



M.A. (ENGLISH) PART-I

COURSE-II

SEMESTER-I

**CLASSICAL AND
ELIZABETHAN DRAMA**

UNIT NO. II

**Department of Distance Education
Punjabi University, Patiala**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : *KING LEAR*

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Note:- The students can download the syllabus from website of department **www.pbiddle.org**

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR

Life and Works :

Dear Student,

We now introduce you to *King Lear*—regarded by some as William Shakespeare's masterpiece. Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest English playwright. His literary reputation remains by and large, unaffected by the shifting artistic tastes of the last three and a half centuries. Samuel Johnson's familiar tribute and one of the earliest (Jonson being Shakespeare's contemporary) reflects the sentiments of all readers, scholars and literary critics : “Thou....art alive still/while thy Books doth live/and we have will to read and praise to give.”

Despite much literary acclaim that Shakespeare has won, the details of his life remain shrouded in mystery. A few contemporary records exist in Stratford and London : a few anecdotes about him have been handed down, a few allusions to him may be found in the literature of the period, but no biography of Shakespeare was written till the beginning of the eighteenth century when Nicholas Rowe made the first attempt at a formal life history. Hence, there is hardly any agreement among literary historians regarding his date of birth, his early childhood, his education, his entry on the stage, etc. His exposure to the world of theatre and the details of his literary career also remain a matter of endless debate and speculation.

It is believed that Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire. The monument erected in Stratford states that he died on April 23, 1616, in his fifty-third year. Shakespeare's father John Shakespeare was a well-to-do trader and enjoyed a good status in society. There is no evidence to show that Shakespeare received formal education. He is accused by Ben Jonson of knowing “little Latin and less Greek”, but the remark itself is quite indicative of the fact that he was not totally uneducated though he may not have been very highly educated. However, if his literary characters reveal something of the character of their creator, it can be safely

presumed that his History plays reveal a deep study of the *Chronicles* of Hall and Holinshed and also show a wide acquaintance with Latin literature, may be not in the original but through many translations which were published during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.”

It is believed that Shakespeare was forced to leave Stratford in his early youth. However, the reasons for his flight and the place where he fled to remain as controversial as anything connected with Shakespeare and his life. Some believe that he fled to Italy. Such historians substantiate their stand by tracing references to Northern Italy and Italian language in his early plays. However, others believe that he served as a page in a Catholic household in Lancashire, from where he passed to the mansion of the Earl of Derby, and by joining the company of actors known as "Derby's Men", he found his way to London. The theory gains ground that it is in connection with Derby's men that we have Shakespeare's first recorded appearance when they performed his first play *Henry IV Part I* in London in 1592.

Shakespeare's Writings : Shakespeare's writings included thirty eight plays, two long non-dramatic poems, one short elegy and one hundred and fifty four sonnets. These sonnets, which are projections of his subjective moods, also communicate the deeper heart throbs of anguished humanity. There is no exaggeration in pointing out that Shakespeare remains one of the greatest practitioners of the art of sonnet writing comparable only to Petrarch. Some of the modifications made by Shakespeare in the Petrarchan rhyme scheme were adopted by majority of later English Sonneteers. Despite his having composed a sizeable number of sonnets and non-dramatic poems, it can certainly be said that his genius was essentially dramatic both in intention and in its masterly execution.

Shakespeare's plays have been divided into Tragedies, Comedies and History plays. This kind of division was first of all adopted by his fellow actors Heming and Condell in the First Folio of 1623, and has been followed ever since in majority of the collected editions of his plays. In this division, the chronological order of plays had not been mentioned. The first of the comedies, is in fact, last in order of composition, while the last of his histories, *Henry VIII* owes its position not to the fact that it was Shakespeare's final History Play, but to the fact that its subject-matter was last in the historical order of reigns. The first scholar to study the order of composition of the plays was Edmund Malone in 1778 and since his time it has been a major preoccupation of Shakespeare's scholars (to determine this order as an objective basis for the study of Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic development. There are many difficulties in the way of dramatic development. There are many

difficulties in the way of determining the exact date of the plays and their relative order of composition. The records are incomplete, and the plays were often not registered or published till long after they were performed. Although it is impossible to determine the exact order of the plays, the order of the main groups of plays is reasonably clear. The early plays, which form a distinct group, are represented in each of the three traditional divisions. The first tetralogy—of his History Plays, including the three parts of Henry VI and Richard III is the expression of Shakespeare's youthful interest in English History, and was perhaps the means of his initiation into the art of dramatic composition. At the same time, his first attempts at Romantic Comedy are to be seen *A Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The theme of romantic love, here developed in the form of comedy, is first applied to tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet* which represents the culmination of Shakespeare's youthful genius.

