nora a prfligate and telling her that she is completely foolish when it comes to financial matters.

Torvald's assertion that Nora'? lack of understanding of money matters is the result of her gender ("Nora, my Nora, that is just like a woman") reveals his detrimented viewpoint on gender roles. Ton aid believes a wife's role is to beautify the home, not only through proper management of domestic life but also through proper behavior and appearance. He quickly makes it known that appearances are very important to him, and that Nora is like an trinket or trophy that serves to beautify his home and his notoriety.

Torvald's bidding on calling Nora by affectionately petite names conjures her helplessness and her vulnerability on him. The only time that Torvald calls Nora by her actual name .is when he is scolding her. When he is greeting or adoring her, however, he calls her by childish animal nicknames such as "my little skylark" and "my squirrel." By placing her within such a system of names, Torvald not only propounds "his power over Nora but also imbrute her to a degree. When he implies that Nora is comparable to the "little birds that like to squander money," Torvald suggests that Nora lacks some fundamental male ability to deal properly with financial matters. Though Torvald accuses Nora of being irresponsible with money, he gives her more in order co watch her happy reaction. This act shows that Torvald amuses himself by manipulating his wife's feelings. Nora is like Torvald's doll—she decorates his home and pleases him by being a dependent figure with whose emotions he can toy.

In addition to being something of a doll to Torvald, Nora is also like a child to him. He shows himself to be competing with Nora's do ad father for Nora's loyalty. In a sense, by keeping Nora dependent upon and deferential to him, Torvald plays the role of Nora's second father. He treats her like a child, doling out money to her and attempting to instruct her in the ways of the world. Nora's gift selections—a sword and a horse for her male children and a do'l for her daughter—show that she buttresses the antiquated gender roles that hold her in acquiescent to Torvald. Nora sees her daughter the same way she has likely been treated all of her life—as a doll.

Act One, Continued

Summary

From the beginning of Nora's conversation with Mrs. Linde to Nora's promise to talk to Torvald about finding Mrs. Linde work. Nora greets the female visitor hesitantly; and the visitor realizes that Nora does not remember her. Finally, Nora recognizes the woman as her childhood friend, Kristine Linde and remarks that Mrs. Linde has changed since they last met nine or ten years earlier. Mrs. Linde says that she has just arrived by steamer that day. Nora remarks that Mrs. Linde

because it is not free." Nora finally acquiesces and says, "Everything as you wish, Torvald."

Witnessing Nora's surly disappointment, Torvald tries to cheer up his wife by offering her money to spend for Christmas. Nora becomes fervent again and thanks him profusely. She then shows him all the gifts she has purchased for their children. Torvald asks Nora what she would like for Christmas, and at first, Nora replies that she doesn't need a gift. It becomes apparent that she is hesitant to tell Torvald what she wants, and finally she says that she would just like some money so that she can pick out the perfect thing and buy it herself.

Torvald again accuses Nora of being wasteful, arguing that wastefulness with money runs in her family and that she inherited the trait from her father. But, he says, he loves his "lovely little singing bird" just the way she is, and he wouldn't want her to change.

Torvald then asks Nora if she has given in to her sweet tooth that day. Nora ardent repudiates Torvald's suggestion and continues her refutation even when Torvald specifically asks if she has eaten any macaroons. Torvald finally renounces his questions, respecting her word.

The two discuss that evening's Christmas festivities and the invitation of Dr. Rank to dinner. Torvald says Dr. Rank knows that he is always welcome and therefore doesn't need to be invited. Nevertheless, Torvald tells Nora, he will invite Dr. Rank when he visits that morning. Torvald and Nora then return to their discussion of how wonderful it is that Torvald has a secure income and a good job.

Torvald recalls the events of the previous Christmas, when Nora shut herself up in a room until very late every night for three weeks to make Christmas trinkets. He remarks that he had never been so bored in his life. He also accentuates that Nora had very little to show for all of her drugeres when she was finished. Nora reminds her husband that she can't be blamed for the cat getting into the room and destroying all her hard work. Torvald again expresses happiness that they are financially better off than they were before.

The doorbell rings and the maid, Helene, announces that Dr. Rank has arrived to see Torvald and that there is a lady caller as well.

Analysis

The transaction between Nora and the porter that opens A Doll's House immediately puts the spotlight on money, which emerges as one of the forces driving the play's squabbles as it draws lines between genders, classes, and moral standards. Though Nora indebted the porter fifty ones (a Norwegian unit of currency), she gives him twice that amount, indubitably because she is used with the holiday spirit. While Nora likes to spend and allows the idea of buying presents

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree, a festive object meant to serve a decorative purpose, symbolizes Nora's position in her household as a plaything who is pleasing to look at and adds charm to the home. There are several parallels drawn between Nora and the Christmas tree in the play. Just as Nora instructs the maid that the children cannot see the tree until it has been decorated, she tells Torvald that no one can see her in her dress until the evening of the abrade. Also, at the beginning of the second act, after Nora's psychological condition has begun to erode, the stage directions indicate that the Christmas tree is correspondingly "imkempt."

