BRITISH DRAMA FROM BENA JONSON TO ARNOLD WESKER

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SYLLABUS

British Drama from Ben Jonson to Arnold Wesker

Objectives:

- To enable the learners to identify the major themes and concerns of literature in the eighteenth century.
- To enable the learners to relate biographical information about authors to the works by these authors.
- To introduce the learners to the selected British dramatists and plays.
- To develop a thinking and receptive leader.

Sr. No.	Description
1	Ben Jonson: Introduction of the Text of *Volpone*; Satire and all its Detailed Analysis and Comedy; Characterization and Plot Construction and Sub-plots.
2	Richard Sheridan: *The School for Scandal* – Introduction to the Author and the Text; Detailed Analysis of the Text Act I to Act V; Criticism to the Text and Characterization; All Major and Minor Themes.
3	G. B. Shaw: *Saint Joan* – Introduction to the Author and the Text; Detailed Analysis of the Text; Epilogue and Plot; Characterization; Themes.
4	Harold Pinter – Introduction to the Author and the Text *The Birthday Party*; Detailed Analysis of the Text; Characterization and Theme.
5	Arnold Wesker – Introduction to the Author and the Text *Roots*; Detailed Analysis of the Text; Characterization and Theme.

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Unit 1: Ben Jonson: Introduction of the Text

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the sources of the text of Volpone;
- Examine that Volpone is a comedy play;
- Describe that Volpone is a classical fable;
- Illustrate that the play was admired for its balance of scathing satire against human greed with classical restraint and formalism.

Introduction

Volpone has long been a popular choice as a set text for students. Written by Ben Jonson, it was first produced in 1606 and billed as a comedy, although it also includes elements of tragedy and even animal fable (Volpone is Italian for 'fox'). In essence, it's a dark satire on greed and lust, and remains Jonson's most performed work.

The action takes place in seventeenth-century Venice, over the course of one day. The chief characters are Volpone, a rich libertine and conman, and Mosca, his self-seeking servant. They cause chaos with an audacious fraud designed to part the city's wealthiest from their fortunes. The tale twists and turns, as all the characters attempt to deceive each other, until the whole scheme finally collapses, with disastrous consequences for Volpone.

This unit elaborates the text of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. It illustrates that *Volpone* is a classical drama. It has been justified that Volpone is a classical comedy and examples have also been cited to prove it a clasical fable in this unit.

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1.1 Sources of the Text

Volpone was first performed in 1605. Since there were no reviews, the audience's exact reaction cannot be known. But we do know from letters and diaries that Jonson was not popular with audiences. His plays provided morals and tended to preach to the audience, something they resented. William Shakespeare's plays were much more popular, since they set out to entertain, and this fact was not lost on Jonson, who is credited with being privately annoyed at Shakespeare. Volpone is considered Jonson's most popular work, since it is the one most frequently staged.

Jonson was a serious classicist who modeled his plays on classic Roman and Greek tragedies. Jonson thought that the poet had a moral function to educate, and the purpose of *Volpone* is to teach lessons about greed. The topic is quite serious, although this is comedy, and there are many moments of humor in the play, especially when Volpone is feigning illness and lies disguised. This play is, in many ways, a play within a play. Volpone and Mosca are actors playing roles throughout, but they are also directors leading the three fortune hunters, Corvino, Voltore, and Corbaccio, through their performances. Jonson differed from other playwrights of the period in that he did not use old stories, fables, or histories as the sources for his plays. Instead, Jonson used a plot "type" as the source for most of his plays. In *Volpone*, the plot is the familiar one of a swindle. The action is set in Venice, which many Englishmen thought was a center of debauchery and sin. Jonson's characters are not well defined, nor do they have any depth. Instead, they are "types" familiar to the audience: the dishonest lawyer, the jealous old husband married to a beautiful young girl, and the miserly old man who cannot be satisfied until he can amass even more money.

Characters and Summary

This plot closely parallels Horace's satire on legacy hunters but dramatizes it with characters whose flattened, comic/satiric personas represent various types of human personality as they are distorted by greed, lust, and sheer perversity. Jonson alerts us to the symbolic order of the action's meaning by means of the names he assigns the primary characters: Volpone (fox—deceiver), Mosca (fly—parasite), Voltore (vulture—scavenger/lawyer), Corbaccio (crow—wealthy but still greedy man), and Corvino (raven, another scavenger—the wealthy merchant who can't get enough). These characters all seek to be named Volpone's heir in order to gain his treasure, but they offer him gifts to achieve that honor, and he (though nowhere near death) strings them along, more in love with his delight in deceiving them than even his beloved gold. A love plot is attached to this legacy-hunt, involving Corvino's wife (Celia) and Corbaccio's son (Bonario), but one of the play's puzzles is that they are such relatively lifeless, though moral, characters. Below these levels, three more sets of characters populate the stage. Nano (a dwarf), Castrone (an eunuch), and Androgyno (a hermaphrodite) join Mosca as Volpone's courtiers, Sir Poltic Would-be and his wife are deceived by Peregrine (the young English man on the Continental tour), and the elders of Venice alternately try to profit from and to bring justice to the confusion (Commendatori [sheriffs], Mercatori [merchants], Avocatori [lawyers, brothers of Corvino], and Notario [the court's registrar]).

Notes The plot in Volpone is that the conspirators try to deceive Volpone, but he's really deceiving them, until his agent (Mosca) deceives him (and them) and they bring him to the court, which they all try to deceive, until they are unmasked.

1.2 Text as a Classical Fable

There is a "fable" running throughout the play, through the associations the characters' names create with animals. It is very simple and tells the tale of a cunning "Fox" (Volponein Italian),

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

Volpone also relies on medieval beast fables, especially one entitled "*The Fox Who Feigned Death*." Although the characters in Volpone are not animals, their names and costumes suggest animals. Suggesting that the characters are animals satirizes human nature in general and shows the bestiality of the characters' behavior.

Taken on one level, the main plot of Volpone is a fable; each character are each personifications of different animals, in a story that has a direct moral message. "Volpone" means "Fox" in Italian, and "Mosca" means "Fly". In many of Jonson's plays, a name gives a strong indication as to the nature of a character, and this play is no different; Volpone is the "cunning" Fox, who appears wounded; "Mosca" is the parasitical, insect-like creature, circling around the Fox, and occasionally feeding off of him (gold, in this metaphor, takes the place of Volpone's flesh). Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino act like the carrion birds they are named after (the vulture, the crow and the raven, respectively), by circling around the Fox and waiting for him to die. But the Fox is craftily faking his wounds, and the Fly helps him, and the birds end up losing their feathers (their wealth). This simple fable helps clearly enunciate the meaning of the play and it also suggests that the main characters in the play are somewhat "beastly"; they are acting out animal instincts, and not listening to the voice of conscience and reason; in short, they are not fully human.

Task Elucidate that the main plot of Volpone is a fable.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following statements about volpone is incorrect?
   (a) There are various views noted in letters and diaries
   (b) Volpone was first performed in 1605
   (c) There were no review on its first performance
   (d) It was not popular with audience.
2. The successful characterization of Volpone lies
   (a) in the fact that characters represents various types of human personality
   (b) in the fact that the character has symbolic order of the actions's meaning
   (c) in the fact that all characters in the persuit of deceiving other is deceived himself
   (d) in the fact that all characters have lust for wealth.
3. Volpone relies on medieval beast fables especially one titled
   (a) *The Hare and the Tottoise*
   (b) *The Rabbit and the Lion*
   (c) *The Fox Who Feigned Death*
   (d) *The Crow and the Fox.*

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Fill in the blanks:

4. Jonson was a serious ..... who modeled his plays on classic Roman and Greek tragedies.
5. There is a ..... running throughout the play, through the associations the characters' names create with animals.
6. The main plot of Volpone is a ..... .
7. The topic of Volpone is quite serious, although this is .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Volpone is considered Jonson's most popular work.
9. The action of Volpone is set in Venice, which many Englishmen thought was a center of debauchery and sin.
10. Corvino a scavengeris the poor merchant who can't get enough.

1.3 Text as a Classical Drama

While Volpone was set in Venice, London audiences were well able to recognise its themes. For his realism, Jonson was attacked at the time as "a meere Empyrick, one that gets what he hath by observation." But four centuries on, his ability to capture social contradictions and present them in a captivating form continues to resonate.

Notes Through the play *Volpone*, considered by some his masterpiece, Jonson portrays with a black humour a society in which the pursuit of wealth and individual self-interest have become primary. Venice was regarded as the epitome of a sophisticated commercial city and virtually all the characters are revealed as corrupt or compromised.

Volpone means "fox" in Italian. Jonson based his story around medieval and Aesopian tales in which a fox pretends to be dead in order to catch the carrion birds that come to feed on its carcass. In the play, Volpone is a single and aging Venetian "magnifico" who has devised a trick to fleece his neighbours while simultaneously nourishing his sense of superiority over his hapless victims. For three years he has pretended to be dying, so as to encourage legacy hunters to bring gifts in the hope of being named as his beneficiary.

With the aid of his servant Mosca, Volpone strings along his suitors—Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino—extracting their wealth by feeding their avarice. (Voltore Corbaccio and Corvino are the Italian names for vulture, crow and raven.) Voltore, a lawyer, offers Volpone a platter made of precious metal. Corbaccio, a doddering gentleman, is talked into disinheriting his son Bonario in favour of Volpone, while Corvino, a miserly merchant and hugely jealous husband, is driven by greed to offer his young wife Celia to bed and comfort the supposedly dying Volpone.

Here Volpone, a rogue whose victims trap themselves by their own weaknesses (and are therefore deserving of their respective fates) becomes overwhelmed by his own passions. Definitely not at death's door and completely obsessed, he tries to force himself onto Celia and is only stopped by the lucky appearance of Bonario. The two innocents bring charges in court against the old man. But countercharges of adultery and fornication against Celia and Bonario are laid by the three legacy hunters who are desperate to defend what each considers his own future wealth.

Volpone revels in these ever-widening displays of degradation. He decides to stage his own death so he can witness their frenzy when they see him bequeathing his wealth to Mosca. However, after

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Mosca begins preparing the elaborate funeral, he ceases to acknowledge his former master. As the heir to Volpone's great wealth, Mosca is transformed in the eyes of the courtroom judges—who are as self-serving as the rest—from a lowly servant into an eligible young man to whom they might marry their daughters.

Task Illustrate that volpone is a rogue whose victims trap themselves by their own weaknesses.

Desperate not to be outfoxed by his servant, Volpone reveals himself, thus exposing his own and everyone else's guilt. He is stripped of his wealth, which is given to charity, and sentenced to prison, while Mosca is condemned to the galleys for passing himself off as a person of breeding. Voltore, the advocate, is debarred from the court and Corbaccio's wealth is transferred to his son Bonario. Corvino is paraded through Venice as an ass, while his wife Celia is sent home to her family with triple her dowry.

Jonson skillfully manipulates the audience so that it identifies with Volpone and his brazen schemes. The old magnifico's zest is infective and the audience is swept along with his machinations only to find itself, along with the anti-hero, hovering at the edge of criminality. In this way, the author tries to confront us with the dangers of unrestrained self-interest and with what Jonson considers to be a necessary sense of social responsibility.

Did u know? One element of Volpone that comes from classical (specifically Roman) drama is the theme of legacy hunting.

The unities of time and place in Volpone also come from classical drama. The unity of time requires that the events of the plot occur over no more than one 24-hour day. The unity of place requires that the action occur in only one setting. To what extent does Volpone observe each of these unities?

The third classical unity, called unity of action, requires that a play develop one and only one plot. Volpone does not observe unity of action, however, because it has both a main plot and a subplot. The main plot concerns Volpone's gulling (tricking) of the legacy hunters.

1.4 Text as a Comedy

Comedy of Humor

The comedy of humours is comedy based on the exaggeration of the greek explantaion for health—the body was balanced by the four humours black bile, yellow bile/cholor, blood and phlegm. If any of these were out of balance, the body and the personality were influenced.

Volpone is lustful—sin of meloncholia (too much black bile) and decietful—sin of sanguine (too much blood) Mosca is covetous—sin of choloric (too much cholor/yellow bile)

In ancient and medieval medicine, it was believed that the four basic fluids of the body (blood, phlegm, choler/yellow bile, melancholy/black bile) directly affect a person's physical condition, and these fluids were called humors. When the humors are in a balanced state, the person will remain in a good temper. If, any of the humors gets imbalanced, the person also becomes abnormal physically and psychologically. For example, dominance of blood makes human sanguine (happy, generous), phlegm makes human phlegmatic (cowardly, pale), choler makes choleric (hot tempered, impatient, vindictive), black bile makes pensive, sentimental, melancholic.

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The conception of the humor of the medieval age has a great impact on Ben Jonson's Volpone, especially on the character development. Actually, Volpone is, to many extents, based upon the humor theory. That's why it is considered as a comedy of humor. Jonson tries to show using the above notion that, if somebody lacks any character trait or contains too much of that particular trait, she/he is considered to be abnormal because of her/his imbalanced features. If a person does contain all the traits in a measured or balanced state, then she/he can be considered normal.

In *Volpone*, Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, Voltore, Sir Politic-Would-Be and his wife, all of them do have imbalance in their characters, and this imbalance make the play a comedy since these abnormal characters pave the way to make the plot satiric and at a time amusing. Each character is peculiar and singular in his/her own way. It is necessary to keep in mind that, a comedy of humor always deals with the characters more than anything else.

Jonson indirectly hints that, the mental imbalance is more dangerous than physical imbalance as he shows that, the characters—Nano, Castrone and Androgyno—being physically abnormal, are better creatures than the earlier ones.

Dark Comedy

In *Volpone* all of the characters are equally greedy. So the audience does not get angry for Volpones victimising them.They deserve their end. This play ends with punishment not just ridicule and this ending makes it dark comedy.

In fact comedy should have a happy endihg but in this play we see that people are punished at the end of the play, thus it doesnt have a satisfactory ending for a comedy so we can say that it is a dark comedy because Ben Jonson was the great comic and satiric writer of the English Renaissance. He also protested in Volpone the inhumanity of greedy people such as greedy lawyers. In Volpone Ben Jonson celebrates the joy of a good trick. He emphasizes the fun and the humour of deceit but he does not overlook its nastiess, and in the end he punishes the deceivers.

According to Wittenburg there are 4 types of love in the play:

- Sexual love (between Volpone and Lady Would Be)
- Self Love (Mosca and the others loving themselves)
- Love of money
- True Love (Between Bonaria and Celia)

People are weak about money and they can do everything for it. The love of money is shown as the root of all evil. The reputation of venice as a wordly, commercial and cosmopolitan place darken the comedy.

According to Watson with Volpone or the fox Johson turned to his satirical talent and developed his own species of satiric comedy. Volpone is the first and the greatest of a series of comedies which show Jonsons characteristic mixture;

- of savagery and humour
- of moral feeling of the monstrous absurdities of human nature Volpone cunningly mixes a number of genres and ideas well known to Renaissance audience: Volpone can be read as:
    - a moral example
    - a best fable: It is a short tale in which the principle actors are of animals, as their names reveal.
    - a satiric play (there is satire on English life is general)
    - a humour play

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However, unlike in the conventional comedy, good does not necessarily triumph at the end, for even the state itself is shown to be easily carrupted. Volpones avarice seems to be epidemic and good characters like Celia and Bonaria stand at the mercy of evil. As Watson explains the play is optimistic. A principal theme is the way that greed can make people gullible. In playing their trick, which focuses on exposing the greed of others, volpone and mosca also expose their own selfishness and greed (which is greater than that of victims). The setting is Renaissance Italy, accepted by the English imagination of the time as the proper home of vice.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Volpone was set in
    (a) Venice
    (b) Scotland
    (c) Wittenberg
    (d) Newhempshire.
12. Which of the following statement substantiate that *Volpone* is a dark comedy ?
    (a) All characters are cheated
    (b) All the characters are equally greedy
    (c) All characters have lust for power
    (d) All characters are deceiving and being deceited.
13. The comedy of humours is comedy based on
    (a) lust of the Volpone
    (b) sin of choloric in Mosca
    (c) the exaggeration of the Greek explantaion for health
    (d) ancient system of medicine.

Fill in the blanks:

14. At the time of opening of Volpone Jonson was attacked as a meere .....
15. Volpone means ..... in Italian.
16. Volpone is a single and aging ..... magnifico.
17. In *Volpone* all of the characters are equally .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. In fact comedy should have a happy endihg but in Volpone people are punished at the end of the play.
19. A comedy of humor always deals with the characters more than anything else.
20. Desperate not to be outfoxed by his servant, Volpone hide himself.

1.5 Summary

- *Volpone* was first performed in 1605. Since there were no reviews, the audience's exact reaction cannot be known. But we do know from letters and diaries that Jonson was not popular with audiences.

Notes

- Jonson's plays provided morals and tended to preach to the audience, something they resented.
- Jonson was a serious classicist who modeled his plays on classic Roman and Greek tragedies.
- Jonson thought that the poet had a moral function to educate, and the purpose of *Volpone* is to teach lessons about greed. The topic is quite serious, although this is comedy, and there are many moments of humor in the play, especially when Volpone is feigning illness and lies disguised.
- The play *Volpone* is, in many ways, a play within a play. Volpone and Mosca are actors playing roles throughout, but they are also directors leading the three fortune hunters, Corvino, Voltore, and Corbaccio, through their performances.
- The plot on *Volpone* closely parallels Horace's satire on legacy hunters but dramatizes it with characters whose flattened, comic/satiric personas represent various types of human personality as they are distorted by greed, lust, and sheer perversity.
- Jonson alerts us to the symbolic order of the action's meaning by means of the names he assigns the primary characters: Volpone (fox—deceiver), Mosca (fly—parasite), Voltore (vulture—scavenger/lawyer), Corbaccio (crow—wealthy but still greedy man), and Corvino (raven, another scavenger—the wealthy merchant who can't get enough).
- There is a "fable" running throughout the play, through the associations the characters' names create with animals. It is very simple and tells the tale of a cunning "Fox" (Volponein Italian), circled by a mischievous "Fly" (Mosca in Italian), who helps the Fox trick several carrion-birds—a vulture (Voltore), a crow (Corvino) and a raven (Corbaccio) into losing their feathers (their wealth).
- Volpone also relies on medieval beast fables, especially one entitled *The Fox Who Feigned Death*.
- The main plot of Volpone is a fable; each character are each personifications of different animals, in a story that has a direct moral message.
- Volpone is a classical drama. For his realism, Jonson was attacked at the time as a meere Empyrick, one that gets what he hath by observation.
- Jonson skillfully manipulates the audience so that it identifies with Volpone and his brazen schemes.
- The comedy of humours is comedy based on the exaggeration of the greek explantaion for health—the body was balanced by the four humours black bile, yellow bile/cholor, blood and phlegm. The instances of humor are Volpone is lustful—sin of meloncholia (too much black bile) and decietful—sin of sanguine (too much blood) Mosca is covetous—sin of choloric (too much cholor/yellow bile).

1.6 Keywords

Black Comedy : Comedy that employs morbid, gloomy, grotesque, or calamitous situations in its plot.

Fable : A short tale to teach a moral lesson, often with animals or inanimate objects as characters; the fable of the tortoise and the hare; Or a story not founded on fact. Or a story about supernatural or extraordinary persons or incidents; legend.

Unencumbered : Not impeded, slowed down, or retarded; free to move,advance, or go forward. Or having few or no burdens or obligations.

Erudition : Knowledge acquired by study, research, etc.

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1.7 Review Questions

1. Give a brief view of the sources of text of *Volpone*.
2. Evaluate that the characterization of Volpone is symbolic order.
3. Explain that the text of Volpone is a classical drama
4. Write short notes on the following in context of Volpone:
   (a) Dark Comedy
   (b) Comedy of Humor
   (c) Classical Fable.
5. Explain the following in context of Volpone:
   (a) Pity (b) Deceit (c) Humor

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. (c)
4. classicist	5. fable	6. fable
7. comedy	8. True	9. True
10. False	11. (a)	12. (b)
13. (c)	14. Empyrick	15. fox
16. Venetian	17. greedy	18. True
19. True	20. False	

1.8 Further Readings

Books

Jonson, Ben; J. D. Rea (ed.). 1919. *Volpone*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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Online links

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http://www.sparknotes.com/drama/volpone/section5.rhtml

http://www.deepdyve.com/lp/university-of-california-press/volpone-and-beast-fable-early-modern-analogic-reading-a161tcCA3v

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Unit 2: Volpone: Satire and all its Detailed Analysis and Comedy

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain that the play is a work of serious intellectual and moral weight;
- Illustrate the problem of protagonist—the play is a comedy, and protagonist in comedies should generally end up happily;
- Summarize the series in all the acts;
- Analyse the satire scene by scene and act by act;
- Examine the construction of the scenes of the play;
- Explain the ironies used in the play.

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Introduction

In Volpone, Jonson sets out to undermine the notion of avarice and vice by showing men who 'possess wealth, as sick men possess fevers.'

Volpone takes place in Venice during the seventeenth century. Volpone is a Venetian nobleman who is already very rich but his sole desire is to accumulate more wealth. His ruling passion is avarice and he makes gold his religion. The first scene of the play introduces Volpone and his lackey, Mosca entering the shrine where Volpone keeps his gold: "Open the shrine, that I may see my saint".

Volpone is twisting values. Gold and avarice are often perceived as the root of all evil, but here in the very first lines of Jonson's play, Volpone is addressing gold as the root of all that is good. He goes on to express how gold has become his God, and is indeed perceived as his religion. The lexis used is that of religious adoration, and his "shrine", the place where his evil intentions are being planned, is described as the "blessed room".

This unit elaborates the satire of avarice in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. More emphasis is given on its detailed analysis scene by scene and act by act.

2.1 Prologue

The play is dedicated to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, both of which had recently awarded Jonson honorary doctorates at the time of the play's writing. He briefly discusses the moral intentions of the play and its debt to classical drama. In the argument, Jonson provides a brief summary of the play's plot in the form of an acrostic on Volpone's name. The prologue then introduces the play to the viewing audience, informing them that "with a little luck," it will be a hit; Jonson ends by promising that the audience's cheeks will turn red from laughter after viewing his work.

2.1.1 Analysis

These opening parts of the play, before we are introduced to the action, may seem superfluous. But they help us understand the play in several ways. First, in the banal sense; the Argument, as Jonson terms it, provides in brief encapsulated form the premise of the play, a premise that will be fully introduced in the first scene.

The dedication, however, gives us a clue as to Jonson's intentions in writing Volpone. First of all, he is intent on writing a "moral" play. By taking to task those "poetasters" who have disgraced the theatrical profession with their immoral work, Jonson highlights the moral intentions of his play. His play will make a moral statement. And it will do so in line with the traditions of drama followed by classical dramatists, that is, the dramatists of ancient Greece. This connection to the past further indicates that the play we are about to read (or see) is a work of serious intellectual and moral weight.

Notes Jonson is boastful—this play was written in five weeks, says Jonson, all the jokes are mine, I think it's going to be a huge hit, and you are all going to laugh hysterically until your cheeks turn red.

The Prologue sets a boisterous tone that the rest of the play will follow. So in these opening passages, Jonson begins to mix a serious intellectual and moral message with a boisterous, light-hearted and entertaining tone, reinforcing the explicit promise he makes in the Prologue "to mix profit with

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your pleasure." In other words, says Jonson, Volpone will be a work that will educate you but also entertain you at the same time.

2.2 Act I

2.2.1 Scene I

The scene is Volpone's house, in the Italian city of Venice, in the spring of 1606. It is morning, and Volpone, whose name in Italian means "the great Fox," enters. He is a Venetian magnifico, or nobleman and accompanying him is his parasite Mosca, best thought of as a personal assistant/manservant/lackey. Volpone asks Mosca to unveil the shrine where Volpone keeps his treasure. Volpone talks at length about the beauty and ethereal qualities of his gold. Then he and his parasite—whose name means "Fly"—discuss the way in which he earned his treasure: without hard work, presumably through cons. They also discuss the liberal way in which Volpone spends his treasure. He also describes the current con he is running; since he is childless, he has no heirs, and since he is extremely wealthy (from his previous cons), there is great interest into whom his estate will go to when he dies. So Volpone is pretending to be gravely ill and near death, prompting three notable citizens who consider themselves potential heirs to shower him with gifts in the hopes that he will make one of them his principal heir.

Analysis

The construction of the first scene of the play is straight forward. It reveals the conceit (premise or situation) of the comedy and firmly establishes Volpone as the protagonist of the play. We find out that Volpone is rich, adores money, but takes more pleasure in gaining money than in having it, "Yet I glory/More in the cunning purchase of my wealth/Than in the glad possession." The "cunning" here arises from the fact that Volpone has gained his wealth not through honest work and toil (or, as Mosca adds, through the vicious practices of money-lending), but instead through cons, such as the one he now plays on his potential heirs. We also learn from Mosca that he is a man who "knows[s] the use of riches." Mosca's description of "Candian wines" and "sumptuous hangings" imply that Volpone is a hedonist, someone controlled by his animal desires for pleasure, as does Volpone's own penchant for hyperbole, or poetic exaggeration, as when he claims that his gold shines brighter than the sun.

Notes The satire of greed and obsession with money is the play's main theme, and we are introduced to it immediately through the first speech.

It is an act of blasphemy, full of religious terms—"sacred," "relic," "heaven," "saint," and "Hail." When Volpone tells the treasure that "even hell is made worth heaven" with it, he explicitly values the worth of gold as higher than the worth of spiritual redemption and excellence—in short, gold, not God, has supreme importance for him. The substitution of money for God in the context of a prayer would have been shocking to an Elizabethan audience, though it has lost much of that sensational effect today. But the speech still reverses our expectations, by associating sacred, religious language with money usually thought to be profane. As such, it is an example of situational irony, where the audience's expectations in a given situation reversed from the norm; in other words, we expect prayer to be sacred, but Volpone makes it crass and profane.

Example: In situational irony a pickpocket who, in the act of picking someone's pocket, has his pocket picked himself; the thief's role is reversed from perpetrator to victim, and instead of gaining from the action, loses by it.

Notes

The use of irony is a key element of satire in general; and used appropriately, irony is perfectly suited to Johnson's intention to convey a moral message in an entertaining fashion.

Caution Irony, like a good joke, involves a reversal of the listener or reader's expectations; so irony is often funny. But irony can also have a serious purpose.

The use of irony is almost always a form of attack on a certain viewpoint or way of life, by showing its inherent contradictions; and if it aims to show us that certain behavior or viewpoints are present in the thoughts and actions of everyday people in society at large, then it makes a pointed commentary on contemporary society. In other words, any thief who believes that stealing is the right way to make money can be made to look ridiculous by losing his money to theft. And a commonly held belief or way of behaving can be made to look ridiculous by showing that, in certain circumstances, it has disastrous consequences. So it is not surprising that irony is omnipresent in Volpone; not only does Jonson use situational irony to convey his message; he also uses verbal irony and dramatic irony. Verbal irony is very close to sarcasm; something is expressed whose actual meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning of the words; the difference between the two is that verbal irony is usually more subtle, relying on ambiguities in certain words and context to tip off the listener or reader to the actual meaning. Dramatic irony is the ironic effect created.

Example: When someone doesn't know something you do, and says something that's normally reasonable but in the context quite stupid or funny; in other, the words or actions of a character take on a meaning different from the one they intend because of circumstances or information that character does not know.

12.2.2 Scene II

Nano (a dwarf), Castrone (a eunuch), and Androgyno enter. They are here to entertain Volpone, with Nano leading the way. In a pleasant little fable, Nano relates that the soul now in Androgyno's body originated in the soul of Pythagoras. Mosca admits that he, in fact, wrote the entertainment, after Volpone says he was pleased with it. Nano then sings a song praising Fools, such as himself, who make their living by entertaining at the tables of the rich. A knock is heard at the door; Mosca says that it is Signior Voltore, a lawyer and one of Volpone's would-be "heirs." Mosca goes to see him into the house and comes back to announce that he has brought a huge piece of gold plate with him as a gift. Volpone is excited; his con is working, and he quickly prepares to put on the act of being sick, by getting into his night-clothes and dropping ointment in his eyes. He notes that he has been fooling these would-be heirs for three years, with various faked symptoms such as palsy (tremors), gout (joint-aches), coughs, apoplexy (breathing problems) and catarrhs (vomit).

Analysis

The entrance of Volpone's bizarre "family" of children is the entrance of the grotesque in the play; all three are"freaks" of one sort or another; Castrone the eunuch, Nano the dwarf, and Androgyno the hermaphrodite. Grotesque figures are often used as personified abstractions, stock and usually comic characters that represent an "inner" ugliness of some sort that the play intends to comment upon. This interpretation is supported by their names—Nano, Castrone and Androgyno simply mean "dwarf", "eunuch," and "hermaphrodite"—and by the fact they speak in heroic couplets, as opposed to the central characters who speak in unrhymed iambic pentameter, also known as blank verse. What their grotesquerie represents is an inner grotesqueness in Volpone. The three are not only his servants, but also because they are in a very important sense his family; by his own admission, he has "no wife, no parent, no child, no ally." Furthermore, Volpone's choice to surround himself with individuals, such as Castrone and Androgyno, with "reproductive deformities" highlights

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and makes more strange his own lack of children, making the failure to reproduce seem more an essential part of his character, rather than an accident of fate. Thus, the lack of the basic human drive to reproduce seems, and certainly would seem to Elizabethan audiences, an indication that Volpone is something less than human, probably due to his inverted system of values.

In case we forget that this is a comedy, the scene also sets a lighthearted, erudite tone, for the play and helps highlight several of Volpone's redeeming qualities that make him a sympathetic protagonist. Nano traces a lineage for Androgyno's soul in rhyming couplets, thus demonstrating a gift for rhetoric similar to the one his master displayed in the first scene. Using this device, Jonson also manages to incorporate a great number of names from classical, which signify his allegiance to classical literature. Volpone, like most of Jonson's plays, follows the unities of classical drama: the unity of time, the unity of place and unity of action. Very few dramatists stuck to these rules perfectly, and Jonson is no exception; though the play conforms to the first two unities farely well, it completely ignores unity of action with an entire subplot centering around the traveler Peregrine and the knight Sir Politic Would-be. Nano's song about "fools" refers directly to himself.

Notes Volpone calls him his "fool," but indirectly to Volpone; for "fool" is an Elizabethan word for "court jester" or "joker"; his defining characteristic is "wit" and "merry making." Fools, in this sense, can be thought of as the earliest professional comedians, pointing out the folly of the ruling classes for their own amusement; because he is a source of laughter, and not serious attack, "he speaks truth, free from slaughter," in other words, without fear of repercussions. He is thus also isolated from normal society, not subject to the usual laws of decorum and propriety that govern others; this distance and outsiders' perspective, as well as the freedom to speak his mind, gives him a moral superiority, especially in an age of hypocrisy, where truth-telling is in short supply.

2.2.3 Scene III

Voltore the lawyer—whose name means "vulture" in Italian—enters with Mosca, and Mosca assures him that he will be Volpone's heir. Voltore asks after Volpone's health, and Volpone thanks him for both his kindness and his gift of a large piece of gold plate. The magnifico then informs the lawyer that his health is failing, and he expects to die soon. Voltore asks Mosca three times whether he is Volpone's heir before he is finally satisfied with Mosca's answer, at which point he rejoices. He asks why he is so lucky, and Mosca explains that it is partly due to the fact that Volpone has always had an admiration for lawyers and the way they can argue either side of a case at a moment's notice. He then begs Voltore not to forget him when the lawyer inherits Volpone's money and becomes rich. Voltore leaves happy, with a kiss for Mosca, at which point Volpone jumps out of bed and congratulates his parasite on a job well done. But the game quickly starts again, as another would-be heir arrives, identified only as "the raven."

2.2.4 Scene IV

"The raven" turns out to be Corbaccio, an elderly man, who, according to Mosca, is in much worse health himself than Volpone pretends to be. Corbaccio offers to give Volpone a drug, but Mosca refuses out of fear that the drug may be Corbaccio's way of speeding up the dying process. Mosca excuses his refusal by saying that Volpone simply does not trust the medical profession in general, to which Corbaccio agrees. Corbaccio then inquires after Mosca's health; as Mosca lists off the ever-worsening symptoms, Corbaccio marks his approval of each one, except when he mishears one of Mosca's replies and gets worried that Volpone might be improving. But Mosca assures him that Volpone is, in fact, getting worse and is in fact nearly dead. This cheers up Corbaccio greatly, who

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remarks that Volpone is even sicker than he is and that he is certain to outlive; he remarks that it makes him feel twenty years younger. Corbaccio expresses curiosity about Volpone's will, but Mosca replies it has not yet been written. The old man asks what Voltore was up to at Volpone's house; when Mosca answers truthfully—that he gave Volpone a piece of gold plate in the hopes of being written into his will—Corbaccio presents a bag of cecchines (Venetian coins) intended for Volpone. Mosca then explain how Corbaccio can be certain of being Volpone's heir; by leaving the bag of cecchines, but also by writing Volpone as his sole heir. Mosca says that when Volpone then writes his own will, his sense of gratitude will compel him to make Corbaccio his sole heir. Corbaccio soon leaves, and Volpone mocks him afterward mercilessly for trying to inherit money from a sick, dying man when he, himself, is on the brink of death.

Analysis of Scene III and IV

Through the device of Volpone's con, Jonson makes his satiric commentary on greed, using dramatic irony, situational irony, verbal irony, and repetition. Dramatic irony is a literary device often used in tragedies; a central character behaves in a certain way in ignorance of key facts about a situation; we, however, know the behavior is incorrect and feel tension because of our inability to stop it. But as Jonson demonstrates, dramatic irony can also be an effective tool for satire and comedy. Each "legacy hunter" is pursuing what, in the world of seventeenth-century Venice, was a sound business strategy: find a dying magnifico and ingratiate yourself with him, using expensive gifts (gifts that would be yours again when you inherited his estate anyways). As Mosca points out to Volpone before Voltore's entrance, "if you died today, What large return would come of all his ventures." It is sound strategy, if Volpone is really ill. But since Volpone is not ill (and since we know this) the behavior of each character seems ridiculous. Like the thief who is the victim of thieving, each character attempts to deceive themselves into money, by pretending they care about Volpone's health, but they are instead deceived out of their own. And we know they are all lying, because though each character reiterates the same well wishes, they also celebrate being named his heir or, like Corbaccio, express approval over his long list of worsening "symptoms." It is clear that their concern is not that Volpone gets better, but that he gets worse; and what is amusing is that their hypocrisy is being exposed by someone even more adept at lying than they are.

Volpone and Mosca are conscious, too, of the "moral" aspect of their game; and they emerge, by contrast to the three legacy hunters, as eminently likable. They are no worse than the legacy hunters; if Volpone is deceitful and immoral in his pursuit of personal gratification, then no less so are they; and if Mosca is servile and obsequious toward Volpone, well, they are too. And Volpone and Mosca are better, in that their motivations are purer; not money for money's sake, but money for the sake of pleasure, or for the sake of the pleasure of getting it-they both enjoy their machinations immensely. The repetition of would-be heirs, from different walks of life (lawyer, merchant, and nobleman), indicate that greed is a characteristic of the society as whole; again, Volpone is valorized because he is the only honest about his greed. Volpone and Mosca are also both conscious of the various ironies of the game, and comment upon them. Volpone remarks on the situational irony of Corbaccio's attempt to become his heir when Corbaccio is in fact the one who is near death. And Mosca's speech to Voltore about how much Volpone admires the "legal profession" is an example of verbal irony, in that Mosca gives a speech in praise of lawyers which actually insults them, as the things Volpone supposedly "admires" are essentially the ability to deceive and equivocate; it is also dramatic irony because Voltore doesn't know that Volpone is a deceiver himself and therefore would probably admire this deceitfulness. This consciousness draws us closer to Volpone and Mosca, because we share it too; it makes us their co-conspirators, as does the frequent use of asides, or comments made directly to the audience, which set-up a conspiring atmosphere between the characters and the play's spectators. Volpone and Mosca play the role of a "fool", by Nano's definition, well. They too, make a living from their wit, and their way with words. They also possess an outsider's viewpoint on society; the knowledge that Volpone is not, in fact, ill, separates both them and us from Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore. And, like the fool, they do not harm the people they mock; the three prospective heirs are not made impoverished by their deceit, and no innocents are hurt.

2.2.5 Scene V

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The final would-be heir now appears. He is a merchant named Corvino, and his names mean "crow" in Italian. He brings a pearl as his gift; Mosca then lets him know that Volpone has been saying his name constantly; though he is so ill he can barely recognize anyone and is unable to say anything else. Corvino hands over the pearl, and Mosca then informs him he took it upon himself to write up a will, interpreting Volpone's cries of "Corvino" as indicating the Fox's desire to have Corvino be his heir. Corvino hugs and thanks Mosca for his help, then asks whether or not Volpone saw them celebrating. Mosca assures him Volpone is blind. Corvino is worried that the sick man might hear them talking this way, but Mosca assures him he is dead by hurling abuse in his ear; he then asks Corvino to join in, which the merchant does gladly. But when Mosca suggests that Corvino suffocate Volpone, Corvino backs off and begs Mosca not to use violence. Corvino then leaves, and pledges to share everything with Mosca when he inherits Volpone's fortune, but Mosca notes that one thing Corvino will not share: his wife. When Corvino is gone, another caller arrives: it is Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of the English knight Sir Politic Would-be, but Volpone does not want to talk-or do anything else-with her, so she is not let in. Mosca explains that Lady Politics' reputation for promiscuity is overblown, unlike Corvino's wife; she is not beautiful enough to be promiscuous. According to Mosca, Corvino's wife is perhaps the most beautiful woman in all of Italy. Volpone is inflamed by Mosca's description, and vows to see her. Mosca explains that she is never let out of the house by the insanely jealous Corvino, and is kept guarded by ten spies. Volpone nevertheless is resolved to see her, so he decides to go in disguise-but not too well disguised, since this might be his first introduction to the beautiful Celia.

Analysis

The final scene is in many ways a conclusion of the scenes with Voltore and Corbaccio. Corvino is not particularly different from the first two characters in terms of his intentions in the scene, or in the way he is thoroughly gulled by Volpone and Mosca. Volpone "What a rare punishment/Is avarice to itself," thus noting the poetic justice of their act, the way it is a perfect retribution for the prospective heirs. Though that last quotation can also be considered an instance of foreshadowing. Volpone will be punished himself in Act V, also as a result of his own greed; as Jonson wishes to convey an unambiguous moral message in the play, in the end all greed will be punished, even that of the likeable Volpone. A couple of other developments combine to presage future plot developments in the play. First, there is Mosca's suggestion that Corvino kill Volpone. It is out of keeping with what Mosca has said before in terms of its violence; and though it is taken as a joke by Volpone, it does raise some doubts about Mosca's loyalty, and also serves to initially associate Corvino with violence—an association that will be strengthened in the following acts. This scene also introduces Corvino's, who will be Volpone's love interest in the play. The love interest gives the plot added impetus; if the play focused entirely around Volpone's con-game, it would in the end prove tiresome; but we instead end the Act with a determined Volpone vowing to introduce himself to a beautiful woman, a source of suspense (especially to anyone with a romantic streak). Taken on one level, the main plot of Volpone is a fable; each character are each personifications of different animals, in a story that has a direct moral message. "Volpone" means "Fox" in Italian, and "Mosca" means "Fly". In many of Jonson's plays, a name gives a strong indication as to the nature of a character, and this play is no different; Volpone is the "cunning" Fox, who appears wounded; "Mosca" is the parasitical, insect-like creature, circling around the Fox, and occasionally feeding off of him (gold, in this metaphor, takes the place of Volpone's flesh). Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino act like the carrion birds they are named after (the vulture, the crow and the raven, respectively), by circling around the Fox and waiting for him to die. But the Fox is craftily faking his wounds, and the Fly helps him, and the birds end up losing their feathers (their wealth). This simple fable helps clearly enunciate the meaning of the play and it also suggests that the main characters in the play are somewhat "beastly"; they are acting out animal instincts, and not listening to the voice of conscience and reason; in short, they are not fully human.

Notes

2.3 Act II

2.3.1 Scene I

The scene is the public square outside Corvino's home, slightly later in the day. Sir Politic Would-be, the English knight residing in Venice, and Peregrine, an English traveler who has just arrived in Venice, are strolling together. Sir Politic explains that is was his wife's wish that the two should go to Venice, for she desired to pick up some of the local culture. He asks Peregrine for news from the home country, and says that he has heard many strange things from England; for example, a raven has been building a nest in one of the king' ships. Having decided that Sir Politic will believe anything anyone tells him, as his name indicates, Peregrine proceeds to let him tell some more improbable stories for his and the audience's amusement, including the one about Mas' Stone, the supposed drunken illiterate who Politic is convinced was a dangerous spy. According to Politic, Stone had secret messages smuggled out of the Netherlands in cabbages. To see just how much Politic will pretend to know, Peregrine mentions a race of spy baboons living near to China. Politic, of course, says he has heard of them, and calls them "the Mameluchi", another name for the Mamelukes. Peregrine says, sarcastically, that he is fortunate to have run into Sir Politic, because he has only read books about Italy, and needs some advice on how to negotiate his way through Venetian life. Sir Politic seems to be agreeing when Peregrine interrupts him, asking him to identify the people entering the square.

Analysis

This scene introduces us to the Sir Politic Would-be subplot of Volpone. The subplot is a key component of Elizabethan drama; it is a secondary storyline which, like a variation on a theme, should take up the themes of the main story, or related themes, and treats them in a slightly different way, either with a different tone or with a different emphasis. The subplot usually often revolves around a central character that plays a less central role in the main plot. Volpone has been criticized for the fact that the central characters in its subplot-Sir Politic, Lady Politic and Peregrine—play almost no role in the central plot. But the satirical intent of the two plots and their light-hearted tone are similar, as are their focus on gullibility. In the main plot, the gullibility of the main characters is inspired by their greed. In the subplot instead of satirizing greed, Jonson attacks another selfish virtue, that of vanity. Sir Politic considers himself wise and learned, and wants everyone to see him that way; he speaks confidently of knowing the ways of Venetians, even though he has only lived in Venice a short while. His name gives us the central indication of his vice, that he "would be politic," or knowledgeable, if he could; his desire to appear so at all costs makes him agree to anything anyone says as if he knew it already, before trying to add his own bit of (usually incorrect) insight to the statement. His situation is ironic (situationally) because in trying so hard to appear knowledgeable, he in fact appears gullible and stupid to anyone who meets him for even the briefest period of time—such as Peregrine.

The Sir Politic subplot is also directed to a specific segment of Jonson's audience, namely Italo-phile Englishmen like himself, for whom a very serious issue at the time was whether or not Englishmen in love with the grandeur of Italian civilization should take the risk of traveling to Italy. The "risk" involved was not that of disease or death, but of "moral degeneration"; Italy was seen as a corrupt and decadent place, full of liars, swindlers, and immoral hedonists, and Englishmen who traveled there risked bringing the moral contagion of vanity and deceit back to the mother country, as if introducing a previously unknown disease to their homeland. Indeed, Venice was the corrupt, decadent city; as we can see from the main plot, where every single character is engaged in some form of deceit, Jonson's portrayal of Venetian life fully buys into the stereotype, and the play's setting probably lent it a great deal of believability in the eyes of its English audiences. Sir Politic functions serves, then, as an example of all Englishmen who go to Italy and are corrupted by its decadent ways. The satire leveled against his vanity is also leveled against his desire to talk and act

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like Italians (in the eyes of Jonson's compatriots, they were just about the same thing). Peregrine, on the other hand, is a model of how one should behave in Italy; his named, which comes from the Latin for "wanderer", indicates that he is just passing through this foreign land. Furthermore, he has been instructed well by "he that cried Italian" to him, in other words his tutor, who instructed him using a "common grammar." This was probably one of the travel books then widely available, published by educated Italo-philes, giving instructions on how to go to Italy without being corrupt; they were full of various bits of helpful advice such as "never let a Venetian know where you live, or any other important facts about you"; and they were seen as a kind of inoculation, if you will, against whatever "virus" the Italians had that made them so mean.

2.3.2 Scene II

Mosca and Nano enter the square, disguised; they serve as the advance scout party for Volpone. They establish themselves beneath the window of Corvino's house. Sir Politic identifies the oncoming crowd as the surrounding party for a mountebank, a Renaissance Italy version of the nineteenth century American medicine-show men, hucksters who sold fake potions to cure all and any ailments; they would "mount a bank" (embankment) in order to speak to the public. He then informs Peregrine that, contrary to popular belief, the Italian mountebanks are not all liars, but are in fact very learned men and excellent physicians. Volpone enters, followed by a crowd. Disguised as Scoto Mantua, Italian mountebank extraordinaire, he takes his place underneath Corvino's window with Mosca and Nano (who mounts on his shoulders) and engages on a long history of Scoto's fictional life, detailing the difficulties he has faced thanks to the rumor-mongering of Alessandro Buttone, a fellow mountebank, who has spread the vicious lie that Scoto was imprisoned for poisoning the cook of Archbishop Bembo, as well as the extreme popularity of the new potion he is selling. He of course lists the numerous illnesses the potion is supposed to cure, sings a wonderful song about its medicinal qualities, discusses how cheap his potion is, sings another song, before trying to convince everyone that they should buy it, immediately, at a special discount price of six pence. He then asks everyone to toss him their handkerchiefs so that he can rub some of his oil on them. The lovely Celia, watching above, tosses down her handkerchief, and Scoto/Volpone engages on a long tribute to her beauty, grace, and elegance.

2.3.3 Scene III

Corvino enters, and he is enraged by his jealousy. He beats Volpone and the crowd away, referring to them by the names of various characters from the Comedia dell'Arte: Flaminio, the lover (Volpone); Franciscina, the serving-maid (Celia); and himself as Pantalone di besognioni, a stock buffoon character, often portrayed as a cuckold. Politic watches the events with shock, Peregrine with amusement. They leave, and Peregrine remarks that he will stay close to the hyper-gullible English knight for the sheer amusement it brings him.

Analysis to Scene II and III

An essential part of Volpone's character is his fascination with disguises. Volpone assumes at least three separate disguises over the course of the play, if we count "ill Volpone" as being a disguise. He also assumes the disguise of Scoto and that of a sergeant in the final act. Furthermore, his thoughts are often obsessed with disguises, and he sees disguise—and acting—as a source of pleasure in its own right. This enthusiasm for disguise has connotations both good and bad. On the one hand, his delight in constantly assuming new identities emphasizes Volpone's energy and imagination. But on the other hand, not having a fixed identity makes him appear unstable, irresponsible and untrustworthy. His love for pretending to be others sums up and connects the central traits that define-energy, imagination, and moral corruption.

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But at least at this point, we should share Volpone's pleasure in his inventiveness. Especially so at this stage of the play, where his tricks are as yet harmless. After all, this is a play we are reading; dramatic art itself is partly based on the basic pleasure to be found in make-believe, something Volpone seems to feel especially keenly. But there is a conflict here, especially in the fact that Volpone is so entertaining in his deceit emphasizes the connection between stagecraft and lying and establishes a conflict between stagecraft and truth. Disguise can be used both to conceal and reveal, while it may conceal the external facts of a person's identity, it can reveal aspects of their inner nature which are usually invisible. We might think that as Scoto Mantua, Volpone is deceiving everyone to an even greater extent than he is when pretending to be ill. But Volpone himself said that his disguise would have to "maintain his own shape"; that is, it would have to maintain some truth about his personality, since he counted this event as his introduction to Celia. So in a perfect example of situational irony, he chooses Scoto Mantua, the mountebank—the man whose profession it is to deceive—as a representation of his true, inner self.

Notes This play is a fiction; the characters do not exist, and the actors who play them are all in disguise. They all pretend to be someone else. But they do so in order to convey a truth, the truth of Jonson's moral message: that greed and vanity are present everywhere and that they are demeaning and ridiculous vices, worthy of contempt, no matter how attractive they may appear, and that people should look beyond shiny, golden exteriors to the inner decadence they may contain.

Scoto delivers his lines in prose, not verse. This could be both because Scoto is a "low", comic character, or because he represents a direct authorial presence in the play. The only other part of the play in prose is Jonson's initial dedication, also written in his own voice. And Scoto also makes several references to Jonson's life. Like Scoto, over the course of eight months Jonson had been slandered in public and arrested; in Jonson's case, it was for participation in a play, Eastward Ho, that had been seen as mocking the king. Thus, Scoto seems to be something of a self-portrait. And this self-portrait Jonson paints of himself, as a carnival huckster/alchemist, suggests that he viewed his art as being similar to the art of both; that he took deceit, lies, and human vices, and, like the alchemist, transformed these valueless things into something valuable—a work of art that could entertain, as well as instruct.