With the second tetralogy of History Plays, we move into Shakespeare's mature period. *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V* are wonderful History plays which mark the maturity of Shakespeare as a dramatist. With *Julius Caesar* as a continuation of History plays, Shakespeare moves from England to Rome for his subject matter. Concurrent with the later History Plays, are the nature of “happy” comedies. Beginning with *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* they include *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like it*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and above all *The Twelfth Night*.

The measure of comedies was followed by the so called ‘Problem Plays’: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* and two tragedies *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet*. Whereas the previous comedies show the poet in his most gentle and representative mood, in these plays his habitual geniality seems overcast by feelings of disgust and disillusionment. They form the prelude to the tragic period, which falls within the first decade of the new century. The four great tragedies begin with *Hamlet* and continue through *Othello* and *Macbeth* to their magnificent climax in *King Lear*. These are followed by two other Roman plays *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare's tragic period concludes with *Timon of Athens*. His tragic inspiration, however, continues in subdued form in the final plays, called Romances. These include *Pericles* and final History play *Henry VIII* written in collaboration with a younger dramatist John Fletcher. He also collaborated with Fletcher in the composition of two other plays. *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Cordelio*. These two plays are not included in the First Folio.

Tragedy

Before taking up the detailed analysis of *King Lear*, it becomes essential to familiarize ourselves with the term 'tragedy' and how it flourished in the hands of Shakespeare. The word tragedy was given to us by the Greeks. Finding its initial beginning in Greek religious rituals to celebrate Dionysius, it became a highly developed poetic form in the hands of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. However, it still remains one of the most difficult critical terms, subject to endless discussion. Aristotle, the Great Greek philosopher was the first to propound a theory of tragedy. Aristotle defined tragedy thus "Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, in language, embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear affecting the purgation of these emotions ?" (*Poetics VI : Butcher's translation*).

In Greek tragedy, the hero is essentially a superior person and is treated sympathetically. His destiny or choice to go down fighting rather than submit thus transforming a physical defeat into a moral victory. The hero's recognition of his role and his acceptance of his destiny constitute the climax of the tragic structure. His tragic flaw "*Hamartia*" as Aristotle calls it, is some defect which helps to involve him in some ruin. Consequently, the hero must have ordinary human failing or limitations and must fall short of ultimate perfection. Aristotle, in his definition of tragedy shows that true tragedy only exists when it produces in the spectators a definite emotional reaction, which he calls *Catharsis* or purgation. The *Catharsis* of pity and fear, indicates the moral and psychological effect a tragic spectacle causes; he who hears the tale, will shrill with horror and melt with pity.

Renaissance tragedy was influenced by classical theory, (The students should not get confused. Classical tragedy is the name given to Greek tragedy, and the plays of Seneca. Seneca was a Roman dramatist of first century A.D. He imitated the seriousness of Greek tragedy but tried to substitute sensational treatment for the complex philosophical and religious considerations. In the sixteenth century, English tragedy did not keep its types and forms separate, but regularly mixed tragedy and comedy, verse and prose. To Shakespeare's contemporaries, the editors of the First Folio, for instance tragedy seems at first sight to have meant little more than a play ending in disaster. Most Elizabethan tragedies end with the stage clustered with corpses.

However, in modern times, the writers of tragedy have exercised

greatest freedom with respect to characters, diction and meaning of tragic theme. More and more tragedies have dealt with ordinary people faced with dilemmas of ordinary situations. Over the centuries, style and treatment have undergone significant development but the central theme of tragedy remains the same. Suffering is the key note of all tragedy.