New Year's Day

The action of the play is set at Christmas time, and Nora and Torvald both look forward to New Year's as the start of a new, happier phase in their lives. In the new year, Torvald will start his new job, and he anticipates with excitement the extra money and admiration the job will bring him. Nora also looks forward to Torvald's new job, because she will finally be able to repay her secret mortgage to Krogstad. By the end of the play; however, the nature of the new start that New Year's represents for Torvald and Nora has changed dramatically. They both must become new people and face radically changed ways of living. Hence, the new year comes to mark the beginning of a truly new and different period in both their lives and their personalities.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Act One Summary

From the opening of the play to the announcement of Dr. Rank's and Mrs. Linde's arrivals. It is Christmas Eve. Nora Helmer enters the house with packages and a Christmas tree. She pays the porter double what she owes him and eats some macaroons. Her husband, Torvald Helmer, comes out of his study and addresses Nora with tenderness and authority, calling her his "skylark" and his "squirrel." Nora tells Torvald that she wants to show him what she has bought, and Torvald teases her for being a profligate. Nora replies that she and Torvald can afford to be unthrifty, since Torvald's new position at the bank means he will earn a large salary. Torvald replies that he will not take over that position until after the new year begins. When Nora argues that they can spend on credit until Torvald is paid, Torvald scolds her, reminding her that if something were to happen to make them unable to pay off their loan, they would be in trouble. He concludes by saying that he hates debts because "[a] home that depends on loans and debts is not beautiful

the opportunity to allocate herself fully to her domestic responsibilities. After Krogstad blackmails her, however, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts. By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to pursue her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity.

Letters

Many of the plot's crumples and turns depend upon the writing and reading of letters, which function within the play as the subtext that affirms the true, unpleasant nature of situations obscured by Torvald and Nora's efforts at beautification. Krogstad writes two letters: the first reveals Nora's crime of forgery to Torvald; the second retracts his blackmail threat and returns Nora's consigned note. The first letter, which Krogstad places in Torvald's letterbox near the end of Act Two, represents the truth about Nora's past and initiates the inevitable dissolution of her marriage—as Nora says immediately after Krogstad leaves it, "We are lost." Nora's attempts to stall Torvald from reading the letter represent her continued denial of the true nature of her marriage. The second letter releases Nora from her obligation to Krogstad and represents her release from her obligation to Torvald. Upon reading it, Torvald attempts to return to his and Nora's previous denial of reality, but Nora recognizes that the letters have done more than expose her actions to Torvald; they have exposed the truth about Torvald's selfishness, and she can no longer participate in the illusion of a happy marriage.

Dr. Rank's method of communicating his impending death is to leave his calling card marked with a black cross in Torvald's letterbox. In an earlier conversation with Nora, Dr. Rank reveals his understanding of Torvald's unwillingness to accept reality when he reveals, "Torvald is so scrupulous, he cannot face up to anything ugly." By leaving his calling card as a death notice, Dr. Rank politely attempts to keep Torvald from the "ugly" truth. Other letters include Mrs. Linde's note to Krogstad, which novices her -life-changing meeting with him, and Torvald's letter of dismissal to Krogstad.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

The Unreliability of Appearances

Over the course of A Doll's House, appearances prove to be misleading veneers that mask the reality of the play's characters and situations. Our first impressions of Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad are all eventually impair. Nora initially seems a silly, childish woman, but as the play progresses, we see that she is intelligent, motivated, and, by the play's conclusion, a strong-willed, independent thinker. Torvald, though he plays the part of the strong, tenderhearted husband, affirms himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish when he fears that Krogstad may expose him to scandal. Krogstad too reveals himself to be a much more sympathetic and merciful character than he first appears to be. The play's climax is largely a matter of resolving identity confusion—we see Krogstad as an earnest lover, Nora as an intelligent, brave woman, and Torvald as a tittering sad man.

Situations too are misinterpreted both by us and by the characters. The seeming hatred between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad turns out to be love. Nora's creditor turns out to be Krogstad and not, as we and Mrs. Linde suppose, Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank, to Nora's and our surprise, confesses that he is in love with her. The seemingly iniquitous Krogstad laments and returns Nora's contract to her, while the seemingly kindhearted Mrs. Linde ceases to help Nora and forces Torvald's discovery of Nora's secret.