2.3.4 Scene IV

Volpone returns to his home, moaning about how beautiful Celia is, and how sick he is with love for her. Mosca listens to him and promises that he will make Celia Volpone's lover, if only he has enough patience. Volpone is pleased by Mosca's determination; he then asks him whether or not he was good in his performance as Scoto. Mosca assures him the entire audience was fooled.

2.3.5 Scene V

The scene is within Corvino's house. Corvino berates Celia for tossing her handkerchief to Scoto Mantua. He feels he has been made a fool of in public and accuses his wife of harboring a desire to be unfaithful to him and of making excuses in order to meet with her paramours. She begs him not to be jealous and protests that she never makes such excuses, that she hardly even leaves the house, even to go to Church—but this is not enough for Corvino. From now on, he says, she will never be allowed out of the house, never allowed to go within two or three feet of a window, and forced to do everything backward—dress backward, talk backward, walk backward. If she fails to obey, he threatens that he will dissect her in public as an example of a woman without virtue.

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2.3.6 Scene VI

Mosca arrives at Corvino's house, and Corvino assumes he brings good news: news of Volpone's death. But Corvino says that, on the contrary, Volpone has recovered—thanks to the medicinal oil of Scoto Mantua. Corvino is frustrated. Not only that, adds Mosca, but he has now been charged by the doctors with the task of finding a woman to sleep with Volpone in order to further aid his recovery. Corvino suggests a courtesan (prostitute), but Mosca rejects the idea; prostitutes are too sly, too experienced, and they might trick both of them out of any inheritance. Rather, he suggests that a woman of virtue is required, someone whom Corvino can command. Volpone's parasite further mentions that one of the doctors offered his own daughter. Boldened by this, Corvino decides that Celia will sleep with Volpone and declares this to Mosca. Mosca congratulates Corvino on ensuring that he will be named heir.

2.3.7 Scene VII

After Mosca leaves, Corvino finds his wife crying. He consoles her, telling her that he is not jealous and was never jealous. Jealousy is unprofitable, he says, and he promises that she will find just how un-jealous he is at Volpone's house, cryptically alluding to his decision to prostitute her.

Analysis of Scenes IV to VII

Celia provokes what can be termed "grotesque" reactions from both Volpone and Corvino, and we can compare and contrast these reactions better understand each character. Volpone used religious imagery in the description of gold, but now he has found a new "better angel" in Celia. And the "gold, plate, and jewels," which Volpone addressed in tones of worship at the beginning of the play, Volpone gives to Mosca so that he can use them to woo Celia; the all-important gold has been subordinated to her conquest. His desire for her is instinctual, not refined or rational, and we are now merely seeing the lustful, hedonist side of Volpone that was only hinted at in previous passages. For the language in which Volpone describes his love for Celia is grotesque; it is the language of sickness, not love. He feels a fever, a "flame", trapped inside his body. "My liver melts," he exclaims, and Mosca describes his situation as a "torment." That the "sick" Volpone now suffers from a lovesickness is another example of situational irony, and, through this irony, Jonson demonstrates that Volpone's light-hearted, lustful ways are not as innocent as they may appear, since they can easily develop into an unhealthy, and unnatural, sexual obsession (remember from Act I that the grotesque can serve as an indication of something unnatural, hidden underneath the surface of a character or situation).

Corvino also has a pathological, grotesque response to Celia's body. Corvino's description of the handkerchief-tossing incident is rife with intense, sensual imagery suggesting that Corvino may be in the grip of some sort of sexual psychosis; he feverishly describes "itching ears," "noted lechers," "satyrs," "hot spectators," "the fricace" (a type of massage), before he verbally imagines Celia and Scoto Mantua engaged in the act of intercourse. By contrast with Corvino, Volpone's earlier outburst seems tame. Corvino ends his first diatribe with a threat of murder, indicating that sex and violence are thus firmly linked in his psyche. Like Volpone, Celia's body causes a sickness in him, except that his sickness is characterized by violence and rage whereas Volpone's is characterized by physical agony. Corvino's grotesque sexual obsession is firmly linked to his sense of property, for he considers Celia to be his property. When he says, "I will make thee an anatomy,/Dissect thee mine own self and read a lecture/Upon thee to the city and in public," the vocabulary of science—"anatomy," "science," and "lecture"—serves to convey the grotesque image; this language strongly associated with the rising bourgeois merchant class of Jonson's day. And when he threatens to kill her entire family as relatiation for her supposed infidelity, he uses the language of law: those murders would be "the subject of my justice." Corvino's rage is that of a merchant who feels that he is being ripped off, whose property has been stolen and who wants the thief put to death. To put it in psychological

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terms, it is that of a sociopath who feels his power threatened; Corvino lashes out in a sadistic and brutal manner in order to maintain control.

So this scene serves to link Corvino's materialistic values to grotesque, unnatural and violent sexual obsession. But more than that, it also shows the fundamental hypocrisy of those values, through irony. When Mosca tests which impulse is stronger in Corvino—his sexual jealousy or his desire for material possession—he quickly discovers that it is the latter. To lose Celia to a lover would send Corvino into a murderous rage, and he condemns her for her perceived infidelity using moral concepts such as "justice"; but to use her in order to gain Volpone's fortune is "nothing." The justice of the situation is determined, it seems, by whether or not Corvino makes a profit, not on any moral issue, and the virtue of his wife for a vast amount of fortune is a more than equitable trade. Corvino's reversal is an example of situational irony, which reveals Corvino's talk of justice to be hypocritical, a means of exercising power over people, like Celia, who care about such things.

2.4 Act III

2.4.1 Scene I

The scene is Volpone's house. This scene consists entirely of a soliloquy by Mosca. He enters, and expresses fear at his growing narcissism. This increasing self-love is the result of the successful way he is helping Volpone conduct his con-game. He then discusses what it is to be a "parasite," presenting it as an "art" in which most of the world, in fact, takes part: "All the world is little else, in nature,/ But parasites or sub-parasites."

2.4.2 Scene II

Corbaccio's son Bonario, enters. Mosca begs to talk to him, but he scorns him, deriding him for being a parasite. Mosca pleads with him not to be so harsh and asks for his pity. Bonario responds to Mosca's plea. But then Mosca informs Bonario that his father has disinherited him. The son does not believe it at first, but Mosca asks him to follow his lead. He promises to let Bonario see his father Corbaccio in the act of disinheriting him. They exit the stage together.

Analysis to Scenes I and II

Mosca opens the act with a soliloquy. The soliloquy is an opportunity for villains to speak their plans and heroes to voice their doubts, and it gives the playwright an opportunity for characterization, defining the character's motivations, problems, and quirks. In the case of Mosca, this soliloquy is especially important in terms of characterization. This is the first time in the play we see Mosca without Volpone, and most of the things Mosca has said up to this point have been clever lies told in order to benefit his master. Mosca has remained a very shadowy, elusive character. Jonson does use the speech for this purpose, but he does it obliquely. And initially he uses the speech to foreshadow later developments in the play. Mosca is growing increasingly independent in the play; we just saw him arrange Volpone's seduction of Celia by himself, and now we have him alone, on stage. Jonson hints that this increasing independence will be a problem for Volpone. "I fear" are the first words of the Act, and he worries that he is growing too strong, too confident, too in love with himself: "I could skip/Out of my skin now, like a subtle snake,/I am so limber."

Notes The snake, a symbol of temptation, signals danger; and the imagery of transformation, of slipping out of one's skin, indicates that Mosca is becoming less satisfied with his identity as a lackey to Volpone.

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This line later developments in Act V, where there is a reversal of fortune between Mosca and Volpone, and Mosca "slips out of his skin" to become a nobleman. Mosca only refers to himself indirectly, through an abstract discussion of parasitism. The word "parasite" had a slightly different meaning for Jonson than it does today; the "parasite" was a stock character of Greek and Roman comedies, similar to the "Fool" character, except that they were buffoons instead of witty. These characters were usually pathetic, and poor: they performed tricks, told stories, and generally debased themselves in order to feed at the table of the rich. Parasitism, in this sense, seems to be a trait that defines Mosca completely; he is dependent on Volpone for his life and for his food (a true parasite), and he expresses this dependence, at least in public, with displays of servility and pathos. In Act I, scene ii, he is so gushing toward Volpone that the Fox, embarrassed, asks him to stop, and his pathetic display in front of Bonario again reinforce this impression. But when Mosca talks about how "all the wise world is little else, in nature, but parasite or sub-parasites," he begins to overturn this image. He identifies the true parasite as being strong, quick, agile, inventive and able to fake any emotion in a second if necessary; being a parasite is a mark of being wise, and not being a "clot-pole," forced to work the earth to make one's living. He is superior to those he feeds on, not inferior.

People that are called "parasites," like Mosca, play the same game as everyone else, but just play it better, with more cunning, which demonstrated in his dealings with Bonario. They show weakness in order to hide their true strength; the goal of the game is to feed off the wealth and livelihood of others without doing any real work yourself, except the work involved in keeping them credulous. This statement of moral equality—"we are all parasites"—clearly refers not only to the legacy hunters, but to Volpone as well; it is indicative that Mosca considers himself less and less a subordinate to Volpone and more of an equal. Mosca gradually develops into an antagonist for Volpone. But his honesty, his resourcefulness, and the correctness of his appraisal of the situation—everyone in the play does in fact attempt to live off of the work of others—make him a sympathetic character. This creates a tension in the play, as to who we are to side for in the battle, who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist. In the end, the answer will seem to be neither, as both characters are punished for their actions. But as we will see, there are problems in the way Jonson brings this result about.

Task Mosca gradually develops into an antagonist for Volpone. But his honesty make him a sympathetic character, illucidate this antagonism.

2.4.3 Scene III

Volpone, his dwarf, his eunuch, and his hermaphrodite enter. Volpone notes that Mosca is late in returning home. To quell his boredom, he asks Nano to entertain him, which he does by discoursing on how fools create more laughter with their faces than with their brains. A knock is heard at the door; Volpone assumes it must be Mosca. Nano goes out to see who it is, and returns to announce that it is a "beauteous madam." Volpone realizes that it is Lady Politic Would-be. He reluctantly tells Nano to let her in.

2.4.4 Scene IV

Lady Politic Would-be enters into an anteroom with Nano and asks him to tell Volpone she has arrived. She fusses over her own appearance, noting her dress does not show her neck enough but that she is still dressed well. She berates Volpone's servant women for not dressing appropriately and not making themselves up in an appropriate way. Finally, she begins to speak to Volpone. Volpone informs her that he had a strange dream the previous night, that a "strange fury" entered his house and tore his roof off with her voice. She ignores the obvious reference to herself and begins a (very one-sided) conversation, advising Volpone on what medicines he should take to cure

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his bad dream, discussing the various Italian poets and their relative strengths and weaknesses, before giving a brief lecture on the value of philosophy when dealing with mental disturbances. By the end of the scene, Volpone is begging to be rescued.

2.4.5 Scene V

Volpone's prayers to be rescued from Lady Politic are answered when Mosca finally returns. Volpone demands that he find a way to get rid of Lady Politic. Mosca quickly decides to tell Lady Politic that he recently saw Sir Politic rowing upon the waters of Venice in a gondola with a courtesan. Sir Politic was actually conversing with Peregrine, the young English traveler, but Lady Politic believes Mosca completely and runs off to search for her husband with the dwarf. Mosca then informs Volpone that Corbaccio is about to arrive, so as to make Volpone his heir; Volpone thanks Mosca for his help and lies down to rest.

Analysis to Scenes III to V

Lady Politic Would-be was identified by her husband, Sir Politic, as the reason the couple came to Venice in the first place, and she serves as his female counterpart in her vanity, continuously minding her appearance and her clothes. She has a bad "reputation." She is the female example of why English people should never go to Italy unprepared, and the moral decadence they can fall into once they reach there. She also embodies the dangers of becoming too engrossed in Italian culture; "I have read them all", she says, after listing off seven Italian poets after Volpone mentions a poet who lived in Plato's time and said that the highest grace of women is silence (quoting the poet Sophocles, who lived in Ancient Greece, like Plato, not Renaissance Italy). She discusses the poet Aretine openly, who is well known for his erotic and obscene poems. To Volpone and the Elizabethan audience, she has obviously missed the benefit of poetry, which is to learn handy maxims such as that woman should be quiet.

Task English people should never go to Italy unprepared, illustrate this statement in context to Lady Politic.

The idea of satirizing a woman for talking too much and fussing over her appearance are considered are fairly tired clichés and are also sexist. After all, Volpone and Mosca talk a great deal, and no one thinks they should be quiet. There is no threat to Volpone's reputation because of his desire to sleep with Celia. But though it perpetuates some negative stereotypes about women, the conversation's comedy is also based on a trait she shares in common with her husband; she desires to be seen as knowledgeable, to fit in and impress others, and like with her husband, this desire backfires completely. Both because of the fact she talks so much that those around her feel exhausted, intimidated and painfully bored; also because of her obliviousness to those feelings of scorn and contempt and to the fact that she knows much less than she says.

Example: Her mistake in not realizing that Plato lived nearly two thousand years before any of the poets she names; her inability to pick up on the fact that Volpone's praising of Sophocles' quote is a hint that she should be silent herself; or her failure to realize that when Volpone talks about his "dream" of having his house torn apart by a "strange fury", that he is referring to her. The tone of the scene is farcical-like a farce, it is dominated by extreme, exaggerated, over-the-top behavior from the characters for humorous effect. The extremely light-hearted tone of this scene contrasts with the seriousness of the next few scenes, emphasizing the upcoming shift in tone toward seriousness.

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2.4.6 Scene VI

Mosca and Bonario enter. Mosca tells Bonario to hide so that he can watch his father disinherit his son and make Volpone his heir. Bonario agrees but, after Mosca leaves, says that he still can't believe that what Mosca says is true.

2.4.7 Scene VII

Mosca, Corvino, and Celia enter. Mosca tells Bonario that Corbaccio will soon arrive. Celia begs not to be forced to sleep with Volpone. Corvino tells her that his decision is final, and that he does not want any protest in terms of "honour"; "honour", according to Corvino, does not exist in reality, and the loss of it cannot harm anyone. Mosca informs Volpone that the pair has arrived; Volpone professes himself past the point of no return but thanks Corvino greatly, implying that Corvino will be his heir. Celia begs a final time to be spared having to sleep with Volpone, but Corvino insists, and threatens to drag her through the streets and—ironically—proclaim her a whore if she does not comply. The act, he says, is not important, since Volpone is old, and will not take much advantage of her; in any case and it will benefit him greatly in financial terms. As soon as Volpone and Celia are alone, Volpone leaps off of his bed, and begins his seduction. He tells Celia that she is heavenly to him, and that he is a far more worthy lover than is Corvino. He details all the sensuous pleasures she will have if she becomes his lover. But Celia is unmoved; she refuses his advances, asking him to stop, offering to never speak of what happened. Volpone is enraged by her refusal, and tells her that if she won't make love to him willingly, then he will take her by force. She cries out to God; Volpone tells her she does it in vain, but just at that moment, Bonario jumps out from behind his hiding place and rescues Celia, spiriting her away. Volpone laments that his con has been exposed.

Analysis to Scenes VI and VII

Throughout the play up to this point, Volpone has seemed both a likeable and sympathetic protagonist and a sociopath. He exposes moral folly, but his glee in doing so can at times seem malicious. And he also makes no pretensions that morality is his main motivation. Instead, the money he gains from his con is a means to an end, and the end is the satisfaction of his appetites and desires. This section of the play emphasizes that Volpone will satisfy these desires at any cost, even if it hurts innocent people, such as Bonario and Celia. These scenes, especially Act III Scene VII, thus form a turning point in the main plot's storyline and in our perception of Volpone. Alone with Celia for the first time, his "seduction speech" firmly unites the contradictory parts of his character through his description of his love for her.

Task Volpone satisfy his appetites and desires of gaining money from his cons at any cost, even if it hurts innocent people. Justify this statement.

In this passage, Volpone articulates what amounts to an alternate conception of morality and sacredness hinted at earlier in the play, a conception where the highest form of spiritual fulfillment is attained through the satisfaction of every conceivable desire for pleasure. The imagery Volpone employs in his seduction speech is rich in both hyperbole and religious imagery; Celia's love is compared to "heaven," "a plot of paradise." But Volpone's picture of paradise is sensual; he offers to Celia a catalogue of an extravagant feast, from pearls dissolved in wine to "the heads of parrots" and "the tongues of nightingales." It is also a bath in flowers, "unicorn milk," "panther's breath" and "Cretan wines." He also emphasizes the disposability of this paradise; pearls are dissolved, and jewels lost, without a second thought. It seems that as soon as one pleasure is expended, the next one is pursued.

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Volpone's use of allusion in his catalogue of famous lovers throughout history serves a two-fold purpose: it widens and elevates his discussion, giving him and Celia immediate historic significance through association with these names, while at the same time making explicit Volpone's desire to make love to Celia in a stylish, erudite way. Jonson uses alliteration to heighten the poetic quality of the speech, and at one point Volpone bursts into song. He conveys the sensuousness of the imagined feast through the sensuousness of his language. And his catalogues of sensual delights and romantic disguises provide a feast of imagery for the reader, underscoring Volpone's imaginativeness and liveliness in our minds. He is "hot," not "frozen and impotent." His paradise is that of an imaginative hedonist, continually and consistently searching for pleasure and new forms of pleasure. And as Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are, he too is greedy, except his greed is for pleasure and is presented in such a seductive way that it seems very attractive—the key word is "seems."

Against this hedonism, this greed for pleasure, Celia and Bonario are posited as the twin voices of moral criticism, representing both the codes of religion and those of honor. They serve as foils to Volpone, exposing his ruthlessness; even though neither are guilty of any moral transgression; he will hurt them if necessary in order to gratify himself. Whereas Corvino's ugliness seems to stem from disrespect for honor, Jonson seems to attribute Volpone's ruthlessness to a lack of religious feeling. Celia tries to appeal to whatever trace of "holy saints, or heaven" Volpone has within him; her complete lack of success implies that he has none. And when Celia cries out to God for help as Volpone prepares to rape her, Volpone says she cries "In Vain," just before Bonario leaps out to save Celia. That moment is a direct refutation, on the part of Bonario and Celia, of Volpone's inverted value-system, where he values immediate self-gratification, over God. This is the turning point of the play; it is at this moment that Volpone begins to lose control over the situation, after having lost control over himself.

2.4.8 Scene VIII

Mosca enters; bleeding from a sword-wound that Bonario has given him on his way out. Volpone is concerned by the injury, but when Mosca blames himself for the disaster of Celia's escape and Bonario's discovery of Volpone's deceit, Volpone readily agrees. They briefly consider what they are going to do, with Mosca suggesting suicide. Then they hear a knock at the door; it is Corbaccio.

2.4.9 Scene IX

Corbaccio enters, with Voltore following right behind. Mosca tells Corbaccio that his son was searching to kill him, in revenge for his disinheritance. Corbaccio accepts the lie readily and agrees to make Volpone his heir, asking Voltore if Volpone is going to die anytime soon so that he can inherit his money. Hearing this, Voltore becomes angry and accuses Mosca of double-dealing; who is going to be the heir, he demands, Voltore or Corbaccio? Mosca professes his loyalty to Voltore and then recounts the events that have just happened with a deceitful spin. Mosca tells Voltore that he had brought Bonario in to watch his father sign away his inheritance to Volpone, in the hopes that the enraged Bonario would kill his treacherous father, thus leaving the path open for Voltore to inherit the magnifico's wealth. But, lies Mosca, Bonario grew impatient waiting for his father, thus kidnapped Celia and made her "cry rape," in order to frame Volpone and thus make it impossible for him to inherit. Voltore, ever the lawyer, immediately takes Mosca's side, seeing the threat to his own interests, and he immediately demands that Mosca fetch Corvino and bring him to the Scrutineo.

Analysis to Scenes VIII and IX

When Volpone loses control with Celia, he breaks the implicit rules he seemed to be playing by initially, or at least may have fooled the audience into thinking he was playing by: that he was only out to deceive and hurt those who deceived and hurt themselves. But this has now been shown to

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be false, the audience has shown itself to be "gulled" (fooled) by Volpone, and so we are now much less likely to take his side. Our loss of sympathy for Volpone and his loss of control over the situation lead to what can be termed as the "disestablishing" of Volpone as the play's protagonist: he is no longer is the hero, or even the anti-hero, of the play, which he has been since the first scene. From his perspective within the play, he is no longer in control over his own life. Instead, the increasingly independent Mosca becomes a substitute protagonist, and Mosca's "sidekick" role is assumed by Voltore. In Act V, Volpone seems to regain control over his life (and his role as protagonist), but this leads to a destructive confrontation between him and Mosca. The didactic element of Volpone becomes pronounced here. Jonson teaches us in this scene never to trust someone like Volpone, an energetic person with a gift for deceit, and he will attempt to show that, in the end, people like Volpone are always done in, usually by their own decision to trust someone.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following statements is correct about the text of Volpone.
   (a) The opening part is superflous
   (b) Dedication gives the information for the purpose of writing of this play
   (c) The prologue sets illogical tone
   (d) The work is of serious intelluctual and immoral weight.
2. The construction of first scene of the play volpone is
   (a) deceitful
   (b) straight forward
   (c) superflous
   (d) of conceit situation.
3. Through the device of Volpone's con, Jonson makes his satiric commentary on
   (a) lust
   (b) desire for wealth
   (c) greed
   (d) situational irony.

Fill in the Blanks:

4. When Volpone loses control with Celia, he breaks the ..... rules.
5. The idea of satirizing a ..... for talking too much and fussing over her appearance are considered fairly tired clichés and are also sexist.
6. Against the greed for pleasure, Celia and Bonario are posited as the twin voices of ..... .
7. Mosca opens the act 3 with a ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Lady Politic Would-be was identified by her husband, Sir Politic, as the reason the couple came to Venice.
9. Volpone's prayers to be rescued from Lady Politic are answered when Mosca finally hatch a conspiracy.
10. This scene I of Act 2 introduces us to the Sir Politic Would-be subplot of Volpone.

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2.5 Act IV

2.5.1 Scene I

Sir Politic and Peregrine are walking along a canal, and Politic undertakes to teach Peregrine a thing or two about life in Venice. His two main points are that one should never tell the truth to strangers, and that one should always have proper table manners, which Politic then goes on to explain in full. Contradicting his first bit of advice, Politic then tells Peregrine about several moneymaking schemes he has in the works. To begin with, he plans to supply the State of Venice with red herrings, bought at a discount rate from a cheese vendor in another Italian state. He also has a plan to convince the Council of Venice to outlaw all timber-boxes small enough to fit into a pocket (in case a disaffected person might hide gunpowder in his or her tinderbox), and then supply the larger tinderboxes himself. His last great idea is a "plague-test," to be administered on ships arriving from the Middle East and other plague-infected areas so that they might not have to undergo the usual fifty or sixty days of quarantine. The plan involves blowing air through a ship from one side, while at the same time exposing the crew to thirty lives worth of onions cut in half from the other side; if the onion changes, color, then the crew have the plague. Politic then make an off-handed comment about how he could, if he wanted to, sell the entire state of Venice to the Turk. Just so Peregrine will know everything about his personal life, Politic lets him read his diary, which includes every single detail of Politic's day, including his decision to urinate at St. Mark's cathedral.

2.5.2 Scene II

Lady Politic, Nano, and some serving women enter, looking for her husband. Sir Politic's wife complains that his unfaithfulness is ruining her complexion. They suddenly see Politic and Peregrine together. They meet, and Sir Politic introduces Peregrine to Lady Politic. But Lady Politic assumes that Peregrine must be the prostitute of whom Mosca was speaking, disguised as a man. She rails against her husband for his unfaithfulness, while he reacts with complete and utter incomprehension. Peregrine asks Lady Politic to forgive him for offending her, though he has no idea how he has. When he begins complimenting Lady Politic's beauty, she reacts with suppressed outrage.

2.5.3 Scene III

Mosca enters and finds Lady Politic incensed over her husband's infidelity. She explains to him that she has found the prostitute he mentioned in Act III, and points out Peregrine. Mosca then explains that she is mistaken. The real prostitute (according to him) is currently at the Scrutineo (he is referring to Celia). Lady Politic then apologizes in a very sexually suggestive way. Peregrine is now incensed, for he thinks that Sir Politic is trying to prostitute him to Lady Politic, and vows that he will get revenge.

Analysis of Scene I-Scene III

The moral satire of the play becomes somewhat submerged in the Fourth Act, as considerations of plot and tone become more important. Jonson frames the intense confrontation between Volpone, Celia, and Bonario with humorous scenes involving the Politic Would-bes. These scenes help keep the tone of the play somewhat light. We have further development of Sir Politic's character in Act IV, Scene I; he is not only now vain, he is also greedy. But he is greedy in a completely non- threatening way, and his plans are laughably far-fetched. In a way, he is a very sympathetic character, and he is always the one who pays the greatest price (in ridicule) for his vanity, such as when he has Peregrine read his journal for the day, one of the funniest sections of the play. Only someone with a great degree of self-obsession would record such gems as "I threw three beans over the threshold" and then "at St. Mark's, I urined," and to then expect others to find it interesting. But he doesn't seem to mind, because he doesn't seem to know, that people find his behavior ridiculous.

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For her part, Lady Politic outdoes herself by taking Peregrine to be the courtesan described to her by Mosca and then coming on to Peregrine as soon as Mosca informs her that he is a man. Again, the tone of the play veers toward farce. Several plot considerations are satisfied in this part of the play as well. Jonson needed to bring the subplot towards a resolution, which he does by giving Peregrine a reason to be angry at Sir Politic: the lustful behavior of Sir Politic's wife. It seems something of a weak reason, especially by today's standards. We also see, in this section of the play, the increased importance of Mosca; Mosca is the one who sets-up Lady Politic Would-be to identify Celia. In fact, Mosca will come to dominate the act, along with Voltore.

2.5.4 Scene IV

The scene is now set at the Scrutineo, the law courts of the Venetian state. Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Mosca enter. They are about to appear before the Scrutineo to answer the accusations of Bonario and Celia. Voltore is the one who will present the case, since he is a lawyer; Bonario expresses concern to Mosca that Voltore will now become co-heir because of this service to Volpone, but Mosca assures him there is nothing to worry about. He also worries that his reputation will be ruined in front of the Scrutineo. Mosca assures him that he has given Voltore a story to tell about the incident that will save Corvino's reputation. Mosca also lets Voltore know that he has another witness to appear if necessary, but he doesn't say who it is.

2.5.5 Scene V

The four Avocatori (who serve as judges in the Venetian state) enter, along with Bonario, Celia, a Notario (Notary) and some Commandadori (guards). The Avocatori discuss how they have never heard anything as "monstrous" as the story Celia and Bonario have just told them: that Corvino agreed to prostitute his wife to Volpone in the hopes that Volpone would make him heir, that Volpone tried to rape Celia and that Corbaccio disinherited his son Bonario. They demand to know where Volpone is: Mosca replies that he is too ill to come, but the Avocatori insist that he come anyway and send some of the Commandadori to fetch him. Voltore then begins to speak to the Scrutineo. He tells a very different story from that told by Celia and Bonario. He claims that Celia and Bonario are lovers; that Bonario went to Volpone's house with the intent to murder Corbaccio for disinheriting him, but finding him absent, decided to attack Volpone instead; and that Celia's cries of rape were part of an attempt to frame Volpone devised by her and Bonario, in order to prevent Volpone from collecting his inheritance. Voltore then produces the "proofs" of his story. These consist in the testimony of Corbaccio and Corvino, who corroborate the story, with Corvino adding that he has seen Bonario and Celia making love with his own eyes, and that he has their love-letters in his possession (which in reality are forged). Mosca further adds that he was wounded while defending his master. Celia faints; Corvino accuses her of acting. The Avocatori begin to express doubts about Celia and Bonario's story. Then Mosca informs the court of his "surprise witness"; she is a "lady", who saw Celia in a gondola with her "knight". He leaves to fetch her, as the Avocatori express their shock at the turn of events.

2.5.6 Scene VI

Mosca enters with his surprise witness, who is, of course, Lady Politic Would-be. She corroborates Mosca's claim, hurling abuse at Celia. She then apologizes profusely to the judges for disgracing the court; the judges attempt to assure her she has not, but can't get a word in edgewise. Voltore then produces his final "proof". Volpone enters, looking old and crippled; Voltore ironically comments that they can now see Celia and Bonario's rapist and criminal. Bonario suggests that Volpone is faking (which he is), and should be "tested", which Voltore takes to mean "tortured"; Voltore ironically suggests that torture might cure Volpone's illness. The Avocatori are convinced

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of Voltore's story, and demand that Bonario and Celia be taken away and separated. They apologize to Volpone for disturbing him, and express outrage at the "deceit" of Bonario and Celia. Mosca then congratulates Voltore on his work. He assuages Corvino, who is still worried that Voltore will get part of Volpone's fortune. And he demands that Corbaccio pay Voltore. Corbaccio and Voltore leave, and Mosca then assures Lady Politic Would-be that, due to her support today, she will in fact be made Volpone's principal heir.

Analysis to Scene IV-Scene VI

The Fourth Act is marked by Volpone's near complete disappearance for the play; Mosca takes his place as the driving force behind the plot. Though Mosca has been central throughout the entire play, in the Fourth Act he truly becomes an independent character, arranging to have Lady Politic Would-be testify against Celia. Volpone's absence in the Act can be seen as a symbol of the growing distance between him and the audience; with his attempted rape, he gives up his claim to our sympathy, and this is symbolized by temporarily giving up his place in the play. Mosca fills the vacuum left by Volpone's absence; and his sidekick role is in turn taken up by Voltore. This shift in the focus of the play emphasizes Mosca's independence from Volpone; Mosca now can carry the plot by himself. And this increased independence from Volpone, in terms of the ability to drive the play forward, foreshadows the play's next Act, where Mosca will actually try to usurp Volpone's role in society. Mosca and Voltore's triumph over Celia and Bonario in The Scrutineo represents the triumph of stagecraft over truth. We can think of the Scrutineo as the stage on which they operate. The Scrutineo was the Venetian Senate-building; the Senate was the head governing body of the Venetian state. As already discussed, the Venetian state was a symbol of decadence and deceit; and the Scrutineo, as its center of power, would have had a very strong association with illusion and deceit. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine the scene being staged in such a way that the audience in the theatre could become part of the audience at the Scrutineo, thus making the audience direct spectators of the drama unfolding between the characters, and turning the Scrutineo into an actual theatre, with real patrons.

Task Illustrate the Mosca's independence from Volpone and his role to carry the plot by himself.

The way Voltore and Mosca go about creating their illusion has similarities with the way playwrights go about creating theirs, using words and images in a dramatic manner. They do not simply tell a lie; they tell a story. Voltore weaves a tale for the Senate full of characters one might expect to find in a sensationalistic play; the treacherous wife (Celia), the murderous, deceitful, son (Bonario), the innocent, betrayed husband (Corvino) and the deceived father (Corbaccio). Corvino's frequent interjections of salacious details about Celia—"these eyes/Have seen her glued unto that piece of cedar/That fine well-timbered gallant" increases the dramatic tension of the scene, which culminates in a couple of suprising "plot twists": Lady Politic Would-be's condemnation of Celia and Volpone's sudden arrival, looking ill and impotent. The objections of Bonario and Celia are incorporated into Voltore's narrative, much like the villain into the plot of a play; Voltore uses verbal irony, a device Jonson loved, to ridicule Bonario's suggestion that Volpone be tested for deceit: "Best try him, then, with goads or burning irons;/Put him to the strappado: I have heard,/The rack hath cured the gout." Bonario's comment is framed as just the type of thing a murderous, sick individual like him would say—just the type of dialogue that he would speak. The audience of this play within the play is composed of the four Avocatori, and their increasing anger mirrors our increasing anger; except that we know their anger is based on false beliefs. When one judge observes that "'tis a pity two such prodigies should live," his statement is an example of dramatic irony. He intends to refer to Celia and Bonario, but we know that the statement much better describes Volpone and Mosca. A

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careful reader would note, however, that in feeling angry at Volpone and Mosca, we are being drawn into a certain reality in much the same way that the four judges are—through images and words, arranged in a dramatic manner, good characters vying against evil ones, drawing our sympathy, making us involved in their struggle. It could make us very suspicious of the exercise of drama as a whole. Drama seems based on the very same methods of deceit used by Voltore and Mosca. But to say that Voltore and Mosca are dramatists is not to say that all dramatists are like Voltore and Mosca. Jonson, after all, acknowledges in his dedication that many dramatic poets rely on sensationalism to sell their plays, plays that harm the moral good of society. This scene can be viewed as an exercise in how to spot this sensationalism, how to differentiate between the good play and the bad play; plays that deceive and confuse; and plays, like Jonson's, that aim to tell the truth.

2.6 Act V

2.6.1 Scene I

Volpone returns home after the drama at the Scrutineo, tired. He declares that he has grown tired of his con and wishes it were over. Pretending to be sick in public has made some of the symptoms he has been falsely presenting, such as cramps and palsy (tremors), feel all too real. The thought that he might actually be getting sick depressed and frightens him; to banish it he takes two strong drinks and calls Mosca.

2.6.2 Scene II

Volpone calls Mosca and informs him that he wants to be over with the con. They discuss how well the entire con went off and congratulate themselves on being so erudite, so brave, and so clever. Mosca advises that Volpone should stop his life of trickery here, for he will never outdo himself. Volpone seems to agree, and then begin discussing the matter of payment to Voltore for his services, something that Mosca insists on. But Volpone suddenly decides to carry out one final joke on the legacy hunters. He calls in Castrone and Nano, and tells them to run through the streets, informing everyone that Volpone is dead. He then tells Mosca to wear his clothes and to pretend that Volpone has named him the heir to the estate when the legacy hunters arrive, using an authentic will naming Mosca as heir. Mosca remarks on how distraught all four of the people involved in the deceit at the Scrutineo—Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Lady Politic—will be when they come to believe that Mosca has been chosen over them. Soon, Voltore arrives, and Volpone hides behind a curtain.

2.6.3 Scene III

Voltore enters to find Mosca making an inventory. Thinking that the property is now his, he praises Mosca's hard work. He takes the will in order to read it. Corbaccio, clearly near death, is carried in by his servants. Corvino soon after enters, and soon Lady Politic Would-be enters too. All the while, Mosca continues to take an inventory of Volpone's property. All four characters then read the will; they understandably react with shock, and demand an explanation. Mosca replies to each of them in turn, reminding them in a short speech of the lies and other immoral acts each of them committed. Lady Politic apparently offered to provide Mosca with sexual favours in return for Volpone's estate. Corvino, of course, unjustly declared his wife an adulterer and himself a cuckold; Corbaccio disinherited his son. For Voltore, Mosca is somewhat sympathetic; he expresses sincere regret that Voltore will not be made heir. After Mosca is finished to talking to a character, that character leaves. After Voltore leaves, Mosca and Volpone are again alone, and Volpone congratulates Mosca on a job well done. Volpone wants to gloat directly in the faces of the four dupes, so Mosca suggests that he disguise himself as a commandadore (a sergeant or guard), and approach them on the street. Volpone congratulates Mosca on his excellent idea.

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Analysis to Scene I-Scene III

The intention of Jonson throughout the play has been to satirize greed in all its forms. At first, Volpone was the instrument of Jonson's satire; he turned the greed of the legacy hunters against itself, creating a situation where greed resulted in not only a complete loss of dignity on the part of the legacy hunters but also, ironically, the loss of the very thing they were seeking to gain: money. But now, Volpone has succumbed to his own form of greed; greed driven by his private desires and appetites for Celia. Because of this, he has defamed two innocent characters, Celia and Bonario. In the moral universe of Jonson's comedy, this transgression cannot go unpunished or uncommented upon; Celia and Bonario were guilty of nothing except dullness; their imprisonment is, to put it simply, "not funny". So Volpone is no longer the instrument of Jonson's satire. In fact, he is now made the target of it, and the attack proceeds, again, through irony.

A central motif in the final act is that of the disguise-made-reality; Volpone has convinced so many people of his lies that his falsehoods now come to stand in the public sphere as truth, with terrible consequences for Volpone. Volpone wishes to be done with his con-game clearly indicates his wish to be done with his con-game, but we receive indications that it will not be so simple, that the lies Volpone has told are too powerful and too widely accepted to simply disappear. He returns from the senate complaining of cramps and aches that roughly coincide with those he has been imitating; the "cramp" and the "palsy," which he had mocked Corbaccio for succumbing to in Act I. These may be indications of a guilty conscience; but they also stand as a metaphor for the way in which Volpone has successfully blurred the line between lies and reality. Again, we can use the metaphor of stagecraft here: in Act IV, Volpone crosses boundary between the "stage" and "reality," by carrying his "play" into the world and appearing sick in public. Ironically, it is at this moment that Volpone impulsively decides to kill himself off, and he does it using the medium of the playwright, the written word.

So when Volpone thinks he is writing himself out of his deceitful game, his "play," he is actually writing himself out of reality altogether. The "exit from reality" occurs when Volpone goes behind the arras, he for a moment becomes a member of the audience of Volpone, the drama written by Ben Jonson; in other words, he is a spectator, not a participant, in his own life. Mosca, at this stage, assumes Volpone's role both as the center of the play's action and as its moral voice; it is he who scolds each legacy hunter in turn for their hypocrisy. Volpone delights—almost sadistically in the vindictiveness with which Mosca reminds each character of the callous and immoral acts they committed in the pursuit of Volpone's treasure. But the irony of the situation is encapsulated by Volpone's statement "Rare, Mosca! How his villainy becomes him!" which foreshadows the events later in the act.

2.6.4 Scene IV

Peregrine enters, in disguise as a merchant. He is accompanied by three other merchants. They rehearse a scheme in which Peregrine has hatched to get his revenge on Sir Politic; Peregrine reminds everyone that his only aim is to frighten Sir Pol, not to injure him. The merchants hide, and Peregrine puts his plot into motion. Peregrine asks Sir Pol's serving-woman to tell the knight that "a merchant, upon urgent business." When Sir Pol comes out of his study, where he has been working on a letter of apology to his wife, Peregrine's disguise is successful; Sir Pol does not know he is talking to Peregrine. So Peregrine/the Merchant tells Sir Politic that the young man Sir Pol was speaking to earlier that day has told the State of Venice that Sir Pol wishes to sell Venice to the Turks. Sir Pol believes Peregrine immediately, and becomes terrified. After all, he did tell Peregrine he could sell Venice to the Turks; of course, he had been joking, but now it seems that Peregrine has understood things in a very wrong, and dangerous, way. Of course, Peregrine has told no such thing to anyone; but when the merchants knock on the door, Peregrine/the merchant tells Sir Pol it is the officers of the state come to arrest him.

Sir Pol decides, at Peregrine's suggestion that he will hide in a wine cask made of tortoise-shell; he quickly does so and asks Peregrine to tell his servant that his papers should be burnt. When the

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merchants come in, they walk around the room; Peregrine "informs" them that he is a merchant, come to look upon a tortoise (actually Sir Pol hidden in a wine cask). The merchants express awe at the tortoise, and Peregrine/the Merchant tells them that the tortoise is strong enough for them to jump on. So they do. They then ask if the tortoise can move, and Peregrine informs them yes. So the tortoise does, and they remark that the tortoise has garters and gloves on. Pulling off the tortoise shell, they reveal Sir Politic. After laughing at his expense, Peregrine claims that he and Sir Politic are even, and apologizes for the burning of the knight's papers that resulted from the joke. The merchants and Peregrine all leave Sir Politic to wallow in his own humiliation and self-pity. The abused Englishman asks his servant where Lady Politic is; she tells him that she has decided that she wishes to return home, for her health. Sir Politic whole-heartedly concurs with his wife's plans.

Analysis

Peregrine's final scene with Sir Politic is in one sense pure farce, intended to make us laugh. But it also foreshadows more serious events about to occur in the play's main plot, events central to the play's moral satire and didactic purpose. Sir Politic disguises himself in front of the Mercatori, just as Volpone will disguise himself in front of the Avocatori during the final scene. Politic's "unveiling" to the Mercatori will be echoed in Volpone's own unveiling. And both characters are the victims of an ironic reversal of fortune; whereas Volpone is disinherited by the same trickery he used to disinherit others, Politic will now become "talk for ordinaries," the butt of one of the many gossipy tales he himself is so fond of telling. Whereas Volpone disguises himself as a commandadore, Politic disguises himself as a tortoise; as we know Jonson likes to identify characters with animals, the choice of tortoise here seems particularly apt, being a slow, dim-witted animal, not nearly as attractive as a Fox. And whereas Volpone will manage a Pyrrhic victory by exposing Mosca's deception, Politic is merely jumped upon and abused by the Mercatori. Peregrine plays a parallel role to Mosca in the subplot, turning Sir Politic's machinations against himself; but Peregrine is portrayed sympathetically. Whereas Mosca is eventually shamed in front of the Mercatori, and made to pay the harshest punishment than that handed out to Volpone. Politic's situation is a farce, however, both because of the complete loss of dignity and humiliation to which he is subjected, and the fact that this loss of dignity is not in any real way harmful. But this is appropriate; in fact, if it results in him leaving Venice, it may very well be beneficial for him. Volpone's will not be so lucky; Jonson's satire will be much more harsh with him, his tone more severe. We can see that this is appropriate; Sir Politic has not, in fact, done harm to anyone, whereas Volpone has endangered the lives of two innocent people.

This scene also identifies Politic's place within the beast-fable that has been an undertone throughout the play. If we remember from Act One, we have a Fox (Volpone), circled by a Fly (Mosca), and three carrion birds—the vulture (Voltore), the crow (Corvino) and the raven (Corbaccio). Politic, on the other hand, is a tortoise: a slow, dim-witted animal who carries its house on its back. Similarly, Politic is dim-witted, slow and English, no matter how hard he tries to be Venetian. He is thus a symbol of someone out of his element; amongst the cunning and carnivorous creatures of the main plot, the tortoise is no match, and will eventually retreat back into its shell, as Sir Politic seems ready to do at the end of the play. Thus, though Sir Politic is an object of fun, he is also an object of sympathy, especially for the English audiences of the play. Contrast this to the treatment the Venetians Volpone and Mosca will receive, and we begin to suspect that Sir Politic's "English-ness" gives him a preferential status; as the character the audience probably identifies most closely with (by virtue of his nationality), he is portrayed as something of an innocent; it is the foreigners who are viewed as intentionally evil, and worthy of punishment.

2.6.5 Scenes V-IX

The scene is now Volpone's house. Mosca and Volpone enter; Mosca is dressed as a clarissimo, or great nobleman, and Volpone wears a commandadore's (sergeant's) uniform. They briefly discuss

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Volpone's plan to blatantly mock those he has duped. He leaves, and Mosca makes some cryptic comments to the effect that Volpone won't be regaining his own identity before he comes to terms with Mosca. He gives Nano, Castrone and Androgyno some money before telling them to find new work. Mosca again cryptically comments that he will either "gain" by Volpone, or "bury him."

Scene VI

The scene has now moved to a street, where Corvino and Corbaccio are disguised. Volpone enters in disguise. He begins asking the two what they have inherited from the dead magnifico, Volpone; they react to his questions with predictable annoyance. Volpone annoys them further by reminding them of what they did in their failed attempts to gain Volpone's inheritance; how Corbaccio signed his own son out of his will, and how Corvino prostituted his wife. They leave, and Volpone goes on to his next victim.

Scene VII

Voltore enters, walking down the street, completely disbelieving that he has lost the inheritance to Mosca, a parasite. Volpone comes up to him, and begins asking about one of his own properties, a small "bawdy-house." He implies that since Voltore is the old magnifico's heir, he is the one to talk to about purchasing this property and perhaps renovating it; it is, after all, nothing at all to someone of Voltore's newfound wealth and stature. Volpone's irony drives Voltore to frustration, and he leaves. Volpone returns to Corbaccio and Corvino.

Scene VIII

Corbaccio and Corvino enter, and watch Mosca pass by in his fine robes. They are infuriated, and even more so when Volpone arrives to continue taunting them. He now inquires whether the rumours about the parasite are true; knowing that they are, he proceeds to admonish Corbaccio and Corvino for having so handily been defeated by Mosca, and having lost their dignity in the process. Corvino then challenges Volpone to a fight, but Volpone wisely backs off.

Scene IX

Voltore makes a cryptic threat to Mosca: though he is in summer now, his "winter shall come on." Mosca tells Voltore not to speak foolishly. Volpone then arrives, and hoping to taunt Voltore further, asks him if he wants Volpone to beat Mosca, to avenge the terrible disgrace Voltore now suffers for being gulled by a parasite. Further adding insult to injury, he demands to know whether or not Mosca's inheritance is in fact a joke. After all, Volpone implies, a lawyer couldn't have been outsmarted by a parasite. Voltore leaves, tormented and humiliated.

Analysis to Scene V-Scene IX

The issue of social class had been treated indirectly in the play through the character of Mosca, forced to be Volpone's parasite due to his poverty; but Jonson deals with it explicitly here. The Elizabethans had a fairly rigid conception of social class, certainly by today's standards. Volpone remarks it is a pity that Mosca was not a born a clarissimo, because he plays the part so well; Mosca replies aside that he may very well keep his "made one", turning Volpone's comment into a piece of dramatic irony. Mosca puns on the word "made", hoping to be a self-"made" man, and achieving it through "manufacture" and "fabrication", two other senses of the word "made". This implies that Mosca's social status is now fake, artificial. So Volpone's lies have resulted in the destabilization of the social order. This destablization is reinforced by the anger Voltore express about being

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dispossessed by "a parasite! A slave!," talking to himself as he walks along the street, seemingly obsessed by it, almost driven to insanity. It is symbolized by Volpone's own decision to effectively trade in his identity as a nobleman for one as a commandadore, all for the sake of the pleasure of taunting someone for having failed to inherit an estate-ironic (situationally), because he loses that very same estate in the process. In the Elizabethan world-view, the social order embodied in the class system is fundamentally linked to the order of the universe, making any destablization in the class system profoundly disturbing and in need of rectification. But the attitude of the play towards class more complex and potentially contradictory; after all, the people mainly upset by Mosca's inheritance are the legacy hunters, who are morally dubious; and Mosca behaves no differently than any of the characters of a higher class level than him. In short, it is difficult to determine whether Jonson endorses the Elizabethan idea of class, or actually criticizes it. Further indications will be given in the play's final scenes; an essay written on this question would be a challenging but interesting one.

2.6.6 Scenes X-XII

The scene now shifts to the Scrutineo. The four judges, the notary, the guards, Bonario, Celia, Corvino and Corbaccio enter; we are witnessing the sentencing hearing for Bonario and Celia. As the judges prepare to declare the sentence, Voltore and Volpone enter, Voltore driven to distraction by Volpone's teasing. He demands forgiveness from the judges, and from the "innocents" Bonario and Celia. He then begins to confess to the deceit that he and Mosca engineered earlier that day. Corvino interrupts him, asking the judges to ignore Voltore, claiming that the lawyer acts out of pure jealousy over the fact that Mosca has inherited Volpone's fortune, now that Volpone is dead. Volpone's "death" takes the judges by surprise. Voltore insists that he is telling the truth, and hands over what seems to be a handwritten confession to the judges. The judges decide to send for Mosca, but cautiously, since they now believe that he may be Volpone's heir, and to insult would be a grave offence.

Scene XI

Volpone paces to and fro on the street. He realizes that his gloating has resulted in Voltore's confession. He curses himself for his "wantonness," his obsessive need to seek pleasure in everything, and hopes aloud that Mosca will help him out of this mess. He runs into Nano, Androgyno and Castrone, who tell him that Mosca told them to go play outside, and took the keys to the estate. Volpone begins to realize that Mosca may be looking to keep the estate for himself, and again curses his foolishness; he decides that he must try to must give Voltore "new hopes," in other words convince the lawyer that he could still inherit the estate, because Volpone is still alive.

Scene XII

Back at the Scrutineo, the judges are thoroughly confused. Voltore and Celia maintain that Voltore is telling the truth, while Corvino continues to insist that Voltore is possessed by a demon. Volpone, still in diguise, enters, and informs the judges that the parasite (Mosca) will soon arrive, before turning to whisper in Voltore's ear. He tells Voltore that Mosca has informed him (the guard Volpone pretends to be) that Volpone still lives, and that the faked death was a test to determine Voltore's resolve; Voltore realizes with chagrin that he has failed. But Volpone suggests that if Voltore corroborates Corvino's contention that he is possessed by falling to the ground and writhing on the floor, he may yet prove his loyalty; Voltore complies immediately. Volpone tells everyone to stand back, and ask them if they see the demon flying out of Voltore's mouth (there is, of course, no demon; it is another one of Volpone's tricks). Voltore then asks "Where am I?," and claims that, though his confession is written in his handwriting, the contents of it are false. According to Voltore post-collapse, Mosca is just as innocent as Volpone—who, the lawyer goes on to assert, is not dead.