The development of Elizabethan tragedy dates back to the year 1559. In 1559 was published, *A Mirror for Magistrates* a collection of tragic stories illustrating the fall of Princes, which was to provide the plots for no less than thirty Elizabethan plays. In 1560 appeared the first translation of Seneca's tragedies by Jasper Heywood, which was also to provide abundant material for late dramatists and to originate the "revenge tradition" which include Kyd's **Spanish Tragedy** (1589) and Shakespeare's **Hamlet**. It may be relevant to point out here that the first theatres were opened in London between 1570 A.D. and 1580 A.D. and plays began to be composed by professional dramatists from the universities of Oxford (Lyly and Peele) and Cambridge (Marlowe and Greene). These dramatists are known collectively as predecessors of Shakespeare, and they did much to prepare the way for the emergence of his genius on the London stage.

Shakespearean Tragedy : Let us first be clear about the meaning of the term Shakespearean. Does it imply that there is a uniform pattern in all Shakespeare's tragedies or does it mean that Shakespeare propounded a theory, applied to all the works produced in that age ? It is significant to note that there is no uniform pattern in Shakespeare's tragedies. Each one of his plays is a unique example. Neither did Shakespeare propound a theory of tragedy. Hence the term is a misnomer. Kenneth Muir rightly points out that there is no such thing as Shakespeare's Tragedy. There are only "Shakespearean tragedies". He deplors that attempts are made because of the range for order to find a formula applicable to everyone of Shakespeare's tragedies, defining them and distinguishing them from those of other dramatists." Such attempts, he adds have met with little success because, as Coleridge realised, each play of a great dramatist will demand its own individual form. No wonder that the form of *King Lear* is unlike that of *Macbeth* not to mention *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Even Allardyce Nicoll reiterates this point. "It may be noted, in regard to these four plays that, though they have all elements in common, they all seem to be in the nature of experiment. *Hamlet* is peculiar in having but one figure of tragic magnitude, *Othello* in being formed on a peculiar plan and in dealing largely with intrigue, *Lear* in reverting technically to the Chronical tradition and in adopting an

action less hero; and *Macbeth* in transforming a villain into a hero." It would, therefore, be proper to regard each as unique.

Once we agree that each one of Shakespeare's tragedies is unique it becomes pointless to find a pattern underlying all tragedies. However, in its basic structure Shakespeare's tragedies observe the fundamental requirements of tragedy as laid down by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. In Shakespeare's tragedy there is an action which is of serious importance, of sufficient magnitude and of universal significance. It is Shakespeare's practice to select usually from history or fiction a theme of some major passion. He develops this theme in a series of situations which throw his characters into contrast with one another or into conflict with circumstances. As his tragic heroes suffer from some flaw or weakness of character they commit crimes and fall down morally. But in their fall, they come out as superior persons. The audience or the reader gets up with a feeling that what lies shattered about the protagonist is merely a physical world. The hero at the end of his struggle emerges from the fire of internal and external torment, purified and refined. It is important to note, that in Shakespeare the connection of events with the characters is strong. The springs of action lie within the hero himself. It is he who initiates the events which ultimately lead to his destruction. It is this element which lends special significance to conflict in Shakespeare's tragedies. The conflict in these tragedies is both outer and inner.

The outer conflict is marked by the hero's clash with forces outside him and with other characters. The inner conflict is generated within the mind of the hero by his own peculiar nature and temperament. It is a conflict of emotion with emotion, of thought with thought and moves on alongside the struggle. As the character himself is responsible for his destruction, the action in the tragedy issues from character himself. There is an inevitability about the outcome of tragic conflict. The element of human responsibility is far greater in Shakespeare's tragedies. This fact distinguishes it from the Greek tragedy where the element of fate or destiny plays an important role. In Sophocles's *Oedipus* the fall of the hero is ordained by destiny whereas in Shakespeare's tragedies, Macbeth suffers because of his ambition, Lear for his headstrong and passionate nature and Hamlet for his indecisiveness.