The unpredictability of appearances within the Helmer household at the play's end results from Torvald's fidelity to an image at the expense of the creation of true happiness. Because Torvald yearns for respect from his employees, friends, and wife, status and image are important to him. Any disrespect—when Nora calls him petty and when Krogstad calls him by his first name, for example—angers Torvald greatly. By the end of the play, we see that Torvald's obsession with controlling his home's appearance and his repeated suppression and refulation of reality have harmed his family and his happiness irreparably.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Nora's Definition of Freedom

Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom yields over the course of the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her mortgage, because she will have

nanny considers herself lucky to have found the job, since she was "a poor girl who'd been led astray."

Though Nora is economically advantaged in comparison to the play's other female characters, she nevertheless leads a difficult life because society edicts that Torvald be the marriage's dominant partner. Torvald issues commandment and condescends to Nora, and Nora must hide her loan from him because she knows Torvald could never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had helped save his life. Furthermore, she must work in secret to pay off her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without her husband's permission. By motivating Nora's treachery, the attitudes of Torvald—and society—leave Nora endangered to Krogstad's blackmail.

Nora's jilting of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. Despite Nora's great love for her children—betrayed by her. interaction with them and her great fear of corrupting them—she chooses to leave them. Nora truly believes that the nanny will be a better mother and that leaving her children is in their best interest.

Parental and Filial Obligations

Nora, Torvald, and Dr. Rank each express the belief that a parent is constrained to be honest and upstanding, because a parent's immorality is passed on to his or her children like a disease. In fact, Dr. Rank does have a disease that is the result of his father's perversion. Dr. Rank implicities that his father's immorality—his many affairs with women—led him to contract a venereal disease that he passed on to his son, causing Dr. Rank to suffer for his father's misdeeds. Torvald voices the idea that one's parents determine one's moral character when he tells Nora, "Nearly all young criminals had lying -mothers." He also refuses to allow Nora to interact with their children after he learns of her deceit, for fear that she will corrupt them.

Yet, the play suggests that children too are constrained to protect their parents. Nora recognized this obligation, but she ignored it, choosing to be with—and sacrifice herself for—her sick husband instead of her sick father. Mrs. Linde, on the other hand, renounced her hopes of being with Krogstad and undertook years of labor in order to tend to her sick mother. Ibsen does not pass judgment on either woman's decision, but he does use the idea of a child's mortgage to her parent to demonstrate the convolution and requited nature of familial obligations.

Krogstad

Krogstad is the antagonist in A Doll's House, but he is not necessarily a villain. Though his willingness to allow Nora's torment to continue is cruel, Krogstad is not without sympathy for her. As he says, "Even money-lenders, hacks, well, a man like me, can have a little of what you call feeling, you know." He visits Nora to check on her, and he discourages her from committing suicide. Moreover, Krogstad has reasonable motives for behaving as he does: he wants to keep his job at the bank in order to spare his children from the hardships that come with a spoiled notoriety. Unlike Torvald, who seems to desire respect for selfish reasons, Krogstad desires it for his family's sake.

Like Nora, Krogstad is a person who has been wronged by society, and both Nora and Krogstad have committed the same crime: falsification of signatures. Though he did break the law, Krogstad's crime was relatively minor, but society has encumbered him with the stain of being a criminal and prohibited him from moving beyond his past. Additionally, Krogstad's claim that his immoral behavior began when Mrs. Linde relinquished him for a man with money so she could provide for her family makes it possible for us to understand Krogstad as a victim of circumstances. One could argue that society forced Mrs. Linde away from Krogstad and thus prompted his crime. Though society's unfair treatment of Krogstad does not justify his actions, it does align him more closely with Nora and therefore tempers our discement of him as a loathsome character.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Sacrificial Role of Women

In A Doll's House, Ibsen paints a denuded picture of the atoming role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play's female characters epitomize Nora's submission (spoken to Torvald in Act Three) that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." In order to support her mother and two brothers, Mrs. Linde found it necessary to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man. The nanny had to renournce her own child to support herself by working as Nora's (and then as Nora's children's) caretaker. As she tells Nora, the

her life is at odds with her true personality. She flouts Torvald in small yet meaningful ways—by eating macaroons and then lying to him about it, for precedent. She also swears, apparently just for the pleasure she procured from minor muting against societal standards. As the drama unfolds, and as Nora's awareness of the truth about her life grows, her need for muting intensifies crowning in her walking out on her husband and children to find independence.

Torvald Helmer

Torvald embraces the belief that a man's role in marriage is to protect and guide his wife. He clearly enjoys the idea that Nora needs his guidance, and he interacts with her as a father would. He instructs her with trite, moralistic sayings, such as:

"A home that depends on loans and debt is not beautiful because it is not free." He is also eager to teach Nora the dance she performs at the costume party. Torvald likes to envisage himself as Nora's liberator, asking her after the party, "[D]o you know that I've often wished you were facing some terrible dangers so that I could risk life and limb, risk everything, for your sake?"