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Everything seems to be going well for Volpone, until Mosca enters. For Mosca refuses to corroborate Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive. According to Mosca, the funeral preparations are underway as he speaks. Volpone is shocked. Mosca offers to help Volpone for half his fortune; Volpone says that he would rather "be hanged" than cut this deal. Volpone, still in disguise, asserts to the court that Volpone is alive, while under his breath acquiescing to Mosca's demand for half; but now Mosca will not accept even this offer. When Volpone insists that he is not dead, in direct contradiction of Mosca, he is taken away to be whipped for his insolence. Realizing that with a legal will in place, there is nothing else for him to do, Volpone reveals himself to the Senate. The judges realize that they have been deceived, and order Bonario and Celia to be let go. They condemn Mosca to life as a galley-slave for impersonating a nobleman of Venice, and send Volpone to prison. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio stripped of all his property (which is handed over to Bonario), and Corvino sentenced to public humiliation: he will be rowed through the canals of Venice, wearing donkey's ears. The scene ends with a polite request to the audience to show their appreciation for the play through their applause.

Analysis to Scene X-Scene XII

The way Jonson metes out punishment to his characters bears a resemblance to one of Lady Politic's less favorite Italian poets: Dante Alighieri. The greedy Corbaccio has his estate taken away from him, Corvino, who behaves like an ass during the entire play, is metaphorically transformed into one, and Volpone, who pretended to be bedridden in order to satisfy his insatiable lusts, will now be bedridden permanently, still unable to satisfy his desires for Celia (or anything else for that matter). This fitting of the punishment to the crime in a poetic, imaginative way is similar to Dante's device of contrapasso which he employs in Inferno (Hell), book one of his Divine Comedy. The punishments there, and here, are meant to capture the inner essence of the crime itself; in other words, Volpone's greed for pleasure and self-gratification made him a prisoner of his desires, bound to be frustrated in his attempts to achieve them, long before he was ever put into chains. The judge, after administering these punishments, emphasizes their didactic purpose: "Take heart, and love to study 'em," he says of the punishments, and his comparison of vices to "beasts" brings to mind the "fable" aspect of Volpone, congruent with the idea that the judge is giving us a tidy, neat moral to the story. But there are some problems with the ending of Volpone, which may serve to contradict the moral message that Jonson has fairly straightforwardly pursued up until now. There is the problem of the protagonist. This is a comedy, and protagonists in comedies should generally end up happily. The only characters who in fact end up happy are Celia and Bonario; but these characters are comparatively thin; we invest much less emotion in them than we do in Volpone, who seems a much more reasonable choice for protagonist. But then the ending is very severe for a comedy, because we are not really given full-blooded characters to sympathize with, and cheer on to a happy resolution. Such harshness is mandated by Jonson's purpose in writing the play, which was not only to entertain but also to educate. Though Jonson allows Volpone and Mosca the spotlight for most of the play, the final scene is meant to tell us that however interesting they may be, and however sympathetic they may appear, they are still worthy of the punishment they will eventually find. Volpone appears especially sympathetic towards the end of the play, when the only person he trusts betrays him. And he does manage the redeeming act of revealing himself, and thus saving Bonario and Celia, though this may be motivated more by a desire to get back at Mosca or to reassert his own identity as from any moral motivations. We can say that it in fact strengthens the moral message of the play that a sympathetic character gets punished for his vice, because our sympathy makes us identify with Volpone, and search for that vice within ourselves. But the unmitigated catastrophe of the situation for Volpone—he is going to jail for the rest of his life—has been said to give the play tragic undertones. Another problem arises with the judges themselves. They are given the job of handing out the punishments at the end of the play, distrbution Jonson's poetic justice. But Jonson satirizes them thoroughly in their treatment of Mosca. While they think Mosca has money, they treat him with the utmost respect and courtesy, and one judge hopes to marry his daughter to

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him. But as soon as it turns out that he has none, he is subjected to the worst punishment of any offender, "for being of no birth or blood." The 3rd judge becomes the victim of dramatic irony when he says that Volpone should be "taught [how] to bear himself/Towards a person of his [an equal or higher] rank." Rank assumes supreme importance at this stage of the play; but rank seems to be ultimately determined by money. Because of his harsh punishment and his conflict with Volpone in the final scene, Mosca is a chief candidate for the play's antagonist; but the behavior of the judges does not refute, but in fact confirms, Mosca's contention, in Act Three, that the "wise" world is "nothing but parasites". While the judges believe that they can possibly gain wealth from him, they treat him kindly; as soon as it is clear they cannot, they abuse him. Jonson's problem with the judges becomes clear; he wants his play to affirm the values cherished by Celia and Bonario, those of honor and religiosity. He desires his use of irony to be stable, irony employed against a certain set of values—those of Volpone—in favor of the values of Celia and Bonario; it is a conservative form of irony, in that it hearkens back to an older idea of virtue, and attacks the modern ideas of Volpone. But the Venetian state, as he portrays it (and we know this closely mirrored his view of English society at the time) was run through with parasitism from top to bottom; everyone was a Mosca, in Jonson's eyes, or at least everyone who had influence, even symbols of wisdom such as the judges. But an ending where Celia and Bonario are punished and Volpone and Mosca escape free would have been contrary to the play's didactic purpose; showing virtue losing out to vice doesn't make virtue seem the more favorable option of the two. So Jonson is forced to compromise his unremittingly negative portrait of Venetian society in order to accommodate his need to have Celia and Bonario win out at the end. This compromise may explain a dissatisfaction produced by the ending, its feeling of being too artificial, and not "of a piece" with the rest of the play.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Sir Politic and Peregrine are walking along
    (a) a canal
    (b) along a courtyard
    (c) along an avenue
    (d) along a street.

12. The Fourth Act is marked by
    (a) return of Mosca
    (b) Volpone's near complete disappearance
    (c) Mosca constructing a plot
    (d) verdict of Scrutineo.

13. The issue of social class had been treated indirectly in the play through the character of
    (a) Volpone
    (b) Scrutineo
    (c) Mosca
    (d) Sir Politico.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Volpone's greed for ..... and self-gratification made him a prisoner of his desires.

15. Everything seems to be going well for Volpone, until ..... enters.

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16. Voltore makes a cryptic ..... to Mosca: though he is in summer now.

17. A central motif in the final act is that of the ..... -made-reality.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. We can say that it in fact strengthens the moral message of the play that a sympathetic character gets punished for his vice.

19. After laughing at his expense, Peregrine claims that he and Sir Politic are even, and apologizes for the burning of the knight's papers.

20. Sir Pol decides, at Peregrine's suggestion that he will hide in a wine cask made of tortoise-shell.

2.7 Summary

- The play is dedicated to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, both of which had recently awarded Jonson honorary doctorates at the time of the play's writing.
- Jonson briefly discusses the moral intentions of the play and its debt to classical drama.
- The opening parts of the play, before we are introduced to the action, may seem superfluous.
- The dedication, however, gives us a clue as to Jonson's intentions in writing Volpone. First of all, he is intent on writing a "moral" play. By taking to task those "poetasters" who have disgraced the theatrical profession with their immoral work, Jonson highlights the moral intentions of his play.
- The scene I of Act 1 is Volpone's house, in the Italian city of Venice, in the spring of 1606. It is morning, and Volpone, whose name in Italian means "the great Fox," enters.
- The construction of the first scene of the play is straight forward. It reveals the conceit (premise or situation) of the comedy and firmly establishes Volpone as the protagonist of the play.
- The use of irony is almost always a form of attack on a certain viewpoint or way of life, by showing its inherent contradictions; and if it aims to show us that certain behavior or viewpoints are present in the thoughts and actions of everyday people in society at large, then it makes a pointed commentary on contemporary society.
- In Scene II of Act 1 Nano (a dwarf), Castrone (a eunuch), and Androgyno enter.
- The entrance of Volpone's bizarre "family" of children is the entrance of the grotesque in the play; all three are"freaks" of one sort or another; Castrone the eunuch, Nano the dwarf, and Androgyno the hermaphrodite.
- In Scene III, Voltore the lawyer—whose name means "vulture" in Italian—enters with Mosca, and Mosca assures him that he will be Volpone's heir.
- Through the device of Volpone's con, Jonson makes his satiric commentary on greed, using dramatic irony, situational irony, verbal irony, and repetition. Dramatic irony is a literary device often used in tragedies; a central character behaves in a certain way in ignorance of key facts about a situation; we, however, know the behavior is incorrect and feel tension because of our inability to stop it.
- In scene V the final would-be heir now appears. He is a merchant named Corvino, and his names mean "crow" in Italian.
- The final scene is in many ways a conclusion of the scenes with Voltore and Corbaccio.
- The scene I of Act 2 introduces us to the Sir Politic Would-be subplot of Volpone. The subplot is a key component of Elizabethan drama; it is a secondary storyline which, like a variation on a theme, should take up the themes of the main story, or related themes, and treats them in a

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slightly different way, either with a different tone or with a different emphasis.

- When Volpone loses control with Celia, he breaks the implicit rules he seemed to be playing by initially, or at least may have fooled the audience into thinking he was playing by: that he was only out to deceive and hurt those who deceived and hurt themselves.
- In scene I of Act IV, Sir Politic and Peregrine are walking along a canal, and Politic undertakes to teach Peregrine a thing or two about life in Venice. His two main points are that one should never tell the truth to strangers, and that one should always have proper table manners, which Politic then goes on to explain in full.
- In Scene II of Act IV, Lady Politic, Nano, and some serving women enter, looking for her husband. And in Scene III, Mosca enters and finds Lady Politic incensed over her husband's infidelity.
- The moral satire of the play becomes somewhat submerged in the Fourth Act, as considerations of plot and tone become more important. Jonson frames the intense confrontation between Volpone, Celia, and Bonario with humorous scenes involving the Politic Would-bes.
- The scene IV of Act IV is now set at the Scrutineo, the law courts of the Venetian state. The four Avocatori also appear in scene V. In Scene VI Mosca enters with his surprise witness, who is, of course, Lady Politic Would-be.
- The Fourth Act is marked by Volpone's near complete disappearance for the play; Mosca takes his place as the driving force behind the plot.
- The way Voltore and Mosca go about creating their illusion has similarities with the way playwrights go about creating theirs, using words and images in a dramatic manner.
- The way Jonson metes out punishment to his characters bears a resemblance to one of Lady Politic's less favorite Italian poets: Dante Alighieri. The greedy Corbaccio has his estate taken away from him, Corvino, who behaves like an ass during the entire play, is metaphorically transformed into one, and Volpone, who pretended to be bedridden in order to satisfy his insatiable lusts, will now be bedridden permanently, still unable to satisfy his desires for Celia. This fitting of the punishment to the crime in a poetic, imaginative way is similar to Dante's device of contrapasso which he employs in Inferno (Hell), book one of his Divine Comedy. The punishments there, and here, are meant to capture the inner essence of the crime itself; in other words, Volpone's greed for pleasure and self-gratification made him a prisoner of his desires, bound to be frustrated in his attempts to achieve them, long before he was ever put into chains.

2.8 Keywords

Poetasters	:	A derogatory term for an inferior playwright who have disgraced the theatrical profession with their immoral work.
Hail	:	A term used in medieval mystery plays to announce the presence of Christ.
Profane	:	Of low moral worth
Dramatic irony	:	It is the ironic effect created, when someone doesn't know something you do, and says something that's normally reasonable but in the context quite stupid or funny.
Iambic pentameter	:	A meter in which each line has ten syllables, or fine pairs of syllables, the first syllable in each pair unstressed and the second stressed.
Unity of time	:	The audience and the characters must experience time at the same rate.
Unity of place	:	The play should have only one setting.

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Unity of action	:	The play should revolve around one action.
Dramatic irony	:	It is a literary device often used in tragedies, a central character behaves in a certain way in ignorance of key facts about a situation.
Stage craft	:	The art of putting on a show.
Soliloquy	:	It is a speech given by a character while alone on stage, spoken directly to the audience and it usually gives the audience direct access to the inner workings of the character's mind.
Avocatori	:	One who serve as judges in the Venetian state
Bawdy-house	:	A seedy night club or whorehouse.

2.9 Review Questions

1. In Volpone, Jonson sets out to undermine the notion of avarice. Explain
2. Mention four satiristic characters of Act II.
3. What are the main themes used in Act IV of the play Jonson?
4. Write short notes on the following scenes:
   (a) Scene I of Act I
   (b) Closing scene of the play
   (c) The scene entrusted to to the punsihment of characters.
5. Explain the following in context of Volpone play:
   (a) Morality (b) Deceit (c) Plot
6. The way Jonson metes out punishment to his characters bears a resemblance to one of Lady Politic's less favorite Italian poets: *Dante Alighieri*. Elucidate.
7. The moral satire of the play becomes somewhat submerged in the Fourth Act. Explain.
8. The main theme of the morality play is: Man begins in innocence, man falls into temptation, man repents and is saved or killed, in the context of this theme, explain the play Volpone.
9. The Fourth Act is marked by Volpone's near complete disappearance for the play. Evaluate.
10. Illustrate that throughout the play, Volpone has seemed both a likeable and sympathetic protagonist and a sociopath.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (b)	2. (b)	3. (c)
4. implicit	5. woman	6. moral criticism
7. soliloquy	8. True	9. False
10. True	11. (a)	12. (b)
13. (c)	14. pleasure	15. Mosca
16. threat	17. disguise	18. True
19. True	20. True	

2.10 Further Readings

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Books

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Unit 3: Volpone: Characterization and Plot Construction and Sub-plots

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Enumerate the characterization of the play;
- Illustrate that Volpone is the manesake of the play;
- Explain that play's title character is its protagonist;
- Examine that the character is first an instrument and then a victim of Jonson's satire of money-obssessed society;
- Elaborate the plot and sub-plot construction in each act of the play.

Introduction

Volpone, the play's title character is its protagonist. His name means 'The Fox' in Italian. Jonson used him as an instrument of satire of money-obsessed society, and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events. He is lustful, raffish, and greedy for pleasure. He is a creature of passion, continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. He is also energetic and has an unusual gift for rhetoric.

Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant and his lackey. He is the person who continually executes Volpone's ideas and the one who comes up with the necessary lie whenever needed. Mosca appears to be exactly what he is described as: a clinging, servile parasite, who only exists for Volpone and through Volpone.

The plot construction in the play closely parallels Horace's satire on legacy hunters but dramatizes it with characters whose flattened, comic/satiric personas represent various types of human personality as they are distorted by greed, lust, and sheer perversity. Jonson alerts us to the symbolic order of the action's meaning by means of the names he assigns the primary characters: Volpone (fox--deceiver), Mosca (fly--parasite), Voltore (vulture--scavenger/lawyer), Corbaccio (crow--wealthy but still greedy man), and Corvino (raven, another scavenger--the wealthy merchant who can't get enough). These characters all seek to be named Volpone's heir in order to gain his treasure, but they offer him gifts to achieve that honor, and he strings them along, more in love with his delight in deceiving them than even his beloved gold. A love plot is attached to this legacy-hunt, involving Corvino's wife (Celia) and Corbaccio's son (Bonario), but one of the play's puzzles is that they are such relatively lifeless, though moral, characters. Below these levels, three more sets of characters populate the stage. Nano (a dwarf), Castrone (an eunuch), and Androgyno (a hermaphrodite) join Mosca as Volpone's courtiers, Sir Poltic Would-be and his wife are deceived by Peregrine, and the elders of Venice alternately try to profit from and to bring justice to the confusion (Commendatori [sheriffs], Mercatori [merchants], Avocatori [lawyers, brothers of Corvino], and Notario [the court's registrar]).

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In a nutshell, the plot is that the conspirators try to deceive Volpone, but he's really deceiving them, until his agent (Mosca) deceives him (and them) and they bring him to the court, which they all try to deceive, until they are unmasked.

Jonson uses all the characters as an instrument of satire of one kind or the other in his play. He compared all the characters to some animals as using their character. This unit elaborates the Jonson's satire for each character. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of its protagonist, the Volpone. The conspiratory to decieve and to be deceived is also beatifully ordinated in the play and has been analysed in detail below.

3.1 Characterization of the Play—Character List

Volpone, the Fox, a venetian magnifico is the main character of the play. Delighting in foxlike trickery, Volpone scorns the easy gain of cheating widows and orphans and the hard gain of labor. He chooses for his victims Venice's leading crooked advocate, its most greedy and dishonest merchant, and its most hardened miser. The joy of the chase of gold and jewels belonging to others is keener to him than the possession. Jonson uses the characters to make them instrument of his satire of greed and dishonesty.

3.1.1 Volpone

Volpone is the protagonist of the play. His name means "The Fox" in Italian. Jonson used him as an instrument of satire of money-obsessed society, and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events. He is lustful, raffish, and greedy for pleasure. He is a creature of passion, continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. He is also energetic and has an unusual gift for rhetoric. He worships his money, all of which he has acquired through cons, such as the one he plays on Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino. Volpone has no children, but he has something of a family: his parasite, Mosca, his dwarf, Nano, his eunuch, Castrone, and his hermaphrodite, Androgyno. Mosca is his only true confidante. Volpone hates to make money through honest labour or cold, he loves making it in clever, deceitful ways. This dynamic in his character shapes our reaction to him throughout the play. At times, this hedonism seems fun, engaging, entertaining, and even morally valuable, such as when he is engaged in the con on his fortune hunters. But his attempted seduction of Celia reveals a darker side to his hedonism when it becomes an attempted rape. The incident makes him, in the moral universe of the play, a worthy target of satire. Through the play, we learn that he is the one who makes the satire but the satire eventually turns back on him, when he becomes a victim of Mosca's "Fox-trap." The reason he is ensnared by Mosca is that he cannot resist one final gloat at his dupes, oblivious to the fact that in doing so, he hands over his entire estate to Mosca. This lack of rational forethought and commitment to his own sensual impulses is characteristic of Volpone. Therefore, he has three weaknesses that might make his 'plots' fail: the first is his lust for Celia, the second is his overconfident behavior, and the last is his complete trust in Mosca.

3.1.2 Mosca

Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant and his lackey. He is the person who continually executes Volpone's ideas and the one who comes up with the necessary lie whenever needed. In the opening acts, Mosca appears to be exactly what he is described as: a clinging, servile parasite, who only exists for Volpone and through Volpone. In other words, he exists to serve Volpone, and all that Volpone wants he wants. But in Act Three, we have the beginning of his assertion of self-identity, when he begins to grow confident in his abilities. But then this confidence again is left unvoiced, and Mosca seems to go back to being Volpone's faithful servant, helping him get out of the troublesome situation with Bonario and Celia. Mosca himself is possessed by greed, and he attempts to move out of his role as parasite to the role of great beast himself. But his attempt

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fails, as Volpone exposes them both. Though initially (and for most of the play) he behaves in a servile manner towards Volpone, Mosca conceals a growing independence he gains as a result of the incredible resourcefulness he shows in aiding and abetting Volpone's confidence game. Mosca's growing confidence, and awareness that the others in the play are just as much "parasites" as he—in that they too would rather live off the wealth of others than do honest work—eventually bring him into conflict with Volpone, a conflict that destroys them both.

3.1.3 Voltore

One of the three legacy hunters or carrion-birds—the legacy hunters continually circle around Volpone, giving him gifts in the hope that he will choose them as his heir. Voltore is a lawyer by profession, and, as a result, he is adept in the use of words. Voltore is, like all the legacy hunters, named after a carrion-bird. In the case of Voltore, that bird is the vulture; for Corvino, it is the crow, and for Corbaccio, the raven. Voltore is the most pleasant of all the legacy hunters, for he is the least crass and the least obsessed with seeing Volpone die. His preferential status shows in Mosca's special regard for him: Mosca tries to make sure that Voltore gets enough payment for his services at the Scrutineo in Act IV. But Voltore comes to regret his actions at the Scrutineo. Of course, this regret only comes after he has been denied his inheritance, and it seems to stem directly from his bitterness at Mosca's leapfrogging over him on the social ladder. And when Volpone whispers to him that he might still get his inheritance, he stops confessing his lies to the Scrutineo and pretends that he was "possessed" by an evil demon. The verbal irony is that Voltore, in that statement and action, reveals his greed.

3.1.4 Corbaccio

Another "carrion-bird" circling Volpone, Corbaccio is actually extremely old and ill himself and is much more likely to die before Volpone even has a chance to bequeath him his wealth. He has a hearing problem and betrays no sign of concern for Volpone, delighting openly in (fake) reports of Volpone's worsening symptoms. He goes as far as to testify against his own son. He is finally punished, sent to a monastery, and forced to turn his estate over to his son, Bonario.

3.1.5 Corvino

A greedy, rich merchant and an extremely cruel and dishonorable character, Corvino is Celia's jealous husband. He frequently threatens to do disgusting acts of physical violence to her and her family in order to gain control over her. Yet he is more concerned with financial gain than with her faithfulness, seeing her, in essence, as a piece of property. Corvino is another one of the "carrion-birds" circling Volpone. Corvino is punished in the end for offering up his wife, which results in her returning to her father, with her dowry tripled. Corvino is the third of the "carrion-birds" circling Volpone.

3.1.6 Bonario

The son of Corbaccio. Bonario is an upright youth who remains loyal to his father even when his father perjures against him in court. His honesty and his desire to do right make him one of the more righteous characters in the play. He heroically rescues Celia from Volpone and represents bravery and honor, qualities which the other characters seem to lack. However, perhaps because he believes so strongly in good, he is too trusting of others and is exploited as a result.

3.1.7 Celia

Celia is the wife of Corvino, who is extremely beautiful, enough to drive both Volpone and Corvino to distraction. She is absolutely committed to her husband, even though he treats her horribly, and

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has a faith in God and sense of honor, qualities which seem to be lacking in both Corvino and Volpone. These qualities guide her toward self-control. She's also known by her self-denial. This makes her a perfect foil for Volpone, since her self-control exposes his complete lack thereof, no more clearly than in Volpone's attempted seduction of her. The turning point of the play comes when she says "no" to Volpone's advances, thus denying him the lecherous pleasures he describes in his seduction speech. Celia seems willing to do anything to avoid dishonor, too ready to sacrifice herself to be believable. Her willingness to subject herself to Corvino's harsh dictates and abuse may make her seem more weak than strong. But she has an inner moral sense, indicated by the fact that she refuses Volpone against her husband's express wishes. Jonson again chooses a name with symbolic meaning for Celia: it derives from the Latin word caelum, meaning "sky" or "heaven."

3.1.8 Nano

A dwarf as his name in Italian indicates ("nano" means "dwarf") is one of the three servants whom Volpone keeps for entertainment. He keeps Volpone amused with songs and jokes written by Mosca. Their performances mostly involve slapstick humor, which serves as a commentary on Elizabethan theater. They also run errands for Volpone, for instance spreading the false news that he has died.

3.1.9 Castrone

An Eunuch, one of the three servants whom Volpone keeps for entertainment, who are also, allegedly, his illegitimate children. The only notable fact about Castrone is that his name means eunuch ("castrone" means "eunuch" in Italian). There is not much else to say about Castrone, as he has no speaking lines whatsoever.

3.1.10 Androgyno

"Androgyno" means "hermaphrodite" in Italian, and as in the case of Nano and Castrone, the name rings true. He is the third of Volpone's servant players. Androgyno apparently possesses the soul of Pythagoras, according to Nano, which has been in gradual decline ever since it left the ancient mathematician's body.

3.1.11 Sir Politic Would Be

Sir Politic an English knight who resides in Venice is a traveler from England who prides himself on knowing the ways of a gentleman. He is a know-it-all who in fact knows not very much at all. He puts tremendous stake in his reputation and in many ways acts as a foil for Volpone. Unlike Volpone's, however, Sir Politic's get-rich-quick schemes are not exploitative. Sir Politic represents the danger of moral corruption that English travelers face when they go abroad to the continent, especially to Italy. He occupies the central role in the subplot, which centers on the relationship between himself and Peregrine, another English traveler much less gullible than the good knight. Sir Politic is also imaginative, coming up with ideas for money making schemes such as using onions to detect the plague, as well as the idea of making a detailed note of every single action he performs in his diary, including his urinations.

3.1.12 Peregrine

A young gentleman English traveller who meets and befriends Sir Politic Would- be upon arriving in Venice. Like Sir Politic, Peregrine is a visitor from England who thus serves to connect the storyline to Jonson's home country. He is amused by the gullible Would-be, but is also easily offended, as

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demonstrated by his adverse reaction to Lady Politic Would-be's suggestive comments. Peregrine also embodies the theme of Vengeance and symbolizes the Knowledge aspect of the Knowledge/ Ignorance theme.

3.1.13 Avocatori

They are four magistrates or the judges from the Scrutineo. For representatives of order and justice, the Avocatori are dangerously gullible. They switch sides in the court case based not on concrete evidence but on their impressions of the defendants and the prosecutors. What's worse, the Avocatori are just as shallow and self-absorbed as the other characters in the play. Even when lives are at stake, the Avocatori are concerned only with marrying their daughters off to Mosca.

3.1.14 Lady Would Be

Lady Would-be, the Knight's wife, is the garrulous, vain, and jealous companion of Sir Politic. Though she is herself independent, Lady Would-be be grudges Sir Politic his freedom, becoming irrationally exasperated when Mosca tells her that Sir Politic is with another woman. We know also that Lady Would-be's greed rivals that of Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore since Mosca tells us that she offered him her body in order to be Volpone's heir.

The Lady Politic Would-be is portrayed as a would-be courtesan. She was the impetus for the Would-bes move to Venice, because of her desire to learn the ways of the sophisticated Venetians. She is very well read and very inclined to let anyone know this, or anything else about her. She is extremely vain.

3.1.15 Notario

The Notario are the Register or officer of the Scrutineo. The Notario acts something like a bailiff would in a modern court of law. He summons witnesses, swears them in, and, in general, runs errands for the Avocatori.

3.1.16 Commendatori

The Commendatori are the court officers who detain Corbaccio, Corvino, Voltore, Mosca, and Volpone once their punishments have been handed down. Also, Volpone disguises himself as a commendatore in order to taunt Corbaccio, Corvino, and Voltore in the streets.

3.1.17 Marcatori

They are three merchants and are Peregrine's accomplices in the practical joke he plays on Sir Politic. They pretend to be representatives of the Venetian state who have come to apprehend Sir Politic.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Volpone, the play's title character is its protagonist. His name means
   (a) the Fox in Italian
   (b) crow in Italian
   (c) parasite in Italian
   (d) greedy in Italian.

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2. Jonson uses all the characters as an instrument of
   (a) idisguise
   (b) satire
   (c) greed
   (d) lust.
3. A dwarf as his name in Italian indicates
   (a) Mosca
   (b) Volpone
   (c) Nano
   (d) Androgyno.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Castrone is an ..... , one of the three servants whom Volpone keeps for entertainment.
5. Peregrine is a young gentleman English ..... who meets and befriends Sir Politic Would- be.
6. The Notario are the ..... or officer of the Scrutineo.
7. Mosca is Volpone's ..... , a combination of his slave, his servant and his lackey.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Voltore is one of the three legacy hunters or carrion-birds continually circle around Volpone.
9. The Commendatori are the court officers who detain Corbaccio, Corvino, Voltore, Mosca.
10. Celia seems willing to do anything to avoid dishonor, too ready to sacrifice herself to be believable.

3.2 Plot Construction

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

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

3.2.1 Plot in First Act

In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to Volpone, except for Corbaccio, who offers only a worthless (and probably poisoned) vial of medicine. But Corbaccio agrees to return later in the day to make Volpone his heir, so that Volpone will return the favor. This act is a boon to Volpone, since Corbaccio, in all likelihood, will die long before Volpone does. After each hunter

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leaves, Volpone and Mosca laugh at each's gullibility. After Corvino's departure Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight living in Venice, arrives at the house but is told to come back three hours later. And Volpone decides that he will try to get a close look at Corvino's wife, Celia, who Mosca describes as one of the most beautiful women in all of Italy. She is kept under lock and key by her husband, who has ten guards on her at all times, but Volpone vows to use disguise to get around these barriers.

3.2.2 Plot in Second Act

The second act portrays a time just a short while later that day, and we meet Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic's husband, who is conversing with Peregrine, an young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain. The two are walking in the public square in front of Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua," actually Volpone in diguise as an Italian mountebank, or medicine-show man. Scoto engages in a long and colorful speech, hawking his new "oil", which is touted as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. Corvino arrives, just as she does this, and flies into a jealous rage, scattering the crows in the square. Volpone goes home and complains to Mosca that he is sick with lust for Celia, and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone. Meanwhile, Corvino berates his wife for tossing her handkerchief, since he interprets it as a sign of her unfaithfulness, and he threatens to murder her and her family as a result. He decrees that, as punishment, she will now no longer be allowed to go to Church, she cannot stand near windows (as she did when watching Volpone), and, most bizarrely, she must do everything backwards from now on—she must even walk and speak backwards. Mosca then arrives, implying to Corvino that if he lets Celia sleep with Volpone (as a "restorative" for Volpone's failing health), then Volpone will choose him as his heir. Suddenly, Corvino's jealousy disappears, and he consents to the offer.

3.2.3 Plot in Third Act

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

3.2.4 Plot in Fourth Act

A short while later, in the early afternoon, Peregrine and Sir Politic are still talking. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under

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

Notes At the Scrutineo, Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Mosca get their story straight. Though they side with Bonario and Celia at the opening of the case, the Avocatori eventually align themselves with Voltore, who argues that Bonario committed adultery with Celia and attempted to kill his father. Lady Would-be testifies that Celia seduced her husband. Bonario and Celia have no witnesses of their own, so they lose the case.

3.2.5 Plot in Fifth Act

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

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

Meanwhile, Volpone gloats in front of each legacy hunter, deriding them for having lost Volpone's inheritance to a parasite such as Mosca, and he successfully avoids recognition. But his plan backfires nonetheless. Voltore, driven to such a state of distraction by Volpone's teasing, decides to recant his testimony in front of the Senate, implicating both himself but more importantly Mosca as a criminal. Corvino accuses him of being a sore loser, upset that Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate upon his death, and the news of this death surprises the Senators greatly. Volpone nearly recovers from his blunder by telling Voltore, in the middle of the Senate proceeding, that "Volpone" is still alive. Mosca pretends to faint and claims to the Senate that he does not know where he is, how he got

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there, and that he must have been possessed by a demon during the last few minutes when he was speaking to them. He also informs the Senators that Volpone is not dead, contradicting Corvino. All seems good for Volpone until Mosca returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it. Mosca, after all, has a will, written by Volpone and in his signature, stating that he is Volpone's heir. now that Volpone is believed to be dead, Mosca legally owns Volpone's property, and Mosca tells Volpone that he is not going to give it back by telling the truth. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Volpone ends up being sent to prison, while Mosca is consigned to a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. At the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the audience, simply asking them to applaud if they enjoyed the play they just saw.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to
    (a) Volpone
    (b) Mosca
    (c) Lady Politico
    (d) Celia.
12. The third act begins with a soliloquy from
    (a) Celia
    (b) Mosca
    (c) Volpone
    (d) lady Politico.
13. In the final act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is actually
    (a) cheated
    (b) revealed
    (c) growing ill
    (d) revealed and punished.

Fill in the Blanks:

14. Volpone gloats in front of each legacy .....
15. At the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the ..... .
16. Volpone is dead in the eyes of the ..... and that Mosca will not let him return to the world of the living.
17. Volpone takes place in ..... Venice, over the course of one day.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.
19. The third act begins with a soliloquy from Celia.
20. Just at the beginning, we see Volpone's latest con in action.

Notes

3.3 Summary

- Volpone, the play's title character is its protagonist. His name means 'The Fox' in Italian.
- Jonson used him as an instrument of satire of money-obsessed society, and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events. He is lustful, raffish, and greedy for pleasure.
- Volpone is a creature of passion, continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. He is also energetic and has an unusual gift for rhetoric.
- Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant and his lackey. He is the person who continually executes Volpone's ideas and the one who comes up with the necessary lie whenever needed.
- Mosca appears to be exactly what he is described as: a clinging, servile parasite, who only exists for Volpone and through Volpone.
- The plot construction in the play closely parallels Horace's satire on legacy hunters but dramatizes it with characters whose flattened, comic/satiric personas represent various types of human personality as they are distorted by greed, lust, and sheer perversity.
- Jonson alerts us to the symbolic order of the action's meaning by means of the names he assigns the primary characters: Volpone (fox--deceiver), Mosca (fly--parasite), Voltore (vulture--scavenger/lawyer), Corbaccio (crow--wealthy but still greedy man), and Corvino (raven, another scavenger--the wealthy merchant who can't get enough).
- These characters all seek to be named Volpone's heir in order to gain his treasure, but they offer him gifts to achieve that honor, and he strings them along, more in love with his delight in deceiving them than even his beloved gold.
- A love plot is attached to this legacy-hunt, involving Corvino's wife (Celia) and Corbaccio's son (Bonario), but one of the play's puzzles is that they are such relatively lifeless, though moral, characters. Below these levels, three more sets of characters populate the stage.
- In a nutshell, the plot is that the conspirators try to deceive Volpone, but he's really deceiving them, until his agent (Mosca) deceives him (and them) and they bring him to the court, which they all try to deceive, until they are unmasked.
- Jonson uses all the characters as an instrument of satire of one kind or the other in his play. He compared all the characters to some animals as using their character.
- Volpone, the Fox, a venetian magnifico is the main character of the play. Delighting in foxlike trickery, Volpone scorns the easy gain of cheating widows and orphans and the hard gain of labor.
- Volpone chooses for his victims Venice's leading crooked advocate, its most greedy and dishonest merchant, and its most hardened miser. The joy of the chase of gold and jewels belonging to others is keener to him than the possession.
- Jonson uses the characters to make them instrument of his satire of greed and dishonesty.

3.4 Keywords

Magnifico : A derogatory term for an inferior playwright who have disgraced the theatrical profession with their immoral work.

Soliloquy : It is a device often used in drama whereby a character relates his or her thoughts and feeling to him/herself and to the audience without addressing any of other characters and is delivered often when they are alone or think they are alone.

Notes

Satire	:	Satire is primarily a literary genre or form, although in practice it can also be found in the graphic and performing arts.
Comedy	:	Comedy, as a popular meaning, is any humorous discourse generally intended to amuse, especially in television, film, and stand-up comedy.
Protagonist	:	A protagonist is the main character of a literary, theatrical, cinematic, or musical narrative, around whom the events of the narrative's plot revolve and with whom the audience is intended to most identify.
Flattery	:	Flattery is the act of giving excessive compliments, generally for the purpose of ingratiating oneself with the subject.
Iambic pentameter	:	A meter in which each line has ten syllables, or fine pairs of syllables, the first syllable in each pair unstressed and the second stressed.
Unity of time	:	The audience and the characters must experience time at the same rate.
Unity of place	:	The play should have only one setting.
Unity of action	:	The play should revolve around one action.
Dramatic irony	:	It is a literary device often used in tragedies, a central character behaves in a certain way in ignorance of key facts about a situation.
Stage craft	:	The art of putting on a show.
Soliloquy	:	It is a speech given by a character while alone on stage, spoken directly to the audience and it usually gives the audience direct access to the inner workings of the character's mind.
Avocatori	:	One who serve as judges in the Venetian state
Bawdy-house	:	A seedy night club or whorehouse.

3.5 Review Questions

1. Which character in the play do you most admire? Explain your answer.
2. Which character do you list admire? Explain your answer.
3. Give a brief sketch of the following characters in *Volpone*:
   (a) Voltore (b) Corvino (c) Castrone
4. Give a critical view of the following characters in the Volpone:
   (a) Nano (b) Androgyno (c) Avocatori
5. Illustrate the plot constructed in the following Act:
   (a) Act I (b) Act II (c) Act III
6. The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his power and his independence from Volpone. Explain
7. In the final act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is actually growing ill. Explain this situation.
8. The legacy hunters do not know that Volpone is actually in excellent health and merely faking illness for the purpose of collecting all those impressive get-well gifts. Explain this statement in context of plot construction in Volpone.

Notes

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. (c)
4. Eunuch	5. traveller	6. Register
7. parasite	8. True	9. True
10. True	11. (a)	12. (b)
13. (c)	14. hunter	15. audience
16. world	17. seventeenth-century	18. True
19. False	20. True	

3.6 Further Readings

Books

Jonson, Ben; J. D. Rea (ed.). 1919. *Volpone*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Jonson, Ben; Michael Jamieson (ed.). 1966. *Volpone and Other Plays*. Penguin Books, New York.

Jonson, Ben; Robert Watson (ed.). 2003. *Volpone*. Methuen Drama, UK.

Online links

http://www.scribd.com/doc/15730904/Character-Analysis-Volpone

http://www.sparknotes.com/drama/volpone/summary.html

http://www.enotes.com/volpone/characters

http://www.scribd.com/doc/15730904/Character-Analysis-Volpone

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Unit 4: Richard Sheridan: The School for Scandal—Introduction to the Author and the Text

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the biographical sketch of Richard Sheridan;
- Elaborate the literary works of Richard Sheridan;
- Explain that *The School for Scandal* is a real comedy;
- Illustrate that the problem of anti-semitism runs throughout the play;
- Describe that the play appears artificial in the character's speech, dress and motivations;
- Discuss the nature of the drama.

Introduction

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley Butler, dramatist and politician, born in Dublin; educated at Harrow; committed to literature, in 1773, settled down in London with his gifted young wife, Elizabeth Linley, and scored his first success with the "Rivals" in 1775. Following it up with the over rated "Duenna" aided by his father-in-law became owner of Drury Lane Theatre, which somewhat lagged till the production of his most brilliant satirical comedy, "The School for Scandal"(1777) and the "Critic" set flowing the tide of prosperity. Turning his attention next to politics he entered Parliament

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under Fox's patronage in 1780, and two years later became Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Rockingham's Ministry. His great speech (1787) impeaching Hastings for his treatment of the Begums placed him in the front rank of orators. But although he sat for 32 years in Parliament, only once again reached the same height of eloquence in a speech (1794) supporting the French Revolution, and generally failed to establish himself as a reliable statesman. Meanwhile his theatrical venture had ended disastrously, and other financial troubles thickening around him, he died in poverty, but was accorded a burial in Westminster Abbey. This unit elaborates the details of his life since birth till his death.

The School for Scandal opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. It was an enormous success. Reviews heralded the play as a "real comedy" that would supplant the sentimental dramas that had filled the stage in the previous years. While wildly popular in the eighteenth century, the play has not been as successful with contemporary audiences. One significant problem is the anti-semitism that runs throughout the play. Other factor that makes it unsuccessful with contemporary audiences is that the play appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations.

This unit also elaborates the text, drawbacks and problems of the play in detail. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text.

18.1 Richard Sheridan—Introduction

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley (1751–1816), the son of an Irish actor, Sheridan achieved fame as both dramatist and politician. Sheridan's major works were all produced before entering Parliament in 1780: *The Rivals* (1775), *The Duenna* (1775), *The School for Scandal* (1777), and *The Critic* (1779). Sheridan was a superb political orator, achieving fame during the campaign against Warren Hastings; one memorable speech, on 8 February 1787, lasted an astonishing 5 hours and 40 minutes. For all his ability, Sheridan never attained cabinet rank, and served only as under-secretary at the Foreign Office (1782), Treasury secretary (1783), and treasurer of the navy (1806-7). Mutual antagonism between Sheridan and Burke contributed to the disintegration of the Whig Party in the 1790s, with Sheridan flaunting his admiration for the French principles Burke despised. He died in straitened circumstances, caused partly by losses incurred from his involvement with Drury Lane theatre.

18.1.1 Biography

Birth

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, (baptized November 4, 1751, Dublin, Ireland—died July 7, 1816, London, England) was born in Dublin, Ireland, on October 30, 1751. His father, Thomas, was an actor and theater manager; his mother, Frances, was the author of novels and plays. The family moved to London in 1758, and Sheridan was educated at Harrow (1762–1768). His first publication, a joint effort with a school friend, N.B. Halhead, was a metrical translation of Aristaenatus (1771). With this friend Sheridan also wrote his first play, a farce called Jupiter, which was rejected by both David Garrick and Samuel Foote.

Childhood and the Family

Sheridan was the third son of Thomas and Frances Sheridan. His grandfather Thomas Sheridan had been a companion and confidant of Jonathan Swift; his father was the author of a pronouncing dictionary and the advocate of a scheme of public education that gave a prominent place to elocution; and his mother gained some fame as a playwright.

The family moved to London, and Sheridan never returned to Ireland. He was educated (1762–68) at Harrow, and in 1770 he moved with his family to Bath. There Sheridan fell in love with Elizabeth

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Ann Linley (1754–92), whose fine soprano voice delighted audiences at the concerts and festivals conducted by her father, Thomas. In order to avoid the unpleasant attentions of a Welsh squire, Thomas Mathews of Llandaff, she decided to take refuge in a French nunnery. Sheridan accompanied her to Lille in March 1772 but returned to fight two duels that same year with Mathews. Meanwhile, Elizabeth had returned home with her father, and Sheridan was ordered by his father to Waltham Abbey, Essex, to pursue his studies. He was entered at the Middle Temple in April 1773 but after a week broke with his father, gave up a legal career, and married Elizabeth at Marylebone Church, London.

Marriage

In 1770 the Sheridans moved to Bath. There Richard, his brother Charles, and his friend Halhead were among the many who fell in love with a beautiful young singer, Elizabeth Linley. The most importunate of her admirers was a Capt. or Maj. Mathews. Terrified by his persecutions, she decided to seek shelter in a French convent, and Sheridan offered to protect her on her journey. In March 1772 they fled to France and were secretly married there. Leaving her at the convent, Sheridan returned to England and fought two duels with Mathews. Elizabeth was brought back to Bath by her father, and Sheridan was sent to London by his, but on April 13, 1773, they were allowed to marry openly and set-up house in London on a lavish scale with little money and no immediate prospects of any—other than his wife's dowry. The young couple entered the fashionable world and apparently held up their end in entertaining.

Notes Though at first the young couple had nothing to live on except a small dowry, in January 1775 Sheridan solved the problem of their support with the production of *The Rivals* at Convent Garden. A comedy of manners that blended brilliant wit with 18th-century sensibility, it became and remained a great success. One measure of its popularity was that it gave a new word to the English language, "malapropism," based on Mrs. Malaprop's mistakes.

The year 1775 was a productive one for Sheridan. In May his farce, *St. Patrick's Day*, or the *Scheming Lieutenant*, was performed, and in November Sheridan's comic opera, *The Duenna*, was produced with the help of his wife's father at Covent Garden. A son, Thomas, was also born to the Sheridans in 1775.

Political Career

Sheridan had become Member of Parliament for Stafford in September 1780 and was undersecretary for foreign affairs (1782) and secretary to the treasury (1783). Later he was treasurer of the navy (1806–07) and a privy councillor. The rest of his 32 years in Parliament were spent as a member of the minority Whig party in opposition to the governing Tories.

Sheridan's critical acumen and command over language had full scope in his oratory and were seen at their best in his speeches as manager of the unsuccessful impeachment of Warren Hastings, Governor General of India. Sheridan was recognized as one of the most persuasive orators of his time but never achieved greater political influence in Parliament because he was thought to be an unreliable intriguer. Some support for this view is to be found in his behaviour during the regency crisis (1788–89) following the temporary insanity of George III, when Sheridan acted as adviser to the unpopular, self-indulgent prince of Wales (George IV). He encouraged the prince to think that there would be a great majority for his being regent with all the royal powers simply because he was heir apparent. In the country at large this was seen as a move by Charles James Fox and his

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friends to take over the government and drive out Prime Minister William Pitt. Sheridan was also distrusted because of his part in the Whigs' internecine squabbles (1791–93) with Edmund Burke over the latter's implacable hostility to the French Revolution. He was one of the few members courageous enough openly to defend those who suffered for their support of the French Revolution. Indeed, Sheridan liked taking an individual stand, and, although he supported Fox in urging that the French had a right to choose their own way of government, he broke with Fox once the French became warlike and threatened the security of England. He also came out on the side of the Tory administration when he condemned mutineers who had rebelled against living conditions in the British Navy (1797). Much to Fox's disgust, Sheridan, although a Whig, gave some support to the Tory administration of Prime Minister Henry Addington, later 1st Viscount Sidmouth (1801–04).

In November 1806, Sheridan succeeded Charles James Fox as member for Westminster—although not, as he had hoped, as leader of the Whigs—but he lost the seat in May 1807. The Prince of Wales then returned him as member for the "pocket borough" of Ilchester, but his dependence on the prince's favour rankled with Sheridan, for they differed in their attitude on Catholic emancipation. Sheridan, who was determined to support emancipation, stood for election as member from Stafford again in 1812, but he could not pay those who had previously supported him as much as they expected and, as a result, was defeated.

Last Years and Death

Sheridan's financial difficulties were largely brought about by his own extravagance and procrastination, as well as by the destruction of Drury Lane Theatre by fire in February 1809. With the loss of his parliamentary seat and his income from the theatre, he became a prey to his many creditors. His last years were beset by these and other worries—his circulatory complaints and the cancer that afflicted his second wife, Esther Jane Ogle. She was the daughter of the dean of Winchester and was married to Sheridan in April 1795, three years after Elizabeth's death. Pestered by bailiffs to the end, Sheridan made a strong impression on the poet Lord Byron, who wrote a Monody on the Death of the Right Honourable R.B. Sheridan (1816), to be spoken at the rebuilt Drury Lane Theatre.

18.1.2 Work Experience

Playwright

When Sheridan settled in London, he began writing for the stage. Less than two years later of his marriage, in 1775, his first play, *The Rivals*, was produced at London's Covent Garden Theatre. It was a failure on its first night. Sheridan cast a more capable actor for the role of the comic Irishman for its second performance, and it was a smash which immediately established the young playwright's reputation and the favour of fashionable London. It has gone on to become a standard of English literature.

Shortly after the success of *The Rivals*, Sheridan and his father-in-law Thomas Linley the elder, a successful composer, produced the opera, *The Duenna*. This piece was accorded such a warm reception that it played for seventy-five performances.

In 1776, Sheridan, his father-in-law, and one other partner, bought a half interest in the Drury Lane theatre and, two years later, bought out the other half. Sheridan was the manager of the theatre for many years, and later became sole owner with no managerial role.

His most famous play *The School for Scandal* (Drury Lane, 8 May 1777) is considered one of the greatest comedies of manners in English. It was followed by *The Critic* (1779), an updating of the satirical Restoration play *The Rehearsal*, which received a memorable revival (performed with Oedipus in a single evening) starring Laurence Olivier as Mr. Puff, opening at the New Theatre on 18 October 1945 as part of an Old Vic Theatre Company season.

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Having quickly made his name and fortune, in 1776 Sheridan bought David Garrick's share in the Drury Lane patent and in 1778 the remaining share. His later plays were all produced there. In 1778 Sheridan wrote *The Camp* which commented on the ongoing threat of a French invasion of Britain. The same year Sheridan's brother-in-law Thomas Linley, a young composer who worked with him at Drury Lane Theatre, died in a boating accident. Sheridan had a rivalry with his fellow playwright Richard Cumberland and included a parody of Cumberland in his play *The Critic*.

Did u know? On 24 February 1809 the Drury Lane Theatre burned down. On being encountered drinking a glass of wine in the street while watching the fire, Sheridan was famously reported to have said: "A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside."

Playwright Works

- *The Rivals* (first acted 17 January 1775)
- *St Patrick's Day* (first acted 2 May 1775)
- *The Duenna* (first acted 21 November 1775)
- *A Trip to Scarborough* (first acted 24 February 1777)
- *The School for Scandal* (first acted 8 May 1777)
- *The Camp* (first acted 15 October 1778)
- *The Critic* (first acted 30 October 1779)
- *The Glorious First of June* (first acted 2 July 1794)

Theatre

After his marriage Sheridan turned to the theatre for a livelihood. His comedy *The Rivals* opened at Covent Garden Theatre, London, in January 1775. It ran an hour longer than was usual, and, because of the offensive nature and poor acting of the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, it was hardly a success. Drastically revised and with a new actor as Sir Lucius, its second performance 11 days later won immediate applause. The situations and characters were not entirely new, but Sheridan gave them freshness by his rich wit, and the whole play reveals Sheridan's remarkable sense of theatrical effect. The play is characteristic of Sheridan's work in its genial mockery of the affectation displayed by some of the characters. Even the malapropisms that slow down the play give a proper sense of caricature to the character of Mrs. Malaprop.