But Shakespeare does not completely rule out fatality. The belief that there is something arbitrary and irrational in human experience is fundamental to Shakespeare's thought. His vision comprehends the presence of both fate and responsibility and preserves in his greatest work a certain balance between believing that each is complementary

to the other. According to Bradley : "Shakespeare's conception of tragedy involved over and above character, the suggestion of fatal forces, operation on the action of mankind, placing these men of power, nobility, strength and courage with which they are incapable of dealing." The inherent weakness of the character brought into contact with the hostile circumstance becomes fatal for the hero. In this way Shakespeare is able to impart to his tragedies the necessary element of mystery and suggestion that there is something wrong. In the world, there is an inexplicable failure in the general justice of things. The human destiny is inscrutable and in a tragedy everything cannot be explained. That is why the idea of "Poetic Justice" cannot be applied to Shakespeare's tragedies. In Shakespeare's plays both the wicked and the innocent suffer. If Lear is undone, Cordelia also lies strangled across his breast. "As this to wanton boys/Are we to gods, they kill us for their sports." There are characters like Desdemona, Cordelia, Duncan or for that reason Hamlet, who suffer in spite of their goodness. Shakespeare brings us close to the eternal mystery which by its very nature is inexplicable and insoluble.

Any discussion of Shakespeare's tragedies remains inconclusive if a word is not said about his art. An essential quality for a work of art, if it is to last is the craftsmanship of an artist. As a tragic dramatist Shakespeare possesses profound sense and an ability to feel the pathos in human suffering as well as an ability to conceal his subjective self. These twin qualities enable to turn the seemingly ordinary situation into something moving and pathetic. Hence, he could perceive that the ideal love of Desdemona and Othello should be fouled and destroyed by such a creature as Iago, that Lear for all his follies should be tortured by his evil daughters, that the bastard Edmund should cause the death of Cordelia. That there is inscrutability of fate, makes one look in awe at the mystery of life. Therefore, in spite of all the sentiments and pathos, his plays do not become melodramatic.

As a playwright, Shakespeare knows how to create a verisimilitude of life—an essential quality of dramatic art. A complete effacement of his own personality provided life-like immediacy to his character and enabled him to present a coherently consistent view of life in his plays. This quality further renders it possible for Shakespeare to look at the world and various point of views of his different characters. This God-like quality of Shakespeare enables him to stand aloof from his creation, yet be with them to witness the strings of destiny manipulating their lives.

Any study of Shakespeare remains incomplete without bearing one

important fact in mind that Shakespeare was a practising playwright and he wrote his plays to be performed on the stage. The Elizabethan audience were full of zest for life, as also equally baffled by its mystery, cruelty and inscrutability. Imbued with the spirit of Renaissance they had insatiable curiosity and dared to ask the ultimate questions about the destiny of man, his potentialities and his place in the universe. Shakespeare probed these questions as no other dramatist had done. No wonder, he has to his credit some of the greatest tragedies of all the stages. We must also know a little about the Elizabethan theatre. The Elizabethan theatre was popular in its nature and catered to a mixed audience comprising various sections of society from the groundings of the countries and the nobles. This accounts for the breadth and variety of the drama of this period. Shakespeare was a great artist as he gave his audience what they wanted but at the same time, turned the limitations of his stage into strength and with the help of his incomparable art and understanding of human nature, held "the mirror up to nature."

Shakespeare's Major Tragedies

Hamlet : The tragedy was produced before 1603-04. It was published imperfectly in quarto in 1603, and fully in quarto in 1604 and with some omissions in the first folio.

The story of the play moves thus : A noble King of Denmark was murdered by his brother Claudius, after HE had seduced Gertrude, the King's wife. Claudius had captured the throne and married with indecent haste the dead man's widow. Hamlet meets the ghost of his dead father, who relates the circumstances of the murder and demands vengeance. Hamlet vows obedience. But his melancholy, introspective and scrupulous nature make him irresolute and dilatory in action. He counterfeits to escape the suspicion that he is threatening danger to the King. His behaviour is attributed to his love for Ophelia (Daughter of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain) whom he had previously courted but now treats rudely. He tests the ghost's story by having a play acted before the King reproducing the circumstances of the murder, and the 'King betrays himself'. A scene follows in which Hamlet violently upbraids the queen. Thinking he hears the King listening behind the curtains, he draws his sword and kills instead Polonius. The King now determines to destroy Hamlet. He sends him on a mission to England, with intent to have him killed there. But the pirates capture Hamlet and send him back to Denmark. He arrives to find that Ophelia, crazed with grief has perished by drowning. Her brother Laertes, a strong contrast to the character of Hamlet, has hurried home to take vengeance for the death of his father Polonius.