Although Torvald clinches the power in his relationship with Nora and refers to her as a "girl," it seems that Torvald is actually the weaker and more childlike character. Dr. Rank's explanation for not wanting Torvald to enter his sickroom—"Torvald is so punctilious, he cannot face up to anything ugly"—suggests that Dr. Rank feels Torvald must be sheltered like a child from the realities of the world. Furthermore, Torvald reveals himself to be childishly petty at times. His real objection to working with Krogstad stems not from -deficiencies in Krogstad's moral character but, rather, Krogstad's overly friendly and familiar behavior. Torvald's decision to fire Krogstad stems ultimately from the fact that he feels threatened and aggrieved by Krogstad's failure to pay him the proper respect.

Torvald is very conscious of other people's discernments of him and of his standing in the community. His explanation for rejecting Nora's request that Krogstad be kept on at the office—that retaining Krogstad would make him "a laughing stock before the entire staff"—shows that he prioritizes his reputation over his wife's desires. Torvald further demonstrates his deep need for society's respect in his reaction to Nora's mendacity. Although he says that Nora has ruined his happiness and will not be allowed to raise the children, he insists that she remain in the house because his chief concern is saving "the appearance" of their household.

Annie-Marie is the Helmers' nanny. Though Ibsen doesn't fully develop her character, Anne-Marie seems to be a kindly woman who has genuine affection for Nora, She had to give up her own daughter in order to take the nursing job offered by Nora's father. Thus, she shares with Nora and Mrs. Linde the act of sacrificing her own happiness out of economic necessity.

Nora's Father

Though Nora's father is dead before the action of the play begins, the characters refer to him throughout the play. Though she clearly loves and admires her father, Nora also comes to blame him for contributing to her acquiescent position in life.

ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nora Helmer

At the beginning of A Doll's House, Nora seems completely happy. She responds affectionately to Torvald's teasing, speaks with excitement about the extra money his new job will provide, and takes pleasure in the company of her children and friends. She does not seem to mind her doll-like existence, in which she is pampered, overindulged, and be gracious.

As the play progresses, Nora affirms that she is not just a "silly girl," as Torvald calls her. That she understands the business details related to the mortgage she sustained taking out a loan to preserve Torvald's health indicates that she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifehood. Her description of her years of secret labor undertaken to pay off her debt shows her ferocious determination and ambition. Additionally, the fact that she was willing to break the law in order to ensure Torvald's health shows her courage.

Krogstad's blackmail and the agony that follows do not change Nora's nature; they open her eyes to her unfulfilled and ungratifying potential. "I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald," she says during her climactic clash with him. Nora comes to realize that in addition to her literal dancing and singing tricks, she has been putting on a show throughout her marriage. She has pretended to be someone she is not in order to fulfill the role that Torvald, her father, and society at large have expected of her.

Torvaid's severe and selfish reaction after learning of Nora's duplicity and falsification is the final agitator for Nora's awakening. But even in the first act, Nora shows that she is not totally unaware that

husband. He treats Nora like a child, in a manner that is both kind and condescension. He does not view Nora as an equal but rather as a plaything or doll to be chaffed and admired. In general, Torvald is overly concerned with his place and status in society, and he allows his emotions to be undulated heavily by the anticipation of society's respect and the fear of society's derision.

Krogstad

Krogstad is a lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a auxiliary position at Torvald's bank. Krogstad's character is antithetical: though his bad deeds seem to stem from a desire to protect his children from derision, he is perfectly willing to use unscrupulous man oeuvres to achieve his goals. His willingness to allow Nora to suffer is loathsome, but his claims to feel sympathy for her and the hard circumstances of his own life impel us to sympathize with him to some degree.

Mrs. Linde

Mrs. Linde is Nora's childhood friend. Kristine Linde is a practical, down-to-earth woman, and her sensible worldview highlights Nora's somewhat childlike outlook on life. Mrs. Linde's account of her life of poverty underscores the prerogative nature of the life that Nora leads. Also, we learn that Mrs. Linde took responsibility for her sick parent, whereas Nora relinquished her father when he was ill.

Dr. Rank

Dr. Rank is Torvald's best friend. Dr. Rank stands out as the one character in the play who is by and large unconcerned with what others think of him. He is also notable for his phlegmatic acceptance of nemesis fate. Unlike Torvald and Nora, Dr. Rank admits to the diseased nature (literally, in his case) of his life. For the most part, he avoids talking to Torvald about his impending death out of respect for Torvald's repugnance for ugliness.