Some of the play's success was due to the acting of Lawrence Clinch as Sir Lucius. Sheridan showed his gratitude by writing the amusing little farce *St. Patrick's Day*; or, *The Scheming Lieutenant* for the benefit performance given for Clinch in May 1775. Another example of his ability to weave an interesting plot from well-worn materials is seen in *The Duenna*, produced the following November. The characters are generally undeveloped, but the intrigue of the plot and charming lyrics and the music by his father-in-law, Thomas Linley, and his son gave this ballad opera great popularity. Its 75 performances exceeded the 62, a record for that time, credited to John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), and it is still revived.

Thus, in less than a year Sheridan had brought himself to the forefront of contemporary dramatists. David Garrick, looking for someone to succeed him as manager and proprietor of Drury Lane Theatre,

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saw in Sheridan a young man with energy, shrewdness, and a real sense of theatre. A successful physician, James Ford, agreed with Garrick's estimate and increased his investment in the playhouse. In 1776, Sheridan and Linley became partners with Ford in a half-share of Drury Lane Theatre. Two years later they bought the other half from Willoughby Lacy, Garrick's partner.

In fact, Sheridan's interest in his theatre soon began to seem rather fitful. Nevertheless, he was responsible for the renewed appreciation of Restoration comedy that followed the revival of the plays of William Congreve at Drury Lane. In February 1777 he brought out his version of Sir John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696) as *A Trip to Scarborough*, again showing his talent for revision. He gave the rambling plot a neater shape and removed much indelicacy from the dialogue, but the result was disappointing, probably because of the loss of much of the earlier play's gusto.

What Sheridan learned from the Restoration dramatists can be seen in *The School for Scandal*, produced at Drury Lane in May 1777. That play earned him the title of "the modern Congreve." Although resembling Congreve in that its satirical wit is so brilliant and so general that it does not always distinguish one character from another, *The School for Scandal* does contain two subtle portraits in Joseph Surface and Lady Teazle. There were several Restoration models for the portrayal of a country girl amazed and delighted by the sexual freedom of high society. Sheridan softened his Lady Teazle, however, to suit the more refined taste of his day. The part combined innocence and sophistication and was incomparably acted. The other parts were written with equal care to suit the members of the company, and the whole work was a triumph of intelligence and imaginative calculation. With its spirited ridicule of affectation and pretentiousness, it is often considered the greatest comedy of manners in English.

Sheridan's flair for stage effect, exquisitely demonstrated in scenes in *The School for Scandal*, was again demonstrated in his delightful satire on stage conventions, *The Critic*, which since its first performance in October 1779 has been thought much funnier than its model, *The Rehearsal* (1671), by George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. Sheridan himself considered the first act to be his finest piece of writing. Although Puff is little more than a type, Sir Fretful Plagiary is not only a caricature of the dramatist Richard Cumberland but also an epitome of the vanity of authors in every age.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following play earned Richard Sheridan the title of "the modern Congreve"?
   (a) *The Critic* (b) *The Rehearsal*
   (c) *The School for Scandal* (d) *The Relapse*.
2. *The School for Scandal* was first of all performed at
   (a) Drury Lane Theatre (b) Covent Garden Theatre
   (c) Westminster Theatre (d) Richmond Theatre.
3. The Sheridan's first play "*The Rivals*" was produced at
   (a) Drury Lane Theatre (b) Covent Garden Theatre
   (c) Richmond Theatre (d) Westminster Theatre.
4. Which of the following play was not a work of Richard Sheridan?
   (a) *The School for Scandal* (b) *St Patrick's Day*
   (c) *The Glorious First of June* (d) *The Rehearsal*.
5. *A Trip to Scarborough*, a play by Richard Sheridan was acted on
   (a) 24 February 1777 (b) 17 January 1775
   (c) 8 May 1777 (d) 15 October 1778.

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Fill in the blanks:

6. After his marriage Sheridan turned to the theatre for a ..... .
7. Sheridan was recognized as one of the most persuasive ..... of his time.
8. Sheridan's financial difficulties were largely brought about by his own ..... and procrastination.
9. Sheridan was one of the orator who manages the unsuccessful impeachment of ..... .
10. What Sheridan learned from the Restoration dramatists can be seen in his play ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. *The School for Scandal* does contain two subtle portraits in Joseph Surface and Lady Teazle.
12. *The Critic*, which since its first performance in October 1779 has been thought much funnier than its model, *The Rehearsal* (1671), by George Villiers.
13. After his marriage Sheridan turned to the theatre as he was very fond of play writing.
14. Richard Sheridan was intimately associated with Covent Garden Theatre.
15. Sheridan had become member of Parliament for Stafford in September 1780.

18.2 The School for Scandal—Introduction to the Text

The *School for Scandal* opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. It was an enormous success. Reviews heralded the play as a "real comedy" that would supplant the sentimental dramas that had filled the stage in the previous years. While wildly popular in the eighteenth century, the play has not been as successful with contemporary audiences. The play suffered with anti-semitism and appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations.

Task Elucidate that *The School for Scandal* is a sentimental drama.

18.2.1 A Real Comedy

A comedy is usually a light, rather amusing, play that deals with contemporary life and manners. Such a drama often has a satirical slant, but ends happily. Among the many sub-genre under comedy, we find the comedy of manners, which originated in France with Molièr's "*Les Precieuses Ridicules*" (1658). Molièr saw this comic form as a way to correct social absurdities.

In England, the Comedy of Manners is represented by the plays of William Wycherley, George Etherege, William Congreve, and George Farquhar. This form was later classed "Old Comedy" but is now known as Restoration Comedy because it coincided with Charles II's return to England. The main goal of these comedies of manners in the period of Restoration is to mock society, or in other ways lift up society for scrutiny, which could cause negative or positive results. In the end, if the playwright has been successful, the audience will leave the theater feeling good (or at least feeling something), having laughed at themselves and society.

The definition of comedy and the background of the Restoration Comedy helps explain the themes that run throughout these plays. One of the major themes is marriage and the game of love. However, if marriage is a mirror of society, the couples in the plays show something very dark and sinister about order. Many critiques of marriage that we see in the play are devastating, but the game of love is not much more hopeful. Although the endings are happy and the man invariably gets the woman (or at least that is the implication), we see marriages without love and love affairs that are rebellious breaks with tradition.

Notes

However, as we look at the Restoration comedies that range from William Wycherley's play, "*The Country Wife*" (1675) to William Congreve's play, "*The Way of the World*" (1700), and further than that if we look at Aphra Behn's comedy of intrigue, "*The Rover*" (1702) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's sentimental comedy, "*The School for Scandal*" (1777), which fall near the same period, we see how dramatically society has progressed. A dramatic change, in moral attitudes about marriage and love, has taken place.

Notes As we look at Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play "*The School for Scandal*" (1777), we see a decided swing away from most of the other plays discussed here. Much of this change is due to a falling away of the Restoration values. We have moved outside of the Restoration Period and into a very different kind of restoration, where a different morality comes into play.

Though, the *School for Scandal* witness a restoration of order, but here, the bad are punished and the good are rewarded, a trend which we saw just a hint of in a couple of the play, but not to this extent. Here, appearance doesn't fool anyone for long, especially when the long lost guardian, Sir Oliver, comes home to discover all. In the Cain and Abel scenario, Cain, a part played by Joseph Surface, is exposed as being an ungrateful hypocrite and Abel, a part played by Charles Surface, is really not that bad after all (all blame seems to be laid on his brother). Also, the virtuous young maiden—Maria—was right in her love at the end, though she obeyed her father's orders to refuse any further contact with Charles until he was vindicated.

Another interesting switch, here, is that Sheridan does not create affairs between the characters of his play. Lady Teazle was willing to cuckold Sir Peter with Joseph, until she hears the truth of his love and, as in every melodramatic drama, she realizes the error of her ways, repents and, when she is discovered, tells all and is forgiven. Of course, in a comedy, all must be restored to a happy ending, so, in the end Charles says, "Why as to reforming, Sir Peter, I'll make no promises, and that I take to be a proof that I intend to set about it. But here shall be my moniter—my gentle guide.—Ah! can I leave the virtuous path those eyes illuminate?" At the end, though, we are left with a all-too-perfect feeling. There is nothing really realistic about the play, but his intent seems to have been much more moral than any of the earlier comedies.

Though these Restoration plays broach similar themes, the methods and the outcomes are completely different, which graphically shows how much more conservative England had become by the late eighteenth century. Also as time moved forward, the emphasis changed from one on cuckoldry and the aristocracy to one on marriage as a contractual agreement and eventually progressed to the sentimental comedy, which seemed more interested in uplifting morals than anything else. As we look at the change, we see that, in many ways, the first plays were the most fun, even though they were the most obscene (according to a more traditional view). All along, though, we see a restoration of social order, in various forms. By looking at the changes, we can gain an insight into historical events.

18.2.2 Problem of Anti-semitism

One significant problem is the anti-semitism that runs throughout the play. Post-World War II audiences are understandably sensitive to the disparaging remarks made about moneylenders, who were often Jewish. That the character of Moses is portrayed as honest and concerned is depicted in the play as an aberration. When Sir Oliver is learning how to disguise himself as a moneylender, he is told that he must ask 100% interest because it is expected that he must behave as an "unconscionable dog."

Notes

18.2.3 Artificial in the Character's Speech, Dress and Motivation

But anti-semitism is not the only problem with modern staging. By current standards, the play appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations. A comedy about manners is not as interesting to twentieth century audiences because manners and the rules of society are far more permissive and wide-ranging than they were in the 1700s. When *School for Scandal* was revived on the London stage in 1990, the director stated that another problem with staging was the lack of any one strong character to drive the play.

Perceptions regarding the nature of drama also play into contemporary perceptions of Sheridan's work. Peter Woods, who directed the 1990 revival, stated in an interview in Sheridan Studies that "today's audience supposes itself to be watching ART. Sheridan's audience was looking at the funnies." Woods believed that audiences taking themselves and historical plays too seriously are what prevent Sheridan's comedy from being as successful today. Nevertheless, School for Scandal remains a standard for comedies of manner and is considered Sheridan's defining work.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

16. On the opening of *The School for Scandal*, the reviews heralded that it was
    (a) real comedy (b) a comedy of manners
    (c) a comedy of Restoration period (d) a comedy of scandal.
17. The comedy *School for Scandal* shows that
    (a) the society progressed with the restoration period
    (b) a dramatic change, in moral attitudes about marriage and love, has taken place
    (c) there is a deviation of social order in the society
    (d) it fully fall in line with the restoration values.
18. The most interesting switch that Sheridan depicted in *The School for Scandal* is
    (a) how conservative England had become by late 18th century
    (b) portraying love marriage
    (c) not to create affairs between the characters of his play
    (d) that bad are rewarded and the good are punished.

Fill in the blanks:

19. The *School for Scandal* shows that a dramatic change, in moral attitudes about ..... and ....., has taken place.
20. Post-World War II audiences are understandably sensitive to the ..... made about moneylenders.
21. Sheridan's play "*The School for Scandal*" (1777) witnesses a decided swing away from most of the contemporary plays. Much of this change is due to a falling away of the ..... .
22. By current standards, the play appears artificial in the ..... dress, and motivations.
23. The main goal of the Restoration comedies of manners is to mock ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

24. Anti-Semitism is the significant problem that runs throughout the play.
25. Though there is a restoration of social order in these comedies, we can gain an insight into historical events.

Notes

26. By current standards, the *School for Scandal* appears realistic in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations.

27. By the current standard, there is no strong character in the *School for Scandal* to drive the play.

28. The comedy of manners in England were classed as Comedy of love.

18.3 Summary

- Richard Brinsley Sheridan, (baptized November 4, 1751, Dublin, Ireland—died July 7, 1816, London, England) was born in Dublin, Ireland, on October 30, 1751.
- Sheridan's father, Thomas, was an actor and theater manager; his mother, Frances, was the author of novels and plays. The family moved to London in 1758, and Sheridan was educated at Harrow (1762-1768).
- Sheridan fell in love with Elizabeth Ann Linley (1754–92), whose fine soprano voice delighted audiences at the concerts and festivals conducted by her father, Thomas. In order to avoid the unpleasant attentions of a Welsh squire, Thomas Mathews of Llandaff, she decided to take refuge in a French nunnery. Sheridan accompanied her to Lille in March 1772 but returned to fight two duels that same year with Mathews.
- On April 13, 1773, Sheridan married Elizabeth Linley and set-up house in London on a lavish scale with little money and no immediate prospects of any—other than his wife's dowry. The young couple entered the fashionable world and apparently held up their end in entertaining.
- The year 1775 was a productive one for Sheridan. In May his farce, *St. Patrick's Day*, or the *Scheming Lieutenant*, was performed, and in November Sheridan's comic opera, *The Duenna*, was produced with the help of his wife's father at Covent Garden. A son, Thomas, was also born to the Sheridans in 1775.
- Sheridan had become Member of Parliament for Stafford in September 1780 and was undersecretary for foreign affairs (1782) and secretary to the treasury (1783). Later he was treasurer of the navy (1806–07) and a privy councillor. The rest of his 32 years in Parliament were spent as a member of the minority Whig party in opposition to the governing Tories.
- Sheridan's financial difficulties were largely brought about by his own extravagance and procrastination, as well as by the destruction of Drury Lane Theatre by fire in February 1809. With the loss of his parliamentary seat and his income from the theatre, he became a prey to his many creditors. His last years were beset by these and other worries—his circulatory complaints and the cancer that afflicted his second wife, Esther Jane Ogle.
- When Sheridan settled in London, he began writing for the stage. Less than two years later of his marriage, in 1775, his first play, *The Rivals*, was produced at London's Covent Garden Theatre. It was a failure on its first night. Sheridan cast a more capable actor for the role of the comic Irishman for its second performance, and it was a smash which immediately established the young playwright's reputation and the favour of fashionable London. It has gone on to become a standard of English literature.
- Sheridan's famous play *The School for Scandal* (Drury Lane, 8 May 1777) is considered one of the greatest comedies of manners in English. It was followed by *The Critic* (1779), an updating of the satirical Restoration play *The Rehearsal*, which received a memorable revival starring Laurence Olivier as Mr. Puff, opening at the New Theatre on 18 October 1945 as part of an Old Vic Theatre Company season.

Notes

- The *School for Scandal* opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. It was an enormous success. Reviews heralded the play as a "real comedy" that would supplant the sentimental dramas that had filled the stage in the previous years. While wildly popular in the eighteenth century, the play has not been as successful with contemporary audiences. The play suffered with anti-semitism and appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations.

18.4 Keywords

Playwright : A person who writes plays. Or The texts of plays that can be read, as distinct from being seen and heard in performance.

Novelist : A person who writes novels.

Social pariah : Any person or animal that is generally despised or avoided. Even if one's marriage was a sham, divorce made a woman a social pariah in the Victorian era.

Post Chaise : A closed four-wheeled horse-drawn coach used as a rapid means for transporting mail and passengers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Anti-semitism : A person who persecutes or discriminates against Jews.

Real comedy : The phrase 'all the world's a stage' is most famously remembered as a line in a soliloquy written by Shakespeare for the character Jacques in his comedy. Later the term frequently used for many a plays such as *The School for Scandal*.

Comedy of manners: Comedy of manners is a comedy representing the contemporary behaviour of fashionable society.

18.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief sketch of birth and early childhood of Richard Sheridan.
2. Illustrate that Richard Sheridan was a playwright.
3. Richard Sheridan was a superb political orator, illustrate this statement in context of Hasting's impeachment.
4. Explain that the *School for Scandal* was a real comedy.
5. Explain the following in context of *School for Scandal*:
   (a) Anti-semitism (b) Real comedy
   (c) Lack of strong character

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (c)	2. (a)	3. (b)	4. (d)	5. (a)
6. livelihood	7. orators	8. extravagance	9. Warren Hastings	
10. *The School for Scandal*		11. True	12. True	13. False
14. False	15. False	16. (a)	17. (b)	18. (c)
19. marriage, love	20. disparaging remarks		21. Restoration values	
22. characters' speech		23. society	24. True	25. True
26. False	27. True	28. False		

Notes

18.6 Further Readings

Books

Fintan O'Toole. 1998. *A Traitor's Kiss: The Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1751–1816*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

George Gabriel Sigmond. 2010. *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan: With a Short Account of His Life*. Nabu Press.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Eric S. Rump (ed.). 1989. *The School for Scandal and other Plays*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.answers.com/topic/richard-brinsley-sheridan#ixzz1hkHxt17V

http://englishliterature99.wordpress.com/2009/01/09/

http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/114766/

Unit 5: The School for Scandal: Detailed Analysis of the Text Act I to Act V

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the summary of scenes in all the acts;
- Illustrate the analysis of scenes;
- Analyse in detail the text of Act I to Act V.

Introduction

The School for Scandal opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. It was an enormous success. Reviews heralded the play as a "real comedy" that would supplant the sentimental dramas that had filled the stage in the previous years. The subject of the play will be scandal and the fact that there is no need to bring more of it into the world. Unfortunately, everyone is always eager to hear bad reports and gossip about people, making it altogether impossible to root out entirely. Sheridan tried to attack it with his pen so that it might be brought under control. Sheridan admonishes the audience to avoid either creating scandals or listening to tales of the scandals of others. He also reminds the audience that appearances are not all they seem and they should look beneath the surface to find the true worth of men and women instead of listening to the reports that other people give. For, Sheridan says, appearances can be deceiving, and they often mislead people.

This unit elaborates the text of the play in detail from Act I to Act V. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text in all the scenes.

19.1 Act I

19.1.1 Scene I

Lady Sneerwell, a wealthy young widow, and her hireling Snake discuss her various scandal-spreading plots. Snake asks why she is so involved in the affairs of Sir Peter Teazle, his ward Maria, and Charles and Joseph Surface, two young men under Sir Peter's informal guardianship, and why she has not yielded to the attentions of Joseph, who is highly respectable. Lady Sneerwell confides that Joseph wants Maria, who is an heiress, and that she wants Charles. Thus she and Joseph are plotting to alienate Maria from Charles by putting out rumors of an affair between Charles and Sir Peter's new young wife, Lady Teazle. Joseph arrives to confer with Lady Sneerwell. Maria herself then enters, fleeing the attentions of Sir Benjamin Backbite and his uncle Crabtree. Mrs. Candour enters and ironically talks about how "tale-bearers are as bad as the tale-makers." Soon after that, Sir Benjamin and Crabtree also enter, bringing a good deal of gossip with them. One item is the imminent return of the Surface brothers' rich uncle Sir Oliver from the East Indies, where he has been for sixteen years; another is Charles' dire financial situation.

Lady Sneerwell and Snake are discussing a recent success they had in assassinating someone's character, and they are very pleased with their efforts. In their plot, Snake sent a few lines of a letter to a Miss Clackitt. Someone soon had his life destroyed. However, Snake notes that Miss Clackitt, while certainly very capable of destroying reputations, does not have the subtle abilities of Lady Sneerwell when it comes to bringing people down.

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Notes With Lady Sneerwell's talents out in the open, she admits that she is proud of her abilities and she wants to use them on her next project. In this project, she is going to use Snake to break off the affections between Charles Surface, a drunk who is throwing away his money, and Maria, the ward of Sir Peter Teazle. Once the couple is split up, Sneerwell wants to move Maria's affections toward Charles's brother Joseph.

19.1.2 Scene II

Sir Peter complains of Lady Teazle's spendthrift ways. Rowley, the former steward of the Surfaces' late father, arrives, and Sir Peter gives him an earful on the subject. He also complains that Maria has refused Joseph, whom he calls "a model for the young men of the age," and seems attached to Charles, whom he denounces as a profligate. Rowley defends Charles, and then announces that Sir Oliver has just arrived from the East Indies.

Sir Peter Teazle, an old man, married a young woman six months ago and his life has been terrible since then. The once shy, innocent, poor young woman Sir Peter wedded has become a greedy shrew who argues with everything he says and demands everything that he has to give and more. Thus, rather than getting a beautiful, retiring woman, he is tied to an absolute beast.

Rowley arrives to speak with Sir Peter and Sir Peter tells him about his troubles with Lady Teazle. In fact, Sir Peter believes that much of her shrewish behavior is due to her spending so much time with Lady Sneerwell and her gang of character assassins. To add to his worries, Maria is still intent on marrying Charles, despite the fact that he has tried to get his ward to move her affections elsewhere.

19.2 Act II

19.2.1 Scene I

Sir Peter argues with his wife, Lady Teazle, refusing to be "ruined by [her] extravagance." He reminds her of her recent and far humbler country origins. Lady Teazle excuses herself by appealing to "the fashion," and departs to visit Lady Sneerwell. Despite their quarrel, Sir Peter still finds himself charmed by his wife even when she is arguing with him.

Sir Peter and Lady Teazle are having another argument, this time about the fact that Lady Teazle wants some expensive new fashions and Sir Peter is not willing to spend the money. Sir Peter tries to convince her that she should be happy just to get a few things from him, since she grew up poor. She, however, insists that she deserves everything any other woman has and more. After all, Sir Peter showed her how rich people live and it is his fault that she wants to live the best life possible.

Notes Sir Peter and Lady Teazle argue until Lady Teazle finally tells Sir Peter that she has to be at her appointment at Lady Sneerwell's and, to make matters worse, Sir Peter promised to join her. So, once Sir Peter offers one final complaint about his wife to the audience, the two of them go to Lady Sneerwell's.

19.2.2 Scene II

At Lady Sneerwell's, the scandal-mongers have great fun at the expense of friends not present. Lady Teazle and Maria arrive; Lady Teazle joins in, but Maria is disgusted. So is Sir Peter, when he

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arrives, and rather breaks up the party with his comments. He departs, the others retire to the next room, and Joseph seizes the opportunity to court Maria, who rejects him again. Lady Teazle returns and dismisses Maria, and it is revealed that she is seriously flirting with Joseph—who doesn't want her, but cannot afford to alienate her.

Lady Teazle and Maria enter the gathering at Sneerwell's. While everyone else sits down to a good session of talking behind others' backs, Joseph Surface and Maria move off to speak to each other privately. When Sir Peter enters, he is shocked at the gossip and slander he hears. He dislikes everyone there, especially their incessant gossiping, and he cannot abide the fact that they enjoy tearing other people down. Thus, as he listens to the party assassinate the looks, qualities, and characters of people they claim to be friends with, he grows more disgusted by the minute. After listening to them, he finally walks out with the words, "I leave my character behind me."

With Sir Peter gone, the rest of the party eavesdrops on Maria and Joseph Surface. Of course, Joseph is pretending to be a kind friend who does not enjoy the others' gossiping.

19.2.3 Scene III

Sir Oliver calls on his old friend Sir Peter. He is amused by Sir Peter's marriage to a young wife. Their talk turns to the Surface brothers. Sir Peter praises Joseph's high morals but Sir Oliver suspects that he may be a hypocrite.

Rowley and Sir Oliver enter as Sir Oliver is laughing at the news that Sir Peter has married a shrew. However, Rowley admonishes him not to bring up the subject with Sir Peter, as it is a very sore point with him. In addition, it will prevent Sir Peter from learning that Rowley has told Sir Oliver all about his marital strife.

Eventually, the subject turns to Sir Peter's estrangement from Charles Surface. It seems that Sir Peter thinks Lady Teazle has her eyes on Charles. Rowley sees she is after Joseph, but Sir Peter does not believe him. Of course, Sir Oliver knows the sort of gossiping and character destruction that goes on in some circles and he wants nothing to do with it. Thus, rather than listen to the stories told by others, Sir Oliver wishes to judge Charles for himself.

19.3 Act III

19.3.1 Scene I

Sir Oliver describes his plan to visit each of the brothers incognito in order to test their characters. He will disguise himself as their needy relative Mr Stanley, and ask each for his help. Rowley also brings in the "friendly Jew" Moses, a moneylender who has tried to help Charles, to explain Charles' position. Moses mentions that he is to introduce Charles to yet another moneylender ("Mr Premium") that very evening. Sir Oliver decides that with Moses' assistance, he will pose as Premium when visiting Charles (still intending to visit Joseph as Stanley).

Sir Peter is left alone and when Maria enters, he tries to urge Joseph on her as a worthier match than Charles, whom she favors. When she is not persuaded, he threatens her with "the authority of a guardian." She goes, and Lady Teazle enters asking her husband for two hundred pounds. Sir Peter and Lady Teazle argue again, and conclude that they should separate.

Sir Oliver, Sir Peter, and Rowley hatch a plan that will allow Sir Oliver to judge Charles and Joseph Surface on their relative merits. A man by the name of Stanley has appealed to both men for financial help. However, neither man has ever seen either Stanley or Sir Oliver, so Sir Oliver can pretend to be Stanley in order to see how his nephews will treat him. The plan changes slightly when Mr Moses, a money-lender, informs Sir Oliver that Charles has asked to borrow money from a Mr Premium. Sir Oliver can actually pretend to be a money-lender when he meets with Charles.

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After Sir Oliver and Moses leave to check on Oliver's two nephews, Maria arrives to speak with Sir Peter about her engagement to Charles. Of course, Sir Peter tries to convince Maria to turn her attentions from Charles to Joseph, but Maria will not pay any heed to it.

19.3.2 Scene II

Mr Moses and Sir Oliver arrive at Charles Surface's house, but Charles's butler, Trip, forces them to wait. Then, while the men are waiting, Trip asks Moses for a loan. Since Trip's credit is no good, Mr Moses refuses to give it to him without collateral, so Trip offers to provide Mr Moses with some clothes from Charles's own wardrobe.

When Sir Oliver and Mr Moses arrive, they find the butler very well dressed, but he asks Mr. Moses for a loan. This shows that Charles is, indeed, quite a spendthrift, since he gives his own butler plenty of money, yet the butler still wants more. This latter point shows that the butler is learning bad habits from his master and Charles must be quite a disaster if even his butler is begging for a loan and will give Mr. Moses stolen goods in order to secure it.

Task When Mr Moses and Sir Oliver arrive at Charles Surface's house, Charles's butler Trip forces them to wait, elucidate.

19.3.3 Scene III

Charles Surface, Careless, and several other men are sitting at the table drinking as Mr. Moses and Sir Oliver enter. Of course, everyone there is drunk and obnoxious and they sing bawdy songs while they empty and refill their glasses. However, when Trip announces Sir Oliver (as Mr. Premium) and Mr. Moses, everyone there sits down to listen to the two money-lenders.

Charles and his raucous guests drink heavily and sing merry songs, as they prepare for a night of gambling. Charles raises a toast to Maria. Moses and "Premium" enter, and Sir Oliver is dismayed at the scene. Charles doesn't recognize his long-lost uncle. Charles frankly asks "Premium" for credit, noting that Sir Oliver (whom he believes is in India) will soon leave him a fortune. "Premium" discounts this possibility, noting that Sir Oliver may live many years, or disinherit his nephew. He asks if Charles has any valuables of his own to sell for immediate cash. Charles admits that he has sold the family silver and his late father's library, and offers to sell the family portrait collection.

Did u know? Though Charles is impudent, he is very honest and straightforward in his business dealings. However, Sir Oliver wants to know first if Charles has anything he can sell in order to raise capital on his own. Unfortunately, Charles has already sold off almost all of the family heirlooms and all he has left are the family portraits. Then, thinking about this, he offers to auction them to Sir Oliver. Of course, Sir Oliver is shocked, but he also realizes that he has an opportunity to save the family.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. In scene I of Act I Lady Sneerwell, a wealthy young widow, and her hireling Snake discuss her various
   (a) scandal-spreading plots
   (b) issues of guardianship
   (c) fidelity in various plots
   (d) affairs of Maria and Charles.

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2. When Sir Oliver and Mr. Moses arrive, they find the Charles butler
   (a) dishevel (b) very well dressed
   (c) waiting for them (d) begging for some money.
3. On meeting with Sir Peter, Sir Oliver amused by
   (a) Sir Peter's love affaire
   (b) Sir Peter's fidelity
   (c) Sir Peter's marriage to a young wife
   (d) Sir Peter's wealth.
4. Sir Peter and Lady Teazle concluded to separate because of
   (a) authority of guardianship
   (b) inheritance of wealth
   (c) Sir Peter's absurdity towards Lady Teazle
   (d) Sir Peter's fidelity with Maria
5. Charles and his raucous guests drink heavily and sing merry songs, as they prepare
   (a) for a night of gambling (b) for a night of music
   (c) for a night of fortune (d) for a night of lovemaking.

Fill in the blanks:

6. Lady Sneerwell and Joseph are plotting to alienate Maria from ..... by putting out rumors of an affair between Charles and Lady Teazle.
7. Sir Peter Teazle rather than getting a beautiful, retiring woman, he is tied to an ..... .
8. Sir Peter argues with his wife, Lady Teazle, refusing to be ruined by her ..... .
9. When Mr Moses and Sir Oliver arrive at Charles Surface's house they find the butler very well dressed, but he asks Mr. Moses for a ..... .
10. Though Charles is impudent, he is very honest and straightforward in his ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. Sir Oliver, Sir Peter, and Rowley hatch a plan that will allow Sir Oliver to judge Charles and Joseph Surface for their moral character.
12. Lady Sneerwell confides that Joseph wants Maria, who is an heiress, and that she wants Charles.
13. Lady Sneerwell is very talented in hatching plots, she is proud of her abilities and she wants to use them on her next project.
14. Sir Peter Teazle, an old man, married a young woman six months ago and his life has been running smoothly since then.
15. Sir Peter tries to convince Maria to turn her attentions from Charles to Joseph, but Maria will not pay any heed to it.

19.4 Act IV

19.4.1 Scene I

Charles sells all but one of the family portraits to "Premium", using the rolled-up family tree as an auction-hammer. However, he refuses to sell the last portrait, which is of Sir Oliver, out of respect

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for his benefactor; Charles will not sell it even when "Premium" offers as much for it as for all the rest. Moved, Sir Oliver inwardly forgives Charles. Sir Oliver and Moses leave, and Charles sends a hundred pounds of the proceeds for the relief of "Mr. Stanley," despite Rowley's objection.

Charles, Careless, Mr Moses, and Sir Oliver enter the portrait room in Charles's house and Charles holds a sham auction to sell off the paintings that it holds. After listing off the names and accomplishments of a few of his illustrious forebears and selling the paintings to Sir Oliver, Charles finally decides to just sells off the rest of the lot for 300 pounds. However, when Sir Oliver points to his own portrait and asks how much it will cost, Charles refuses to sell it. In fact, even when Sir Oliver offers to purchase his own painting for over 400 pounds, Charles still refuses to sell it, since Sir Oliver was very good to him. Of course, Sir Oliver is very pleased to hear that his nephew holds him in such high regard, so he is finally convinced that Charles does have some worth after all.

19.4.2 Scene II

Sir Oliver, reflecting on Charles's character with Moses, is met by Rowley, who has brought him the hundred pounds sent to "Stanley." Declaring "I'll pay his debts, and his benevolence too," Sir Oliver plans to go meet his other nephew in the person of Stanley.

Mr Moses and Sir Oliver are in Charles's parlor and Mr Moses points out that all the stories about Charles are true. However, Sir Oliver is impressed that Charles refused to sell the portrait of Sir Oliver, which Sir Oliver appreciates greatly. Then, when Rowley enters and reports that Charles has dispatched him to give money to Stanley, Sir Oliver is even more impressed with his nephew, since the 100 pounds could be used to placate the creditors who are waiting to speak with Charles. Thus, Sir Oliver says that he will pay off Charles's debts himself.

Though Sir Oliver has seen Charles at his worst, he has also seen that Charles is still noble beneath the surface. Thus, Sir Oliver is shown to be a good judge of character, since he can look past Charles's roguishness and find the good in him.

19.4.3 Scene III

Joseph, anxiously awaiting a visit from Lady Teazle, is told by a servant that she has just left "her chair at the milliner's next door" and so has the servant draw a screen across the window (his reason: "my opposite neighbour is a maiden lady of so curious a temper"). On her entrance, Joseph forswears any interest in Maria, and flirts in earnest with Lady Teazle, perversely suggesting that she should make a "faux pas" for the benefit of her reputation. The servant returns to announce Sir Peter, and Lady Teazle hides in panic behind the screen. Sir Peter enters and tells Joseph that he suspects an affair between Charles and Lady Teazle (due to the rumors spread by Joseph and Lady Sneerwell). Joseph hypocritically professes confidence in Charles' and Lady Teazle's honor. Sir Peter confides his intention to give his wife a generous separate maintenance during his life and the bulk of his fortune on his demise. He also urges Joseph to pursue his suit with Maria (much to Joseph's annoyance, as Lady Teazle is listening behind the screen).

Charles's arrival is announced. Sir Peter decides to hide, and have Joseph sound Charles out about his relationship with Lady Teazle. He starts behind the screen, but sees the corner of Lady Teazle's petticoat there already. Joseph "confesses" that he is not as virtuous as he seems: "a little French milliner, a silly rogue that plagues me" is hiding there to preserve her own reputation. Sir Peter then hides in the closet.

Charles now enters and Joseph questions him about Lady Teazle. Charles disclaims any designs on her, noting that Joseph and the lady seem to be intimate. To stop Charles, Joseph whispers to him that Sir Peter is hiding in the closet, and Charles hauls him forth. Sir Peter tells Charles he now regrets his suspicions about him. Charles passes off his comments about Joseph and Lady Teazle as a joke.

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When Lady Sneerwell is announced, Joseph rushes out to stop her from coming up. Meanwhile, Sir Peter tells Charles about the "French milliner." Charles insists on having a look at her and flings down the screen as Joseph returns, discovering Lady Teazle. Charles, very amused, leaves the other three dumbstruck individuals. Joseph concocts a phony explanation for Sir Peter of why he and Lady Teazle are together. But she refuses to endorse it and admits that she came to pursue an affair with Joseph; however, having learned of Sir Peter's generosity, she has repented. She denounces Joseph and exits, and the enraged Sir Peter follows as Joseph continues trying to pretend innocence.

19.5 Act V

19.5.1 Scene I

Sir Oliver (as Mr Stanley) now visits Joseph. Joseph, like Charles, does not recognize his long-lost uncle. He greets "Stanley" with effusive professions of goodwill, but refuses to give "Stanley" any financial assistance, saying he has no money to give. "Stanley" suggests that Sir Oliver would help him if he was here, and that Joseph might pass on some of what Sir Oliver has given him. But Joseph tells "Stanley" that Sir Oliver is in fact very stingy, and has given him nothing except trinkets such as tea, shawls, and "Indian crackers." Furthermore, Joseph has lent a great deal to his brother, so that he has nothing left for "Stanley." Sir Oliver is enraged, as he knows both statements are flat lies - he sent Joseph 12,000 pounds from India. He stifles his anger, and departs amid further effusions. Rowley arrives with a letter for Joseph announcing that Sir Oliver has arrived in town.

19.5.2 Scene II

At Sir Peter's house, Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Candour, Sir Benjamin, and Crabtree exchange confused rumors about the Teazle affair. Sir Benjamin says Sir Peter was wounded in a swordfight with Joseph Surface, while Crabtree insists it was a pistol duel with Charles. When Sir Oliver enters, they take him for a doctor and demand news of the wounded man. At that moment Sir Peter arrives to prove the report wrong, and orders the scandalmongers out of his house. Sir Oliver says he has met both of his nephews and agrees with Sir Peter's (former) estimate of Joseph's high character, but then acknowledges with laughter that he knows the story of what happened at Joseph's with the closet and screen. When he leaves, Rowley tells Sir Peter that Lady Teazle is in tears in the next room, and Sir Peter goes to reconcile with her.

Candour, Sneerwell, Backbite, and Crabtree are all at Sir Peter's house, discussing the events that so recently transpired at Joseph Surface's house. However, their information is all wrong, since some of them think that it was actually Charles and not Joseph who was caught with Lady Teazle. Furthermore, they seem to think that Sir Peter was wounded in a duel with either swords or pistols and is at death's door. Thus, when Sir Oliver enters, everyone seems to think that he is a physician who is there to treat Sir Peter's wounds.

19.5.3 Scene III

Lady Sneerwell complains to Joseph that Sir Peter, now that he knows the truth about Joseph, will allow Charles to marry Maria. They plot to use Snake as a witness to a supposed relationship between Charles and Lady Sneerwell, and she withdraws.

Sir Oliver arrives. Joseph takes him for "Stanley" and orders him out. Charles arrives and recognizes "Premium". Despite the identity confusion, both brothers want the man out before Sir Oliver comes. As Charles and Joseph try to eject their incognito uncle, Sir Peter and Lady Teazle arrive with Maria, ending Sir Oliver's pretense. Sir Oliver, Sir Peter, and Lady Teazle together condemn Joseph, but Sir Oliver forgives Charles because of his refusal to sell Sir Oliver's picture and his generous aid

Notes

to his uncle "Stanley." Maria, however, declines to give Charles her hand, citing his supposed involvement with Lady Sneerwell. Joseph now reveals Lady Sneerwell. Charles is baffled, and Rowley then summons Snake. Snake, however, has been bribed to turn against Sneerwell, so her lie is exposed. After Lady Teazle tells her that she (Lady Teazle) is withdrawing from the School for Scandal, Lady Sneerwell leaves in a rage, and Joseph follows, supposedly to keep her from further malicious attacks. Charles and Maria are reconciled. Charles makes no promises about reforming, but indicates that Maria's influence will keep him on a "virtuous path." The concluding line assures the audience that "even Scandal dies, if you approve."

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

16. When Joseph anxiously awaiting a visit from Lady Teazle, the servant draw a screen across the window because
    (a) of tempered opposite neighbour
    (b) Lady Teazle just left
    (c) Lady Teazle does not want to meet Joseph
    (d) he wants to hide the presence of Lady Teazle.
17. When Sir Oliver points to his own portrait and asks how much it will cost, Charles
    (a) asks for over 400 pounds for it
    (b) refuses to sell it
    (c) refuses to sell it, since Sir Oliver was bad to him
    (d) refuses to sell it because it is priceless.
18. When Sir Oliver enters Sir Peter's house, Candour, Sneerwell, Backbite, and Crabtree are all at Sir Peter's house, and think
    (a) that Joseph was wounded in a duel and is at death's door
    (b) that Sir Peter caught was caught with Lady Teazle
    (c) that Sir Oliver is a physician who has come to treat Sir Peter's wounds
    (d) that their information is all correct.

Fill in the blanks:

19. Charles sells all but one of the family portraits to ..... .
20. Sir Oliver, reflecting on Charles's character with Moses, is met by Rowley, who has brought him the ..... sent to Stanley.
21. Mr Moses and Sir Oliver are in Charles's parlor and Mr Moses points out that all the stories about Charles are ..... .
22. Lady Sneerwell complains to Joseph that Sir Peter, now that he knows the truth about Joseph, will allow Charles to marry ..... .
23. Maria declines to give Charles her hand, citing his supposed involvement with ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

24. When Sir Oliver offers to purchase his own painting for over 400 pounds, Charles agrees to sell it.
25. Sir Oliver (as Mr Stanley) visits Joseph. Joseph, like Charles, does not recognize his long-lost uncle.
26. Sir Oliver is shown to be a good judge of character, since he can look past Charles's roguishness and find the good in him.

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27. In Scene II Act V Sir Oliver arrives, Joseph takes him for "Stanley" and orders him in.

28. At Sir Peter's house, Lady Sneerwell, Mrs Candour, Sir Benjamin, and Crabtree exchange confused rumors about the Teazle affair.

19.6 Summary

- *The School for Scandal* opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. The subject of the play was scandal and the fact that there is no need to bring more of it into the world.
- Lady Sneerwell, a wealthy young widow, and her hireling Snake discuss her various scandal-spreading plots.
- Sir Peter complains of Lady Teazle's spendthrift ways. Rowley, the former steward of the Surfaces' late father, arrives, and Sir Peter gives him an earful on the subject.
- Sir Peter and Lady Teazle are having another argument, this time about the fact that Lady Teazle wants some expensive new fashions and Sir Peter is not willing to spend the money. The couple argue until Lady Teazle finally tells Sir Peter that she has to be at her appointment at Lady Sneerwell's and, to make matters worse, Sir Peter promised to join her.
- At Lady Sneerwell's, the scandal-mongers have great fun at the expense of friends not present. Sir Peter departs. With Sir Peter gone, the rest of the party eavesdrops on Maria and Joseph Surface. Of course, Joseph is pretending to be a kind friend who does not enjoy the others' gossiping.
- Sir Oliver calls on his old friend Sir Peter and amused by his marriage to a young wife. Rowley and Sir Oliver enter as Sir Oliver is laughing at the news that Sir Peter has married a shrew and Rowley admonishes him not to bring up the subject with Sir Peter, as it is a very sore point with him. Sir Oliver knows the sort of gossiping and character destruction that goes on in some circles and he wants nothing to do with it.
- Sir Oliver describes his plan to visit each of the brothers incognito in order to test their characters. And he with Sir Peter, and Rowley hatch a plan that will allow Sir Oliver to judge Charles and Joseph Surface on their relative merits. After Sir Oliver and Moses leave to check on Oliver's two nephews, Maria arrives to speak with Sir Peter about her engagement to Charles.
- Mr Moses and Sir Oliver arrive at Charles Surface's house, but Charles's butler, Trip, forces them to wait. They find the butler very well dressed, but he asks Mr Moses for a loan. This shows that Charles is, indeed, quite a spendthrift, since he gives his own butler plenty of money.
- Charles sells all but one of the family portraits to "Premium", using the rolled-up family tree as an auction-hammer. Charles refuses to sell Sir Oliver's painting since he was very good to him. Sir Oliver is very pleased to hear that his nephew holds him in such high regard, so he is finally convinced that Charles does have some worth after all.
- Though Sir Oliver has seen Charles at his worst, he has also seen that Charles is still noble beneath the surface. Thus, Sir Oliver is shown to be a good judge of character, since he can look past Charles's roguishness and find the good in him.
- Lady Teazle is withdrawing from the School for Scandal, Lady Sneerwell leaves in a rage, and Joseph follows, supposedly to keep her from further malicious attacks. Charles and Maria are reconciled. Charles makes no promises about reforming, but indicates that Maria's influence will keep him on a "virtuous path." The concluding line assures the audience that even Scandal dies, if you approve.

Notes

19.7 Keywords

Spendthrift : A person who spends possessions or money extravagantly or wastefully.

Profligate : Utterly and shamelessly immoral or dissipated; thoroughly dissolute. Or recklessly prodigal or extravagant.

Extravagance : Excessive or unnecessary expenditure or outlay of money or unrestrained or fantastic excess, as of actions or opinions. For instance sports car is an inexcusable extravagance.

Hypocrite : A person who pretends to have virtues, moral or religious beliefs, principles, etc., that he or she does not actually possess, especially a person whose actions belie stated beliefs. Or A person who feigns some desirable or publicly approved attitude, especially one whose private life, opinions, or statements belie his or her public statements.

Disinherit : To deprive (an heir or next of kin) of inheritance or right to inherit.

Faux pas : A slip or blunder in etiquette, manners, or conduct; an embarrassing social blunder or indiscretion.

Scandal monger : A person who spreads scandal or gossip.

Guardianship : The position and responsibilities of a guardian, especially toward a ward.

Flirting : A playful romantic or sexual overture by one person to another subtly indicating an interest in a deeper relationship with the other person.

Alienate : To make unfriendly, hostile, or indifferent especially where attachment formerly existed.

19.8 Review Questions

1. Why is Lady Sneerwell involved in the affairs of Sir Peter Teazle, his ward Maria, and Charles and Joseph Surface?
2. Illustrate and analyse the events of scene II of Act 1.
3. What proves that Lady Teazle was extravagant?
4. Why is Charles baffled in scene III of Act V?
5. Give a brief sketch of the following characters in School for Scandal:
   (a) Lady Sneerwell (b) Sir Peter (c) Charles

Answers: Self Assessment

1.	(a)	2. (b)	3. (c)	4. (d)	5. (a)
6.	Charles	7. absolute beast	8. extravagance	9. loan	
10.	Business dealings	11. False	12. True	13. True	14. False
15.	True	16. (a)	17. (b)	18. (c)	
19.	Premium	20. Hundred pounds	21. True	22. Maria	
23.	Lady Sneerwell	24. False	25. True	26. True	27. False
28.	True				

Notes

19.9 Further Readings

Books

Richard Brinsley B. Sheridan. 1820. *The School for Scandal: A Comedy*. Oxford University Press, UK.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Eric S. Rump (ed.). 1989. *The School for Scandal and other Plays*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http:// www.fullbooks.com/The-School-For-Scandal.html

http://www.enotes.com/school-scandal

http://classiclit.about.com/cs/articles/a/aa_restoration.htm

Notes

Unit 6: The School for Scandal: Criticism to the Text and Characterization

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the criticism of the text of the *School for Scandal*;
- Enumerate all the characters in the play;
- Discuss the criticism of each character.

Introduction

As conceived by Robin Phillips, *The School for Scandal* displays a harsh and glittering world of exquisite beauty and viciousness, where sentimental sobriety—when genuine—is the only refuge from the savagery that lies in wait for vitality and virtue. Phillips has read the play as a piece of serious social criticism, with decidedly mixed results: his version of this classic comedy of manners is thought-provoking, visually stunning, but finally a failure.

The School for Scandal is a kind of dramatic harpsichord. It has surface vivacity rather than inner strength. It has elegance of style rather than profundity of substance. Thumped by realism's heavy hand, it would jangle and go mute; stroked with exquisite artifice, it enchants and amuses.

Reading a play requires an ability to visualize, and it is very difficult to manage this visualization without a careful scrutiny of the stage directions and some experience reading drama. This notion is especially true for Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, which makes the reader *wish* for a fine production to view.

The characters of the play have their own significance by their names. Sheridan makes one particular characteristic or weakness appear and plays on it. For instance, Joseph is totally exposed; there is no depth and roundness which provides humor. The humor is created by such characters because of their limitations suggested by their names.

Notes

This unit illustrates the criticism of the text of the play and gives an analysis of the characters and justified their significance by their names.

20.1 Criticism to the Text

The School for Scandal is generally considered as Sheridan's masterful play. Ironically, the play excels in its blend of sentimentalism with the attack on sentimentalism. Some regard it as a revolt against the dominant sentimental comedy of Sheridan's time. Historically, comedy of manners preceded sentimental comedy. Sheridan's success lies in his skillful combination of elements from both traditions. As a dramatist, Sheridan has created virtually all that a comedy of intense qualities could provide: amusing characters, funny intrigues, jaunty and ridiculous situations, witty dialogue, incisive social satire, deft commentary on human foibles and penetrating insight of human relationship. Sheridan's characters follow their comic bents more consistently than abruptly. More laughter and wit than surprising episodes are poured into the play. He never lets up until he has wrung the last drop of laughter from every situation possible. These all add up to account for Sheridan's early success. *The School for Scandal* is a marvelous array of comic characters of a highly civilized urbane society of which the playwright plays an active role. It stirs uproar and wins admiration. It is so much a caricature of his own time and society in view of the interrelationship between Sheridan's comic art, literary mien, his time and social climate.

Task Critically evaluate *The School for Scandal* as a revolt against the dominant sentimental comedy of Sheridan's time.

Sheridan's time was an age of conversation, fashion, costume, color and gossip. *The School for Scandal* reflects faithfully the social temper—the tastes, customs, and morals of the modish society of its age in which the rich lived in magnificent style and dressed in ermine, silks, satins, and brocades exquisitely embroidered with gold or silver thread…the gentlemen vied with their ladies in the fantastic display of ostentatious fashion…manners were rigid and morals were lax. The society was elaborate and artificial. Small talk, scandalizing, drinking, and gambling were more important than occupation with the world of trade, the church, or the arts.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. At the beginning of the play Lady Teazle targets
   (a) Sir Peter Teazle, Joseph and Charles (b) Sir Peter Teazle and Maria
   (c) Maria and Charles (d) Joseph and Charles.
2. The School for Scandal is generally considered as Sheridan's
   (a) sentimental play (b) masterful play
   (c) Restoration comedy (d) Restoration sentimental play.
3. Sheridan's success of *School for Scandal* lies in his
   (a) depiction of sentimentalism (b) attack on sentimentalism
   (c) skillful combination of comedy of manners and sentimental comedy
   (d) depiction of revolt against the dominant sentimental comedy.

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4. As a dramatist, Sheridan has created virtually all that a comedy of intense qualities could provide such as
   (a) amusing characters (b) funny intrigues
   (c) witty dialogue (d) all the above
5. Which of the following add up to account for Sheridan's early success?
   (a) His wit to wrung the last drop of laughter from every situation possible
   (b) Penetrating insight of human relationship
   (c) Surprising episodes as compared to laughter and wit
   (d) Array of comic characters of highly uncivilized society.