The King contrives a fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes, in which the latter uses a poisoned sword, and kills Hamlet, but not before Hamlet has mortally wounded Laertes and stabbed the King, Gertrude has drunk a poisoned cup intended for her son.

Macbeth : The tragedy was founded on Holinshed's "*Chronicle of Scottish History*" and finished in 1606. It was designed as a tribute to King James I and first printed in the Folio of 1623.

Macbeth and Banquo, generals of Duncan, King of Scotland, returning from a victorious campaign against rebels, encounter the three weird witches sisters. The witches make a prophecy that Macbeth shall be the Thane of Cawdor, and King hereafter, and that Banquo shall beget kings though he himself will not be a king. Immediately after that comes the news that the King has promoted Macbeth as the Thane of Cawdor. Stimulated by the prophecy, and spurred on by Lady Macbeth, Macbeth murders Duncan, who is on a visit to his castle. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, escape, and Macbeth assumes the crown. To defeat the prophecy of the witches regarding Banquo, he contrives the murder of Banquo and his son Fleance, but the latter escapes. Haunted by the ghost of Banquo, Macbeth consults the weird sisters, and is told to beware of Macduff, the Thane of Fife, that none born of woman has power to harm Macbeth; and that he never will be vanquished till Birnam Wood shall come to Dunsinane. Learning that Macduff has joined Malcolm who is gathering an army in England, he attacks the castle of Macduff and causes Lady Macduff and her children to be slaughtered. Lady Macbeth loses her reason and dies. The army of Malcolm and Macduff attacks Macbeth. Passing through Birnam Wood every man cuts a bough and under this leafy screen marches on Dunsinane. Macduff, who was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped" kills Macbeth. Malcolm is hailed the King of Scotland.

Othello : *Othello, The Moor of Venice* was acted in 1604. It was printed in quarto in 1622. The story is drawn from Cinthio.

Desdemona, daughter of the Venetian Senator, Brabantio, has secretly married the Moor, Othello, a gallant general in the service of the Venetian state. Desdemona was attracted by Othello's tales of adventures and encounters. Present before the Duke, Othello is accused by Brabantio of carrying off his daughter. In the mean time comes the news of an attack on Cyprus by the Turks against whom Othello is needed to lead the Venetian forces. Othello explains by what simple means he has won Desdemona. Brabantio reluctantly hands his daughter over to the Moor, who at once sets out with Desdemona for Cyprus.

Othello had promoted to the Lieutenancy, Cassio, a young Florentine

whom he trusted. By this promotion he had deeply offended Iago, an older soldier who thought he had a better claim, and who now plots his revenge. By a device he first discredits Cassio, as a soldier with Othello, so that Cassio is deprived of his lieutenancy. He instigates the latter to ask Desdemona to plead in his favour with Othello, which Desdemona warmly does. At the same time he craftily instils in Othello's mind suspicion of his wife's fidelity and jealousy of Cassio. Finally by a trick he arranges that a handkerchief given by Othello to Desdemona shall be found on Cassio. He stirs Othello to such a frenzy of jealousy that the Moor smothered Desdemona in her bed. Shortly afterwards Cassio against whom Iago had set Roderigo, is wounded by Roderigo. But Roderigo has failed in his purpose, and has been killed by Iago to prevent discovery of the plot. However, on him are found letters revealing the guilt of Iago and the innocence of Cassio. Othello, thunderstruck by the discovery that he has murdered Desdemona without cause, kills himself out of remorse.

King Lear

After this brief preliminary survey of tragedy as practised by Shakespeare it is in the fitness of things that we turn to the study of *King Lear*, one of the most outstanding examples in the literary form.