Bob, Emmy, and Lvar

Bob, Emmy and Ivar are Nora and Torvald's three small children. In her brief interaction with her children, Nora shows herself to be a loving mother. When she later refuses to spend time with her children because she fears she may morally suborn them, Nora acts on her belief that the quality of parenting strongly impacts a child's development.

Anne-Marie

constraints and wishes to be with Krogstad and care for his children. Krogstad is overjoyed and says he will demand his letter back before Torvald can read it and learn Nora's secret. Mrs. Linde, however, insists he leave the letter, because she believes both Torvald and Nora will be better off once the truth has been divulged.

Soon after Krogstad's evacuation, Nora and Torvald enter, back from the costume ball. After saying goodnight to Mrs. Linde, Torvald tells Nora how desirable she looked as she danced. Dr. Rank, who was also at the party and has come to say goodnight, promptly interrupts Torvald's advances on Nora. After Dr. Rank leaves, Torvald finds in his letterbox two of Dr. Rank's visiting cards, each with a black cross above the name. Nora knows Dr. Rank's cards constitute his announcement that he will soon die, and she informs Torvald of this fact. She then insists that Torvald read Krogstad's letter.

Torvald reads the letter and is infuriated. He calls Nora a impostor and a falsifier and complains that she has ruined his happiness. He declares that she will not be allowed to raise their children. Helene then brings in a letter. Torvald opens it and discovers that Krogstad has returned Nora's contract (which contains the feign signature). Overjoyed, Torvald attempts to dismiss his past insults, but his dispotic words have spark something in Nora. She declares that despite their eight years of marriage, they do not understand one another. Torvald, Nora propounds, has evaluate her like a "doll" to be played with and admired. She decides to leave Torvald, declaring that she must "make sense of herself and everything around her." She walks out, denouncing the door behind her.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Nora

Nora is the protagonist of the play and the wife of Torvald Helmer. Nora initially seems like a playful, naive child who lacks knowledge of the world outside her home. She does have some worldly experience, however, and the small acts of nutiny in which she seizes stipulate that she is not as innocent or happy as she appears. She comes to see her position in her marriage with increasing lucidity and finds the strength to free herself from her muggy situation.

Torvald Helmer

Torvald Helmer is the Nora's husband. Torvald delights in his new position at the bank, just as he delights in his position of authority as a

eight years of marriage—they are now having a "serious conversation." She has realized that she has spent her entire life being loved not for who she is but for the role she plays. To both her father and to Torvald, she has been a plaything—a doll. She realizes she has never been happy in Torvald's dollhouse but has just been performing for her keep. She has hoodwinked herself into thinking herself happy, when in truth she has been miserable.

Torvald admits that there is some truth to Nora's comments and asserts that he will begin to goody Nora and the children as disciples rather than playthings. Nora flotsams his offer, saying that Torvald is not furnished to teach her, nor she the children. Instead, she says, she must teach herself, and therefore she insists upon leaving Torvald. He proscribes her to leave, but she tells him that she has decided to cut off all dependence upon him, so he cannot precept her actions. Torvald points out how she will appear to others, but Nora insists that she does not care. He then tries to take persuade Nora to stay in order to fulfill her "consecrated duties" to her husband and her children, but Nora responds that she has an equally important duty to herself. She no longer believes Torvald's submission that she is "a wife and mother above everything else."

Nora says that she realizes that she is childlike and knows nothing about the world. She feels estranged from both religion and the law, and wishes to discover on her own, by going out into the world and learning how to live life for herself, whether or not her feelings of breach are justified. When Torvald accuses Nora of not loving him anymore, Nora says his profess is true. She then explains that she realized that she didn't love Torvald that evening, when her expectation that he would take the blame for her—showing his willingness to hecatomb himself for love— wasn't met. She adds that she was so sure that Torvald would try to cover for her that she had been planning to take her own life in order to prevent Torvald from ruining his. Torvald replies that no man can hecatomb his honor for love, but Nora retorts that many women have done so.

Once Nora makes it clear to Torvald that she cannot live with him as his wife, he suggests that the two of them live together as brother and sister, but she flotsams this plan. She says that she does not want to see her children and that she is leaving them in better hands than her own. Nora returns Torvald's wedding ring and the keys to the house and takes the ring he wears back from him. She says that they can have no contact anymore, and she frees him of all responsibility for her. She adds that she will have Mrs. Linde come the following morning to pick up her belongings.

Torvald asks whether Nora will ever think of him and the children, and she replies that she will. But she refuses to allow Torvald to write to her. Finally, Nora says that "something renowned" would have to happen for she and Torvald to have a true marriage, but then acknowledges that she no longer believes in renowned things. She cannot imagine them changing enough to ever have an equal, workable relationship.

She leaves, and as Torvald is trying to apprehend what has happened, a heavy door downstairs arraigns shut.