Fill in the blanks:

6. The play The *School for Scandal* excels in its blend of sentimentalism with the attack on ..... .
7. *The School for Scandal* is a marvelous array of comic characters of a highly ..... society.
8. Sheridan's time was an age of ....., fashion, costume, color and gossip.
9. The society during Sheridan's period was elaborate and ..... .
10. Small talk, scandalizing, drinking, and gambling were more important than ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. *The School for Scandal* is generally considered as Sheridan's masterful play.
12. Historically, comedy of manners preceded Restoration comedy.
13. As a dramatist, Sheridan has created virtually all that a comedy of intense qualities could provide.
14. *The School for Scandal* badly treated the social temper—the tastes, customs, and morals of the modish society.
15. *The School of Scandal* stirs uproar and wins admiration.

20.2 Criticism to the Characters

Much of the success of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* lies in the rich humorous exposition of characters. The delineation of characters is primarily designed to provoke laughter and entertainment. The hypocrite who fails, the forger who fears a reputation for honesty are more objects of laughter than devices of moral comment. No one in *The School for Scandal* acts as he does simply because some circumstance compels him: people act out of their own characters and shape events accordingly. When circumstances take the form of accidents and misunderstanding, their effect upon characters is always to display something we know to be there, not to revel something entirely new to us. Much of the play's comic force springs from this treatment. The audience, let into the secret of a character, expects him to behave accordingly. When he does, Sheridan then devises ingenious circumstances to delight us with his inventiveness. At the same time, as he pleases and amuses us by showing the character confirming itself in behavior. By design and craft, there is an undisrupted flow of characterization. The plot unfolds itself along with the portrayal of characters. Hence, the plot is somewhat subordinated to the line of characterization. The continuity and intensity of characterization are achieved through the policy of gossiping and technique of scandalizing within the academy of scandalmongers.

Notes Characterization is caricature. Humor comes from the characters.

Notes

Task Elucidate that much of the success of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* lies in the rich humorous exposition of characters.

Fashioned to suit the final showdown of surface characters, the plot breaks into three major parts—(*i*) the testing of Charles and Joseph by their uncle Sir Oliver Surface; (*ii*) the problem of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle; (*iii*) the events surrounding the scandalous school driven by the desire for revenge, fortune and fame. The play takes shape and begins to climb to a series of climaxes with the arrival of Sir Oliver Surface from India.

The School for Scandal opens with a scene in which Lady Sneerwell introduces many of the complications through an idle, gossiping conversation. We learn an astonishing amount of social climate, plot and character before Joseph Surface's entrance. The quiet opening is deceptive. Lady Sneerwell, president of the Academy of Scandalmongers, reveals her own character by a discussion with Snake. Snake questions, in a businesslike manner, Lady Sneerwell's motives in the matter of Sir Peter Teazle. In so doing, Sheridan reveals his power of insinuation as well as plot. Furhtermore, Lady Sneerwell's circumstantial answer supplies some of our knowledge of her character, pointed by her reference to suffering in youth from the envenomed tongue of slander, namely an emotional, impulsive vulnerability which, in this instance, leads her to reveal more than she should to snake. Her tender wound is spotted; her innate character slips and comes to the surface. Later, Joseph Surface mentions the danger of this lapse of the tongue and inclination. At the end of the play Snake gives Lady Sneerwell reason to regret confiding in him. Judged from this aspect, part of the ending is skillfully foreshadowed. The end is laden in the beginning. When Lady Sneerwell describes Joseph as a sentimental nave the reader is given a comment on the nature of a character who is about to show up.

With the entrance of Joseph, we know more about the plot and characters. We have already learned that Charles Surface and Maria have an attachment, that Lady Sneerwell, due to her love of Charles, supports Joseph in his attempt to win Maria (Sir Peter's ward) for himself (and thus her fortune). Now Joseph informs us that his brother Charles is hurrying to disaster. He does so in the smooth language of sentiment which lends itself so easily to transparent hypocrisy

Example: Aye, poor Charles! I am sure I wish it were in my power to be of any essential service to him; for the man who does not share in the distresses of a brother, even though merited by his own misconduct, deserves…

It is certainly a charity to rescue Maria from such a libertine.

All these remarks carry "reverse overtones" and hyperbole. Here for the first time Joseph is associated with one of the underlying themes—hypocrisy degenerated into malice and villainous schemes.

Snake's exit soon occurs. And Joseph's comment to Lady Sneerwell that the man is treacherous and will betray them both completes Sheridan's portrait of him in all essentials.

Notes Sheridan's smooth-tongued makers of plots motivated entirely by cold self-interest, acting under cover of morality and goodness, is presented in toto caelo at one stroke. Lady Sneerwell has already spoken of him in her gossiping way, and his entrance and subsequent behavior exactly match the description.

However, Sheridan's skill resides in his revelation of Joseph's character in action. Joseph talks to Lady Sneerwell and Snake as one of a trip of plot-makers and scandalizers who are concerned with how to make progress of a business. His sharp observation that Snake's friendship with old Rowley

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is dangerous turns out to be accurate. Joseph appears to be gossiping and, of course, in a sense is, but really gossip is simply the form applied by Sheridan to policy to tell the story, to reveal foresight and wit. His character emerges here as the shaping force behind dialogue and plot.

The play moves easily into its presentation of scandalmongering without diminishing the audience's sense of the onward movement of plot. Lady Sneerwell presides over a scandalous school composed of Mrs Candour, Crabtree, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Snake and Joseph. Nothing new is added to the plot until Crabtree asks if it is true that Sir Oliver is coming home from India. This illusion of movement results from Sheridan's trick of letting plot emerge from gossip.

The gossip will turn sooner or later to Charles Surface; he is too good a subject to miss. As it ranges over other people and their affairs we become more and more entertained by our sense of anticipation of characters.

20.2.1 Major Characters

Charles Surface

Young bachelor notorious for his extravagance and dissipation. However, his dissolute behavior may only be a passing phase. At heart, he is a good and generous person. He and Maria are in love. He is the nominal hero of the play, both in the slight romantic plot and as a contrats to his hypocritical brother, Joseph. Despite the fact that he is a center of attention, he does not appear until scene three of the third act, almost half way through the play. His presence, however, is felt in many of the scenes preceding his entry, making him a focus of interest long before he appears. References to Charles are carefully manipulated by Sheridan so that, without having seen him, the audience recognizes him as an integral part of the framework of the play. The interest taken in him by many of the characters forces the audience to wait expectantly for his first appearance so that it can test its judgement against that of the various characters who either like or dislike him.

Example: Lady Sneerwell, who herself is fond of Charles, remarks on Charles: Must I confess that Charles—that libertine, that extravagant, that bankrupt in fortune and reputation—

The key to Charles's character could lie with Maria, who has been coupled with Charles by Lady Sneerwell and Snake. Her resentment of the derogation of his character argues that something can be said in his behalf, but she actually offers nothing at all about him. She is too busy trying to escape the advances of Sir Benjamin to have an opportunity to comment on her feelings about Charles. But Maria earns the respect of the audience not only by appearing comparatively innocent in her conversation, but by aligning herself against the gossips. In all, the character of Charles, phony or genuine, is a conversation focal point of the first scene. Had the play followed the conventional pattern of dramatic exposition, Charles could reasonably have been expected to make his entrance in the next scene or so; but, in order to sustain interest in Charles and manipulate the expectation of the audience, Sheridan withholds him for quite a while.

Notes Joseph Surface constantly provokes Sir Peter and other scandalizers to condemn Charles. However, Charles finds a supporter, Rowley, who is older, wiser, and more courteous than any of the other characters.

In order to develop the difference between Charles and Joseph, Sheridan has made Rowley withhold the really important information of the scene until the end. The play now takes on new interest as the arrival of Sir Oliver is certain to uncover the ral character of Charles as contrasted with that created by the scandalous rumor.

Notes

Sir Oliver agrees completely with Rowley's opinion of the relative merits of his two nephews. To Charles, he opines, "If Charles has done nothing false or mean, I shall compound for his extravagance." In marked contrast, Sir Oliver speaks of Joseph as "If he salutes me with a scrap of morality in his mouth, I shall be sick directly."

In Act III, scene III, Charles is presented to the audience in his native habitat, drinking, singing, toasting Maria, and living up to his reputation as an uninhibited wastrel. He is boisterous and carefree, in sharp contrast to his reserved and polished brother. This scene and the one that follows, the auction of the pictures, substantiate Rowley's favourable impression of Charles in spite of his high living. Undoubtedly, he is wild and full of clever talk in the first place; however, he eventually shows himself to be inherently decent. His bluntness and recklessness are anathema to the gossips, but his generosity to his poor relation, Mr. Stanley, and appreciation of past help from Sir Oliver, put him solidly on the side of common decency and honesty. The image of Charles has been completed in this scene. He has survived the scandalous gossip to carry the day in his uncle's eyes.

Sheridan's decision to hold a major character out of play until it is half finished adds considerably to the dramatic richness and accentuates the comic effect. It generates great interest in Charles's personality and, at the same time, is a device by which the various characters expose themselves by means of their remarks about Charles.

Example: Maria, Rowley and Sir Oliver all have faith in and understanding of Charles, while Joseph, Lady Sneerwell, and the rest of the gossips express disgust at his profligacy. These attitudes only serve to characterize themselves.

Notes The testing of Charles provides one of the several emotional climaxes of the play. Interest has built on Charles until it is natural that he should be the center of attention when he appears. His most important scene, the auction scene, comes immediately after his introduction to the audience. From this scene, the audience can come to understand his true skin. This snap yet effective treatment is indeed managed with dexterity.

Joseph Surface

Young bachelor who pretends to be honorable gentleman but is really a double-dealing scoundrel. He is the older brother of Charles Surface and is in love with the fortune Maria. He plots with Lady Sneerwell to break up Charles and Maria. Meanwhile, he attempts to seduce the wife of Sir Peter Teazle. Where Charles is direct and frank, Joseph is devious; where Charles is honest, Joseph is deceitful; where Charles is generous to a fault, Joseph is mean to the point of vice, which he dresses up as virtue. The professional hypocrisy and contrived tactics are relentlessly peeled off in the famous screen scene. Two characters (Joseph and Maria) soon become three (with Sir Peter added), the third overhearing the other two, and then four, two overhearing the other two. The action proceeds through a series of exposed duplicities ending in a major revelation. The straightforward Charles throws down the screen to expose Joseph's perfidity and hypocrisy in the shape of the abashed Lady Teazle. Joseph reminds us of his ingratiating with Lady Teazle by saying in Act II:

> I wish I may not lose the heiress, through the scrape I have drawn myself into with the wife; however, Charles's imprudence and bad character are great points in my favour.

This anticipates the events of the scene to ensue. The servant announces Lady Teazle, saying she always leaves her chair at the milliner's in the next street, therefore planting the word milliner in Joseph's mind for future use. Joseph ordered the servant to set-up the screen to ensure privacy from the prying eyes of a maiden lady across the street. The irony becomes so evident and plain when Lady Teazle hides behind it.

Notes

Act V, scene I, runs on from the screen scene with Joseph, the bad-tempered, blaming not himself but Fortune and abusing his servant. However, the audience expects Joseph to have a moment of composure. It does happen, in real life, that a man is pounded by unremitting misfortune but generally there is a pause. Joseph surveys the wreck of his hopes ruefully. His annoyance arise from the offended pride of a professional schemer: Sure Fortune never played a man of my policy such a trick before!

He cannot believe that disaster has befallen him through an error of judgement—as it has insofar as he has failed to understand Sir Peter and Lady Teazle—and attributes everything to the confrontation and revelations in his library. Apart from his miscalculations about the Teazles, his scheme to have an affair with Lady Teazle as a cover for his approach to Maria through Sir Peter has not been carefully thought out.

The effect Sheridan seeks and achieves in the characterization of Joseph Surface is that this man of Policy is too clever by half and that his discomfiture is just the punishment for his nasty combination of hypocrisy, self-seeking, and conceit. There is some danger that Sheridan may overplay his hand and, in Act V, portray Joseph as too repellent. Angry that his schemes have collapsed, Joseph is a specialist in pursuing his own ends under a cloak of morality and searching his own goals with a cynical disregard of others.

In Act V, the scenes are brief and powerful. Joseph speaks the perfect language of sentiment in order to fob off his beggar. To explain his inability to give, he holds up a mirror in which his own image is drawn and reflected. Joseph tends to use sentiment to offset the disadvantages of his reputation for benevolence, and recommends the technique to other men of policy as heartless as himself. He desires respectability—position and wealth—no matter how many bodies he has to climb over to achieve it. He spouts smug and sententious pieces of advice, artful, selfish and malicious.

Notes If we regard Sir Joseph as a sinner, then his brother, Sir Charles, is a saint. Not so! Not so much of a clear-cut line of demarcation! Sheridan would neither allow these two brothers to go to hell nor paradise! He gives them each a human foible and inherent flaw to make them sound and appear agreeable and laughable on the stage. For Charles, it is his extravagance and dissipation that smite him most. For Joseph, it is restlessness, wit, and avarice that betray himself in the first place!

Sir Peter Teazle

Upright gentleman of about age fifty who has recently married a young woman. Fooled by Joseph Surface's pretensions, he promotes a marriage between Joseph and Maria. Sir Peter Teazle is named after the teasel, a thorny and prickly plant which suggests Sir Peter's vexatious nature. Sir Peter, the unhappy bridegroom and confident of his more lively friend, Sir Oliver, fills three roles of varying degrees of importance. As far as the entertainment value of the play is concerned, his most important function lies in his role as the husband of Lady Teazle. These two engage in several thoroughly witty exchanges in the course of the action, which make them a delight to have on the stage Sir Peter is obviously cast in the beginning as an aging comic husband who marries a young country girl. Sir Peter does stand alone for part of the play, talking to the audience or Rowley. He ceases to be specifically the husband of Lady Teazle and becomes more generally the stock comic figure of the woe-begone husband with serious difficulties on his hands. The Restoration concern with horns has been replaced by a concern with extravagant expenses but the overall comic effect is much the same.

Besides being a source of entertainment, Sir Peter is also important to the actual movement of the play in his role as confident to Sir Oliver. It is through him and because of him that Sir Oliver

Notes

decides on the disguises to test each of his nephews. Had it not been for Sir Peter's opposition to Rowley's judgements, Sir Oliver might never have felt it necessary to go to the extremes he does to test the brothers.

Notes The third role Sir Peter acts is as a contrast in character to Sir Oliver. Unlike Sir Oliver the unmarried shrewd, often he is both comic and pathetic, particularly in the scenes with Lady Teazle. In these encounters, his situation is pathetic in that his marital problem seems insurmountable. His approach to Lady Teazle is a blend of love and affection, with an attempt to win her with kindness and fatherly understanding.

At times, Sir Peter seems to be the dupe of Joseph, who has a design on Maria. He appears to be a solid citizen, despite his name, who approves the virtues professed by Joseph, and is a sober representative of the moral order. But when Sir Peter praises Joseph's feelings, he is unable to tell the difference between hypocrisy and honesty. In general, Sir Peter poses as a figure for sympathy because of his trouble with marriage and self-proclaimed righteousness.

Example: The sympathy built up for him in the first scene, however, is modified by his very first line which puts him in a different framework altogether, "When an old bachelor takes a young wife, what is he to expect?" The audience knew what he could expect. Having complained of his wife's expenses and admitting that he loves her, he concludes: "However, I will never be weak enough to own it." Here he produces a truly comic attitude.

By the end of the scene, Sir Peter has classed himself as a simple country squire, not very well suited to the complexities of life in the city. He is still likeable in his own stubborn way, but his faults are readily discernible.

By his widespread involvement in all the action, Sir Peter plays an important part in providing the connecting personality between the disparate characters of the play. He is the guardian of maria, the overseer of Charles and Joseph, the husband of Lady Teazle, the employer of Rowley, and the friend of Sir Oliver. As such, he is "a nexus for all of them within the world of the play." This connection of the characters through Sir Peter is clearly borne out by the number of scenes which take place at his house. Of the fourteen scenes in the play, five take place at Sir Peters. Sir Peter appears in eight scenes, over half of those in the play. This figure is exceeded only by Sir Oliver, who appears in ten scenes, and far overshadows Joseph, who appears in five Scenes, and Charles, who is in only four scenes.

Lady Teazle

Young wife of Sir Peter. She and her husband have their little spats. When he visits Joseph Surface one day, he discovers his wife hiding behind a screen and at first thinks she has been having an affair with Joseph, whom he now brands as a villain. Lady Teazle, as a counterpart of Sir Peter, is not quite a hoyden. She has become a charming, lovely young woman who has attained somehow her place in London society. As a matter of fact, her charm and superior wit often leave Sir Peter the comic butt of their arguments. Intoxicated with city life, clothes, and gossip, she is flattered by the attention of a worldly and handsome young man, Joseph Surface. As a glittering personality and novice of the worldly affairs, she is one of the important vehicles for Sheridans wit. Without her daily jangle with Sir Peter, this would be a duller play. The audience shares the sense of danger when she plays with fire.

Notes

Sir Oliver Surface

Wealthy uncle of Charles and Joseph Surface. After returning to England from the East Indies, he disguises himself to find out the truth about his nephews. Sir Oliver, appearing in ten of the fourteen scenes of the play, is instrumental to the development of the characterization. Once he makes his entrance in the third scene of the second act, he is never again off the stage for more than part of a scene.

The antiquity of the business of testing character would make a role such as Sir Oliver's easily recognizable to the audience. In the role of tester, Sir Oliver will be the prime mover in the events to follow, but not necessarily the hero, that role devolving upon Charles. Sir Oliver well demonstrates an ability to see the unfortunate side of his friend's marriage.

Example: He began by laughing at the stock comic situation reminiscent of the Country Wife:

"So my old friend is married, hey?—a young wife out of the country—ha! Ha! Ha!"

But he shows compassion for the personal situation upon being appraised of it by Rowley. In all essentials, Sir Oliver represents the vigorous proponent of truth and good humor. Such a man could be Peter Teazle before he made the mistake of marrying a young wife.

To make a comparison between Sir Peter and Sir Oliver, both are kindly. But Sir Oliver has more common sense and broader humanity. Sir Peter is slightly self-centered. It is likely that his love for humanity was tempered by his frequent maulings by the social backbiters. Yet he is fair and not too exacting in his dealings with his wife whose inclination to an expensive gaiety is all too human.

20.2.2 General Criticism of all the Minor Characters

Sheridan makes each character embody a single trait in order to show the follies of London's fashionable life in the late eighteenth century. The significance of this type of characterization is evident in the very names which Sheridan gives his actors.

Sir Benjamin Backbite is just that—a clawing, "catty kind of man." Premium reminds us of the extra bonus or high interest which a money lender or a usurer would exact from a borrower. Careless is careless of his tongue. Snake, who is called Spatter in an earlier draft of the play, is a snake in the grass, darting his poisonous tongue at anybody for a price. The supposedly virtuous Mrs Candour with her assumed sweetness of disposition is ironically named. Lady Sneerwell, the attractive widow, is an unpleasant, vindictive scandalmonger, retaliating on the world. She knows no pleasure equal to the reducing others to the level of [her] own injured reputation. Trip plays the fop and is a burlesque exaggeration of his master's vices. Moses is set as a Jewish moneylender with canting speech.

Maria

Desirable and wealthy young ward of Sir Peter Teazle. She is a woman of principle who refuses to gossip.

Lady Sneerwell

Young widow of a knight. She is attracted to Charles Surface and plots with Joseph Surface to break up Charles and Maria.

Snake

Cat's paw of Lady Sneerwell. He spreads false rumors designed to help Lady Sneerwell achieve her goals.

Notes

Mrs Candour

Prolific gossip who says how wrong it is to spread rumors, then indulges in her favorite pastime—spreading rumors. Mrs Candour is a good-natured and friendly gossip whose talkative nature makes her dangerous, since she spreads slander more effectively than Backbite or Crabtree.

Sir Benjamin Backbite

Annoying young man who pursues Maria and engages in slanderous conversation. Backbite is a suitor to Marie. He is a gossip who will slander anyone, even those he does not know. Lady Sneerwell admires Backbite's wit and poetry Backbite is an especially malicious character whose rude behavior is encouraged in the company of his uncle, Lady Sneerwell, and Mrs Candour.

Rowley

Helpful servant and friend of Sir Peter Teazle and a former servant of the father of the Surface brothers. He is an upright fellow who sees through Joseph's hypocrisy. Aware of Snake's nefarious behavior, he pays him to reveal that the stories he has been spreading for Lady Sneerwell and Joseph are lies.

Moses

Moneylender who assists Sir Oliver in his scheme to find out the truth about Charles and Joseph Surface.

Mr Stanley

Dublin merchant who was ruined by business reversals. He is related to Charles and Joseph Surface, to whom he wrote for financial assistance. Sir Oliver assumes Stanley's identity when he is investigating his nephews.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

16. Much of the success of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* lies in
    (a) the rich humorous exposition of characters
    (b) provoking laughter and entertainment
    (c) poor delineation of characters
    (d) comic representation of characters.
17. The School for Scandal opens with a scene in which
    (a) Joseph Surface introduces plot against Charles Surface
    (b) Lady Sneerwell introduces many of the complications through an idle, gossiping conversation
    (c) Lady Sneerwell targeting his neighbour
    (d) Lady Sneerwell hatching a plot with her venomous wit.
18. In order to develop the difference between Charles and Joseph, Sheridan has made
    (a) entry of Sir Oliver to uncover the real character of Charles
    (b) made Sir Oliver uncover the real character of Joseph with the scandalous rumor

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(c) Rowley withhold the really important information of the scene until the end

(d) made Sir Oliver hid his identity.

Fill in the blanks:

19. The character Charles Surface is depicted as a young bachelor notorious for his extravagance and ..... .

20. Lady Sneerwell presides over a ..... composed of Mrs Candour, Crabtree, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Snake and Joseph.

21. Fooled by Joseph Surface's pretentions, Sir Peter Teazle promotes a marriage between .....

22. Backbite is gossip who will ....., even those he does not know.

23. Both Sir Peter and Sir Oliver are kindly but Sir Oliver has more common sense and .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

24. No one in *The School for Scandal* acts as he does simply because some circumstance compels him: people act out of their own characters and shape events accordingly.

25. Sneerwell describes Joseph as a rude nave.

26. Sir Peter Teazle is named after the teasel, a thorny and prickly plant which suggests Sir Peter's vexatious nature.

27. In the role of tester, Sir Oliver will be the prime mover in the events to follow, as well as a hero.

28. When Sir Peter Teazle visits Joseph Surface one day, he discovers his wife hiding behind a screen, whom he now brands as a villain.

20.3 Summary

- Witty, sparkling dialogue is the hallmark of Sheridan's plays. Everybody including servants and fops displays wit in *The School for Scandal*. Even when a leading character such as Sir Peter Teazle loses his composure while quarreling with his wife and explodes with "Aye, … you had no taste when you married me!" he does not lose his wit. His lines are of equal wit with those of his wife, whose earlier words, "If you wanted authority over me, you should have adopted me, and not married me. I am sure you were old enough." The whole play is full of epigrams and aphorism. "Charity begins at home," is but one of the many that we still cherish at home. To say the least, Sheridan's wit is an incessant flame. What distinguishes it from ordinary wit is that it has inherent charm and grace.
- In addition to his witty and epigrammatic dialogue, Sheridan is skillful in manipulating intrigues. The Playwright is inventive enough to give us an entertaining story in *The School for Scandal* in a vivacious manner which moves us smoothly from one incident to another. He is a master of good theatre as revealed in the screen scene in the library of Joseph Surface's house. The scene is a three ring circus done so well that it does not degenerate into common broad farce.
- The marvel of Sheridan's dramatic craft can also be attributed to his application of comic suspense, the audience gains joy and delight. Knowledge of action does not lessen the enjoyment because Sheridan adroitly subordinates action to anticipation. Through authentic portrait, liveliness permeates Sheridan's characters. Verisimilitude is his own disguise and masquerading as there is enough inconsequence to suggest realism. As an actor-manager Sheridan possesses a sensitive feeling for his audience, transforming in action and boredom into fun and wisdom.

Notes

- Most significant, *The School for Scandal* is not all for exposing scandals; it is a blend of satire and compassion. Sheridan was a sharp observer of a modish society; however, the brilliance of his satire was tempered with humanity. When he satirizes the ballooning of the rumor concerning Sir Peter's mythical duel with Charles, Sheridan is not vindictive, but just reportorial.

20.4 Keywords

Caricature : A pictorial, written, or acted representation of a person, which exaggerates his characteristic traits for comic effect.

Humor : A comic, absurd, or incongruous quality causing amusement: the humor of a situation.

Dissipation : Dissolute way of living, or unrestrained indulgence in physical pleasures, especially excessive drinking of liquor; intemperance.

Moneylender : A person or organization whose business it is to lend money at interest.

Scoundrel : An unprincipled, worthless, dishonorable person; villain.

Villain : A cruelly malicious person who is involved in or devoted to wickedness or crime; scoundrel.

Slanderous : A malicious, false, and defamatory statement or report.

Tale-bearer : A person who spreads gossip, secrets, etc., that may cause trouble or harm.

Hypocrisy : A pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.

20.5 Review Questions

1. Which character in the play do you most admire? Explain your answer.
2. Which character do you list admire? Explain your answer.
3. Compare and contrast *The School for Scandal* with a modern situation comedy.
4. Which role in the play do you think poses the greatest challenge for an actor? Explain your answer.
5. Give a critical view of the following characters in *The School for Scandal*:
   (a) Sir Peter Teazle (b) Maria (c) Joseph Surface

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. (c)
4. (d) 5. (a) 6. sentimentalism
7. civilized urbane 8. conversation 9. artificial
10. occupation 11. True 12. False
13. True 14. True 15. True
16. (a) 17. (b) 18. (c)
19. dissipation 20. scandalous school 21. Joseph and Maria
22. slander anyone 23. broader humanity 24. True
25. False 26. True 27. False
28. True

20.6 Further Readings

Notes

Books

Auburn, Mark S. 1977. *Sheridan's Comedies: Their Contexts and Achievements.* University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Eric S. Rump (ed.) 1989. *The School for Scandal and other Plays*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.enotes.com/school-scandal/critical-overview

http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides3/School.html

http://www.artsclub.com/youth/pdfs/0607guides/

Notes

Unit 7: The School for Scandal: All Major and Minor Themes

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate all major themes in *The School for Scandal*;
- Elucidate all minor themes in *The School for Scandal*;
- Explain Defamation and deceptive appearance of characters;
- Illustrate the pitfalls of idleness in *The School for Scandal*;
- Discuss the hypocrisy occurring in the play *The School for Scandal*.

Introduction

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* is a comedy of manners, a play satirizing the behavior and customs of upper classes through witty dialogue and an intricate plot with comic situations that expose characters' shortcomings. Characters generally consist of stock types—such as the bore, the flirt, the gossip, the wastrel, the rich uncle, etc.—rather than individuals with unique qualities. Comedies of manners in Sheridan's time typically avoided the romantic sentimentality that characterized many other stage dramas of the eighteenth century. In The *School for Scandal*, the author mainly satirizes malicious gossip and hypocrisy in the fashionable society of London in the 1770s. This unit illustrates the various themes used in this play.

Notes

21.1 Defamation of Characters

Underlying the comedy is a serious theme: condemnation of the odious practice of slander and, in the case of the written letters, libel. Spreading scandal was commonplace in London's high society of the 1770s, when conversation—in drawing rooms, at balls, in spas, and across card tables—was a form of entertainment.

Task Illustrate that spreading scandal was a common place in London's high society of the 1770's in context of *the School for Scandal*.

21.2 Deceptive Appearance

Charles Surface has a reputation as a scoundrel. But beneath his flawed veneer, he is a decent fellow. Joseph Surface has a reputation as an upright man. But beneath his flawless veneer, he is a villain. Hence, this theme: Before judging a person, look beneath his or her outward guise.

21.3 Hypocrisy

Joseph Surface pretends to be a paragon of honor and rectitude while attempting to sabotage his brother and marry into a fortune. Mrs Candour and others of her ilk pretend to oppose gossip but delight in spreading it.

Example: When Maria tells her that it is "strangely impertinent" for people to busy themselves with the affairs of others, Mrs Candour says, Very true, child: but what's to be done? People will talk—there's no preventing it. Why, it was but yesterday I was told that Miss Gadabout had eloped with Sir Filigree Flirt. But, Lord! there's no minding what one hears; though, to be sure, I had this from very good authority.

21.4 Steadfast Integrity

Amid all the wrongdoing in the play, it is easy to overlook the moral resolve of Maria—and to a lesser extent, Charles. Maria refuses to gossip and repeatedly denounces the practice. For example, in Act 1, when Lady Sneerwell asks her what Sir Benjamin Backbite has done to make her run from him, she replies, "Oh, he has done nothing—but 'tis what he said: his conversation is a perpetual libel on all his acquaintance." Later, in the same act, she tells Mrs. Candour, "'Tis strangely impertinent for people to busy themselves so [with gossip]." When Joseph Surface attempts to defend his tongue-wagging friends—saying, "[T]hey appear more ill-natured than they are; they have no malice at heart"—Maria replies, "Then is their conduct more contemptible; for, in my opinion, nothing could excuse the intemperance of their tongues but an unnatural and uncontrollable bitterness of mind." Maria also steadfastly refuses to become involved with Joseph Surface even though her legal guardian, St. Peter Teazle, pressures her to do so. For his part, Charles Surface—despite his extravagance and devil-may-care lifestyle—refuses to compromise the basic goodness that undergirds his character. In particular, he refuses to sell the portrait of Sir Oliver even though the bidder, Sir Oliver in the guise of Mr. Premium, offers him a large sum of money. Moreover, even though he has little money left to support his wastrel ways, he contributes a generous sum to the destitute Mr. Stanley.

Notes

21.5 Pitfalls of Idleness

An implied theme in the play is that idleness breeds mischief. Most of the characters live on inherited money and property, allowing them to devote a good portion of their time to leisure activities. Telling or listening to scandalous stories, as well as reading about them, is apparently one of their favorite pastimes. Favored activities of the young include gambling and drinking.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following themes is not a characteristics of the play *The School for Scandal*?
   (a) Admiration (b) Pitfalls of idleness
   (c) Steadfast integrity (d) Hypocricy.
2. Pitfalls of idleness is
   (a) a sentimental theme (b) an implied theme in the play
   (c) wrongdoing in the play (d) misdeed in the play.
3. Amid all the wrongdoing in the play, it is easy to overlook
   (a) Maria's refusal of gossip (b) Maria's repeated denounce of practice
   (c) moral resolve of Maria (d) hypocrisy shown by Maria.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Joseph Surface pretends to be a paragon of honor and ..... .
5. An implied theme in the play is that idleness breeds ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

6. Charles Surface has a reputation as a scoundrel.
7. Spreading scandal was commonplace in London's high society of the 1770s.
8. Telling or listening to scandalous stories, as well as reading about them, was apparently one of the favorite pastimes in of working class.

21.6 Summary

- Spreading scandal was commonplace in London's high society of the 1770s, when conversation—in drawing rooms, at balls, in spas, and across card tables—was a form of entertainment.
- Charles Surface has a reputation as a scoundrel. But beneath his flawed veneer, he is a decent fellow.
- Joseph Surface pretends to be a paragon of honor and rectitude while attempting to sabotage his brother and marry into a fortune.
- Amid all the wrongdoing in the play, it is easy to overlook the moral resolve of Maria—and to a lesser extent, Charles.
- Maria refuses to gossip and repeatedly denounces the practice.
- An implied theme in the play is that idleness breeds mischief.
- Most of the characters live on inherited money and property, allowing them to devote a good portion of their time to leisure activities.
- Telling or listening to scandalous stories, as well as reading about them, is apparently one of their favorite pastimes. Favored activities of the young include gambling and drinking.

Notes

21.7 Keywords

Hypocrisy : Hypocrisy is the state of pretending to have beliefs, opinions, virtues, ideals, thoughts, feelings, qualities, or standards that one does not actually have. Or A pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.

Gambling : To play at any game of chance for money or other stakes. Or to stake or risk money, or anything of value, on the outcome of something involving chance.

Idling : Idle (idling) is a term which generally refers to a lack of motion and/or energy.

Defamation : Defamation is also called calumny, vilification, traducement, slander, and libel is the communication of a statement that makes a claim, expressly stated or implied to be factual, that may give an individual, business, product, group, government, or nation a negative image.

Scandal : A person whose conduct causes reproach or disgrace.

21.8 Review Questions

1. Explore the deceptive appearance in the play *The School for Scandal*.
2. An implied theme in the play is that idleness breeds mischief. Explain.
3. Amid all the wrongdoing in the play, it is easy to overlook the moral resolve of Maria. In the context of The School for Scandal, explain the theme used in this statement.
4. Give a critical view of the following themes in *The School for Scandal*:
   (a) Hypocrisy (b) Steadfast Integrity (c) Pitfalls of idleness

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. (c)
4. rectitude 5. mischief 6. True
7. True 8. False

21.9 Further Readings

Books

Rump, Eric. 1995. Sheridan, Congreve and *School for Scandal. In*: James Morwood and David Crane (eds.), *Sheridan Studies.* Cambridge University Press.

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Notes

Unit 8: G. B. Shaw: Saint Joan— Introduction to the Author and the Text

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the biographical sketch of George Bernard Shaw;
- Elaborate the literary works of George Bernard Shaw;
- Explain that *Saint Joan* is a tragedy without villains;
- Illustrate the appropriateness of characterising Saint Joan as a tragedy;
- Describe that the play is full of historical inaccuracy and too talky or comic;
- Discuss the nature of the play.

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. Although his first profitable writing was music and literary criticism, in which capacity he wrote many highly articulate pieces of journalism, his main talent was for drama, and he wrote more than 60 plays. Nearly all his writings address prevailing social problems, but have a vein of comedy which makes their stark themes more palatable. Shaw examined education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege. This unit elaborates the details of his life since birth till his death.

Saint Joan is a play by George Bernard Shaw, based on the life and trial of Joan of Arc. Published not long after the canonization of Joan of Arc by the Roman Catholic Church, the play dramatises what is known of her life based on the substantial records of her trial. Shaw studied the transcripts and decided that the concerned people acted in good faith according to their beliefs. This unit also elaborates the text, drawbacks and problems of the play in detail. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text.

Notes

22.1 George Bernard Shaw—Introduction

George Bernard Shaw was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class. An ardent socialist, Shaw wrote many brochures and speeches for the Fabian Society. He became an accomplished orator in the furtherance of its causes, which included gaining equal rights for men and women, alleviating abuses of the working class, rescinding private ownership of productive land, and promoting healthy lifestyles. For a short time he was active in local politics, serving on the London County Council.

He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize for Literature (1925) and an Oscar (1938), for his contributions to literature and for his work on the film Pygmalion (adaptation of his play of the same name), respectively. Shaw wanted to refuse his Nobel Prize outright because he had no desire for public honours, but accepted it at his wife's behest: she considered it a tribute to Ireland. He did reject the monetary award, requesting it be used to finance translation of Swedish books to English.

22.1.1 Biography

Birth and the Family

George Bernard Shaw was born in Synge Street, Dublin, in 1856 to George Carr Shaw (1814–85), an unsuccessful grain merchant and sometime civil servant, and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, née Gurly (1830–1913), a professional singer. He had two sisters, Lucinda Frances (1853–1920), a singer of musical comedy and light opera, and Elinor Agnes (1855–76).

Education

Shaw briefly attended the Wesley College, Dublin, a grammar school operated by the Methodist Church in Ireland, before moving to a private school near Dalkey and then transferring to Dublin's Central Model School. He ended his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. He harboured a lifelong animosity toward schools and teachers, saying: "Schools and schoolmasters, as we have them today, are not popular as places of education and teachers, but rather prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents". In the astringent prologue to Cashel Byron's Profession young Byron's educational experience is a fictionalized description of Shaw's own schooldays. Later, he painstakingly detailed the reasons for his aversion to formal education in his Treatise on Parents and Children. In brief, he considered the standardized curricula useless, deadening to the spirit and stifling to the intellect. He particularly deplored the use of corporal punishment, which was prevalent in his time.

When his mother left home and followed her voice teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, to London, Shaw was almost sixteen years old. His sisters accompanied their mother but Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, first as a reluctant pupil, then as a clerk in an estate office. He worked efficiently, albeit discontentedly, for several years. In 1876, Shaw joined his mother's London household. She, Vandeleur Lee, and his sister Lucy, provided him with a pound a week while he frequented public libraries and the British Museum reading room where he studied earnestly and began writing novels. He earned his allowance by ghostwriting Vandeleur Lee's music column, which appeared in the London Hornet. His novels were rejected, however, so his literary earnings remained negligible until 1885, when he became self-supporting as a critic of the arts.

Marriage

In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a fellow Fabian, whom he survived. They settled in Ayot St. Lawrence in a house now called Shaw's Corner.

Notes

Political Activism

Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society, a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means. In the course of his political activities he met Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress and fellow Fabian; they married in 1898. The marriage was never consummated, at Charlotte's insistence, though he had had a number of affairs with married women; Shaw declined to stand as an MP, but in 1897 he was elected as a local councilor to the London County Council as a Progressive.

Did u know? In 1906 the Shaws moved into a house, now called Shaw's Corner, in Ayot St. Lawrence, a small village in Hertfordshire, England; it was to be their home for the remainder of their lives, although they also maintained a residence at 29 Fitzroy Square in London.

Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1890s. By the end of the decade he was an established playwright. He wrote sixty-three plays and his output as novelist, critic, pamphleteer, essayist and private correspondent was prodigious. He is known to have written more than 250,000 letters. Along with Fabian Society members Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Graham Wallas, Shaw founded the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895 with funding provided by private philanthropy, including a bequest of £20,000 from Henry Hunt Hutchinson to the Fabian Society. One of the libraries at the LSE is named in Shaw's honor; it contains collections of his papers and photographs.

Task Why did G.B. Shaw beeome a dedicated socialist and a charter member of the Fabian society.

Last Years and Death

Shaw died there, aged 94, from chronic problems exacerbated by injuries he incurred by falling from a ladder. During his later years, Shaw enjoyed attending to the grounds at Shaw's Corner. He died at the age of 94, of renal failure precipitated by injuries incurred by falling while pruning a tree. His ashes, mixed with those of his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, were scattered along footpaths and around the statue of Saint Joan in their garden.

22.1.2 Work Experience and Literary Works

After working in an estate agent's office for a while he moved to London as a young man (1876), where he established himself as a leading music and theatre critic in the eighties and nineties and became a prominent member of the Fabian Society, for which he composed many pamphlets. He began his literary career as a novelist; as a fervent advocate of the new theatre of Ibsen (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 1891) he decided to write plays in order to illustrate his criticism of the English stage. His earliest dramas were called appropriately *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). Among these, *Widower's Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* savagely attack social hypocrisy, while in plays such as *Arms and the Man* and *The Man of Destiny* the criticism is less fierce. Shaw's radical rationalism, his utter disregard of conventions, his keen dialectic interest and verbal wit often turn the stage into a forum of ideas, and nowhere more openly than in the famous discourses on the *Life Force*, *Don Juan in Hell*, the third act of the dramatization of woman's love chase of man, *Man and Superman* (1903).

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In the plays of his later period discussion sometimes drowns the drama, in *Back to Methuselah* (1921), although in the same period he worked on his masterpiece *Saint Joan* (1923), in which he rewrites the well-known story of the French maiden and extends it from the Middle Ages to the present.

Other important plays by Shaw are *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), a historical play filled with allusions to modern times, and *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), in which he exercised a kind of retrospective history and from modern movements drew deductions for the Christian era. In *Major Barbara* (1905), one of Shaw's most successful plays, the audience's attention is held by the power of the witty argumentation that man can achieve aesthetic salvation only through political activity, not as an individual. *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), facetiously classified as a tragedy by Shaw, is really a comedy the humour of which is directed at the medical profession. *Candida* (1898), with social attitudes toward sex relations as objects of his satire, and *Pygmalion* (1912), a witty study of phonetics as well as a clever treatment of middle-class morality and class distinction, proved some of Shaw's greatest successes on the stage. It is a combination of the dramatic, the comic, and the social corrective that gives Shaw's comedies their special flavour.

Shaw's complete works appeared in thirty-six volumes between 1930 and 1950, the year of his death.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following play earned George Bernard Shaw The Nobel Prize?
   (a) *Saint Joan* (b) *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*
   (c) *The Doctor's Dilemma* (d) *Candida.*
2. Which of the following plays was not written by George Bernard Shaw?
   (a) *Caesar and Cleopatra* (b) *The Merchant of Venice*
   (c) *Pygmalion* (d) *Major Barbara.*

Fill in the blanks:

3. In 1906 the Shaws moved into a house, now called ..... .
4. After marriage Shaw settled in ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society.
6. Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1870s.

22.2 Saint Joan—Introduction to the Text

George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* was first produced in New York City in 1923 and in London in 1924. Shaw published it with a long Preface in 1924. When word came out that Shaw, who was known as an irreverent jokester, was writing about a Christian saint and martyr, there were fears that he would not be able to produce something appropriate, but the early reception of the play was generally favorable, although some commentators criticized him for historical inaccuracy and for being too talky or comic. Over the years, the play, a rare tragic work in his generally comic oeuvre, has been seen as one of his greatest and most important.

Did u know? Saint Joan has been hailed as being intellectually exciting and praised for dealing with important themes, such as nationalism, war, and the relation of the individual to society. The play solidified Shaw's reputation as a major playwright and helped win him the Nobel Prize in 1925.

Notes

Notes Being at least in part a tragedy, though with comic moments, *Saint Joan* is part of a shift in Shaw's work from his earlier optimistic comedies to a more melancholy attitude, perhaps in part the result of his reaction to World War I.

Although he had been thinking about Joan of Arc as early as 1913, Shaw did not actually begin writing the play until 1923, three years after Joan's canonization. He consulted many earlier works on Joan, including the transcripts of her trial. In fact, he modestly said that he had done little more than reproduce Joan's own words as recorded in the transcripts; however, that statement is unfair to Shaw, who left a distinctive Shavian touch on the story of the martyred saint.

There are no villains in the play. Crime, like disease, is not interesting: it is something to be done away with by general consent, and that is all about it. It is what men do at their best, with good intentions, and what normal men and women find that they must and will do in spite of their intentions that really concern us.

Michael Holroyd has characterised the play as "a tragedy without villains" and also as Shaw's "only tragedy". John Fielden has discussed further the appropriateness of characterising Saint Joan as a tragedy.

Task Elucidate that the play Saint Joan is a tragedy without villains.

Joan, a teenage country girl, shows up at the castle of Vaucouleurs. She's determined to kick the English out of France and to crown the Dauphin, Charles, as King. Joan has heard voices from God telling her that this is her destiny. Through sheer confidence and natural charisma, she manages to sway the skeptical Captain Robert de Baudricourt. He gives her soldier's clothes, armor, and other supplies to assist in getting to the Dauphin.

Upon arriving at Charles's court, Joan wins over most everybody. First, she's able to pick Charles out of a crowd, which some view as a miracle. Her humility and reverence for the Church get the Archbishop on her side. Then of course, there's the Dauphin himself. It takes a little doing, but after a good old fashioned pep talk she convinces him to stop messing around and stand up for France and himself. Charles grants her control of the army.

She's off to Orleans, a town under siege by the English. Joan meets Dunois, the leader of the French troops at Orleans. He has been waiting for a while for the wind to change. It's the only way he can sail his soldiers up the river and launch a sneak attack on the English. When the wind switches directions upon Joan's arrival, Dunois is convinced that Joan has been sent by God. They march off together, to liberate Orleans.

Notes Joan's enemies are plotting against her. The Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber, both Englishmen, meet with Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais. Warwick wants Cauchon to try Joan for heresy. The angry little Chaplain just wants her to die and die painfully. Cauchon agrees to try Joan, but refuses to be a political tool of the English. He says that he will do his best to save her soul.

Joan and company have been busy little bees. They've liberated Orleans, won a bunch of other battles, and have just crowned Charles as King in Rheims Cathedral. Joan, however, is unsatisfied. A good chunk of the country, including Paris, is still not under French control. She urges Charles,

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the Archbishop, and Dunois to press on and liberate the capital city. When they refuse she says she'll just do it without them. They tell her that, if she gets captured, they'll do nothing to help her escape.

Joan gets captured and put on trial for heresy. Sure enough, her "friends" do nothing to rescue her. The Bishop Cauchon, true to his word, does everything he can to try and save her. He's helped in this effort by the Inquisitor. It proves to be impossible, though, because Joan's personal beliefs just don't jive with the Church's. She thinks God's messengers speak to her directly. They think God's voice on Earth is the Church and the Church alone; meaning the voices she hears must be demons. They also just can't handle with her wearing men's clothes. She absolutely refuses to dress like a woman as long as she's a soldier. In the end, they're forced to condemn her to death.

Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other characters show up to have a chat in his royal bedroom. We learn the fate of everybody and, more importantly, we learn of Joan's legacy. King Charles now rules all of France. He set up a hearing to have her name cleared. We also learn from a time-traveling cleric that, many years afterward, Joan was made a saint by the Catholic Church. Everybody tells Joan how awesome she is and how they're sorry that they sold her out. Joan says, great, now can I come back to Earth as living person again? No way, says everybody and they all make excuses to exit the dream.

At the end of the play, Joan is left alone in a pool of light. She asks God when the world will be ready to accept saints like her.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

7. George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* was first produced in New York City in 1923 and in London in 1924. Shaw published it with
   (a) a long preface (b) a long epilogue
   (c) detailed scenes (d) seven scenes.
8. Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other characters show up to have
   (a) a chat in the battle (b) a chat in his royal bedroom
   (c) a chat in the hundred year war (d) a chat in the battlefield of Orelon.

Fill in the blanks:

9. Michael Holroyd has characterised the play as a tragedy without ..... .
10. Joan gets captured and put on trial for ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. There are no villains in the play *Saint Joan*.
12. Shaw start thinking about Joan of Arc in 1923 and write the play the same year.

22.3 Summary

- George Bernard Shaw was born in Synge Street, Dublin, in 1856 to George Carr Shaw (1814–85), an unsuccessful grain merchant and sometime civil servant, and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw.
- Shaw briefly attended the Wesley College, Dublin, a grammar school operated by the Methodist Church in Ireland, before moving to a private school near Dalkey and then transferring to Dublin's Central Model School.
- When his mother left home and followed her voice teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, to London, Shaw was almost sixteen years old. His sisters accompanied their mother but Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, first as a reluctant pupil, then as a clerk in an estate office.

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- In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a fellow Fabian, whom he survived. They settled in Ayot St. Lawrence in a house now called Shaw's Corner.
- Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society, a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means.
- In 1906 the Shaws moved into a house, now called Shaw's Corner, in Ayot St. Lawrence, a small village in Hertfordshire, England; it was to be their home for the remainder of their lives, although they also maintained a residence at 29 Fitzroy Square in London.
- Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1890s. By the end of the decade he was an established playwright.
- Shaw died there, aged 94, from chronic problems exacerbated by injuries he incurred by falling from a ladder.
- George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* was first produced in New York City in 1923 and in London in 1924. Shaw published it with a long Preface in 1924.
- The play solidified Shaw's reputation as a major playwright and helped win him the Nobel Prize in 1925.
- Although he had been thinking about Joan of Arc as early as 1913, Shaw did not actually begin writing the play until 1923, three years after Joan's canonization.
- There are no villains in the play. Crime, like disease, is not interesting: it is something to be done away with by general consent, and that is all about it. It is what men do at their best, with good intentions, and what normal men and women find that they must and will do in spite of their intentions that really concern us.
- Joan, a teenage country girl, shows up at the castle of Vaucouleurs. She's determined to kick the English out of France and to crown the Dauphin, Charles, as King. Joan has heard voices from God telling her that this is her destiny.
- Joan and company have been busy little bees. They've liberated Orleans, won a bunch of other battles, and have just crowned Charles as King in Rheims Cathedral. Joan, however, is unsatisfied.
- Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other characters show up to have a chat in his royal bedroom. We learn the fate of everybody and, more importantly, we learn of Joan's legacy.
- At the end of the play, Joan is left alone in a pool of light. She asks God when the world will be ready to accept saints like her.

22.4 Keywords

Playwright : A person who writes plays. Or The texts of plays that can be read, as distinct from being seen and heard in performance.

Novelist : A person who writes novels.

Class privilege : A special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual, class, or caste. Such an advantage, immunity, or right held as a prerogative of status or rank, and exercised to the exclusion or detriment of others. Or protection from being sued for libel or slander for making otherwise actionable statements in a context or forum where open and candid expression is deemed desirable for reasons of public policy.

Fabian Society : The Fabian Society is a British socialist movement, whose purpose is to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist, rather than

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revolutionary, means. It is best known for its initial ground-breaking work beginning late in the 19th century and continuing up to World War I.