Date of Composition : *King Lear* was written late in 1605 or early in 1606. It was entered on the Register of the Stationer's Company, 26 November, 1607 and published in 1608. The entry in the 'Stationer's Register' in 1607 states that the tragedy was played before the King's Majesty at Whitehall upon Saint Stephen's night at Christmas Last" that is, on 26 December, 1606. However, there cannot be any finality of opinion regarding the date of composition, so far as Shakespeare's plays are concerned. Likewise, the date of **King Lear's** composition has also been debated. Some critics assign the composition of **Lear** to the end of 1604 or early part of 1605. Those who believe that the play was written in 1604 argue that in 1605 there was an anonymous dramatisation of the story of King Lear and his daughters. From this they further argue that, to have been frequently acted in 1604, the play must have been written in 1605. The reason for anonymity, these critics argue, may have been an attempt on part of the publishers to exploit the popularity of Shakespeare's play. Other scholars who date the composition of the play in 1605 argue that the turbulence of many events, natural and political is reflected not only in the tone of *King Lear* as a whole but is particularly alluded to in the speeches of Gloucester. The reference to "mutinies", "discord" and "treason" (Gloucester's speech. *King Lear* Act I Sc. ii ((107) is taken by these scholars as an easily identifiable allusion to the most sensational

political event of 1605 – what has come to be known as the Gunpowder Plot. Hence, it will be fair to conclude that the play was definitely in existence in 1606, therefore it must have been written in late 1604 or early 1605. This makes it possible to place it in chronological sequence in relation to the other major tragedies written by Shakespeare later than *Hamlet* (1600-1601) and *Othello* (1603-1604) just preceding or contemporaneous with *Macbeth* (1605-1606). The writing of *King Lear* and *Macbeth* at about the same time would seem to suggest that, after having dramatised comparatively recent history in the English History plays, Shakespeare was now turning to material related to an earlier phase of British history. Another point which becomes very clear from these dates of publication is that *King Lear* is a 'Jacobean' play and not an "Elizabethan" play.

Sources of the Play :- At the outset, we would like to point out that none of the stories in Shakespeare's plays is original. He borrowed extensively from various sources. As regards the sources of *King Lear*, we must keep in mind that the play is set in pre-Christian England which was essentially pre-historic as well.

Two stories are blended in this play, that in which King Lear is the central figure and that which deals with the Earl of Gloucester. The story of the Lear and his three daughters is, in its crude outlines one of those legends of which the origin is lost in the traditional "mists of antiquity." Some scholars even say that it is a nature myth. Some critics point out there are references to King Lear in Welsh and Irish mythology. According to some Celtic folklorists 'Lir' stands for Neptune and Goneril and Regan for the tough winds and Cordelia for gentle Zephyr. But there is no evidence that Shakespeare knew any of these stories.

According to Furnivall, "The folly of parents giving up their property of their children was often dwelt upon by early English writers." Taking this view in consideration the critics point out that *The True Chronicle History of King Lear* which was entered in the Stationer's Register in May, 1549 seems to be the immediate source of the play. However, according to another theory the first, recorded version of the story of King Lear and his three daughters to be found in a *History of the Kings of Britain*, written in Latin in the twentieth century by a Clergyman, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and entitled *History Regum Britannide*. It might not be very fruitful to give you the details of the story from this work but it should be relevant to point out that many scholars are of the opinion that Shakespeare is unlikely to have taken the story of King Lear directly from Geoffrey of Monmouth. These critics suggest "*The Historic of England*" by Raphael Holinshed, part of the *Cronicles of*