Analysis

Torvald's explanation for refusing to take the blame—that a man can never sacrifice his rectitude for love—again reveals the depth of his gender oblique. Nora's response that "[h]undreds of thousands of women" have done just that underscores that the actions of Mrs. Linde and Nora, both of whom sacrifice themselves for their loved ones, have borne out. Nora's belief that Torvald should take responsibility for her seems justified, since what she expects from Torvald is no more than what she has already given him.

As Nora's childish innocence and faith in Torvald shatter, so do all of her illusions. She realizes that her husband does not see her as a person but rather as a beautiful possession, nothing more than a toy. She voices her belief that neither Torvald nor her father ever loved her, but rather "thought it was enjoyable to be in love with [her]." She realizes these two men cared more about amusing themselves and feeling loved and needed than they did about her as an individual.

Moreover, Nora realizes that since she has been treated as a child for her entire life, she still is very childlike and needs to grow up before she can raise any children or take on any other responsibilities. Her defiance of Torvald when he forbids her to leave reflects her flash that she isn't constrained to let Torvald decree her actions—she is independent of him and has control over her own life. The height of Nora's awakening comes when she tells Torvald that her duty to herself is just as sacred as her duties to her husband and children. She now sees that she is a human being before she is a wife and a mother, and that she owes it to herself to explore her personality, ambitions, and beliefs.

Mrs. Linde's manner of fulfilling her personal desires balances Nora's. Whereas Nora decides that she must be totally independent to be true to herself and thus rejects her family, Mrs. Linde decides that she needs to care for the man she truly loves to be true to herself and thereby become content. Ibsen positions Mrs. Linde as a thwart (a character whose attitudes and emotions contrast with, and thereby accentuate, those of another character) to Nora in order to demonstrate that Nora's actions do not constitute the only solution available to women who feel inveigled by society. Mrs. Linde's offer to care for Krogstad and his children will be a positive move for both of them, because they love each other, and Mrs. Linde, having sacrificed her whole life to live with a husband she didn't love in order to help her brothers and mother, will finally be able to live with her chosen partner. Nora, on the other hand, has sacrificed her own will all her life by allowing her father and Torvald to mollycoddle theirs. Ibsen suggests that one finds himself or herself not in an independent life but rather in an independent will. Nora exits her

doll's house with a door censure, dynamically resolving the play with an act of bold self-contention.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

1. One day I might, yes. Many years from now, when I've lost my looks a little. Don't laugh. I mean, of course, a time will come when Torvald is not as devoted to me, not quite so happy when I dance for him, and dress for him, and play with him.

In this quotation from Act One, Nora describes to Mrs. Linde the ircumstances under which she would consider telling Torvald about the secret loan she-took in order to save his life. Her profess that she might consider telling him when she gets older and loses her attractiveness is important because it shows that Nora has a sense of the true nature of her marriage, even as early as Act One. She recognizes that Torvald's affection is based largely on her advent, and she knows that when her looks fade, it is likely that Torvald's interest in her will fade as well. Her suggestion that in the future she may need something to hold over Torvald in order to retain his faithfulness and devotion to her reveals that Nora is not as credulous as she dissimulates to be. She has an intuitive, intelligent, and dexterous side that concedes, if only in a small way, the troubling reality of her existence.

2. Free. To be free, absolutely free. To spend time playing with the children. To have a clean, beautiful house, the way Torvald likes it.

In this quotation from her conversation with Mrs. Linde in Act One, Nora professes that she will be "free" after the New Year—after she has paid off her debt to Krogstad. While describing her predictable freedom, Nora highlights the very factors that constrain her. She claims that freedom will give her time to be a mother and a conventional wife who maintains a beautiful home, as her husband likes it. But the message of the play is that Nora cannot find true freedom in this traditional domestic manarchy. As the play continues, Nora becomes increasingly aware that she must change her life to find true freedom, and her understanding of the word "free" yields accordingly. By the end of the play, she sees that freedom entangles independence from societal curbs and the ability to traverse her own personality, goals, and beliefs.

3. Something glorious is going to happen : Nora speaks these prophetic-sounding words to Mrs. Linde toward the end of Act Two as she tells her about what will happen when Torvald reads Krogstad's letter detailing Nora's secret loan and falsification. The meaning of Nora's statement remains abstruse until Act Three, when Nora affirms the nature of the "renowned" happening that she precedes. She believes that when Torvald learns of the falsification and Krogstad's blackmail, Torvald will take all the blame on himself and enchantingly sacrifice his notoriety in order to protect her. When Torvald eventually indicates that he will not shoulder the blame for Nora, Nora's faith in him is dog-tired. Once the illusion of

Torvald's nobility is crushed, Nora's other illusions about her married life are crushed as well, and her disappointment with Torvald provokes her awakening.