Household : Something for use in maintaining a home, especially for use in cooking, cleaning, laundering, repairing, etc., in the home.

Martyr : One who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce religious principles. Or One who makes great sacrifices or suffers much in order to further a belief, cause, or principle.

Tragedy : Tragedy depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of hubris, fate, and the will of the gods.

Nationalism : Nationalism is a political ideology that involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a political entity defined in national terms, *i.e*. a nation.

22.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief sketch of birth and early childhood of George Bernard Shaw.
2. Illustrate that George Bernard Shaw was a playwright.
3. George Bernard Shaw was a superb writer, illustrate this statement in context of his conferment of Nobel Prize and Oscar award.
4. Explain that *Saint Joan* was a tragedy without villain.
5. Joan gets captured and put on trial for heresy but her friends do nothing to rescue her. Why?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. Shaw's Corner
4. Ayot St. Lawrence	5. True	6. False
7. (a)	8. (b)	9. villains
10. heresy	11. True	12. False

22.6 Further Readings

Books

George Bernard Shaw, Harold Bloom (ed.). 1987. *Saint Joan*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (ed.). 2001. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1925/

http://www.novelguide.com/SaintJoan/novelsummary.html

http://www.enotes.com/saint-joan/underlying-philosophy

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Unit 9: Saint Joan: Detailed Analysis of the Text

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the summary of all the scenes;
- Illustrate the analysis of all the scenes;
- Analyse in detail the text of preface, scenes I to scenes VI and epilogue.

Introduction

George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* was first produced in New York City in 1923 and in London in 1924. Shaw published it with a long Preface in 1924. When word came out that Shaw, who was known as an irreverent jokester, was writing about a Christian saint and martyr, there were fears that he would not be able to produce something appropriate, but the early reception of the play was generally favorable, although some commentators criticized him for historical inaccuracy and for being too talky or comic. Over the years, the play, a rare tragic work in his generally comic oeuvre, has been seen as one of his greatest and most important. It has been hailed as being intellectually exciting and praised for dealing with important themes, such as nationalism, war, and the relation of the individual to society. The play solidified Shaw's reputation as a major playwright and helped win him the Nobel Prize in 1925. This unit elaborates the text of the play in detail from preface scene I to scene VI and epilogue. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text in all the scenes.

23.1 Preface

23.1.1 Summary

Shaw briefly recounts the barest biographical facts regarding Joan, and proceeds to anoint her as an exemplar of Protestantism, Nationalism, Realism, Feminism, and Rationalism. Shaw claims that, above all other real or perceived offenses, Joan was burned for her "presumption." People received Joan as either "miraculous" or "unbearable" because, like Socrates and even Jesus of Nazareth (but unlike Napoleon Bonaparte) before her, she did not understand the penalty paid by those who "show up" their supposed superiors: "[T]he strange superiority of Christ and the fear it inspires elicit a shriek of Crucify Him from all who cannot divine its benevolence."

In contrast to much of the hagiography Shaw sees surroundings of Joan; he judges her trial to have been a fair one, given the medieval worldview. He is not concerned with rehabilitating her character so much as he is concerned with restoring her humanity; he attempts not to demonstrate Joan's righteousness-"The mud that was thrown at her had dropped off by this time so completely that there is no need for any modern writer to wash up after it"-as to rehabilitate, to some degree, those who tried, judged, and condemned her. Joan's "ideal biographer," Shaw decrees, "must be free from nineteenth century prejudices and biases; must understand the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Holy Roman Empire much more intimately than our Whig historians have ever understood them; and must be capable of throwing off sex partialities and their romance, and regarding women as the female of the human species, and not as a different kind of animal with specific charms and specific imbecilities." In short, Shaw proposes that, to truly understand Joan and the events in which she became embroiled and which she precipitated, one must first truly understand her historic, social, and intellectual context.

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Joan was not, argues Shaw, a beauty; or a poor "beggarmaid"; or illiterate; or unmindful of the political scene in which she moved. Nor, he insists, was Joan insane, despite the fact that she claimed inspiration and guidance from the voices and visions of saints and angels. In fact, Shaw posits, her voices and visions, so far from being evidence of insanity, are evidence of keen rationality and of superior imagination—a point to which Shaw returns repeatedly throughout the preface and, indeed, the play. Shaw argues that visionaries—those who are "geniuses," those who see "farther and [probe] deeper than other people"-are judged by the results, or practical effects, of their visions. Joan's visions were, for Shaw, simply the expression of her "mother wit." Joan's aims-raising the siege of Orleans and securing the enthronement of Charles VII at Rheims-were sound and sane, even though Joan claimed these aims came to her in messages from Saint Catherine. Shaw thus distinguishes between the content of Joan's policy and the forms in which it came, which establish, not insanity, but "her dramatic imagination." Joan was not "mentally defective" but "mentally excessive."

Shaw praises Joan as "very capable" and "a born boss," but reminds us that she was, after all, an adolescent girl. Her undeniable military and political successes, he argues, can only be attributed to "simplicity." Her goals, for all their far-reaching consequences, were "simple" ones—that is, they could be decisively and unambiguously accomplished through force of arms. Her naïve nature aided her in this regard, Shaw says, but hurt her when she ran up against impersonal forces that drive and shape society—in Joan's case, such forces as "the great ecclesiastical and social institutions of the Middle Ages." As he will state later in the preface, "From the moment when [Joan] failed to stimulate Charles to follow up his coronation with a swoop on Paris she was lost." She could not effect a further success to bolster her cause—and, as a "theocrat", she learned the lesson that success after success is essential for the continuation of theocracy.

Shaw does not dispute that "a great wrong [was] done to Joan and to the conscience of the world by her burning." He does, however, object that this wrong proves the medieval world "uncivilized" as compared to the modern world. He recounts childhood memories of public burnings in Dublin, and composer Richard Wagner's recollection of crowds clamoring to see a man broken on the wheel, as evidence that modern bloodlust is all too real. Further, Shaw does not blithely pardon or excuse the Church for its part in Joan's death. He argues, "The Churches must learn humility as well as teach it." Only such humility leaves room for persons of genius, for visualizers, for giants of the imagination—such as Shaw believes Joan to have been—to move humanity forward. As Shaw says, "[W]hen the Churches set themselves against change as such, they are setting themselves against the law of God."

Not only the Churches, Shaw argues, but all societal institutions must be on guard against stifling change and growth, of opposing what he has earlier called the "evolutionary appetite." Granted, that "society must always draw a line somewhere between allowable conduct and insanity or crime," we must still "be very careful what we persecute." Shaw, therefore, argues for a broad tolerance, with limits of acceptability defined liberally rather than conservatively, widely rather than narrowly. As cautionary examples, he mentions such incidents as the imprisonment of pacifist Quakers during wartime and the 1920 attack of the British Government upon Irish "advocates of a constitutional change which it [i.e., the British Government] had presently to effect itself." Shaw reminds his readers that Joan's society afforded her a fair trial even during the stress and strain of civil war (between those French who supported the Dauphin and those who did not). Therefore, Shaw concludes, "there was not the smallest ground for the self-complacent conviction of the nineteenth century that it was more tolerant than the fifteenth."

Example: Shaw returns at several points to the practice of inoculation. "Various forms of inoculation were used from ancient times in China, India, and Persia, but it remained for the English physician Edward Jenner in the late 18th century to demonstrate its feasibility to the Western world". Judging from Shaw's comments in the preface, all controversy regarding the practice and the mandating of it had not yet died down.

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Notes In an arresting and provocative passage near the end of the preface, Shaw makes the point again that modern society is no less credulous than medieval society. He categorizes such spiritualist beliefs as mediums, clairvoyance and slate writing (i.e., "spirit writing") together with such scientific items as "astronomers who tell us that the sun is nearly a hundred million miles away and that Betelgeuse is ten times as big as the whole universe" as well as atomic researchers. He does so not because he believes the scientists are wrong and the spiritualists correct, but rather to emphasize that "modern science has convinced us that nothing that is obvious is true." Modern science demands every bit as much "faith" as medieval religion or the spiritualism of Shaw's day.

Turning finally to his own drama, Shaw reminds the readers that he has, because of the practical limits of the theatre, compressed the time frame in which events occurred and has combined some historical participants into composite characters. In short, he has taken dramatic license. He defends also the fact that his characters show, on the stage, awareness of their society that their historical counterparts would not have had, or at the least would not have articulated. He argues that such a theatrical device is needed to show the audience what impersonal societal forces were at work in Joan's day and, indeed, are still at work in their own. He criticizes the plays of Shakespeare for creating the impression that "the world is finally governed by vulgarly ambitious individuals who make rows." Shaw could thus be said to be rejecting what some later, twentieth and twenty-first century historians have referred to as the "Great Man" theory of history, in favor of a reading of history that privileges the work of larger societal forces.

Further, Shaw insists, "There are no villains in the piece. It is what men do at their best, with good intentions, and what normal men and women find that they must and will do in spite of their best intentions that really concern us." Shaw relegates villains to melodrama; he is concerned with tragedy. He allows that tragedy, as a genre, inevitably falsifies its characters; but such falsification occurs for the greater good of making them intelligible to the audience, and therefore helping the audiences to better understand life. "[T]he things I represent these [characters] as saying," Shaw states, "are the things they actually would have said if they had know what they were really doing."

In closing, Shaw rejects calls from critics for shortening his play (which he says runs the accepted classical length of three hours for a tragedy), including calls to excise the epilogue. He defends the play as he has written it: "I write in the classical manner for those who pay for admission to a theatre because they like classical comedy or tragedy for its own sake, and like it so much when it is good of its kind and well done that they tear themselves away from it with reluctance."

23.1.2 Analysis

In his classic book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, the nineteenth-century theologian, historian, and humanitarian Albert Schweitzer concluded that everyone finds the Jesus whom they intend to find. Judging from Shaw's preface, we might well say the same of Joan. "She comes to us as one unknown," we might say, revealing our own selves to us. Shaw hammers away at this point with his characteristic wit and vigor throughout the preface. At one point, for instance, he states that most-indeed, perhaps all-previous artistic interpreters and historians of Joan's life "illustrate the too little considered truth that the fashion in which we think changes like the fashion of our clothes, and that it is difficult, if not impossible, for most people to think otherwise than in the fashion of their own period." Readers would be justified in applying Shaw's own words to himself. To what extent does Shaw think in the fashion of his day, and to what extent has he actually achieved the larger viewpoint that he seeks? Shaw is quick to criticize other artists' representations of Joan. Does he posit that he is offering a superior view, or simply a different one? Whatever readers decide, they can at least credit him for

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announcing his presuppositions at the outset. Saint Joan may or may not offer a historically accurate representation of its events, but at least we know that its author has tried to be accurate; and, in addition, it offers all readers an example in the possibilities and limits of doing history, of attempting to understand another era, as we would say, "from the inside out."

23.2 Scene I

23.2.1 Summary

The play's action begins in a room in Vaucouleurs, the castle of Captain Robert de Baudricourt, military commander, in the spring of 1429. Baudricourt is berating one of his servants, who has just informed him that there are no fresh eggs to be had that morning. Baudricourt is convinced that someone, perhaps this servant himself, has stolen the hens-as well as the cows, for there was no fresh milk to be had the day before. The servant informs Baudricourt that, on the contrary, the cows have stopped giving milk and the hens have stopped laying eggs ever since the captain refused to grant an audience to "The Maid." The girl is still at the castle, still insistent upon seeing Baudricourt. "She is so positive," the servant says of her, noting that all the captain's host is encouraged by her. Exasperated at the girl's stubbornness, Baudricourt summons her to him.

"The Maid" is, of course, Joan. Immediately upon meeting Baudricourt, she asks him to supply her with a horse, armor, and troops for a military expedition to Orleans, where the Dauphin (a title for the eldest son of the King of France or heir to the throne; in this context, the future King Charles VII) is being besieged by the invading English armies, thus being kept from assuming the throne. Baudricourt is shocked by her plans; he is even more shocked when the girl tells him that her plan is actually the will of God. She tells him she has already secured the aid of Bertrand de Poulengey (whom she casually calls "Polly") and John of Metz (whom she similarly calls "Jack"), as well as other soldiers and servants of Baudricourt.

Still astonished, Baudricourt dismisses Joan and summons de Poulengey. He questions him about Joan. He suspects "Polly" of harboring untoward intentions toward the young lady. Polly insists that there is nothing improper about his interest in Joan. "There is something about her," he tells Baudricourt, pointing out that Joan has inspired hope in French soldiers when neither the Dauphin nor La Hire, one of his military commanders, can. He wonders if supporting Joan in her quest to rid France of its English invaders, and to see Charles crowned as king, may not simply be the most practical course of action. Polly calls Joan "the last card left in our hand. Better play her than throw up the game." When Baudricourt questions Joan's sanity, Polly only replies, "We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us!"

After a further interview with Joan, Baudricourt—seemingly, hardly able to believe it himself—agrees to give the Maid his support. He warns her that defeating the English will be more difficult than she expects, but Joan is confident that she will be able to beat the "goddams," as the English soldiers are called: "One thousand like me can stop them. Ten like me can stop them with God on our side." She says she will teach them that they belong in England, just as the French belong in France. As Joan departs, Baudricourt's servant returns to make the unexpected report, "The hens are laying lie mad, sir." Baudricourt can only conclude, "She did come from God."

23.2.2 Analysis

Scene I presents, on a small scale, many of the themes that will occupy the play on a larger scale by its conclusion. For example, much of what seemingly persuades Baudricourt to support Joan is her appeal to nationalism. Recall that, in the preface, Shaw called Joan an early advocate of nationalism,

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a social and intellectual movement that, by definition, undercuts all claims to catholicity (or universality), including any claims of a "catholic" Church. Nationalism cannot be catholic; it is particular and specific. As Joan says, "God made [the English] just like us; but He gave them their own country and their own language." Nationalism also stands in contrast to medieval feudalism: instead of vassals owing loyalty to their feudal masters, people now owe loyalty to their country, their nation. Joan summarizes the position nationalism occupies between feudalism and catholicism when she states, "We are all subject to the King of Heaven; and He gave us our countries and our languages, and meant us to keep to them."

Notes The first scene also loudly announces Shaw's theme of the salvific nature of imagination.

Even the description Shaw gives of Joan in his stage directions heralds this theme: Joan's "eyes [are] very wide apart and bulging as they often do in very imaginative people"—and also, doubtless, indicative of her status as a "Galtonic visualizer". While de Poulengey does not give credence to Joan's reports of visions of and conversations with the saints, he cannot deny the practical effects her inspiration and motivation are having on French soldiers. He cannot deny, "There is something about the girl." As Shaw said in the preface, the truth of the visions does not have to be granted in order to grant the truth of the visions' outcomes, or the commonsense appeal of Joan's policies and goals. "Her words and her ardent faith," says Polly, "have put fire into me"—and that fire is exactly what the French need in their current situation. Imagination—the ability to see more and to see truly than others—will be the key to France's salvation from English domination. Joan herself puts it plainly: when Baudricourt says, accusingly, that the voices she hears conveying God's will come from her imagination, she replies with great assurance, "Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us." The playwright's unspoken warning is: Let those who ignore the divine message mediated through imagination beware! The rest of the play will show who is able to respond, and who is not, and what eventually happens to each.

23.3 Scene II

23.3.1 Summary

Charles the Dauphin and his court are at the central French town of Chinon. As the scene begins, four courtiers-Georges, Duc de la Trémouille, the Lord Chamberlain (the most important official in a royal household and counselor to the monarch); Regnault de Chartres, the Archbishop of Rheims (where the cathedral in which all French kings have been crowned is located); Captain Gilles de Rais, or "Bluebeard" for the "extravagance of a little curled beard dyed blue" which he sports, an aristocrat and military commander; and another commander, Captain La Hire are discussing the accidental drowning of a solider whose death Joan supposedly prophesied because he was swearing. The Dauphin enters, interrupting the conversation, excited about the news he has received that Baudricourt is sending Joan to him: "He is sending a saint: an angel. And she is coming to me. She knows the blood royal." Archbishop de Chartres protests that Charles cannot have an audience with Joan: "This creature is not a saint. She is not even a respectable woman." La Hire proposes finding out what Joan is by testing her: when she arrives, Gilles de Rais will impersonate the Dauphin. If she can see through the deception, she will be permitted to speak to Charles. All agree to the plan, though for different reasons. Charles, for instance, wants to know that Joan can, in fact, detect the royal blood in him; De Chartres, on the other hand-who knows full well that, because the Dauphin's physical description is common knowledge, Joan will be able to reject Gilles de Rais as an impostor-hopes that her "miracle" of detection will "confirm or create faith."

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Joan, of course, does recognize that La Hire is not the Dauphin, and she is quickly introduced to Charles. They speak privately. Joan urges a reluctant Charles to accept his destiny: "[T]hou must face what God puts on thee." Charles is loath to engage his enemies in combat, for "one good treaty is worth ten good fights." Joan insists, however, that it cannot be France's English invaders who are allowed to set the terms of any treaties. Charles further protests that he does not want to be king. Joan at last "tempts" him (Shaw's word in the stage directions) by outlining for him her vision of a united France at peace. Charles calls his court back into session and announces that he has given command of his army to Joan-an announcement that sits well with neither La Trémouille nor De Chartres.

23.3.2 Analysis

Scene II raises the question of how much Joan is actually commanding the situation around her, and how much others are using her to advance their own agenda. As did Baudricourt and Polly in Scene I, the character in this scene recognize that supporting Joan's crusade is a pragmatic, common sense decision. General Jack Dunois-the so-called "Bastard of Orleans" because he was the natural son of Louis, Duke of Orleans, Charles' father whom the Burgundians had assassinated-has been unable to take his troops across the Loire River to attack the English because the wind has been blowing against him; therefore, the characters ask, might not Joan, for all her talk of saints and angels and visions, be able to do some good? The tone of Scene II, however, is quite different. Whereas Polly seemingly expressed a genuine hope, the outlook expressed here is more marked by cynicism and weariness. Consider, for instance, La Trémouille's line: "Oh, let them have their way. Dunois' men will give up the town in spite of him if somebody does not put some fresh spunk into them." Also note how Archbishop de Chartres moves quickly from summary dismissal of Joan and her claims to a posture of asserting ecclesiastical authority over her: "The Church must examine the girl before anything is done about her." La Trémouille and De Chartres' conversation about Joan and miracles, in fact, emphasizes the degree to which Joan is vulnerable to being manipulated by others: the Archbishop views her as a potential "miracle," not in any supernatural sense, but as "an event which creates faith," even if the supposedly "miraculous" aspects can be rationally accounted for. Notice also how the Archbishop, who scoffed at the idea that Joan prophesied Foul Mouthed Frank's death, then makes a similar prophecy of his own regarding De Rais, invoking Joan's authority with the soldiers as his own. In these and other ways, Scene II dramatizes the claim Shaw made in the preface: that Joan, for all her energy and positive action, was always at the mercy of institutional and social forces larger than she understood.

Joan adopts an almost maternal attitude toward Charles in Scene II: she calls him the diminutive and intimate "Charlie," for example, and she calls him a "poor child" whom she will have to teach to pray. Yet she also seems childlike, especially in her attitude of absolute and immediate subjection toward De Chartres: "Oh, my lord, you have given me such strength, such courage. It must be a most wonderful thing to be Archbishop." This tension, too, dramatizes statements Shaw has made about Joan in the preface, and illustrates the paradoxical nature of her character.

Task Illustrate the fact that Joan adopts an almost maternal attitude toward Charles in scene II.

This scene reinforces the preface in a further manner. De Chartres recognizes that "a new spirit [is] rising" in the age. "We are at the dawning of a wider epoch," he states—an epoch, readers can infer, in which rationalism will carry the day away from religion. As a result, the Archbishop acts with

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great pragmatism. Not only does the Archbishop's recognition of what we could call a new zeitgeist illustrate Shaw's depiction of Joan as a proto-Protestant and—Nationalist, it also is one example of his practice of having his characters say "what they would have said" if they fully understood their own actions and socio-cultural setting.

In both his stage directions and in the exchange of dialogue between De Rais and the Archbishop about his destiny on the gallows, Shaw is alluding to the fact that the historical De Rais is considered a forerunner of the modern "serial killer." For the murder of several young victims, de Rais was hanged; although he suffered this temporal capital punishment, he avoided the spiritual fate of excommunication by voluntary confession. Shaw does not fully develop the parallels he sees, if any, between Joan's trial and de Rais', likely because most academic historians today do not dispute de Rais' crimes. It is interesting, however, that both Joan and de Rais found themselves tried and executed, and that the one who died in the good graces of the Church-de Rais—was, history has shown, the true criminal, as opposed to Joan, who died a "relapsed heretic."

23.4 Scene III

23.4.1 Summary

The chronology of the play advances by almost two months, to Orleans on April 29, 1429 (the date on which French forces, led by Joan, entered the city). Captain Dunois, the "Bastard of Orleans," is lamenting the fact that the wind has not shifted in his favor when he receives word that Joan approaches. Joan urges that she, Dunois, and the French forces cross the bridge leading into Orleans, but Dunois advises her that matters are not as simple as that and gently chastises her for her impatience. He tells her she is in love with war (just as, in Scene II, de Chartres told her she was in love with religion). He explains that, without a change in the wind, the French rafts carrying heavy artillery with which to attack the English fortifications cannot progress upstream. He says he will take Joan to church that she may pray for a west wind. Almost immediately, Dunois' pageboy sneezes. Miraculously, the wind has changed. Dunois is now convinced that "God has spoken," and he and Joan lead the French into battle.

23.4.2 Analysis

This brief scene dramatizes the turning point of the battle of Orleans, which lasted from April 29 to May 9, and was, in itself, a turning point in the entire Hundred Years' War. The English had besieged Orleans since October 12 of the previous year. Shaw, who does not dramatize other dramatic moments from Joan's biography in his play-neither Joan's visions, Charles' coronation, nor Joan's burning are themselves shown on stage (see Shaw's comments about dramatic spectacle in the preface)-does choose to depict this key moment in the French campaign. Readers may wish to consider why this scene emerges as the one true "action moment" in this drama that is otherwise mainly occupied by dialogue.

In an essay entitled "On Playing Joan," actress Imogen Stubbs has written humorously of the practical difficulties staging this scene involves: "This requires a banner, a wind machine, and a sense of humour. We had nightmares with that moment. The poor boy whose only aim was to leap up and down and shout at the wind! the wind!—It's changed!' would either have to scream above the sound of a Boeing 707 taking off, or stare at the limp banner and say 'The wind! The wind! I'm sure it's about to change,' rush into the wings screaming 'Point the machine higher you idiots' and then rush back on stage and say 'God has spoken". When staged successfully, this scene could provoke audiences to consider whether, in fact, God has spoken, or whether the shifting wind is—like the drowning of "Foul-Mouthed Frank," discussed in Scene II—another coincidence into which we are free to read what we will, or what we hope to find.

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Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Immediately upon meeting Baudricourt Saint Joan asks him supply her with
   (a) horse, armor, and troops
   (b) extra troops and foods for the soldier
   (c) horse, armor and troops for a rescue operation
   (d) back supply and extra troops for military expedition.
2. The scene III dramatizes the turning point of
   (a) Second World War (b) battle of Orleans
   (c) the battle of French with the British (d) The First World War.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Charles the Dauphin and his court are at the central French town of ..... .
4. What persuades Baudricourt to support Joan is her appeal to ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. Shaw praises Joan as "very capable" and "a born boss," but reminds us that she was, after all, an adolescent girl.
6. Scene III raises the question of how much Joan is actually commanding the situation around her, and how much others are using her to advance their own agenda.
7. The chronology of the play advances by almost two months, to Orleans on April 29, 1429, the date on which French forces, led by Joan, entered the city.

23.5 Scene IV

23.5.1 Summary

Several battles after Joan and Dunois recaptured Orleans, Richard de Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick; and Chaplain Stogumber are in a tent in an English camp. Stogumber is most distressed at seeing English forces defeated abroad. Warwick (he is referred to by his title) cannot quite understand the priest's self-identification as an "Englishman," but he does understand that such burgeoning nationalism is a threat to both Stogumber's ecclesiastical authority and his own authority as a feudal lord. To reassure Stogumber, however, that Joan's campaign will not ultimately succeed, Warwick shares with the chaplain plans to get Joan under English control: "Some of Charles's people will sell her to the Burgundians; the Burgundians will sell her to us."

The chaplain and the nobleman receive a visitor: Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais. Warwick tells Cauchon that Stogumber believes Joan to be a witch, and suggests that Cauchon would have to turn Joan over to the Inquisition "and have her burnt for that offence." While the chaplain points to Joan's recovery on the battlefield at Orleans from what seemed to be a mortal wound, as well as to the very fact that her forces have bested those of the English, as evidence of her sorcery, Cauchon has a different opinion of the Maid: "She is not a witch. She is a heretic." He believes the Devil is using Joan to strike, not against the English nation, but against the whole Catholic Church-indeed, against "the souls of the entire human race."

Warwick mistakenly believes that the bishop is already disposed to help him find a way of killing Joan; with much indignation, Cauchon announces that he is no puppet. "You great lords are too

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prone to treat The Church as a mere political convenience. [T]he soul of this village girl is of equal value with yours or your king's before the throne of God; and my first duty is to save it." He does not deny, however, that he can divide Joan's spiritual fate from her temporal one, and that, if she is declared to be excommunicated from the Church, she could be handed over to the temporal authorities for such punishment as those authorities deem fit. In response, Warwick suggests that "the practical problem would seem to be how to save her soul without saving her body." At first, Cauchon is primarily angry about the way Joan sets herself above the Church; but Warwick argues that Joan is equally as much a threat to "the temporal power," the aristocracy. In short, Joan proposes "a transaction which would wreck the whole social structure of Christendom." Joan is a "Protestant." In the end, all three men agree that-alluding to John 11:50, knowingly or not-"[i]t is expedient that one woman die for the people."

23.5.2 Analysis

The wind has changed in more senses than the literal. With Scene IV, Shaw's play reaches a turning point as Joan's campaign did with Scene III. Until this point, Shaw has focused on Joan's supporters. Now, her opponents take the stage. Ironically, representatives of the two great, opposing armies of England and France find common ground, though for different reasons, in their desire to see Joan's cause brought to an end. Scene IV thus offers further, ample evidence of Shaw's technique (which he announced in his preface) of having characters speak as though they possessed the one-step-removed, dispassionate understanding of their own time and situation that Shaw possesses. Cauchon's assessment of Joan as a heretic rather than a witch, for example, shows that the bishop understands the true nature of the alleged threat that Joan represents: the threats of proto-Protestantism that undercuts the Church's magisterial authority, and of fledgling Nationalism that undercuts the authority of the medieval feudal system. The historical Cauchon would not, of course, have spoken in such terms; but Shaw enables his theatrical Cauchon to do so in order to dramatize the interplay of these various social forces.

In keeping with the spirit of Shaw's preface, which continually forces the modern era to justify its (in Shaw's eyes unjustifiable) sense of superiority to the Middle Ages, readers may choose to reflect on Cauchon's comment that, in a world where Joan's individualistic "Protestantism" becomes the spirit of the age, life will be filled with more blood, fury, and devastation. How many times have these terms proved apt to describe the post-medieval course of human civilization, especially in the 20th century in the early years of which Shaw was writing Saint Joan, having just witnessed the disillusioning horrors of World War I? To be sure, few, if any, in 21st century American society would choose to live under the structures of feudal aristocracy and medieval ecclesiastical power. Even so, we might pause to ask if our society could benefit from some arrangement in which "the individual soul" is not the ultimate seat of authority. Readers may ask: What institutions, if any, possess the potential of unifying society without crushing individual freedom and responsibility? Can the two goals be mutually achieved, or must they always remain in tension and, if so, how can the tension be a creative one?

Notes The word "Protestant," applied to Joan not only in this scene but also in the preface, was an originally pejorative term (as it is in Warwick's speech) that did not arise until the 16th century. In its essential meaning, however—literally, one who protests—it is applicable not only to Joan but also to Hus and Wycliffe, whom Cauchon mentions.

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23.6 Scene V

23.6.1 Summary

The setting is the "ambulatory," or area behind the altar at the east end of a cathedral, of Rheims Cathedral, shortly after the Dauphin has been crowned King Charles VII. Joan is at prayer. She is interrupted by Dunois, who tells her the crowds outside are calling for her. Joan thanks Dunois for his friendship, and wonders why "all these courtiers and knights and churchmen" hate her. Dunois tells her that no one enjoys or appreciates being bested by those whom they regard as their inferiors. When Joan announces her assumption that the French forces will now press on to recapture Paris, Dunois warns her that she will not be allowed to do so. And, in fact when the newly anointed Charles arrives, with Rais and La Hire, he does recoil at the thought of marching on for Paris. He suggests making a treaty with the Burgundians instead: "[L]et us be content with what we have done." When Joan protests, the Archbishop de Chartres, who has just entered the scene, warns Joan of her pride: "You forget yourself. You very often forget yourself." And Dunois, even though he is a friend to Joan, reminds her that his military generalship contributed in no small part to the French successes: "I know exactly how much God did for us through The Maid, and how much He left me to do by my own wits." He states that Joan is in danger of being captured by her enemies if she continues to press on against numerically superior forces.

Example: A price of 16,000 English pounds is on her head, and Dunois knows that no one from the army, the state, or the church will "lift a finger" to help Joan should she be captured. "You stand alone," the Archbishop tells her. Rather than causing Joan to despair, this statement seems to determine her defiance and her resolve: "Yes. I have always been alone. France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God?" She marches out to meet the crowds who are calling for her, while her companions express sorrow over what now seems to be her inevitable fate.

23.6.2 Analysis

As did Scene IV, Scene V illustrates the way in which "commonsense" and realism is turning against Joan. Joan argues that no mystic voices need to make the commonsense case for "striking while the iron is hot" and marching on to Paris. She appeals to the sensible reasons she has provided for all of her actions, even if the promptings came from saints and angels. Dunois and the others do not dispute any of this, but they do insist that commonsense dictates against any one coming to Joan's aid should she press too far. Dunois, for example, whom Shaw portrays as Joan's strongest and staunchest supporter in the play, makes the cool, level-headed calculation that he will not be able to risk the lives of his men in an effort to rescue Joan, "much as I cherish her as a companion-in-arms." Joan's cause has reached a point at which she would be better off, as she says, going home to her farm. Part of her tragedy, as Shaw reads her story, is that Joan did not recognize her limitations and the limitations of others. He does present her as prideful-and, as the Archbishop admonishes her, alluding to a biblical proverb, "Pride will have a fall." The falling action of Shaw's classical tragedy is clearly taking shape.

23.7 Scene VI

23.7.1 Summary

Two years after Scene V-May 30, 1431-Joan's trial is coming to its close at the castle of Rouen. Cauchon has convened the court. Canon John D'Estivet is the "promoter," or prosecutor; and Brother John Lemaitre is at the proceedings in his capacity as representative of the Inquisition. The Inquisition

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has only recently become involved in the case, he says, for only recently has the Inquisitor decided that Joan's is "one of the gravest cases of heresy within [his] experience." The Earl of Warwick makes it clear that he is looking forward to a hasty resolution and condemnation of Joan; Cauchon affirms again that Joan shall have a fair hearing, for "[t]he Church is not subject to political necessity." D'Estivet and the Inquisitor, however, remark that Joan has been doing much to condemn herself, every time she has opened her mouth in her previous examinations.

Not all of Joan's opponents are satisfied with the proceedings thus far, however. Chaplain de Stogumber and De Courcelles, a Parisian cleric, arrive and protest that the Inquisitor has reduced the charges against Joan, eliminating a number of what the Inquisitor considers lesser matters-for example, a charge that Joan stole a bishop's horse, or that she dances "round fairy trees with the village children, and praying at haunted wells, and a dozen other things." The Inquisitor is firm: "Heresy, gentlemen, heresy is the charge we have to try." He points out that they cannot leave a door open for Joan to defend herself successfully against lesser charges while the most important charge of heresy remains, inferring that any acquittal Joan might gain, however small, would undercut the case against her. He reminds his hearers that Joan's heresy in particular cannot be overlooked or forgiven, for she is one of many "vain and ignorant persons setting up their own judgment against the Church, and taking it upon themselves to be the interpreters of God's will." He urges the court to remember mercy, but also to insist upon justice and to set aside their natural compassion: "[R]emember that nothing is so cruel in its consequences as the toleration of heresy." Cauchon labels Joan's error the "arch heresy" of "Protestantism," which, if left unchecked, could well bring the "mighty structure of Catholic Christendom" to ruin.

A guard of English soldiers brings Joan, in shackles, before the court. Joan protests her treatment, but is told that nothing else can be done, for she tried to jump out the window of the tower where she was being held. Joan retorts that of course she tried to escape; it was a commonsense action, and her survival of the jump is a sign, not of witchcraft, but the degree to which the tale has grown in the re-telling-the tower's height has been exaggerated. Joan insists that she is neither a witch nor mad: "I am reasonable if you will be reasonable." When talk of making her yet again swear an oath to tell the truth arises, Joan refuses, claiming, "God does not allow the whole truth to be told." She further declares that she will not profess that her voices and visions, and the actions they prompted, spring from any diabolical source: "What God made me do I will never go back on; and what He has commanded or shall command I will not fail to do in spite of any man alive. My voices do not tell me to disobey the Church; but God must be served first."

At length, Joan realizes in horror that the stake is being readied for her even at that moment. Frightened, she says, after prompting from the court officials, that her voices have misled her. In order to avoid excommunication (the spiritual punishment) and execution (the temporal one), Joan makes her mark on a document of recantation. De Stogumber and other English officials are furious when the Inquisitor allows Joan to recant. Her recanting, however, does not last long, for a sentence is still pronounced: Joan must spend the rest of her life in prison, with only bread and water for sustenance. Now understanding that she is not to be set free, Joan tears up the recantation. Now judged as a "relapsed heretic," the Inquisitor and Cauchon solemnly intone the judgment of excommunication, and Joan is led away to the stake. The Inquisitor remarks, "[I]t is a terrible thing to see a young and innocent creature crushed between these mighty forces, the Church and the Law."

After Joan is burnt, de Stogumber, who has witnessed it all, returns to the castle interior, where he seeks consolation from Warwick. He laments, "I did not know what I was doing." He relates how Joan, as she burned, asked for a cross, and a nearby soldier took two sticks and tied them together for her. She clutched the cross until it was snatched from her, and as she died, she warned Ladvenu, another of the court officials, not to get too close to the flames. She thought of another's danger at her own moment of death. "Jesus!" the chaplain cries. "She is in Thy bosom; and I am in hell forevermore." Ladvenu prophesies, "This is not the end for her, but the beginning." And though the executioner reports that there is nothing left of Joan's body-save her heart, which would not burn Warwick believes that none have heard the last of Joan of Arc.

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23.7.2 Analysis

In the penultimate scene of his drama, Shaw depicts Joan as the proto-Protestant he holds her to be: adamantly insisting upon the privileged position of her individual relationship to God, over and against the Church's magisterial authority to interpret and pronounce God's will; denying that the Church is wiser than she is, simply because the Church claims it is; and affirming her right of conscience to obey God as she understands such obedience. All the arguments that Shaw has been making about Joan throughout the play-her Nationalism, her Protestantism, her Rationalism, her Imagination-come to fruition in this scene. Some readers may feel, ironically, that Shaw, although he has set out to humanize Joan and strip away the "whitewashing" of centuries of legend and piety, he has substituted an equally "mythic" Joan in the former construct's place. On the other hand, readers must remember Shaw's intention, stated in the preface, to dramatize social forces, and to have his characters speak as they never could have in history. To a large extent, this intention accounts for Joan's emergence in Scene VI as virtually the incarnation of the modern spirit-despite her "imagery" (as Shaw called it in the preface) of saints and angels-in the face of the medieval spirit.

Yet Shaw does not let modern audiences rest easy in congratulatory self-satisfaction-another of Shaw's stated intentions. For example, the Inquisitor's lengthy speech justifying the Inquisition and its courts as a kindness gives modern readers pause. We are all too aware that the worst of actions can be justified under the best and most sincere of intentions. Indeed, as the Inquisitor himself states, "Heresy at first seems innocent and even laudable. [Heretics] believe honestly and sincerely that their diabolical inspiration is divine." Shaw unsettles his audience, leading them to wonder, as he does in the preface, if their own cherished "orthodoxies" are no less diabolical. Again, Shaw is dramatizing what he sees as the horror of intolerance. Joan is, in this sense, a martyr to society's need to preserve itself a legitimate need, but only when not taken too far, as Shaw believes it was in this case and still was in many cases in his own day. He does not offer any easy answers or solutions; his purpose is to confront us with the dilemma, and that purpose has achieved.

23.8 Epilogue

23.8.1 Summary

A quarter-century after Joan's death, King Charles VII is falling asleep over a book in bed when Ladvenu enters his chambers to tell him that Joan, in a new ecclesiastical inquiry, has been rehabilitated and judged innocent. Ladvenu reflects on the irony: at Joan's first trial, justice was administered fairly and truth was told, and yet she was burned; at her second, falsehood prevailed in testimony and procedure, and yet the Maid has been justified. Charles' sole concern is that he is now no longer open to charges that he was crowned by a witch and a heretic. He also talks about the hypocrisy of Joan's latter—day judges: "If you could bring her back to life, they would burn her again within six months, for all their present adoration of her."

After Ladvenu leaves, Charles sleeps and dreams. Joan appears to him in his dream. Joan reacts to news of her rehabilitation with typical commonsense: "I was burned, all the same. Can they unburn me?" Charles admits, "If they could, they would think twice before they did it."

More figures from the past-some dead, others who are also asleep, elsewhere, but whose spirits have been mystically summoned by the spirit of Joan-enter Charles' dream. Cauchon manifests himself, relating how, as a result of the second inquest into Joan's case, he is not allowed to rest in peace; his corpse has been unearthed and flung into the sewer, so great is the public's hatred of him, so thoroughgoing has the vilification of him been. Dunois appears, telling Joan that he has kept his

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word and has rid France of the English. And the soldier who fashioned the cross for Joan at her burning makes his entrance, also making the rather startling announcement that he is in hell, but receives one "day off" each year for that good deed that he did for Joan. Charles and the others also glimpses the future canonization of Joan as a saint, thanks to the entrance of a gentleman from the 1920s who announces the news of Joan's elevation to sainthood.

The epilogue and play end with a striking contrast of "litanies." One by one, the characters in the dream offer their praises to Saint Joan, reciting the various reasons why she is to be lauded. Joan then declares, "Woe unto me when all men praise me!" She asks who among her chorus of admirers would want her to return from the dead. One by one, each character rejects her. No one, given, the choice, would have her back. Only the anonymous solider stays with her, until he, too, leaves, summoned back to Hell at the stroke of midnight. The last line of the play echoes biblical language of lament as Joan cries out, "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

23.8.2 Analysis

When the anonymous soldier who made the cross for Joan tells her that his fifteen' years service in the French wars was worse than his eternal damnation in Hell, Joan flings up her arms, a gesture, the stage directions inform us, of "despair of humanity." That phrase could be seen as an apt summary of Shaw's epilogue. Repeatedly, the playwright makes the point, through his characters, that Joan would be no more welcome in the modern world than she was in the medieval one. The litany of rejection that follows immediately after the litany of praise makes this point in a dramatic fashion, as does the play's famous final line. Some readers may feel that Shaw exercises a heavy hand, but he does not want the moral of his version of Joan's story to go unnoticed and unheeded. Joan's lamentation in the face of men's praise makes the point-as the Archbishop warned her in Scene V-that Joan is alone in death, even as she was in life. Shaw leaves his audience and his readers with a vision of Joan as imaginative genius, one of those singular members of the human race who embody its super-personal drive for evolution, for advancement, for change and who also embody the resistance to such development that is inevitably encountered. The plaintive question on Joan's lips as the curtain falls, surely, is Shaw's own.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

8. Two years after scene V, May 30, 1431, Joan's trial is coming to its close
   (a) at the castle of Rouen (b) in a room in Orleans
   (c) in a room in Vaucouleurs (d) in the battle field of Orleans.
9. All the arguments that Shaw has been making about Joan throughout the play—her Nationalism, Protestantism, her Rationalism, her Imagination—come to fruition in
   (a) scene V (b) scene VI
   (c) epilogue (d) scene IV.

Fill in the blanks:

10. Several battles after Joan and Dunois recaptured Orleans, ..., the Earl of Warwick; and Chaplain Stogumber are in a tent in an English camp.
11. Joan thanks Dunois for his friendship, and wonders why all these courtiers and ..... hate her.

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State whether the following statements are true or false:

12. Scene V illustrates the way in which "commonsense" and realism is turning against Joan.

13. After Ladvenu leaves, Charles sleeps and dreams, Joan appears to him in his dream and Joan reacts to news of her rehabilitation with typical commonsense.

23.9 Summary

- Joan, a teenage country girl, shows up at the castle of Vaucouleurs. She's determined to kick the English out of France and to crown the Dauphin (that's a title for the oldest son of a king of France), Charles, as King.
- Joan has heard voices from God telling her that this is her destiny. Through sheer confidence and natural charisma, she manages to sway the skeptical Captain Robert de Baudricourt. He gives her soldier's clothes, armor, and other supplies to assist in getting to the Dauphin.
- Upon arriving at Charles's court, Joan wins over most everybody. First, she's able to pick Charles out of a crowd, which some view as a miracle. Her humility and reverence for the Church get the Archbishop on her side. Then of course, there's the Dauphin himself. It takes a little doing, but after a good old fashioned pep talk she convinces him to stop messing around and stand up for France and himself. Charles grants her control of the army.
- She's off to Orleans, a town under siege by the English. Joan meets Dunois, the leader of the French troops at Orleans. He has been waiting for a while for the wind to change. It's the only way he can sail his soldiers up the river and launch a sneak attack on the English.
- When the wind switches directions upon Joan's arrival, Dunois is convinced that Joan has been sent by God. They march off together, to liberate Orleans.
- Meanwhile, Joan's enemies are plotting against her. The Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber, both Englishmen, meet with Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais. Warwick wants Cauchon to try Joan for heresy.
- The angry little Chaplain just wants her to die and die painfully. Cauchon agrees to try Joan, but refuses to be a political tool of the English. He says that he will do his best to save her soul.
- Joan and company have been busy little bees. They've liberated Orleans, won a bunch of other battles, and have just crowned Charles as King in Rheims Cathedral. Joan, however, is unsatisfied. A good chunk of the country, including Paris, is still not under French control. She urges Charles, the Archbishop, and Dunois to press on and liberate the capital city. When they refuse she says she'll just do it without them. They tell her that, if she gets captured, they'll do nothing to help her escape.
- Joan gets captured and put on trial for heresy. Sure enough, her "friends" do nothing to rescue her. The Bishop Cauchon, true to his word, does everything he can to try and save her. He's helped in this effort by the Inquisitor. It proves to be impossible, though, because Joan's personal beliefs just don't jive with the Church's.
- She thinks God's messengers speak to her directly. They think God's voice on Earth is the Church and the Church alone, meaning the voices she hears must be demons. They also just can't handle with her wearing men's clothes. She absolutely refuses to dress like a woman as long as she's a soldier. In the end, they're forced to condemn her to death.
- Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other characters show up to have a chat in his royal bedroom. We learn the fate of everybody and, more importantly, we learn of Joan's legacy.

Notes

- King Charles now rules all of France. He set up a hearing to have her name cleared. We also learn from a time-traveling cleric that, many years afterward, Joan was made a saint by the Catholic Church. Everybody tells Joan how awesome she is and how they're sorry that they sold her out. Joan says, great, now can I come back to Earth as living person again? No way, says everybody and they all make excuses to exit the dream.
- At the end of the play, Joan is left alone in a pool of light. She asks God when the world will be ready to accept saints like her.

23.10 Keywords

Protestantism : Protestantism is one of the three major groupings (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism) within Christianity.

Nationalism : Nationalism is a political ideology that involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a political entity defined in national terms, *i.e.*, a nation.

Realism : Realism in the visual arts and literature refers to the general attempt to depict subjects "in accordance with secular, empirical rules", as they are considered to exist in third person objective reality, without embellishment or interpretation.

Feminism : Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women.

Rationalism : Rationalism is "any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification".

23.11 Review Questions

1. What does Saint Joan determined?
2. Illustrate and analyse the events of scene II.
3. Illustrate that the scene III dramatizes the turning point of the battle of Orleans.
4. Explain the fact that the epilogue and play end with a striking contrast of litanies.
5. Write a short notes on the events of:
   (a) Scene I (b) Scene IV (c) Scene VI

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. Chinon
4. Nationalism	5. True	6. False
7. True	8. (a)	9. (b)
10. Richard de Beauchamp	11. knights and churchmen	12. True
13. True		

Notes

23.12 Further Readings

Books

George Bernard Shaw, Harold Bloom (ed.). 1987. *Saint Joan*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (ed.). 2001. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.enotes.com/saint-joan/summary

http://www.shmoop.com/saint-joan/summary.html

Unit 10: Saint Joan: Epilogue and Plot

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the analysis of the epilogue;
- Illustrate the various plots hatched in the play;
- Give a detailed analysis of all the plots.

Introduction

A quarter-century after Joan's death, King Charles VII is falling asleep over a book in bed when Ladvenu enters his chambers to tell him that Joan, in a new ecclesiastical inquiry, has been rehabilitated and judged innocent. Ladvenu reflects on the irony: at Joan's first trial, justice was administered fairly and truth was told, and yet she was burned; at her second, falsehood prevailed in testimony and procedure, and yet the Maid has been justified. Charles' sole concern is that he is now no longer open to charges that he was crowned by a witch and a heretic. He also talks about the hypocrisy of Joan's latter-day judges: "If you could bring her back to life, they would burn her again within six months, for all their present adoration of her. This unit elaborates a detailed analysis of the epilogue and the plot hatched in this play.

10.1 Epilogue

Shaw characterised Saint Joan as "A Chronicle Play in six Scenes and an Epilogue". Joan, a simple peasant girl, hears voices which she claims to be those of Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine, and the archangel Michael, sent by God to guide her conduct.

Scene 1 begins with Robert de Baudricourt complaining about the inability of the hens on his farm to produce eggs. Joan claims that her voices are telling her to raise a siege against Orleans, and to allow her several of his men for this purpose. Joan also says that she will eventually crown the Dauphin in Rheims cathedral. De Baudricourt ridicules Joan, but his servant feels inspired by her

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words. De Baudricourt eventually begins to feel the same sense of inspiration, and gives his consent to Joan. The servant enters at the end of the scene to exclaim that the hens have begun to lay eggs again. De Baudricourt interprets this as a sign from God of Joan's divine inspiration.

In Scene 2 (8 March 1429), Joan talks her way into being received at the court of the weak and vain Dauphin. There, she tells him that her voices have commanded her to help him become a true king by rallying his troops to drive out the English occupiers and restore France to greatness. Joan succeeds in doing this through her excellent powers of flattery, negotiation, leadership, and skill on the battlefield.

In Scene 3 (29 April 1429), Dunois and his page are waiting for the wind to turn so that he and his forces can lay siege to Orléans. Joan and Dunois commiserate, and Dunois attempts to explain to her more pragmatic realities of an attack, without the wind at their back. Her replies eventually inspire Dunois to rally the forces, and at the scene's end, the wind turns in their favour.

Task Joan and Dunois commiserate, and Dunois attempts to explain to her more pragmatic realities of an attack, illustrate this statement in context of scene 3.

Ultimately she is betrayed, and captured by the English at the siege of Compiègne. Scene 6 (30 May 1431) deals with her trial. John de Stogumber is adamant that she be executed at once. The Inquisitor, the Bishop of Beauvais, and the Church officials on both sides of the trial have a long discussion on the nature of her heresy. Joan is brought to the court, and continues to assert that her voices speak to her directly from God and that she has no need of the Church's officials. This outrages de Stogumber. She acquiesces to the pressure of torture at the hands of her oppressors, and agrees to sign a confession relinquishing the truth behind her voices, so that she can live a life in permanent confinement without hope of parole. Upon hearing this, Joan changes her mind:

Joan: "You think that life is nothing but not being dead? It is not the bread and water I fear. I can live on bread. It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again climb the hills. To make me breathe foul damp darkness, without these things I cannot live. And by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your council is of the devil."

Notes Joan accepts the ultimate punishment of death at the stake as preferable to such an imprisoned existence. De Stogumber vehemently demands that Joan then be taken to the stake for immediate execution.