England, Scotland and Ireland written by several hands and published in 1577 as the direct source of the play. It is believed that Shakespeare derived the material for his English History Plays and for *Macbeth* from the second edition of this work published in 1587. It is therefore, considered likely that the story of *King Lear* was also taken from the same source. A poem by John-Higgins Cealing with the early "unfortunate princes" of England, included in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, a compilation of verse-narratives by several hands, is cited as another source for Shakespeare's play. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* which also presents "A Chronicle of Briton Kings" including Lear, whose story is narrated in Canto X of Book II stanza 27-32 is taken as another source. It is believed that the story of Gloucester and his two sons is based upon the similar fate of the King of Paphalagonia, described in Book II of Sir Philip Sidney's prose romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Accadia* (1590). However, the portrait of the Gloucester family in the relation to the Lear family and the blending of the two, speaks of Shakespeare's originality. The source for Lear's madness out of his suffering has been traced by Prof. Bullough to one of the contemporary events of Queen Elizabeth's time. Brain Annesley was an old courtier of Queen Elizabeth, who had three daughters the youngest being Cordelia. The oldest son-in-law wrote in 1603, to the Secretary of State regarding Brain Annesley's imperfection of mind and thus incapability to rule the state. The move was resisted by Cordelia. When in 1604 Annesley died he left his property to Cordelia. Since the entire affair was a recent history when Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*, it may have made the theme of the play exciting and topical.

The Story in brief : Old King Lear of Britain, eager to divest himself of the cares of kingship, proposes to divide his realm among his three daughters giving the "largest share to the one who describes her love for him most eloquently. The two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, vie with each other in declaring their devotion; but Cordelia, the youngest and Lear's favourite, says simply that she bears him the love due to him as her father. Disappointed and enraged by her answer, the king disowns Cordelia and bestows his royal power and possessions on her elder sisters and their husbands retaining only his title. Henceforth, he and his retinue of 100 knights will live in turn with Goneril and Regan. Cordelia gets married to the king of France and leaves. Kent is banished by Lear when the former tries to show him the folly of his decision.

Meanwhile, Edmund, the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester, feels bitterly resentful of the low estate to which his bastardy condemns him. Determined to supplant his legitimate older brother Edgar, in his father's affection, he contrives to persuade Gloucester

that Edgar wishes to kill him.

Lear is ill-treated by Goneril and her husband. Kent has joined Lear's service in disguise. In a fit of anger, Lear leaves Goneril's castle for Regan's palace. Meanwhile Edmund continues his machinations against Edgar. Kent picks up a fight with Oswald—a steward to Goneril, the noise brings Gloucester, Regan and Cornwall on the scene, Kent is imprisoned. Lear feels humiliated - Goneril also arrives. Both the sisters want the dismissal of Lear's servants. Hurt and humiliated, Lear goes out into a stormy night. He becomes mad. Gloucester helps Lear and tells Kent to take him to Dover. Edmund betrays the secret of his father's help to Lear, to Cornwall. Cornwall gouges out one of Gloucester's eye. Edgar on being ill-treated by Gloucester because of Edmund's machinations, lives as a lunatic. Edgar meets his father. Here Lear also appears. Lear and Gloucester recognise each other, despite the madness of the former and the blindness of the latter. Oswald tries to kill Gloucester but is himself killed by Edgar. Lear is then taken to the camp of the king of France, who has invaded England to avenge the wrongs done to his father-in-law. Lear and Cordelia meet. In the meantime, Goneril and Regan's infidelity is discovered as 'both of them are in love with villainous Edmund.' Cornwall dies. Edmund becomes Regan's paramour. The Duke of Albany, Goneril's husband starts hating his wife and takes up arms against the King of France, because they have invaded the British soil. In the battle, the British army is victorious. Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoners. Edgar challenges Edmund and injures him. Goneril kills herself and poisons Regan. Lear and Cordelia also die. Thus Albany with Edgar and Kent, are left to mourn and to heal the wounds of the "gored state."

Suggested Readings

1. A.C. Bradley : *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904)
2. H.B. Charlton : *Shakespearean Comedy* (1962)
3. R. Heilman : *Image and Structure in King Lear* (1948)
4. A. Harbage : *Shakespeare, The Tragedies : A Collection of Critical Essays* (1964)
5. L. C. Knights : *Some Shakespearean Themes* (1959)
6. Kenneth Muir : *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence* (1972)
7. Frank Kermode : Ed. *King Lear, A Case Book.*

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR
A Critical Study of the Text**