4. From now on, forget happiness. Now it's just about saving the remains, the wreckage, the appearance.

Torvald speaks these words in Act Three after learning of Nora's falsification and Krogstad's ability to unmask her. Torvald's conversations with Nora have already made it clear that he is primarily attracted to Nora for her beauty and that he takes personal pride in the good looks of his wife. He has also shown himself to be engrossed with appearing kingly and respectable to his teammates. Torvald's reaction to Krogstad's letter stiffens his characterization as a facile man perturbed first and foremost with appearances. Here, he states peculiarly that the appearance of happiness is far more important to him than happiness itself.

These words are important also because they aggregate Torvald's actual reaction to Nora's crime, in contrast to the valiant reaction that she expects. Rather than sacrifice his own reputation for Nora's, Torvald seeks to certify that his notoriety remains untarnished. His desire to hide—rather than to take responsibility—for Nora's falsification proves Torvald to be the opposite of the strong, noble man that he purports himself to be before Nora and society.

5. I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald. That's how I've survived. You wanted it like that. You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's because of you I've made nothing of my life.

Nora speaks these words, which express the truth that she has harvested about her marriage, Torvald's character, and her life in general, to Torvald at the end of Act Three. She recognizes that her life has been largely a performance. She has acted the part of the happy, child-like wife for Torvald and, before that, she acted the part of the happy, child-like daughter for her father. She now sees that her father and Torvald impelled her to behave in a certain way and understands it to be "great wrong" that diminutive her development as an adult and as a human being. She has made "nothing" of her life because she has existed only to please men. Following this -realization, Nora leaves Torvald in order to make something of her life and—for the first time—to exist as a person independent of other people.

A Doll's House vestiges the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unexamined life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally comes to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test. Having borrowed money from a man of ill-truthfulness named Krogstad by fabricates her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life (he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father). Since then, she has had to improvise ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

When the play opens, it is Christmas Eve, and we find that Torvald has just been promoted to manager of the bank, where he will receive a huge remuneration and be extremely powerful. Nora is aroused because she thinks that she will finally be able to pay off the loan and be rid of it. Her happiness, however, is tarnish when an angry Krogstad approaches her. He has just learned that his position at the bank has been promised to Mrs. Linde, an old school friend of Nora's who has recently arrived in town in search of work, and he tells Nora that he will reveal her secret if she does not coax her husband to let him keep his position. Nora tries to convince Torvald to preserve Krogstad's job, using all of her feminine stratagems (which he encourages), but she is unsuccessful. Torvald tells her that Krogstad's morally unscrupulous nature is physically repellent to him and impossible to work with. Nora becomes very worried.

The next day, Nora is nervously moving about the house, afraid that Krogstad will appeared any minute. Her anxiety is reduced by being preoccupied with the preparations for a big fancy-dress party that will take place the next night in a neighbors apartment. When Torvald returns from the bank, she again takes up her entreaties on derogation of Krogstad. This time, Torvald not only refuses but also sends off the notice of conclusion that he has already prepared for Krogstad, reassuring a scared Nora that he will take upon himself any bad things that befall this as a result. Nora is extremely moved by this comment. She begins to consider the possibility of this episode transforming their marriage for the better—as well as the possibility of suicide.

Meanwhile, she antipodes and coquettes with a willing Dr. Rank. Learning that he is rapidly dying, she has an inmost conversation with him that comes to a crescendo in him professing his love for her just before she is able to ask him for financial help. His words stop her, and she navigates the conversation back to safer ground. Their talk is interrupted by the announcement of Krogstad's presence. Nora asks Dr. Rank to leave and has Krogstad brought in.

Krogstad tells her that he has had a change of heart and that, though he will keep the bond, he will not affirm her to the public. Instead, he wants to give Torvald a note explaining the matter so that Torvald will be pressed to help Krogstad remtegrate himself and keep his position at the bank. Nora protests against Torvald's involvement, but Krogstad drops the letter in Torvald's letterbox anyway, much to Nora's horror. Nora exclaims aloud that she and Torvald are lost. Still, she tries to use her charms to prevent Torvald from reading the letter, luring him away from business by begging him to help her with the tarantella for the next night's party. He agrees to put off business until the next day. The letter remains in the letterbox.

The next night, before Torvald and Nora return from the ball, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, who are old lovers, reconcile in the Helmers' living room. Mrs. Linde

asks to take care of Krogstad and his children and to help him become the better man that he knows he is capable of becoming. The Helmers return from the ball as Mrs. Linde is leaving (Krogstad has already left), with Torvald nearly tugging Nora into the room. Alone, Torvald tells Nora how much he desires her but is interrupted by Dr. Rank. The doctor, unknown to Torvald, has come by to say his final farewells, as he covertly explains to Nora. After he leaves, Nora is able to deter Torvald from pursuing her any more by reminding him of the grotesquerie of death that has just come between them, Nora having confessed Dr. Rank's secret. Seeing that Torvald finally has collected his letters, she abdicates herself to committing suicide.