The Inquisitor and the Bishop of Beauvais excommunicate her and deliver her into the hands of the English. The Inquisitor asserts that Joan was fundamentally innocent, in the sense that she was sincere and had no understanding of the church and the law. De Stogumber re-enters, screaming and severely shaken emotionally after seeing Joan die in the flames, the first time that he has witnessed such a death, and realising that he has not understood what it means to burn a person at the stake until he has actually seen it happen. A soldier had given Joan two sticks tied together in a cross before the moment of her death. Bishop Martin Ladvenu also reports that when he approached with a cross to let her see the cross before she died, and he approached too close to the flames, she had warned him of the danger from the stake, which convinced him that she could not have been under the inspiration of the devil.

Did u know? In the Epilogue, 25 years after Joan's execution, a new trial has cleared her of heresy.

Notes

Brother Martin brings the news to the King Charles. Charles then has a dream in which Joan appears to him. She begins conversing cheerfully not only with Charles, but with her old enemies, who also materialise in the King's bedroom. An emissary from the present day (at the time of the play, the 1920s) brings news that the Catholic Church is to canonise her, in the year 1920. Joan says that saints can work miracles, and asks if she can be resurrected. At this, all the characters desert her one by one, asserting that the world is not prepared to receive a saint such as her. The last to leave is the English soldier, who is about to engage in a conversation with Joan before he is summoned back to hell at the end of his 24-hour respite. The play ends with Joan ultimately despairing that mankind will never accept its saints:

O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to accept thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Joan, a simple peasant girl, hears voices which she claims to be those of
   (a) Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine and archangel Michael
   (b) Saint Margaret and archangel Michael
   (c) Saint Catherine and Saint Maragaret
   (d) Saint Catherine and archangel Michael.
2. Saint Joan is betrayed and captured by the English at the siege of
   (a) Orleans (b) Compiègne
   (c) Stogumber (d) Vaucouleurs.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Joan accepts the ultimate punishment of death at the stake as preferable to such an ..... .
4. In the Epilogue, 25 years after Joan's execution, a new trial has cleared her of ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. De Stogumber vehemently opposes the immediate execution of Joan.
6. Church officials on both sides of the trial have a long discussion on the nature of her heresy.
7. In Scene 3 (29 April 1429), Dunois and his page are waiting for the wind to turn so that he and his forces can lay siege to Orléans.

24.2 Plot

Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients: the initial situation, conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion. Great writers sometimes shake up the recipe and add some spice.

The first scene does a great job of establishing Joan's character. Her charm, courage, and faith are on full display as she sways Robert and his soldiers to her side. The scene also establishes the generally unstately state of France. By the end of it we've got a good idea of who our protagonist is and the world she lives in. The stage is set for her to sally forth and kick some English butt.

Once Joan wins over Charles and gets control of the army, she can really get down to business. Her goals aren't small. She wants to raise the siege at Orleans, crown Charles at Rheims Cathedral, and expel the English out of France for good. The main conflict of the play is crystal clear.

Notes

In Scene Four, we see the Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber forming plans to take Joan down. They enlist the help of Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, who agrees to try her for heresy. By the end of this scene, we know better than Joan the barriers that are standing in her way.

After Charles gets crowned at Rheims, Joan's buddies want to sit back and relax. Joan, however, demands they get off their lazy butts and keep the fight going. The English aren't all gone. Paris isn't under French control. Tempers flare when her allies refuse to help her and accuse her of being prideful.

Notes Joan's friends warn her that if she continues the fight and gets captured, they won't lift a finger to help her escape. Perhaps foolishly, perhaps bravely, she swears to trust in her voices and continue the fight without them.

The action of the play begins to resolve as the captured Joan is convicted of heresy and is burnt at the stake.

Shaw ends the play with a dream sequence. We learn that, after Joan was executed, her name was cleared and she was made a saint. A bunch of characters, show up and tell Joan they're sorry that they dissed her back in the day. However, when Joan asks them if she should come back to Earth, they all freak out and leave. Joan ends the play by asking God if the world will ever be ready for saints.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

8. Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients such as
   (a) conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion
   (b) conflict and complication
   (c) suspense and climax
   (d) denouement, and conclusion.
9. In Scene Four, we see the Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber forming plans
   (a) to rescue Joan (b) to take Joan down
   (c) execute Joan (d) to chain Joan.

Fill in the blanks:

10. The first scene does a great job of establishing ..... .
11. Once Joan wins over Charles and gets control of the army, she can really get down to ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

12. Joan's friends warn her that if she continues the fight and gets captured, they won't lift a finger to help her escape.
13. After Charles gets crowned at Rheims, Joan's buddies agitated and hatched plots.

24.3 Summary

- The stage directions inform us that it's a dark and stormy night in June 1456.
- Charles, who is now King Charles VII, is reading in bed. He's 51.

Notes

- Ladvenu, 25 years older than last we saw him, enters the bedroom unannounced.
- Startled, the King jumps out of bed.
- Ladvenu tells the King that Joan's good name has been cleared. Apparently he's been obsessed with setting the record straight ever since her execution.
- He goes on to say that, unlike Joan's original trial, this recent hearing was full of lies and corruption. However, strangely enough, this time the truth was actually heard.
- Charles says he doesn't care how Joan's name got cleared, as long people can't criticize him for being crowned by a heretical sorceress.
- Ladvenu says that he should be thinking of Joan now not himself.
- There's no use in thinking about her, says the King. She was bigger than all of us.
- He tells Ladvenu that, if Joan were resurrected today, people would just burn her all over again.
- The clock tolls and the Soldier goes back to Hell.
- Joan is left alone in a bright white light.
- She asks God when the world will be ready for His saints.
- Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients such as the initial situation, conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion.
- The first scene does a great job of establishing Joan's character. Her charm, courage, and faith are on full display as she sways Robert and his soldiers to her side.
- Once Joan wins over Charles and gets control of the army, she can really get down to business.
- In Scene Four, we see the Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber forming plans to take Joan down.
- After Charles gets crowned at Rheims, Joan's buddies want to sit back and relax.
- Joan's friends warn her that if she continues the fight and gets captured, they won't lift a finger to help her escape.
- The action of the play begins to resolve as the captured Joan is convicted of heresy and is burnt at the stake.

24.4 Keywords

Peasant : A member of a class of persons, as in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, who are small farmers or farm laborers of low social rank.

Inspiration : A divine influence directly and immediately exerted upon the mind or soul.

Ingredients : A constituent element of anything; component.

Conflict : A discord of action, feeling, or effect; antagonism or opposition, as of interests or principles.

Rationalism : Rationalism is "any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification".

Climax : In a dramatic or literary work, a decisive moment that is of maximum intensity or is a major turning point in a plot.

24.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief view of the betrayal and capture of Saint Joan by British?
2. Illustrate and analyze the plot in Scene II.

Notes

3. Analyze the fact that the first scene does a great job of establishing Joan's character.
4. Explain the fact that Shaw ends the play with a dream sequence.
5. Write a short notes on plots hatched in:
   (a) Scene III (b) Scene V (c) Epilogue

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. imprisoned existence
4. heresy 5. False 6. True
7. True 8. (a) 9. (b)
10. Joan's character 11. business 12. True
13. False.

24.6 Further Readings

Books

George Bernard Shaw, Harold Bloom (ed.). 1987. *Saint Joan*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (ed.). 2001. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.studyworld.com/studyworld_studynotes/novelguide/

http://www.shmoop.com/saint-joan/plot-analysis.html

Unit 11: Saint Joan: Characterization

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Enumerate all the characters in the play;
- Discuss the criticism of each character.

Introduction

Most plays are a series of actions and therefore there is no surprise that the characters in *Saint Joan* are defined by their actions. The Chaplain's viciousness is shown in his relentlessly maniacal pursuit of Joan's execution. Cauchon and the Inquisitor's compassion (at least to their way of thinking) is shown in the lengths to which they go to try and get Joan to repent. King Charles's lack of love for warfare (some call it cowardice) is shown when he decides to negotiate for Paris instead of supporting Joan in her conquest. And, of course, there's Joan, herself—a woman of action to say the least. She single handedly inspires a movement which unites all of France. Her actions define her as brash, daring, and maybe just a little bit proud. The characters of the play have their own significance by their names. This unit illustrates the characterization of the play Saint Joan their significance by their names.

Notes

25.1 Characterization

25.1.1 The Dauphin

The Dauphin, later King Charles VII, is a reluctant ruler, more eager for a lack of hostility than he is to govern the kingdom that is rightfully his. He seeks to avoid responsibility and decision-making, and, in Shaw's play, he is all but forced by Joan into his royal position. Perhaps the playwright is contrasting those who are called "great" by the world and those are truly great, those who imagine, the "Galtonic visualizers". Imagination is not a quality Shaw's Dauphin can be said to possess! He is weak and easily bullied-including, readers note, "bullied" by Joan his own greatest champion. (He says as much when he complains to Joan in Scene V that his coronation was her fault.)

Notes Charles does not seem to grow any as a character during the course of the play. By the epilogue, he does lead his own troops into battle, but he is still self-centered, concerned only that Joan's rehabilitation twenty-five years after her death will lay to rest any questions about the legitimacy of his reign.

Task Elucidate that king Charles VII is a reluctant ruler.

25.1.2 Captain Jack Dunois

Captain Jack Dunois is described by Shaw in the stage directions as "a good natured and capable man who has no affectations and no foolish illusions." Shaw depicts him as both friendly with and respectful of Joan. Indeed, he seems to be the only true friend she has. He is a true military man who shares his expertise with the Maid: "Come! let me begin to make a soldier of you." He urges her not to press on to Paris, not out of fear (as seems to be King Charles' motivation), but out of concern for her. Yet even he abandons Joan in the epilogue's dream sequence, although he does so out of what seems to be a genuine awareness of his own status compared to her: "Forgive us, Joan: we are not yet good enough for you."

Did u know? Captain Jack Dunois is the only friend Joan has.

25.1.3 Captain de Stogumber

Chaplain de Stogumber typifies one medieval religious reaction to Joan: that she was a witch. Stogumber's objection to the Maid is that she is "unnatural"-leading armies into battle, wearing male garb, and so forth. Yet even as Stogumber is fully medieval in this aspect of his thinking, he is, paradoxically, modern in another: he is a burgeoning Nationalist: "I was born in England," he proudly declares, "and it makes a difference." Ironically, in his love of his native country, he is not unlike Joan, whom he regards as his enemy. In that sense, nationalism unites them.

25.1.4 The Earl of Warwick

The Earl of Warwick exemplifies the pragmatism of which Shaw writes in his preface—pragmatism, readers will recall, that Shaw credited Joan with having as well. Upon Warwick's introduction in

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Scene IV, however, the audience will realize how such pragmatism, such realism, such "commonsense" becomes a double-edged sword that can work against Joan as well as for her. As a pragmatic man, the Earl of Warwick is not truly concerned with the Church's condemnation or rehabilitation of Joan: he is concerned only that Joan undercuts his authority as a feudal lord, and therefore she must be destroyed.

25.1.5 Bishop Cauchon

Bishop Cauchon emerges in Shaw's play as a man who wants to do what is right, but who is unable to do so. Indeed, readers should consider the possibility that Shaw establishes Cauchon as a "foil" in many ways to Joan herself. Like Joan, he is a person of principle, even if his principles serve the interest of the Church and not of the individual conscience or imagination (for instance, his repeated insistence that the Church is not subject to political necessity). As Joan is (literally) sanctified after her death, Cauchon, we learn in the epilogue, is (virtually) demonized after his. And yet his words in the epilogue could just as easily have come from Joan's mouth: "I was faithful to my light: I could do no other than I did."

25.1.6 Joan

Joan is, of course, the focus of the play. There can be little doubt that Shaw honestly attempts to present a human Joan. But readers will have to conclude if he has truly done so, especially given the drama's famous final line: "O God when will [the world] be ready to receive Thy saints?" Surely, Joan is not a "saint" for Shaw in the medieval sense of a miracle-worker. Yet she is a "saint" of the imagination, and, for all the ways in which she may be like us, she may remain, even for Shaw, fundamentally of a different order.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The Dauphin, a reluctant ruler of the kingdom that is rightfully his is later
   (a) King Charles VII (b) King Charles V
   (c) the real heir of the kingdom (d) was opposed by Joan.
2. Which of the following statements is not true about Joan?
   (a) The focus of the play (b) The most cruel oppressor
   (c) The human and patriotic (d) The saint.

Fill in the blanks:

3. The Dauphin seeks to avoid ....., and, in Shaw's play, he is all but forced by Joan into his royal position.
4. Captain Jack Dunois is described by Shaw a good natured and capable man who has no affectations and no ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. The Earl of Warwick exemplifies the pragmatism of which Shaw writes in his preface.
6. Bishop Cauchon emerges in Shaw's play as a man who wants to do the wrong.

25.2 Summary

- Characters in *Saint Joan* are defined by their actions. The Chaplain's viciousness is shown in his relentlessly maniacal pursuit of Joan's execution. Cauchon and the Inquisitor's compassion is shown in the lengths to which they go to try and get Joan to repent.

Notes

- King Charles's lack of love for warfare (some call it cowardice) is shown when he decides to negotiate for Paris instead of supporting Joan in her conquest. And, of course, there's Joan, herself—a woman of action to say the least. She single handedly inspires a movement which unites all of France. Her actions define her as brash, daring, and maybe just a little bit proud.
- The world of Saint Joan is strictly divided according to social status. All the characters have their specific place, which grants them certain rights, privileges, and powers. Look at Joan's trial, for example. Bishop Cauchon is the ranking official for most of it. So, he presides over the proceedings.
- When the Inquisitor shows up, Cauchon must defer to some of his power because the Inquisition carries a lot of weight. Below Cauchon and the Inquisitor you have the lower Church officials like D'Estivet, the Chaplain, and Courcelles. Though they would dearly love to, they don't have the power to excommunicate Joan on their own. The decision ultimately rests with Cauchon and the Inquisitor.
- In the political world everything is just as regimented. There are kings like Charles and feudal lords like Warwick. Everybody knows their place. Then, of course, there's the army. We see everybody from commanders like Dunois down to the lowliest soldier.
- The conflict in the play is almost completely derived from the fact that Joan bucks all of these carefully laid out structures. She's just a common girl from the country. When she presumes to boss around kings, bishops, and generals the world is shaken. Her character is defined by the fact that she carves her own place in the social hierarchy through sheer resolve and determination.
- Joan's choice to wear men's clothes is one of the big reasons she is executed. It's unheard of in this time. Everybody else wears clothes befitting their station. Dunois wears his armor, the Bishop wears his robes, and the ladies of Charles's court wear the fancy dresses that they are expected to wear. Joan however, chooses to do away with the simple dress of an ordinary country girl and don the armor and clothes of a soldier.
- The use of men's cloth by Saint Joan makes sense. She's out there fighting everyday. How is she going to do that in a dress? Anyway, if she dresses like a woman, the soldiers will tend to think of her that way. Not only will they not be as likely to listen to her, they may even try to take advantage of her. Her choice to wear men's clothes is indicative of both her common sense approach to life and her flagrant flouting of authority.

25.3 Keywords

Execution : The infliction of capital punishment or, formerly, of any legal punishment.

Maniacal : Affected with or characteristic of mania or characteristic of or befitting a maniac.

Warfare : The process of military struggle between two nations or groups of nations.

Conflict : A discord of action, feeling, or effect; antagonism or opposition, as of interests or principles.

Privileges : A special right, immunity, or exemption granted to persons in authority or office to free them from certain obligations or liabilities.

25.4 Review Questions

1. Which character in the play do you most admire? Why.
2. Which character do you list admire? Why.

Notes

3. Sketch the character of Joan.
4. Bishop Cauchon emerges in Shaw's play as a man who wants to do what is right, but who is unable to do so. Analyze this character in view of this statement.
5. Give a critical view of the following characters in the play *Saint Joan*:
   (a) Bishop Cauchon (b) The Dauphin (c) Captain Jack Dunois

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. responsibility and decision-making
4. foolish illusions 5. True 6. False

25.5 Further Readings

Books

George Bernard Shaw, Harold Bloom (ed.). 1987. *Saint Joan*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (ed.). 2001. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.shmoop.com/saint-joan/characterization.html

http://www.enotes.com/saint-joan-salem/saint-joan

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Unit 12: Saint Joan: Themes

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate all major themes in *Saint Joan*;
- Explain Joan as hero of Imagination;
- Illustrate the religion, women and feminity in *Saint Joan*;
- Discuss the pride and admiration occurring in the play *Saint Joan*.

Introduction

Shaw himself provides the best guide to the thematic concerns of Saint Joan in his preface to the play. The major themes that Shaw mentions in his play are: Power—The conflict in Saint Joan is built around some pretty major power clashes. The Religion—Saint Joan chronicles the life of a Catholic saint. Women and Femininity—Joan was an early pioneer of women's equality. Society and Class—Medieval society was rigidly divided by class and position. Versions of Reality—Joan of Arc is well known for claiming to hear voices sent to her by God. Warfare—Saint Joan is set in medieval France, which was at the time in the throes of the Hundred Years War. Pride—Just about everybody in Saint Joan accuses Joan of pride. And Admiration—Joan is able to inspire such admiration, that she launches a movement which eventually unites a country. This unit illustrates these themes in detail.

Notes

26.1 Joan as a Hero of the Imagination

When Shaw invokes the "imagination" in reference to Joan, he does not mean that Joan was consciously "making up" the voices and visions she experienced, or that, as her accusers state in Scene VI, that she was "pretending" to receive messages from the saints. Rather, Shaw means that Joan possessed a faculty for transcending the everyday concerns of most people; she was gripped by, shaped by, driven by what Shaw calls the "evolutionary appetite" for humanity's advancement to a degree that most people are not. She is a "visualizer." Shaw's conviction on this point accounts for the several references to imagination in the play.

Example: Baudricourt's "They come from your imagination," Scene I; "Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?,"

For Shaw, the imagination is the source of humanity's progress, and Joan is one of its strongest representatives. In this respect, and not in the traditional ecclesiastical sense, Joan is, for Shaw, a "saint." She is "the unaveraged individual, representing life possibly at its highest actual human evolution and possibly at its lowest, but never at its merely mathematical average." She is "upstart" in the positive sense of the word-but also in its negative sense, which, in Shaw's view, ultimately leads her to her doom.

26.2 The Will to Power

In his preface, Shaw points to the major social and cultural forces of the Middle Ages-the church and feudalism-as rocks against which Joan, in her innocence and naiveté, was dashed. Throughout the play, but especially in Scene VI, Shaw depicts Joan as someone who does not understand the powers she is up against; a victim of a collision between various peoples' quest for and use and abuse of power. Thus the Archbishop can warn Joan, in Scene II, that it is dangerous to be "in love with religion"; and thus, for another instance, the Inquisitor can state, after her trial is concluded in Scene VI, "[I]t is a terrible thing to see a young and innocent creature crushed between these mighty forces, the Church and the Law." Cauchon tells Warwick in Scene IV, "I know well that there is a Will to Power in the world. I know that while it lasts there will be a struggle between the Emperor and the Pope, between the dukes and the political cardinals, between the barons and the kings. The devil divides us and governs." To a large extent, Shaw's characters serve as ciphers for the powers they represent, and the conflicts between them on stage dramatize larger, more abstract conflicts among these powers. Notably, Joan, who represents the "super-personal" (that is, concerned with more than the individual) power of the evolutionary appetite, is destroyed by these conflicts.

Task There were two major social and cultural forces—the church and feudalism, explain this statement.

26.3 Religion

Saint Joan chronicles the life of a Catholic saint. As such, we're sure it's no big surprise that religion is a major theme. In the play, we see the one of the earliest clashes of Protestantism and Catholicism. There's also much discussion of popular religious topics such as faith, heresy, martyrdom, and repentance.

26.4 Women and Feminity

Joan was an early pioneer of women's equality. In a time where it was completely unheard of, she wore men's clothes, became a soldier, and advised the most powerful men of her day, as *Saint Joan* details. She has inspired generations of women to challenge gender roles.

Notes

26.5 Society and Class

Medieval society was rigidly divided by class and position. *Saint Joan* investigates the inner workings of this intricate structure. Among the things examined are the tiers of power within the Church, the political factions of kings and feudal lords, and the lot of common peasants and soldiers. We also see just how severe the punishment was for people who defied this rigid hierarchy.

26.6 Pride

Just about everybody in *Saint Joan* accuses Joan of pride. It is unclear as to whether she's guilty of this or not. Her every decision leads to success for her and those around her. She also believes that she gets her orders directly from God. In her mind, that all adds up to the idea that everyone should just listen to her and do what she says. The rich and powerful, however, view this as insufferable pride, when coming from an upstart teenage girl.

26.7 Admiration

Joan is able to inspire such admiration, that she launches a movement which eventually unites a country, shifting its entire power structure in the bargain. Even the men who put her to death can't help but respect her courage and tenacity. Her spirit was so strong that it continued to inspire for hundreds years after her death. She became a symbol for generation after generation. Eventually, admiration for her grew so much that the Catholic Church made her a saint. *Saint Joan* chronicles the life, death, and legacy of this inspirational figure.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. There were two major social and cultural forces in the middle ages, they are
   (a) church and feudalism (b) admiration and power struggle
   (c) feminism and social class (d) pride and religion.
2. Medieval society was rigidly divided by
   (a) religion and orthodoxy (b) class and position
   (c) religion and power struggle (d) feminism and class.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Joan is able to inspire such admiration, that she launches a movement which eventually unites a ..... .
4. Joan was an early pioneer of women's ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. In his preface, Shaw points to the major social and cultural forces of the Middle Ages.
6. *Saint Joan* chronicles the life of a Protestant saint.

26.8 Summary

- Power—The conflict in Saint Joan is built around some pretty major power clashes. The Catholic Church and the English feudal lords are all challenged by Joan's rise.
- Religion—Saint Joan chronicles the life of a Catholic saint. As such, we're sure it's no big surprise that religion is a major theme.

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- Women and Femininity—Joan was an early pioneer of women's equality. In a time where it was completely unheard of, she wore men's clothes, became a soldier, and advised the most powerful men of her day.
- Society and Class—Medieval society was rigidly divided by class and position. Saint Joan investigates the inner workings of this intricate structure.
- Versions of Reality—Joan of Arc is well known for claiming to hear voices sent to her by God. The Church chose a different view, saying they were demonic in origin.
- Warfare—Saint Joan is set in medieval France, which was at the time in the throes of the Hundred Years War. There are many different factions vying for power, the main ones being the English.
- Pride—Just about everybody in Saint Joan accuses Joan of pride. It is unclear as to whether she's guilty of this or not. Her every decision leads to success for her and those around her.
- Admiration—Joan is able to inspire such admiration, that she launches a movement which eventually unites a country, shifting its entire power structure in the bargain.

26.9 Keywords

Power : Political ascendancy or control in the government of a country, state.

Religion : A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Feminity : The quality of being feminine; womanliness.

Warfare : The process of military struggle between two nations or groups of nations; war. Or armed conflict between two massed enemies, armies, or the like.

Pride : A high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.

Admiration : A feeling of wonder, pleasure, or approval. Or the act of looking on or contemplating with pleasure.

26.10 Review Questions

1. Where does Joan companions' admiration give way to prejudice?
2. How is power divided between the religious and political spheres in Joan's society?
3. Why is it so threatening for Joan to dress like a man?
4. Why does Bishop Cauchon feel so threatened by Joan's voices? How do her beliefs challenge Church doctrine?
5. Give a critical view of the following themes in *Saint Joan*:
   (a) Admiration (b) Pride (c) Feminity

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. Country
4. equality 5. True 6. False

Notes

26.11 Further Readings

Books

George Bernard Shaw, Harold Bloom (ed.). 1987. *Saint Joan*. Chelsea House Publishers, New York.

George Bernard Shaw, Dan H. Laurence (ed.). 2001. *Saint Joan*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Online links

http://www.enotes.com/saint-joan/themes

http://www.shmoop.com/saint-joan/themes.html

Notes

Unit 13: Harold Pinter— Introduction to the Author and the Text

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the biographical sketch of Harold Pinter;
- Elaborate the literary works of Harold Pinter;
- Explain that *The Birthday Party* is a comedy of menace;
- Elucidate that *The Birthday Party* is failure of language to serve as an adequate tool of communication;
- Critically evaluate the play *The Birthday Party*;
- Discuss the nature of the play.

Introduction

Harold Pinter was a Nobel Prize–winning English playwright and screenwriter. One of the most influential modern British dramatists, his writing career spanned more than 50 years. His best-known plays include *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Homecoming* (1964), and *Betrayal* (1978), each of which he adapted to film. His screenplay adaptations of others' works include *The Servant* (1963), *The Go-Between* (1970), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *The Trial* (1993), and *Sleuth* (2007). He also directed or acted in radio, stage, television, and film productions of his own and others' works. This unit depicts in detail his life since birth till his death.

Notes

The Birthday Party, was the Harold Pinter's first commercially-produced, full-length play. He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour, during which, in Eastbourne, England, he had lived in filthy insane digs. There he became acquainted with a great bulging scrag of a woman and a man who stayed in the seedy place. The flophouse became the model for the rundown boarding house of the play and the woman and her tenant the models, respectively, for the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber. Produced by Michael Codron and David Hall, the play had its world première at the Arts Theatre, in Cambridge, England, on 28 April 1958, where the play was warmly received on its pre-London tour, in Oxford and Wolverhampton, where it also met with a positive reception as the most enthralling experience the Grand Theatre has given us in many months. This unit also introduces the text, drawbacks and problems of the play.

27.1 Harold Pinter—Introduction

Pinter was the author of 29 plays and 15 dramatic sketches and the co-author of two works for stage and radio. He was considered to have been one of the most influential modern British dramatists. Along with the 1967 Tony Award for Best Play for *The Homecoming* and several other American awards and award nominations, he and his plays received many awards in the UK and elsewhere throughout the world. His style has entered the English language as an adjective, Pinteresque, although Pinter himself disliked the term and found it meaningless. Pinter received over 50 awards, prizes, and other honours, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005 and the French Legion d'honneur in 2007.

22.1.1 Biography

Birth and the Family

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930, in Hackney, a section of metropolitan London, England. His father, Hyman, and his mother, Frances Mann, were descended from Sephardic Jews from Portugal, who had, around 1900, migrated to England after an interim residence in Hungary. The family, relatively poor, lived very frugally, like the other working-class families in the area.

Education

Pinter was raised in Hackney, east London, and educated at Hackney Downs School (1941 to 1947), where he began writing poetry and prose. He was a sprinter and a keen cricket player, acting in school plays and writing poetry.

Example: He took an interest in theater, taking roles as both Macbeth and Romeo in school productions of Shakespeare.

His education continued in 1948, when he obtained a grant to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but did not complete the course. Finding the academy oppressive, he only stayed for two terms. In the same year, he tried to obtain legal status as a conscientious objector, which he was denied, and he was eventually fined for refusing National Service as a conscientious objector. Subsequently, he continued training at the Central School of Speech and Drama and worked in repertory theatre in Ireland and England.

Marriage

In 1956 he married actress Vivien Merchant and had a son, Daniel born in 1958. He left Merchant in 1975 and married author Antonia Fraser in 1980.

Notes

Last Years and Death

Despite frail health after being diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in December 2001, Pinter continued to act on stage and screen, last performing the title role of Samuel Beckett's one-act monologue Krapp's *Last Tape*, for the 50th anniversary season of the Royal Court Theatre, in October 2006. He died from liver cancer on 24 December 2008.

27.1.2 Playwright

Pinter's career as a playwright began with a production of *The Room* in 1957. His second play, *The Birthday Party*, closed after eight performances, but was enthusiastically reviewed by critic Harold Hobson. His early works were described by critics as comedy of menace. Later plays such as *No Man's Land* (1975) and *Betrayal* (1978) became known as memory plays. He directed productions of his own plays, also those of others for stage, television and film.

Comedies of Menace (1957–1968)

Pinter's first play, *The Room*, written and first performed in 1957, was a student production at the University of Bristol, directed by his good friend, actor Henry Woolf, who also originated the role of Mr. After Pinter mentioned that he had an idea for a play, Woolf asked him to write it so that he could direct it to fulfill a requirement for his postgraduate work. Pinter wrote it in three days. The production was described by Billington as a staggeringly confident debut which attracted the attention of a young producer, Michael Codron, who decided to present Pinter's next play, *The Birthday Party*, at the Lyric Hammersmith, in 1958.

Notes Written in 1957 and produced in 1958, Pinter's second play, *The Birthday Party*, one of his best-known works, was initially both a commercial and critical disaster, despite an enthusiastic review in *The Sunday Times* by its influential drama critic Harold Hobson, which appeared only after the production had closed and could not be reprieved. Pinter himself and later critics generally credited Hobson as bolstering him and perhaps even rescuing his career.

In a review published in 1958, borrowing from the subtitle of *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*, a play by David Campton, critic Irving Wardle called Pinter's early plays comedy of menace—a label that people have applied repeatedly to his work. Such plays begin with an apparently innocent situation that becomes both threatening and absurd as Pinter's characters behave in ways often perceived as inexplicable by his audiences and one another. Pinter acknowledges the influence of Samuel Beckett, particularly on his early work; they became friends, sending each other drafts of their works in progress for comments.

Pinter wrote *The Hothouse* in 1958, which he shelved for over 20 years. Next he wrote *The Dumb Waiter* (1959), which premièred in Germany and was then produced in a double bill with *The Room* at the Hampstead Theatre Club, in London, in 1960. It was then not produced often until the 1980s, and it has been revived more frequently since 2000, including the West End Trafalgar Studios production in 2007. The first production of *The Caretaker*, at the Arts Theatre Club, in London, in 1960, established Pinter's theatrical reputation. The play transferred to the Duchess Theatre in May 1960 and ran for 444 performances, receiving an Evening Standard Award for best play of 1960. Large radio and television audiences for his one-act play *A Night Out*, along with the popularity of his revue sketches, propelled him to further critical attention. In 1964, *The Birthday Party* was revived both on television and on stage and was well-received.

Notes

Did u know? By the time Peter Hall's London production of *The Homecoming* (1964) reached Broadway in 1967, Pinter had become a celebrity playwright, and the play garnered four Tony Awards, among other awards.

During 1964–1967, Pinter also wrote the radio play *A Slight Ache*, first broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1959 and then adapted to the stage and performed at the Arts Theatre Club in 1961. *A Night Out* (1960) was broadcast to a large audience on Associated British Corporation's television show Armchair Theatre, after being transmitted on BBC Radio 3, also in 1960. His play *Night School* was first televised in 1960 on Associated Rediffusion. The Collection premièred at the Aldwych Theatre in 1962, and *The Dwarfs*, adapted from Pinter's then unpublished novel of the same title, was first broadcast on radio in 1960, then adapted for the stage in a double bill with *The Lover*, which was then televised on Associated Rediffusion in 1963; and *Tea Party*, a play that Pinter developed from his 1963 short story, first broadcast on BBC TV in 1965.

Working as both a screenwriter and as a playwright, Pinter composed a script called *The Compartment* (1966), for a trilogy of films to be contributed by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Pinter, of which only Beckett's film, entitled Film, was actually produced. Then Pinter turned his unfilmed script into a television play, which was produced as *The Basement*, both on BBC 2 and also on stage in 1968.

Memory Plays (1968–1982)

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, Pinter wrote a series of plays and sketches that explore complex ambiguities, elegiac mysteries, comic vagaries, and other quicksand-like characteristics of memory and which critics sometimes classify as Pinter's memory plays. These include *Landscape* (1968), *Silence* (1969), *Night* (1969), *Old Times* (1971), *No Man's Land* (1975), *The Proust Screenplay* (1977), *Betrayal* (1978), *Family Voices* (1981), *Victoria Station* (1982), and *A Kind of Alaska* (1982). Some of Pinter's later plays, including *Party Time* (1991), *Moonlight* (1993), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), and *Celebration* (2000) draw upon some features of his memory dramaturgy in their focus on the past in the present, but they have personal and political resonances and other tonal differences from these earlier memory plays.

Overtly Political Plays and Sketches (1980–2000)

Following a three-year period of creative drought in the early 1980s after his marriage to Antonia Fraser and the death of Vivien Merchant, Pinter's plays tended to become shorter and more overtly political, serving as critiques of oppression, torture, and other abuses of human rights, linked by the apparent invulnerability of power. Just before this hiatus, in 1979, Pinter re-discovered his manuscript of *The Hothouse*, which he had written in 1958 but had set aside; he revised it and then directed its first production himself at Hampstead Theatre in London, in 1980. Like his plays of the 1980s, *The Hothouse* concerns authoritarianism and the abuses of power politics, but it is also a comedy, like his earlier comedies of menace. Pinter played the major role of Roote in a 1995 revival at the Minerva Theatre, Chichester.

Notes Pinter's brief dramatic sketch precisely (1983) is a duologue between two bureaucrats exploring the absurd power politics of mutual nuclear annihilation and deterrence. His first overtly political one-act play is one for the *Road* (1984).

Notes

In 1985 Pinter stated that whereas his earlier plays presented metaphors for power and powerlessness, the later ones present literal realities of power and its abuse. Pinter's political theater dramatizes the interplay and conflict of the opposing poles of involvement and disengagement. *Mountain Language* (1988) is about the Turkish suppression of the Kurdish language. The dramatic sketch *The New World Order* (1991) provides what Robert Cushman, writing in *The Independent* described as 10 nerve wracking minutes of two men threatening to torture a third man who is blindfolded, gagged and bound in a chair; Pinter directed the British première at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, where it opened on 9 July 1991, and the production then transferred to Washington, DC, where it was revived in 1994. Pinter's longer political satire *Party Time* (1991) premiered at the Almeida Theatre in London, in a double-bill with Mountain Language. Pinter adapted it as a screenplay for television in 1992, directing that production, first broadcast in the UK on Channel 4 on 17 November 1992.

Intertwining political and personal concerns, his next full-length plays, *Moonlight* (1993) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) are set in domestic households and focus on dying and death; in their personal conversations in *Ashes to Ashes*, Devlin and Rebecca allude to unspecified atrocities relating to the Holocaust. After experiencing the deaths of first his mother (1992) and then his father (1997), again merging the personal and the political, Pinter wrote the poems *Death* (1997) and *The Disappeared* (1998).

Notes Pinter's last stage play, *Celebration* (2000), is a social satire set in an opulent restaurant, which lampoons The Ivy, a fashionable venue in London's West End theatre district, and its patrons who have just come from performances of either the ballet or the opera. Not that they can remember a darn thing about what they saw, including the titles.

During 2000–2001, there were also simultaneous productions of *Remembrance of Things Past*, Pinter's stage adaptation of his unpublished Proust Screenplay, written in collaboration with and directed by Di Trevis, at the Royal National Theatre, and a revival of *The Caretaker* directed by Patrick Marber and starring Michael Gambon, Rupert Graves, and Douglas Hodge, at the Comedy Theatre.

Like *Celebration*, Pinter's penultimate sketch, *Press Conference* (2002), invokes both torture and the fragile, circumscribed existence of dissent. In its première in the National Theatre's two-part production of Sketches, despite undergoing chemotherapy at the time, Pinter played the ruthless Minister willing to murder little children for the benefit of *The State*.

27.1.3 Screenwriter

Pinter composed 27 screenplays and film scripts for cinema and television, many of which were filmed, or adapted as stage plays. His fame as a screenwriter began with his three screenplays written for films directed by Joseph Losey, leading to their close friendship: *The Servant* (1963), based on the novel by Robin Maugham; *Accident* (1967), adapted from the novel by Nicholas Mosley; and *The Go-Between* (1970), based on the novel by L. P. Hartley. Films based on Pinter's adaptations of his own stage plays are: *The Caretaker* (1963), directed by Clive Donner; *The Birthday Party* (1968), directed by William Friedkin; *The Homecoming* (1973), directed by Peter Hall; and *Betrayal* (1983), directed by David Jones.

Pinter also adapted other writers' novels to screenplays, including *The Pumpkin Eater* (1964), based on the novel by Penelope Mortimer, directed by Jack Clayton; *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), from the 1965 spy novel *The Berlin Memorandum*, by Elleston Trevor, directed by Michael Anderson; *The Last Tycoon* (1976), from the unfinished novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, directed by Elia Kazan; *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), from the novel by John Fowles, directed by Karel Reisz; *Turtle Diary* (1985), based on the novel by Russell Hoban; *The Heat of the Day* (1988), a television film, from

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the 1949 novel by Elizabeth Bowen; *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), from the novel by Ian McEwan, directed by Paul Schrader; and *The Trial* (1993), from the novel by Franz Kafka, directed by David Jones.

His commissioned screenplays of others' works for the films *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), *The Remains of the Day* (1990), and *Lolita* (1997), remain unpublished and in the case of the latter two films, uncredited, though several scenes from or aspects of his scripts were used in these finished films. His screenplays *The Proust Screenplay* (1972), *Victory* (1982), and *The Dreaming Child* (1997) and his unpublished screenplay *The Tragedy of King Lear* (2000) have not been filmed. A section of Pinter's Proust Screenplay was, however, released as the 1984 film *Swann in Love*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff, and it was also adapted by Michael Bakewell as a two-hour radio drama broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 1995, before Pinter and director Di Trevis collaborated to adapt it for the 2000 National Theatre production.

Did u know? Pinter's last filmed screenplay was an adaptation of the 1970 Tony Award-winning play *Sleuth*, by Anthony Shaffer, which was commissioned by Jude Law, one of the film's producers. It is the basis for the 2007 film *Sleuth*, directed by Kenneth Branagh.

Pinter's screenplays for *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Betrayal* were nominated for Academy Awards in 1981 and 1983, respectively.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following play earned Harold Pinter Tony Award for Best Play?
   (a) *The Homecoming* (b) *The Birthday Party*
   (c) *The Hothouse* (d) *Betrayal*.
2. Which of the following plays was not written by Harold Pinter?
   (a) *No Man's Land* (b) *Roots*
   (c) *Family Voices* (d) *Party Time*.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Harold Pinter was suffering with ..... cancer.
4. Working as both a screenwriter and as a playwright, Pinter composed a script called ..... for a trilogy of films to be contributed by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Pinter.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. In the early 1980s after his marriage to Antonia Fraser and the death of Vivien Merchant, Pinter's plays become overtly political, serving as critiques of oppression, torture, and other abuses of human rights.
6. Pinter composed 27 screenplays and film scripts for cinema and television, many of which could not be filmed.

27.2 The Birthday Party—Introduction to the Text

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play. He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour, during which, in Eastbourne, England, he had lived in filthy insane digs. There he became acquainted with a great bulging scrag

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of a woman and a man who stayed in the seedy place. The flophouse became the model for the rundown boarding house of the play and the woman and her tenant the models, respectively, for the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber.

In an earlier work, *The Room*, a one-act play, Pinter had worked on themes and motifs that he would carry over into *The Birthday Party* and some of his succeeding plays. Among these themes are the failure of language to serve as an adequate tool of communication, the use of place as a sanctum that is violated by menacing intruders, and the surrealistic confusions that obscure or distort fact.

Task Elucidate that language as an adequate tool of communication is a failure in context of the play *The Birthday Party*.

Directed by Pinter himself, the finished full-length play premiered in Cambridge, England, at the Arts Theatre, on April 28, 1958. There and on tour in Oxford it was quite successful, but when, under the direction of Peter Wood, it moved to London and later opened on May 19 at the Lyric Opera House in Hammersmith, it met with harsh reviews and closed down within a week. Among the reviewers, only Harold Hobson of the *Sunday Times* saw much promise in the play. He thought that Pinter had considerable originality and was ''the most disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London.'' However, his review appeared too late to do the production any good. The show was already off the boards, done in by abysmal attendance, including one matinee audience of six, and persistently hostile reviews. Most critics opined that Pinter floundered in obscurity and suffered from the negative influence of Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Eugene Ionesco (*The Bald Prima Donna*), and other avant-garde writers.

Pinter would later marvel at the fact that in London the play was completely massacred by the critics but noted that it was the only maltreatment he had received from reviewers and that it never dimmed his interest in writing. The work, in fact, became the dramatist's first full-length comedy of menace, a group of plays that secured Pinter's reputation as a premier, avant-garde playwright. Subsequent productions were much better received, including the play's 1964 revival at London's Aldwych Theatre and its 1968 Broadway premier at the Booth Theatre in New York. By the mid-1960s, the burgeoning appreciation of absurdist drama and the success of other plays by Pinter, including *The Dumbwaiter* (1959) and *The Caretaker* (1960), had secured for *The Birthday Party* a reputation as a classic in the dramatic genre that literary critic Martin Esslin dubbed the Theatre of the Absurd.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

7. Harold Pinter's play *The Birthday Party*, the finished full length play was first premiered at
   (a) the Arts Theatre in Cambridge (b) at London's Aldwych Theatre
   (c) at Lyric Opera House in Hammersmith (d) at Booth Theatre in New York.
8. Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other characters show up to have
   (a) a chat in the battle (b) a chat in his royal bedroom
   (c) a chat in the hundred year war (d) a chat in the battlefield of Orelon.

Fill in the blanks:

9. Harold Pinter had worked on themes and motifs that he would carry over into *The Birthday Part* from an earlier work ....., a one-act play.
10. Martin Esslin dubbed the *The Birthday Party* as ..... .

Notes

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play.

12. *The Birthday Party* when opened on May 19 at the Lyric Opera House in Hammersmith, it met with harsh reviews and closed down within a week.

27.3 Summary

- Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930, in Hackney, a section of metropolitan London, England.
- Pinter was raised in Hackney, east London, and educated at Hackney Downs School (1941 to 1947). His education continued in 1948, when he obtained a grant to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but did not complete the course.
- In 1956 he married actress Vivien Merchant and had a son, Daniel born in 1958. He left Merchant in 1975 and married author Antonia Fraser in 1980.
- Pinter died from liver cancer on 24 December 2008.
- Pinter's career as a playwright began with a production of *The Room* in 1957. His second play, *The Birthday Party*, closed after eight performances, but was enthusiastically reviewed by critic Harold Hobson.
- Pinter's first play, *The Room*, written and first performed in 1957, was a student production at the University of Bristol, directed by his good friend, actor Henry Woolf, who also originated the role of Mr. After Pinter mentioned that he had an idea for a play, Woolf asked him to write it so that he could direct it to fulfill a requirement for his postgraduate work.
- Pinter wrote *The Hothouse* in 1958, which he shelved for over 20 years. Next he wrote *The Dumb Waiter* (1959), which premiered in Germany and was then produced in a double bill with *The Room* at the Hampstead Theatre Club, in London, in 1960.
- The first production of *The Caretaker*, at the Arts Theatre Club, in London, in 1960, established Pinter's theatrical reputation. The play transferred to the Duchess Theatre in May 1960 and ran for 444 performances, receiving an Evening Standard Award for best play of 1960.
- During 1964–1967, Pinter also wrote the radio play *A Slight Ache*, first broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1959 and then adapted to the stage and performed at the Arts Theatre Club in 1961. *A Night Out* (1960) was broadcast to a large audience on Associated British Corporation's television show Armchair Theatre, after being transmitted on BBC Radio 3, also in 1960.
- Working as both a screenwriter and as a playwright, Pinter composed a script called *The Compartment* (1966), for a trilogy of films to be contributed by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Pinter, of which only Beckett's film, entitled Film, was actually produced.
- Following a three-year period of creative drought in the early 1980s after his marriage to Antonia Fraser and the death of Vivien Merchant, Pinter's plays tended to become shorter and more overtly political, serving as critiques of oppression, torture, and other abuses of human rights, linked by the apparent invulnerability of power.
- Pinter composed 27 screenplays and film scripts for cinema and television, many of which were filmed, or adapted as stage plays. His fame as a screenwriter began with his three screenplays written for films directed by Joseph Losey, leading to their close friendship: *The Servant* (1963), based on the novel by Robin Maugham; *Accident* (1967), adapted from the novel by Nicholas Mosley; and *The Go-Between* (1970), based on the novel by L. P. Hartley.
- Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play.

Notes

- In an earlier work, *The Room*, a one-act play, Pinter had worked on themes and motifs that he would carry over into *The Birthday Party* and some of his succeeding plays.
- Among these themes are the failure of language to serve as an adequate tool of communication, the use of place as a sanctum that is violated by menacing intruders, and the surrealistic confusions that obscure or distort fact.
- Directed by Pinter himself, the finished full-length play premiered in Cambridge, England, at the Arts Theatre, on April 28, 1958. There and on tour in Oxford it was quite successful.
- Pinter would later marvel at the fact that in London the play was completely massacred by the critics but noted that it was the only maltreatment he had received from reviewers.

27.4 Keywords

Playwright : A person who writes plays. Or The texts of plays that can be read, as distinct from being seen and heard in performance.

Screenwriter : A person who writes screenplays, especially as an occupation or profession.

Comedies of Menace : A term used to describe the plays of David Campton, Nigel Dennis, N. F. Simpson, and Harold Pinter by drama critic Irving Wardle, borrowed from the subtitle of Campton's play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*, in reviewing Pinter's and Campton's plays in *Encore* in 1958.

Political Plays : In the history of theatre, there is long tradition of performances addressing issues of current events and central to society itself, encouraging consciousness and social change. The political satire performed by the comic poets at the theatres, had considerable influence on public opinion. Such plays are known as political plays.

Maltreatment : To treat or handle badly, cruelly, or roughly; abuse.

Memory Plays : A play that focuses on the past as narrated by the main character. Usually, the play is a dramatic representation of the playwright's life—or at least loosely based upon the playwright's experiences.

27.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief sketch of birth and early childhood of Harold Pinter.
2. Illustrate that Harold Pinter was an apt screenwriter.
3. Harold Pinter was a superb screenwriter. Illustrate this statement in context of his conferment of Tony Award and Academy Awards.
4. Explain that *The Birthday Party* is failure of language to serve as an adequate tool of communication.
5. Harold Pinter never dimmed his interest in writing even though his play *The Birthday Party* was completely massacred by the critics in London. Why?

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. oesophageal
4. *The Compartment*	5. True	6. False
7. (a)	8. (b)	9. *The Room*
10. Theatre of the Absurd	11. True	12. True.

Notes

27.6 Further Readings

Books

Stanley N. Alpert. 1987. *The Birthday Party: A Memoir of Survival*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, UK.

Harold Pinter. 1991. *The Birthday Party*. Faber and Faber.

Online links

http://www.thebirthdayparty.com.au/

http://www.haroldpinter.org/plays/title_bdayparty.shtml

http://www.enotes.com/birthday-party

Unit 14: The Birthday Party: Detailed Analysis of the Text

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the summary of all the Acts;
- Illustrate the analysis of all the Acts;
- Analyse in detail the text of Act I to Act III.

Introduction

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play. He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour, during which, in Eastbourne, England, he had lived in filthy insane digs. The flophouse became the model for the rundown boarding house of the play and the woman and her tenant the models, respectively, for the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber. The play was heavily criticized by the reviewers, some of which very negative. The nearly unanimous negative reviews that assaulted the 1958 London premier of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* baffled the young playwright but never dampened his spirits. Those early reviewers, with the exception of Harold Hobson, found Pinter's play unfunny, obscure, and derivative. In the *Evening Standard*, Milton Shulman, scoffed that the work would be best enjoyed by those who believe that obscurity is its own reward and further complained that the play was not very funny, in part because the fun to be derived out of the futility of language. This unit elaborates the text of the play in detail from from Act I to Act III. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text in all the Acts.

14.1 Act I

The Birthday Party opens in the living-dining area of a seedy rooming house at an unnamed seaside resort in England. Petey and Meg Boles, the proprietors, converse while she prepares his breakfast

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and he reads the newspaper. Their talk is inane, centering on their tenant, Stanley Webber. Petey also tells her of two strangers who might come to rent a room.

While Meg prepares to serve her husband Petey breakfast, Stanley, described as a man in his late thirties, who is disheveled and unshaven, enters from upstairs. Alternating between maternal and flirtatious affectation toward Stanley, Meg tells him that two gentlemen, two new visitors, will be arriving. At this information, Stanley appears concerned, suspicious, and disbelieving; there is "A sudden knock on the front door" and Meg goes offstage, while Stanley listens at a voice coming through the letter box, but it is just Lulu carrying in a package delivered for Meg. Right after Meg and Lulu exit, Goldberg and McCann arrive, but Stanley immediately sidles through the kitchen door and out of the back door before they can see him to eavesdrop, but they speak only vaguely about this job they have to do with bureaucratic cliches, nevertheless rendering McCann satisfied. After Meg's new guests go up to their room, Stanley enters, and Meg gives him the package brought by Lulu containing his birthday present, which he opens, revealing, inappropriately for a man his age, a toy drum.

Task Illustrate the opening of the play *The Birthday Party.*

28.2 Act II

It is evening of the same day. McCann, at the living room table, methodically tears Petey's newspaper into strips. Stanley enters and begins a polite conversation. When McCann mentions the birthday party, Stanley insists that he wants to celebrate alone, but McCann says that, as the guest of honor, Stanley cannot skip out on it.

McCann and Stanley bicker, with Stanley acting erratically and denying that it is his birthday and that Meg is round the bend. Goldberg sends McCann out to buy alcohol for the party that Meg has informed them that she has planned to celebrate Stanley's birthday, which he denies having. McCann eventually confronts Stanley by asking Why did you leave the organization? and Why did you betray us? telling him You betrayed our land […] you betray our breed […] you're dead. Meg comes down in her dress, and they begin the party, all except Stanley drinking and becoming drunk. Lulu enters and they decide to play the children's game blind man's buff.

28.3 Act III

It is early the next morning. As before, Petey sits at the table reading the newspaper. Through the hatch, Meg explains that Goldberg and McCann had eaten all the breakfast food. She enters to pour Petey some tea and spots Stanley's present, broken and discarded in the fireplace. She plans to fetch Stanley down, observing that she had gone up earlier and found him talking to McCann. Meg asks Petey about Goldberg's car and the suspicious wheelbarrow, which, he tells her, does not exist.

Paralleling the first scene of the play, Petey is having breakfast, and Meg asks him innocuous questions, with important differences revealing the aftermath of the party. They exit and McCann brings in Stanley, with his broken glasses; overpowered by their rhetorical prowess, Stanley goes catatonic and does not respond. They begin to lead him out of the house toward the car waiting to take him to Monty. Petey confronts them one last time but passively backs down as they take Stanley away, broken, calling out Stan, don't let them tell you what to do! After Meg returns from shopping, she notices that The car's gone and as Petey remains silent, he continues to withhold his knowledge of Stanley's departure, allowing her to end the play without knowing the truth about Stanley.

Notes

Task Illustrate the parallelism of scenes in Act I and Act II.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following is not true about *The Birthday Party*?
   (a) It was a tragedy
   (b) It was Harold Pinter's first commercially-produced play
   (c) Harold Pinter began writing *The Birthday Party* after acting in a theatrical tour
   (d) The play was heavily criticized by the reviewers.
2. Who is described disheveled and unshaven in the Act I?
   (a) McCann (b) Stanley
   (c) Meg (d) Petey.

Fill in the blanks:

3. McCann, at the living room table, methodically tears Petey's ..... into strips.
4. Through the hatch, Meg explains that Goldberg and McCann had eaten all the ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. On hearing the news of arrival of two new visitors, Stanley appears concerned, suspicious, and disbelieving.
6. Paralleling the first scene of the play, Petey is having breakfast, and Meg asks him innocuous questions, with important differences revealing the details of the party.
7. The nearly unanimous negative reviews that assaulted the 1958 London premier of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* baffled him and dampened his spirits of writing.

28.4 Summary

- Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, was the playwright's first commercially-produced, full-length play. He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour, during which, in Eastbourne, England, he had lived in filthy insane digs. The flophouse became the model for the rundown boarding house of the play and the woman and her tenant the models, respectively, for the characters of Meg Boles and Stanley Webber.
- The criticism of the 1958 London premier of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* baffled the young playwright but never dampened his spirits.
- *The Birthday Party* opens in the living-dining area of a seedy rooming house at an unnamed seaside resort in England. Petey and Meg Boles, the proprietors, converse while she prepares his breakfast and he reads the newspaper.
- While Meg prepares to serve her husband Petey breakfast, Stanley, described as a man in his late thirties, who is disheveled and unshaven, enters from upstairs.
- It is evening of the same day. McCann, at the living room table, methodically tears Petey's newspaper into strips. Stanley enters and begins a polite conversation. When McCann mentions the birthday party, Stanley insists that he wants to celebrate alone, but McCann says that, as the guest of honor, Stanley cannot skip out on it.
- It is early the next morning. As before, Petey sits at the table reading the newspaper. Through the hatch, Meg explains that Goldberg and McCann had eaten all the breakfast food. She enters to pour Petey some tea and spots Stanley's present, broken and discarded in the fireplace.

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- After Meg returns from shopping, she notices that The car's gone and as Petey remains silent, he continues to withhold his knowledge of Stanley's departure, allowing her to end the play without knowing the truth about Stanley.

28.5 Keywords

Insane : Characteristic of a person of unsound mind.

Flophouse : A cheap lodging house, especially one used by tramps.

Tenant : A person or group that rents and occupies land, a house, an office, or the like, from another for a period of time.

Unfunny : Not funny; especially failing to achieve the intended humor.

Obscure : Not clear or plain; ambiguous, vague, or uncertain: an obscure sentence in the contract. Or not clear to the understanding; hard to perceive: obscure motivations. Or not expressing the meaning clearly or plainly.

28.6 Review Questions

1. What truth about Stanley Petey withhold to tell Meg?
2. Illustrate and analyse the events of Act II.
3. Illustrate the conversation of Petey and Meg Boles in their living dining area in the opening of the play.
4. Illustrate the events of Act III about the Stanley's departure and end of the play.
5. Write a short notes on the events of:
   (a) Act I (b) Act II (c) Act III

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. newspaper
4. breakfast food 5. True 6. False
7. False

28.7 Further Readings

Books

Ganz, Arthur (ed.). 1972. *Introduction to Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice-Hall.

Esslin, Martin. 1976. *The Theatre of the Absurd*, revised and enlarged edition, Penguin Books.

Online links

http://www.slideshare.net/Johof/the-birthday-party-full-text-2073679

http://www.enotes.com/birthday-party/birthday-party-work-anti-text

Unit 15: The Birthday Party: Characterization and Theme

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CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Enumerate all the characters in the play;
- Discuss the criticism of each character;
- Elucidate that the play *Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information;
- Illustrate that with the hosting of the birthday party, the play reaches its climax of menace.

Introduction

Characterization is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. Characterization of a play is revealed through direct characterization and indirect characterization. Most plays are a series of actions and manners and therefore there is no surprise that the characters in *The Birthday Party* are defined by their behaviour. The Meg Boles's good nature is shown in her behaviour with their tenant Stanley calling him boy and mothering him. She fills a void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding house tenant into a kind of surrogate child. The characters of the play have their own significance by their behaviour. This unit illustrates the characterization of the play The Birthday Party and analyse their behaviour. The themes depicted in the play have also been illustrated here.

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29.1 Characterization

29.1.1 Meg and Petey Boles

Petey's wife, Meg Boles is a good-natured woman in her sixties. If only from a lack of any reference to offspring of her own, it is implied that she and Petey are childless, thus she fills a void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding-house tenant, Stanley Webber, into a kind of surrogate child. She insists on calling him "boy" and mothering him. She even takes liberties appropriate to a parent—though not to the landlady of an adult roomer—by invading his privacy to fetch him down to breakfast.

Like his wife, Petey Boles is in his sixties. He is a deck-chair attendant at the unidentified seaside resort where he and Meg own their boarding house, which, although it is ''on the list,'' has seen much better days. Petey is dull and ambitionless, no more inclined than his wife to find challenges beyond the confines of their rooming house. The pair have simply settled into a humdrum existence appropriate to their mundane minds.

Task Illustrate the events in the play *Birthday Party* that proves Meg Boles a good natured woman.

29.1.2 Goldberg and McCann

Goldberg and McCann represent not only the West's most autocratic religions, but its two most persecuted races. Goldberg goes by many names sometimes Nat but when talking about his past he mentions that he was called by the names Simey and also Benny. He seems to idolise his Uncle Barney as he mentions him many times during the play. It is thought that Goldberg is a Jewish man. McCann is an unfrocked priest and has two names. Petey refers to him as Dermot but Goldberg calls him Seamus. McCann seems to think that Goldberg is a Christian man but this seems not to be the case as Goldberg is a typically Jewish name.

Nat Goldberg, in his fifties, is the older of the two strangers who come to interrogate and intimidate Stanley before taking him away. He is a suave character, a gentleman in appearance and demeanor. He also seems to exude superficial good will, inclined to give kindly advice to both his henchman, McCann, and the other characters. He is nostalgic, too. He fondly and affectionately recalls his family and events in his early life. He also insists that Meg and the others honor Stanley with a birthday party.

Task Goldberg and McCann represent both west's most autocratic religions and persecuted races. Analyse this statement in context of *Birthday Party*.

29.1.3 Stanley Webber

Stanley Webber is a palpably Jewish name incidentally is a man who shores up his precarious sense of self through fantasy, bluff, violence and his own manipulative form of power-play. His treatment of Meg initially is rough, playful, teasing, ... but once she makes the fateful, mood-changing revelation—'I've got to get things ready for the two gentlemen'—he's as dangerous as a cornered animal.

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29.1.4 Lulu

Lulu is a woman in her twenties whom Stanley tries vainly to rape during the birthday party in Act II. Described as a girl in her twenties,' Lulu is a neighbor who first appears carrying Stanley's birthday present, the toy drum and drum sticks that Meg had bought for him. On the flirtatious side, she is self-conscious about her sexual appeal and cannot sit still for long without taking out a compact to powder her face. To her, looks are obviously important, and she sees Stanley as a washout because he seems to care nothing about his unkempt appearance.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Goldberg and McCann represent not only the West's most autocratic religions, but its
   (a) two most persecuted races (b) class society
   (c) oppressed society (d) aristocratic society.
2. Which of the following statements is not true Stanley Webber?
   (a) He is the tenant of Petey Boles
   (b) He is a saint
   (c) He is as dangerous as a cornered animal
   (d) He is palpably a Jewish name.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Like his wife, Petey Boles is in his ..... .
4. Lulu is a woman in her twenties whom ..... tries vainly to rape during the birthday party in Act II.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. Lulu is a neighbor who first appears carrying Stanley's birthday present.
6. Nat Goldberg, in his fifties, is the older of the two strangers who come to interrogate and intimidate Stanley before taking him away.

29.2 Themes

As in many absurdist works, *The Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information that defies efforts to distinguish between reality and illusion. For example, despite the presentation of personal information on Stanley and his two persecutors, who or what they really are remains a mystery. Goldberg, in particular, provides all sorts of information about his background, but he offers only oblique clues as to why he has intruded upon Stanley's life.

The term comedy of menace was first used by David Campton as a subtitle to his four short plays The Lunatic view. Harold Pinter exploited the possibilities of this kind of situation in his early plays like *The Room*, *Birthday Party* and *A Slight Ache*, where the both the character/s and the audience face an atmosphere, apparently funny but actually having suggestiveness of some impending threat from outside. Pinter himself explained the situation thus: more often than not the speech only seems to be funny—the man in question is actually fighting a battle for his life. He also said: Everything is funny until the horror of the human situation rises to the surface! Life is funny because it is based on illusions and self-deceptions, like Stanley's dream of a world tour as a pianist, because it is built out of pretence. In fact the play *Birthday Party* is built around the exchanges of words, which, though

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funny enough, contain hints that suggest the impending doom lurking around to them. Meg's situation as a childless old woman who talks through repetitions may seem funny and odd, but those cover up her unconscious desire to have son, a desire she tries to fulfil through the mothering of Stanley and Petey. But Above all, Stanley's staying in a sea-side lodge, his shabby appearance combined with inconsistent words and memorising may seem strange and invoke mild laughter but in reality he is facing a crisis which he is himself not completely aware of.

Pinter creates an atmosphere of menace through a variety of dramatic elements and techniques. First of all, he lets situations fall from a light-hearted situation unexpectedly down to one which is highly serious. For instance, while talking to Meg among other things, he tells her about a wheel-barrow which will come to the house for some body. Here we get a suggestion of impending death through the sudden reference to coffin. Again, we see Meg offering Staley the gift of a drum as a compliment to his supposed musical talent. But Stanley begins to beat it with such savagery that the audience is left dumb-struck as to the real intention behind this. This kind of abrupt explosion of violence is once again seen when Stanley kicks at McCann. But more importantly, menace is presented through the fears the characters feel but cannot spot. First of all, fear of weather is introduced: the characters repeatedly enquire about weather, and this becomes tangible once the audience understands that the lodge is situated on the coast of a sea. Then Stanley tries to frighten Meg by prophesying the arrival of wheel-barrow which, of course, does not come for her. On the other hand, on hearing the visit of two strangers, Stanley feels a complex fear—first of all, the fear of being driven away from the lodge which has become for him as comfortable as his mother's womb. A house represents security and comforts from the hazards of the outside world but sadly it is impossible to sustain. Goldberg and McCann is the embodiment of menace from a hostile outside world. We also note that he stays in a lodge, which cannot be a substitute for home. Secondly, Stanley faces the fear of being persecuted by the intruders. That is why he expresses his desire to run away with Lulu, but is afraid of doing so in reality.

Task How does Pinter create an atmosphere of menace in the play *Birthday Party.*

With the hosting of the birthday party, the play reaches its climax of menace. A birthday party is expected to be a ritualistic celebration of one's life, but in the case of Stanley it turns out to be the greatest ordeal of life leading to his complete mental derangement. The audience now understands the menace turning real though in transformed forms. Stanley faces not only physical assault but also a torrent of words, with the serious accusations like He's killed his wife mingled with trivial and ludicrous like Why do you pick your nose? The persons who could have saved him are either absent or drunk.

The play ends with Stanley's forced removal from the house by Goldberg and McCann who leave a further note of unknown menace awaiting Stanley in near future. This uncertain menace is further strengthened by Petey's inability to communicate to Meg what has exactly happened with Stanley. To conclude, it can be said that the final impression of the play on the audience echoes Pinter's own words: In our present-day world, everything is uncertain, there is no fixed point, we are surrounded by the unknown... There is a kind of horror about and I think that this horror and absurdity (comedy) go together.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

7. Pinter creates an atmosphere of menace through a variety of
   (a) dramatic elements and techniques
   (b) admiration and power struggle
   (c) ritualistic celebration
   (d) disjointed information.

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8. The play ends with Stanley's forced removal from the house by

(a) Goldberg and Lulu (b) Goldberg and McCann

(c) Lulu and Petey (d) Lulu and McCann.

Fill in the blanks:

9. Pinter creates an atmosphere of menace through a variety of dramatic elements and ..... .

10. With the hosting of the birthday party, the play reaches its climax of ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. Stanley tries to frighten Meg by prophesying the arrival of wheel-barrow which, of course, does not come for her.

12. The play ends with Stanley's willing removal from the house by Goldberg and McCann.

29.3 Summary

- Most plays are a series of actions and manners and therefore there is no surprise that the characters in *The Birthday party* are defined by their behaviour.
- The Meg Boles's good nature is shown in her behaviour with their tenant Stanley calling him boy and mothering him. She fills a void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding house tenant into a kind of surrogate child.
- Petey's wife, Meg Boles is a good-natured woman in her sixties. If only from a lack of any reference to offspring of her own, it is implied that she and Petey are childless.
- Like his wife, Petey Boles is in his sixties. He is a deck-chair attendant at the unidentified seaside resort where he and Meg own their boarding house, which, although it is ''on the list,'' has seen much better days.
- Goldberg and McCann represent not only the West's most autocratic religions, but its two most persecuted races.
- McCann seems to think that Goldberg is a Christian man but this seems not to be the case as Goldberg is a typically Jewish name.
- Nat Goldberg, in his fifties, is the older of the two strangers who come to interrogate and intimidate Stanley before taking him away.
- Stanley Webber is a palpably Jewish name incidentally is a man who shores up his precarious sense of self through fantasy, bluff, violence and his own manipulative form of power-play.
- Lulu is a woman in her twenties whom Stanley tries vainly to rape during the birthday party in Act II.
- As in many absurdist works, *The Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information that defies efforts to distinguish between reality and illusion.
- The term comedy of menace was first used by David Campton as a subtitle to his four short plays The Lunatic view.
- Harold Pinter exploited the possibilities of this kind of situation in his early plays like *The Room*, *Birthday Party* and *A Slight Ache*, where the both the character/s and the audience face an atmosphere, apparently funny but actually having suggestiveness of some impending threat from outside.
- Pinter himself explained the situation thus: more often than not the speech only seems to be funny—the man in question is actually fighting a battle for his life.

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- In fact the play *Birthday Party* is built around the exchanges of words, which, though funny enough, contain hints that suggest the impending doom lurking around to them.
- Pinter creates an atmosphere of menace through a variety of dramatic elements and techniques.
- First of all, he lets situations fall from a light-hearted situation unexpectedly down to one which is highly serious. For instance, while talking to Meg among other things, he tells her about a wheel-barrow which will come to the house for some body.
- With the hosting of the birthday party, the play reaches its climax of menace. A birthday party is expected to be a ritualistic celebration of one's life, but in the case of Stanley it turns out to be the greatest ordeal of life leading to his complete mental derangement.
- The play ends with Stanley's forced removal from the house by Goldberg and McCann who leave a further note of unknown menace awaiting Stanley in near future.

29.4 Keywords

Mothering **:** The nurturing of an infant or small child by its mother.

Autocratic **:** Relating to an absolute and unrestricted ruler.

Lunatic **:** Lunatic is a commonly used term for a person who is mentally ill, dangerous, foolish, unpredictable; a condition once called lunacy.

Cliches **:** Cliches is an expression, idea, or element of an artistic work which has been overused to the point of losing its original meaning or effect, rendering it a stereotype, especially when at some earlier time it was considered meaningful or novel.

Illusion **:** An illusion is a distortion of the senses, revealing how the brain normally organizes and interprets sensory stimulation.

29.5 Review Questions

1. Which character in the play do you most admire? Why.
2. Which character do you list admire? Why.
3. Sketch the character of Stanley Webber.
4. Meg Boles is a good-natured woman in her sixties who want to fill the void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding-house tenant, Stanley Webber, into a kind of surrogate child. Analyze this character in view of this statement.
5. Illustrate the the *The Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information.
6. Justify that Pinter creates an atmosphere of menace through a variety of dramatic elements and techniques in *Birthday Party*.
7. Give a critical view of the following characters in the play *The Birthday Party*:
   (a) Lulu (b) Stanley Webber (c) Petey

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. sixties
4. Stanley	5. True	6. True
7. (a)	8. (b)	9. techniques
10. menace	11. True	12. False

29.6 Further Readings

Notes

Books

Ganz, Arthur (ed.). 1972. *Introduction to Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice-Hall.

Esslin, Martin. 1976. *The Theatre of the Absurd*, revised and enlarged edition, Penguin Books.

Online links

http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-birthdayparty/char.html

http://www.enotes.com/birthday-party/meg-boles

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Unit 16: Arnold Wesker—Introduction to the Author and the Text

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the biographical sketch of Arnold Wesker;
- Elaborate the literary works of Arnold Wesker;
- Explain that *Root* is one of the play of Arnold Wesker Chicken soup trilogy;
- Elucidate that *Root* is a kitchen sink drama
- Critically evaluate the play *Root*;
- Discuss the nature of the play.

Introduction

Arnold Wesker, considered one of the key figures in 20th Century drama, is the author of 44 plays, 4 volumes of short stories, 2 volumes of essays, an autobiography, a book on journalism, a children's book, extensive journalism, poetry and other assorted writings. His plays have been translated into 18 languages, and performed worldwide. 2002 celebrated his 70th birthday, 2006 celebrated his knighthood for services to drama. 2008 celebrates his 50th year as a playwright. In this unit details of his work with summaries and synopses, his essays, lectures and journalism, the books written about him, and his life has been depicted.

Roots is the second play by Arnold Wesker in The Wesker Trilogy. The first part is *Chicken Soup with Barley* and the final play *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*. *Roots* focuses on Beatie Bryant as she makes the transition from being an uneducated working-class woman obsessed with Ronnie, her unseen liberal

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boyfriend. The story, briefly, is about Beatie Bryant, the daughter of Norfolk farm labourers who returns for a short holiday from London, where she has fallen in love with a young, Jewish, working-class boy. This unit also introduces the text, drawbacks and problems of the play.

30.1 Arnold Wesker—Introduction

30.1.1 Life and Career

Sir Arnold Wesker was born on 24 May 1932 in Stepney, London, the son of Leah, a cook, and Joseph Wesker, a tailor's machinist. He was delivered by the father of Oliver Sacks and is a prolific British dramatist known for his contributions to kitchen sink drama. His early plays *Roots*, *The Kitchen*, and *Their Very Own* and *Golden City* were staged by The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre under the management of George Devine and later William Gaskill.

Did u know? The inspiration for *The Kitchen* came when Arnold Wesker was working at the Bell Hotel in Norwich. It was while working here that he also met his future wife Dusty. *Roots* are also set in Norfolk. He founded the Roundhouse's first theatre, called Centre 42, in 1964.

Wesker's play *The Merchant* (a play which he also called *Shylock*) tells the plot of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* from Shylock's point of view. In this retelling, Shylock and Antonio are fast friends bound by a mutual love of books and culture and a disdain for the crass anti-semitism of the Christian community's laws. They make the bond in defiant mockery of the Christian establishment, never anticipating that the bond might become forfeit. When it does, the play argues, Shylock must carry through on the letter of the law or jeopardize the scant legal security of the entire Jewish community. He is, therefore, quite as grateful as Antonio when Portia, as in Shakespeare's play, shows the legal way out. The play received its American premiere on November 16, 1977 at New York's Plymouth Theatre with Joseph Leon as Shylock, Marian Seldes as Shylock's sister Rivka and Roberta Maxwell as Portia. This production had a challenging history in previews on the road, culminating with the death of the exuberant Broadway star Zero Mostel, who was initially cast as Shylock. Wesker wrote a book chronicling the entire process from initial submissions and rejections of the play through to rehearsals, Zero's death, and the disappointment of the critical reception for the Broadway opening called The Birth of Shylock and the Death of Zero Mostel. The book reveals much about this playwright's relationship to director John Dexter, to criticism, to casting, and to the ephemeral process of collaboration through which the text of any play must pass.

Notes In 2005, Arnold Wesker published his first novel, *Honey*, which recounted the experiences of Beatie Bryant, the heroine of his earlier play *Roots*. The novel broke from the previously established chronology. *Roots* was set in the early 1960s and Beatie is 22, in *Honey* she has only aged 3 years yet the action has been transplanted into the 1980s. Other oddities are that the timeframe includes the Rushdie affair and John Major's fall as recent events and yet the action is concerned with the dotcom boom.

He was knighted in the 2006 New Year's Honours list. He was the castaway on Desert Island Discs, BBC Radio 4 on Sunday 17 December 2006. In 2008 Arnold Wesker published his first collection of poetry, *All Things Tire of Themselves*. The collection dates back many years and represents what he considers his best and most characteristic poems. He is a member of the editorial advisory board of

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Jewish Renaissance magazine. Many of Wesker's plays have underlying political themes, and Wesker himself is open about his admiration of the working class side of the 'class struggle'. Wesker joined with enthusiasm the Royal Court group on the Aldermaston March in 1959. Another of the Royal Court contingent, Lindsay Anderson, made a documentary film about the event.

Task Illustrate the work for which Arnold Wesker was knighted in the 2006 New year's Honours List.

30.1.2 Works

The Kitchen, 1957, *Chicken Soup with Barley*, 1958, *Roots*, 1958, *I'm talking about Jerusalem*, 1958 , *Menace*, 1961 (For Television) , *Chips with Everything*, 1962 , *The Nottingham Captain*, 1962, *Four Seasons*, 1965, *Their Very Own and Golden City*, 1966, *The Friends*, 1970, *The Old Ones*, 1970, *The Journalist*, 1972, *The Wedding Feast*, 1974, *Shylock*, 1976, *Love Letters on Blue Paper*, 1976, *Phoenix*, 1980, *Caritas*, 1980, *Words on the Wind*, 1980, *One More Ride on the Merry-Go-Round*, 1980, *Breakfast*, 1981, *Sullied Hand*, 1981, *Four Portraits - Of Mothers*, 1982, *Annie Wobbler*, 1982, *Yardsale*, 1983, *Cinders*, 1983, *The Merchant*, 1983, *Whatever Happened to Betty Lemon?*, 1986, *When God Wanted a Son*, 1986, *Lady Othello*, 1987, *Little Old Lady and Shoeshine*, 1987, *Badenheim* 1939, 1987, *The Mistress*, 1988, *Beorhtel's Hill*, 1988 (Community Play for Basildon) , *Men Die Women Survive*, 1990, *Letter To A Daughter*, 1990, *Blood Libel*, 1991, *Wild Spring*, 1992, *Bluey*, 1993, *The Confession*, 1993, *Circles of Perception*, 1996, *Break, My Heart*, 1997, *Denial*, 1997, *Barabbas*, 2000, *The Kitchen Musical*, 2000, *Groupie*, 2001, *Longitude*, 2002, *Honey*, 2005 (novel) , *The Rocking Horse*, 2007.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. For which of the following play Arnold Wesker got inspiration working at Bell Hotel in Norwich?
   (a) *The Kitchen* (b) *Chicken Soup with Barley*
   (c) *The Nottingham Captain* (d) *Four Seasons*.
2. Which of the following plays was not written by Arnold Wesker?
   (a) *Caritas* (b) *Family Voices*
   (c) *The Mistress* (d) *When God Wanted a Son*.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Wesker's play *The Merchant* tells the plot of Shakespeare's ..... from Shylock's point of view.
4. In 2005, Arnold Wesker published his first novel, *Honey*, which recounted the experiences of Beatie Bryant, the heroine of his earlier play ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. Arnold Wesker met his future wife Dusty while working at the Bell Hotel in Norwich.
6. Many of Wesker's plays have underlying social themes.

30.2 Roots—Introduction to the Text

Roots is the second play by Arnold Wesker in The Wesker Trilogy. The first part is *Chicken Soup with Barley* and the final play *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*. *Roots* focuses on Beatie Bryant as she makes the

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transition from being an uneducated working-class woman obsessed with Ronnie, her unseen liberal boyfriend, to a woman who can express herself and the struggles of her time. It is written in the country dialect of the people on which it focuses, and is considered to be one of Wesker's Kitchen Sink Dramas.

Task Elucidate that *Roots* is a Kitchen Sink Drama.

The story, briefly, is about Beatie Bryant, the daughter of Norfolk farm labourers who returns for a short holiday from London, where she has fallen in love with a young, Jewish, working-class boy (Ronnie Kahn, the son from Chicken Soup with Barley). He is due to join her to meet the family. During the days of waiting, she regales her family with stories about Ronnie and his bewilderingly alien east London family. Her spirit is effervescent and sunny, but her words are not hers, they're Ronnie's.

Her stern but hospitable mother gathers the family to meet him. An event of great importance is about to take place: Beatie's lover is coming to meet the family. He has been described, imitated, quoted, talked about, made fun of and eagerly awaited. He doesn't turn up. Instead, the postman brings a letter from Ronnie saying he doesn't think the relationship will work. The effect upon Beatie and her family is at first numbing, then humiliating. They are incensed to have been left standing like fools. The ensuing anger with which they turn on Beatie, her self-defence, her halting, hesitant stumble upon fluency, the discovery of her own voice deliriously reaching high C as she uses her own words instead of Ronnie's all take up the last 15 minutes of the play.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

7. Roots is the second play by Arnold Wesker
   (a) in the Wesker Trilogy (b) in the Chicken tetralogy
   (c) in the political trilogy (d) in the social trilogy.
8. The play *Roots* focuses on
   (a) Norfolk farm labourers (b) Beatie Bryant
   (c) Ronnie Kahn (d) an alien east London family.

Fill in the blanks:

9. Beatie Bryant makes the transition from being an uneducated working-class woman obsessed with .....
10. The story of *Roots*, briefly, is about Beatie Bryant, the daughter of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. Beatie's spirit is effervescent and sunny, but her words are not hers, they're Ronnie's.
12. *Roots* is written in the country dialect of the people on which it focuses.

30.3 Summary

- Sir Arnold Wesker was born on 24 May 1932 in Stepney, London, the son of Leah, a cook, and Joseph Wesker, a tailor's machinist.
- His early plays *Roots*, *The Kitchen*, and *Their Very Own* and *Golden City* were staged by The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre under the management of George Devine and later William Gaskill.

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- His inspiration for *The Kitchen* came when he was working at the Bell Hotel in Norwich.
- It was while working here that he also met his future wife Dusty.
- *Roots* are also set in Norfolk. He founded the Roundhouse's first theatre, called Centre 42, in 1964.
- Wesker's play *The Merchant* (a play which he also called *Shylock*) tells the plot of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* from Shylock's point of view.
- In 2005, he published his first novel, *Honey*, which recounted the experiences of Beatie Bryant, the heroine of his earlier play *Roots*.
- The novel broke from the previously established chronology. *Roots* was set in the early 1960s and Beatie is 22, in *Honey* she has only aged 3 years yet the action has been transplanted into the 1980s.
- He was knighted in the 2006 New Year's Honours list. He was the castaway on Desert Island Discs, BBC Radio 4 on Sunday 17 December 2006.
- In 2008 Arnold Wesker published his first collection of poetry, *All Things Tire of Themselves*. The collection dates back many years and represents what he considers his best and most characteristic poems.
- He is a member of the editorial advisory board of Jewish Renaissance magazine.
- Wesker joined with enthusiasm the Royal Court group on the Aldermaston March in 1959. Another of the Royal Court contingent, Lindsay Anderson, made a documentary film about the event.
- *Roots* is the second play by Arnold Wesker in The Wesker Trilogy. The first part is *Chicken Soup with Barley* and the final play *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*.
- *Roots* focuses on Beatie Bryant as she makes the transition from being an uneducated working-class woman obsessed with Ronnie, her unseen liberal boyfriend, to a woman who can express herself and the struggles of her time.
- It is written in the country dialect of the people on which it focuses, and is considered to be one of Wesker's Kitchen Sink Dramas.
- The story, briefly, is about Beatie Bryant, the daughter of Norfolk farm labourers who returns for a short holiday from London, where she has fallen in love with a young, Jewish, working-class boy.
- Her spirit is effervescent and sunny, but her words are not hers, they're Ronnie's.
- Her stern but hospitable mother gathers the family to meet him.
- The effect upon Beatie and her family is at first numbing, then humiliating. They are incensed to have been left standing like fools. The ensuing anger with which they turn on Beatie, her self-defence, her halting, hesitant stumble upon fluency, the discovery of her own voice deliriously reaching high C as she uses her own words instead of Ronnie's all take up the last 15 minutes of the play.

30.4 Keywords

Playwright : A person who writes plays. Or The texts of plays that can be read, as distinct from being seen and heard in performance.

Machinist : A person who operates machinery, especially a skilled operator of machine tools.

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Dramatist	:	A writer of dramas or dramatic poetry; playwright.
Kitchen sink drama	:	The kitchen sink drama is placed in an ordinary domestic setting and typically tells a relatively mundane family story. Family tensions often come to the fore with realistic conflict between husband and wife, parent and child, between siblings and with the wider community. The family may also pull together in unity against outer forces that range from the rent-collector to rival families.
Trilogy	:	A series or group of three plays, novels, operas, etc., that, although individually complete, are closely related in theme, sequence, or the like.

30.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief sketch of birth and early childhood of Arnold Wesker.
2. Illustrate that Arnold Wesker was an apt playwright.
3. Arnold Wesker is a prolific British dramatist known for his contributions to kitchen sink drama. Illustrate this statement in context of his contribution.
4. Explain that *Roots* is a kitchen sink drama.
5. Elucidate that *Root* is written in the country dialect of the people on which it focuses.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)	2. (b)	3. *The Merchant of Venice*
4. *Roots*	5. True	6. False
7. (a)	8. (b)	9. Ronnie
10. Norfolk farm labourers	11. True	12. True

30.6 Further Readings

Books

Arnold Wesker. 1959. *Roots: The Second Play of the Chicken Soup Trilogy*. Penguin Books.

Robert Wilcher. 1991. *Understanding Arnold Wesker*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S. Carolina.

Online links

http://www.arnoldwesker.com/synopses/roots.htm

http://www.walesonline.co.uk/showbiz-and-lifestyle/theatre-in-wales/2011/

Notes

Unit 17: Roots: Detailed Analysis of the Text

CONTENTS

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the summary of the play *Roots*;
- Describe the summary of all the three acts of the play *Roots*;
- Illustrate the analysis of play Roots.

Introduction

In *Roots*, Arnold Wesker gives us a bickering, baffled, sometimes belligerent, always believable family of farm workers in the north of England. His achievement here is to show the Bryants simultaneously as individuals, as a family and as victims of an economic and social system far beyond their comprehension. The catalyst is Beatie, the youngest daughter, who has been living in London with her lover, a Socialist intellectual. She has returned home for two weeks, bursting with the notions of uplift that her Ronnie, who sounds slightly Shavian, has been pouring into her. In London, she has been an ignorant farm girl; at home, she tries to be a force for enlightenment, arguing with her hidebound brother-in-law, Jimmy, about the rights of labor and trying to get her mother to appreciate classical music. This unit elaborates the text of the play in detail from from Act I to Act III. More emphasis is given on the detailed analysis of the text in all the Acts.

17.1 Analysis of the Text

The play opens at a rather ramshackle house in Norfolk where there is no water laid on, nor electricity, nor gas. Everything rambles and the furniture is cheap and old. If it is untidy it is because there is a child in the house and there are few amenities, so that the mother is too over-worked to take much care.

An assortment of clobber lies around: papers and washing, coats and basins, a tin wash-tub with shirts and underwear to be cleaned, tilly lamps and primus stoves. Washing hangs on a line in the room. It is September.

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Two weeks have passed. It is Saturday, the day Ronnie is to arrive. One of the walls of the kitchen is now pushed aside and the front room is revealed. It is low-ceilinged, and has dark brown wooden beams. The furniture is not typical country farm house type. There may be one or two windsor-type straight-back chairs, but for the rest it is cheap utility stuff. Two armchairs, a table, a small bamboo table, wooden chairs, a small sofa, and a swivel bookcase. There are a lot of flowers around—in pots on the window, ledge and in vases on the bamboo table and swivel case.

It is three in the afternoon, the weather is cloudy—it has been raining and is likely to start again. On the table is a spread of food (none of this will be eaten). There are cakes and biscuits on plates and glass stands. Bread and butter, butter in a dish, tomatoes, cheese, jars of pickled onions, sausage rolls, dishes of tinned fruit—it is a spread! Round the table are eight chairs. Beatie's paintings are hanging on the wall. The room is empty because Beatie is upstairs changing and Mrs Bryant is in the kitchen. Beatie—until she descends—conducts all her conversation shouting from upstairs.

Did u know? *Roots*, written about 30 years ago, is part of the Wesker trilogy and is, by consensus, among the playwright's best works. A slice of England in the 1950's, it was also an acute study of a woman's liberation before that phrase was devalued by overuse.

The production at the Jewish Repertory Theatre is intelligent, if not inspired. The mood, emphasized by Geoffrey Hall's domestic sets and Edward M. Cohen's direction, is realistic. Much of the slow first act is given to Beatie's tidying of sister Jenny's living room and their conversation about Jimmy's back pains. Mr. Wesker saves his big revelations for the end, tossing in a couple of false leads along the way as though trying to hold our attention while we get comfortable with the characters. The play begins with the crying of a baby, who we learn is Jenny's illegitimate child, but we never find out who the father is. And there are entirely mystifying references to a dispute between Mrs. Bryant and her daughter-in-law, Pearl, over the labor tote, which the program informs us is a pool. The point is to show up the triviality even of their feuds.

Gradually, Beatie's irrepressible energy and her striving toward ideals she scarcely understands win our affection and concern. By the second act, we are caught up in her confusion at belonging neither in the family that she now sees through Ronnie's eyes nor among the self-made intellectuals back in London.

If Mr. Wesker says too little in Act I, he says too much in Act III. The family is gathered to meet Ronnie; Beatie is on edge. I don't want Ronnie to think I come from a small-minded family, she confesses—a generous estimate of people whose conversation is confined mostly to town gossip, bits from the tabloids and jokes about sex. Members of the audience who do not glance at the cast list may be surprised when Ronnie does not appear. Beatie realizes that now she is on her own, and her final soliloquy, though rousing, sounds as though Mr Wesker had taken over as her ventriloquist.

Task Analyse the fact that Arnold Wesker says too little in Act I, but too much in Act III.

Nealla Spano develops her portrayal of Beatie carefully. She is full of affection for her family but exasperated at their self-satisfied ignorance; watching them, she becomes Ronnie watching her. You didn't open a door for me! she cries desperately to her mother. Miss Spano's dialect, like those of the other players, has never been heard in the North Country, but Mr. Wesker's dialogue is so flavorsome that after the first moments, the accents don't jar.

Gloria Barret as Mrs Bryant comes on rather more stylishly than her words or her condition allow. Even so, the Act II give-and-take between Beatie and her mother about music is the play's most

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effective scene. Dermot McNamara as Mr Bryant and Bonnie Gallup, Fred Sanders and Brian Drillinger as the younger generation are more convincing as not-too-bright people resisting any changes in their narrow lives. Just sitting awkwardly side by side on a couch, dressed in their blue-suit best, their white socks on display, Mr Sanders and Mr Drillinger are plainly men who would be more comfortable out with the livestock. Roger DeKoven gets every bit of juice out of the role of a dying neighbor whose lusty impulses have not entirely subsided and is disgusted with the lifeless resignation he sees all about him. He seems to sense that the prospect that society's trap may yet be broken by a new generation rides with Beatie. Mr Wesker and Miss Spano between them give reason for hope.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following is not true about *Roots*?
   (a) It was a comedy of menace
   (b) Nealla Spano develops her portrayal of Beatie carefully
   (c) It is part of the Wesker trilogy
   (d) The play opens at a ramshackle house in Norfolk.
2. Who is focused in the play *Roots*?
   (a) Nealla Spano (b) Beatie
   (c) Gloria Barret (d) Bonnie Gallup.

Fill in the blanks:

3. The production of the play *Roots* at the Jewish Repertory Theatre is intelligent, if not ..... .
4. If Mr Wesker says too little in ....., he says too much in Act III.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. *Roots* is part of the Wesker trilogy and is, by consensus, among the playwright's best works.
6. Arnold Wesker's achievement in *Roots* is to show the Bryants simultaneously as individuals, as a family and as victims of an economic and political system.
7. Gloria Barret as Mrs Bryant comes on rather more stylishly than her words or her condition allow.

31.2 Summary

- The play *Roots* opens at a rather ramshackle house in Norfolk where there is no water laid on, nor electricity, nor gas. Everything rambles and the furniture is cheap and old. If it is untidy it is because there is a child in the house and there are few amenities, so that the mother is too over-worked to take much care.
- An assortment of clobber lies around: papers and washing, coats and basins, a tin wash-tub with shirts and underwear to be cleaned, tilly lamps and primus stoves.
- Two weeks later it is Saturday, the day Ronnie is to arrive. One of the walls of the kitchen is now pushed aside and the front room is revealed. It is low-ceilinged, and has dark brown wooden beams.
- It is three in the afternoon, the weather is cloudy—it has been raining and is likely to start again. On the table is a spread of food (none of this will be eaten). There are cakes and biscuits on plates and glass stands. Bread and butter, butter in a dish, tomatoes, cheese, jars of pickled onions, sausage rolls, dishes of tinned fruit—it is a spread!

Notes

- *Roots*, written about 30 years ago, is part of the Wesker trilogy and is, by consensus, among the playwright's best works.
- The production of the play at the Jewish Repertory Theatre is intelligent, if not inspired.
- The mood, emphasized by Geoffrey Hall's domestic sets and Edward M. Cohen's direction, is realistic. Much of the slow first act is given to Beatie's tidying of sister Jenny's living room and their conversation about Jimmy's back pains.
- Mr. Wesker saves his big revelations for the end, tossing in a couple of false leads along the way as though trying to hold our attention while we get comfortable with the characters.
- The play begins with the crying of a baby, who we learn is Jenny's illegitimate child, but we never find out who the father is.
- If Mr. Wesker says too little in Act I, he says too much in Act III.
- The family is gathered to meet Ronnie; Beatie is on edge. I don't want Ronnie to think I come from a small-minded family, she confesses—a generous estimate of people whose conversation is confined mostly to town gossip, bits from the tabloids and jokes about sex.
- Nealla Spano develops her portrayal of Beatie carefully. She is full of affection for her family but exasperated at their self-satisfied ignorance; watching them, she becomes Ronnie watching her.
- Gloria Barret as Mrs Bryant comes on rather more stylishly than her words or her condition allow. Even so, the Act II give-and-take between Beatie and her mother about music is the play's most effective scene.
- Dermot McNamara as Mr Bryant and Bonnie Gallup, Fred Sanders and Brian Drillinger as the younger generation are more convincing as not-too-bright people resisting any changes in their narrow lives.

31.3 Keywords

Bickering : To engage in petulant or peevish argument; wrangle.

Baffled : To frustrate or confound; thwart by creating confusion or bewilderment.

Belligerent : Pertaining to a warlike character; aggressively hostile; bellicose.

Enlightenment : A philosophical movement of the 18th century, characterized by belief in the power of human reason and by innovations in political, religious, and educational doctrine.

Hidebound : Oriented toward or confined to the past; extremely conservative.

Soliloquy : An utterance or discourse by a person who is talking to himself or herself or is disregardful of or oblivious to any hearers present (often used as a device in drama to disclose a character's innermost thoughts).

Ventriloquist : The art of producing vocal sounds that appear to come from another source.

31.4 Review Questions

1. Why did Nealla Spano cries desperately to her mother saying "you didn't open a door for me!"?
2. Illustrate and analyse the events of Act II.
3. Illustrate that the Act II give-and-take between Beatie and her mother about music is the play's most effective scene.

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4. Illustrate the events of Act III about the arrival of Ronnie.
5. Write a short notes on the events of:
   (a) Act I (b) Act II (c) Act III

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. inspired
4. Act I 5. True 6. False
7. True

31.5 Further Readings

Books

Arnold Wesker. 1959. *Roots: The Second Play of the Chicken Soup Trilogy*. Penguin Books.

Robert Wilcher. 1991. *Understanding Arnold Wesker*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S. Carolina.

Online links

http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/

http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=4753755

Unit 18: Roots: Characterization and Theme

Notes

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Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Elucidate that the play *Roots* is governed by three sources of pressure—current affairs, the author's attitude and the characters;
- Illustrate that the most notable qualities of the play are emotional maturity and command of action in depth.

Introduction

Wesker's most notable qualities are emotional maturity and his command of action in depth. The first means that he never condescends to his characters, the second that what happens on stage is always more interesting in performance than we would be likely to guess from quotation. Under the surface of dialogue which, like O'Neill's, is often limp and colourless on the page, there comes into focus a network of relationships more significant than the interplay in the foreground, which can be written off as a quarrel between cooks or the gushing quotation of a half-educated young man's ideas, accurate but uninspiring. The inner framework, on the contrary, contains social and political issues, held together dramatically by the playwright's urgent concern for them and by his conviction that they affect the homely characters in front. Thus, behind Ronnie Kahn lies the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and behind both is the fact of the author's Russo-Hungarian descent; behind Peter the cook lies German idealism and violence; and behind Beatie Bryant is a generation faced with a new kind of choice. In each case there are three sources of pressure: current affairs, the author's attitude, and the characters in the play. This unit illustrates the themes depicted in the play.

18.1 Themes

Arnold Wesker has tried his best explores the theme of self-discovery. Beatie Bryant, daughter of Norfolk farm labourers, has fallen in love with Ronnie Kahn from the Chicken Soup family. She returns from London to visit her family all of whom await the arrival of Ronnie. During the two-week

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waiting period Beatie is full of Ronnie's thoughts and words. To greet him the family gathers for a huge Saturday afternoon tea. He doesn't turn up. Instead comes a letter saying he doesn't think the relationship will work. The family turns on Beatie. In the process of defending herself she finds, to her delight, that she's using her own voice.

Her stern but hospitable mother gathers the family to meet him. An event of great importance is about to take place: Beatie's lover is coming to meet the family. He has been described, imitated, quoted, talked about, made fun of and eagerly awaited. He doesn't turn up. Instead, the postman brings a letter from Ronnie saying he doesn't think the relationship will work. The effect upon Beatie and her family is at first numbing, then humiliating. They are incensed to have been left standing like fools. The ensuing anger with which they turn on Beatie, her self-defence, her halting, hesitant stumble upon fluency, the discovery of her own voice deliriously reaching high as she uses her own words instead of Ronnie's all take up the last 15 minutes of the play. He had been wrong; the gap could have been bridged. "I can stand on my own two feet," she cries.

Task Rather than turning up of Ronnie, a letter is brought from him saying he doesn't think the relationship will work. Illustrate the aftermath of this scene.

At the end of Roots there is a good example of the way this three-fold pressure is applied. The elementary theatrical situation is that of a heroine ditched by her fiancé and alone with a family she has outgrown. From the current sociological angle, Beatie Bryant is a working-class girl, newly awakened to the joys of abstract painting, classical music, and extra-marital love. From Wesker's angle she is all that, and also a creature with a choice between self-realisation and absorption by the greedy mass of spenders corrupted by advertising; from her own, she is a woman in love who has done her best to reconcile her boy-friend's view of life with that of her mother. By the end of the play she has been let down by everybody, yet she chooses that moment to assert herself with all the zest of a woman who at last knows her own mind. It works, because the commonplace events on stage register a series of pressures beyond those undergone by the characters.

Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. There were three sources of pressure in the play the play *Roots*, they are
   (a) current affairs, author's attitude and the characters
   (b) feudalism, admiration and power struggle
   (c) feminism, social class, and author's attitude
   (d) pride, characters, and current affairs.
2. Which of the following depicts the elementary theatrical situation in the play *Roots*?
   (a) heroine outgrown alone with the family
   (b) heroine ditched by her fiancé
   (c) fiancé revolted against the heroine's family
   (d) heroine's extra marital love.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Arnold Wesker has tried his best explores the theme of ..... .
4. The elementary theatrical situation is that of a ..... ditched by her fiancé.

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State whether the following statements are true or false:

5. The inner framework contains social and political issues, held together dramatically by the playwright's urgent concern for them and by his conviction.
6. From the contemporary sociological angle, Beatie Bryant is a working-class girl, newly awakened to the joys of extra-marital love.

18.2 Summary

- Wesker's most notable qualities are emotional maturity and his command of action in depth.
- The first means that he never condescends to his characters, the second that what happens on stage is always more interesting in performance than we would be likely to guess from quotation.
- The inner framework contains social and political issues, held together dramatically by the playwright's urgent concern for them and by his conviction that they affect the homely characters in front.
- Arnold Wesker has tried his best explores the theme of self-discovery.
- Beatie Bryant, daughter of Norfolk farm labourers, has fallen in love with Ronnie Kahn from the Chicken Soup family.
- During the two-week waiting period Beatie is full of Ronnie's thoughts and words. To greet him the family gathers for a huge Saturday afternoon tea.
- Ronnie doesn't turn up. Instead comes a letter saying he doesn't think the relationship will work. The family turns on Beatie. In the process of defending herself she finds, to her delight, that she's using her own voice.
- Her stern but hospitable mother gathers the family to meet him. An event of great importance is about to take place: Beatie's lover is coming to meet the family. He has been described, imitated, quoted, talked about, made fun of and eagerly awaited.
- At the end of Roots there is a good example of the way this three-fold pressure is applied.
- The elementary theatrical situation is that of a heroine ditched by her fiancé and alone with a family she has outgrown.
- From the current sociological angle, Beatie Bryant is a working-class girl, newly awakened to the joys of abstract painting, classical music, and extra-marital love.
- From Wesker's angle she is all that, and also a creature with a choice between self-realisation and absorption by the greedy mass of spenders corrupted by advertising; from her own, she is a woman in love who has done her best to reconcile her boy-friend's view of life with that of her mother.

18.3 Keywords

Current affairs : The cultural, political, and social events of importance and interest at the present time; also called current events.

Imitated : To follow or endeavor to follow as a model or example.

Quoted : To repeat (a passage, phrase, etc.) from a book, speech, or the like, as by way of authority, illustration, etc.

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Numbing : Incapable of action or of feeling emotion; enervated; prostrate: numb with grief. Or lacking or deficient in emotion or feeling; indifferent.

Humiliating : Lowering the pride, self-respect, or dignity of a person; mortifying.

18.4 Review Questions

1. Explore the three sources of power in the play *Root*.
2. How is Arnold Wesker tried his best explores the theme of self-discovery?
3. Why is it so threatening for Joan to dress like a man?
4. Elucidate that by the end of the play Beatie has been let down by everybody.
5. Give a critical view on Self-discovery.

Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)
2. (b)
3. self-discovery
4. heroine
5. True
6. False

18.5 Further Readings

Books

Arnold Wesker. 1959. *Roots: The Second Play of the Chicken Soup Trilogy*. Penguin Books.

Robert Wilcher. 1991. *Understanding Arnold Wesker*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S. Carolina.

Online links

http://www.arnoldwesker.com/synopses/roots.htm

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jan/26/theatre