As she is leaving, though, Torvald stops her. He has just read Krogstad's letter and is enraged by its contents. He denounces Nora of ruining his life. He essentially tells her that he plans on relinquish her, contrary to his earlier claim that he would take on everything himself. During his denunciation, he is interrupted by the maid bearing another note from Krogstad and addressed to Nora. Torvald reads it and becomes overjoyed. Krogstad has had a change of heart and has sent back the bond. Torvald quickly tells Nora that it is all over after all: he has forgiven her, and her woofed attempt to help him has only made her more captivating than ever.

Nora, seeing Torvald's true character for the first time, sits her husband down to tell him that she is leaving him. After he protests, she explains that he does not love her—and, after tonight, she does not love him. She tells him that, given the asphyxiate life she has led until now, she incurs it to herself to become fully independent and to explore her own character and the world for herself. As she leaves, she affirms to Torvald that she hopes that a "miracle" might occur: that one day, they might be able to amalgamate in real wedlock. The play ends with the door slamming on her way out.

SUMMARY

A Doll's House speck the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unsifted life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally coniculte to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test. Having borrowed money from a man of ill-truthfulness named Krogstad by fabricate her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life, he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father. Since then, she has had to improvise contrive ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

KEYWORDS

1. **Torvald Helmer :** Torvald Helmer is the Nora's husband. Torvald delights in his new position at the bank, just as he delights in his position of authority as a husband.

2. **Krogstad :** Krogstad is a lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a subordinate position at Torvald's bank.

3. **Dr. Rank :** Dr. Rank is Torvald's best friend.

4. **Bob :** Bob is Nora and Torvald's child.

5. **Anne-Marie :** Annie-Marie is the Helmers' nanny.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Which is considered to be the finest play of Ibsen?
2. How does Ibsen rewrite the rules of drama?
3. Who was the unknown visitor of Nora?
4. Describe the character of Mrs. Linde.
5. Compare and contrast Mrs. Linde and Nora at the end of the play.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Wild Duck (1884) is by many considered Ibsen's finest work, and it is certainly the most complex. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after an extended deputation and is reconvened with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. Over the course of the play, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' ostensibly happy home are confessed to Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the "Summons of the Ideal".

2. Ibsen had completely rewritten the rules of drama with a realism which was to be adopted by Chekhov and others and which we see in the theater to this day. From Ibsen forward, challenging assumptions and directly speaking about issues has been considered one of the factors that makes a play art rather than entertainment.

3. Helene, the maid, announces that the Helmers' dear friend Dr. Rank has come to visit. At the same time, another unknown visitor has arrived. To Nora's great surprise, Kristine Linde, a former school friend, comes into the room.

4. Mrs. Linde is Nora's childhood friend. Kristine Linde is a practical, down-to-earth woman, and her sensible worldview highlights Nora's somewhat childlike outlook on life. Mrs. Linde's account of her life of poverty underscores the privileged nature of the life that Nora leads.

5. By the end of Act Three, both Nora and Mrs. Linde have entered new phases in their lives. Nora has chosen to abandon her children and her husband because she wants independence from her roles as mother and wife. In contrast, Mrs. Linde has chosen to relinquish her independence to marry Krogstad and take care of his family. She likes having people depend on her, and independence does not seem to fulfill her. Despite their discernible opposition, both Nora's and Mrs. Linde's decisions allow them to fulfill their respective personal desires. They have both chosen their own fates, freely and without male influence. Ibsen seems to feel that the nature of their choices is not as important as the fact that both women make the choices themselves.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Mrs. Linde's arrival and Nora's awakening and transformation?
2. Sketch the character of the protagonist of the play, "Nora Helmer".
3. What does Torvald's fascination with beauty and appearances imply about his personality? Do his attitudes change at all over the course of the play?
4. Write down the detailed summary of the play, "A Doll's House".
5. How do the characters in A Doll's House use the words "free" and "freedom"? Do different speakers use the terms differently? Do they take on different connotations over the course of the play?

FURTHER READINGS

1. A Commentary on the Works of Henrik Ibsen— Hjalmar Boyesen
2. Ibsen: The Critical Heritage— Michael Egan
3. Ibsen, A Dissenting View — Ronald Gray
4. Ibsen's Lively Art—Frederick Marker

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सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणिः पष्यन्तु माकष्चिद् दुःख भाग्भवेत्।।

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