Dear Student,

We now take you through the text of *King Lear*. The first thing is to read the play very thoroughly. No amount of analysis of critical opinion can help you to understand the play unless you go through the text yourself. You can use Verity's or Arden's edition of *King Lear*. While reading the text, kindly be alert so that you can appreciate the gradual unfolding of action and unravelling of characters in the play. Action and character are closely inter-related in a Shakespeare's tragedy. Characters set into motion a whole chain of reactions and counteractions, to evershifting readjustment of relations and attitudes. The complex interaction of these moves and counter-moves constitutes the segment of simulated experience, the play presents to its reader and audience. Let us begin the text :

Act I, Sc. i

The opening scenes in Shakespeare plays are always important and perform several functions. They arrest the attention of the audience, introduce the initial situation, provide us important information about the characters, suggest or define their mutual relationship, and lay ground for future development of action. The opening scene of *King Lear* performs these functions well.

It is set in a state room in King Lear's palace with full pomp of a royal ceremony. Two elegant courtiers – Earl of Kent and Earl of Gloucester enter. They are accompanied by Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund. They are discussing an important event which is to take place at the court i.e. the king's division of the kingdom. They are not sure as to which of the two sons-in-law, Duke of Albany or Cornwall, will get the larger share : "for equalities are so weighted, that in curiosity neither can make choice of either's moiety."

It is significant that the play begins with these remarks upon what

seems to Lear's friends a piece of waywardness and inconsistency. They strike a keynote.

The subject quickly changes to Edmund who we are told, is handsome and impressive. Edmund is perhaps the most physically-attractive of Shakespeare's villains. Iago and Richard lament their comparative ugliness, Iago is beautiful according to some, but Edmund is admired by all. By the manner of introducing him Gloucester betrays his own levity when he remarks : "Though this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair." Gloucester derides the bastard boy and speaks jovially of his mother, a sportive whore.

Moreover, the comment is made before the boy, ignoring both his presence and reaction. A father who carelessly rouses the image of the primal sexual act to inflict pain on his son in the fantasy life of fiction does so at great peril to himself. The father, we are told has "blushed to "acknowledge" the boy. The boy would indeed bring blood to old man's cheeks. Cheeks, how "brazed" hardened to the shame of this illegitimacy. Shame-this is to be the central motif of the play. Perhaps for the shame of the whole affair alone, Edmund has been away for nine years.

Gloucester also suggests the potentialities of a conflict between his legitimate son, Edgar and his bastard son, Edmund. "But I have a son Sir, by order of law, some years older than this, who yet is no dearer in my account." According to Coleridge, Gloucester's shame in acknowledging his bastard son has embittered Edmund. His isolation from home, compulsion for him to seek fortune in foreign lands, his sense of inferiority because of comparison with his elder brother Edgar, all have evil influences on his character. As the action further unfolds itself, we observe that Edmund poses a threat to the established order which prizes the legitimates more than the bastards. We shall see as we proceed further that the story of Gloucester and his sons, Edmund and Edgar, will roughly parallel that of Lear and his daughters. The king's proposed action—the division of his kingdom among his daughters portends a similar threat to the established order. All this is confirmed by what happens.

Lear comes on the stage accompanied by the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany, his daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. With the entrance of the king, we see that the tone suddenly changes. The conversation which has been earlier going on in prose now takes place in verse.

Lear makes his intentions clear : "Meantime we shall express our darker purpose." The darker purpose, definitely is more secret than

the question of Cordelia's-betrothal. Two rivals for Cordelia's hand—the Princes of France and Burgundy—are already present. However, more important than this is Lear's intention to divide his kingdom into three parts which he will bestow on his three daughters. There is also an implication that the parts are not equal. "Which of you shall we say doth love us most ? That we our largest bounty may extend." Lear gives reasons for divesting himself of power and possessions and transferring them to his daughters according to their merit and love for him. The test of love, it may be noticed, Lear has introduced, on a sudden whim. It has been suggested that "he cannot refrain from ministering to his own vanity (and love of flattery)" by demanding such a declaration from his children he has resolved to benefit. To begin with Goneril, the eldest daughter is called to speak. "Sir I love you more than words can wield the matter..... "

"A love that makes breath poor; and speech unable." We observe that Goneril's declaration of love is full of shameless flattery. What Lear wants, she gives him in fullest measure. Such an extravagant proclamation of love shocks Cordelia who remarks :

What shall Cordelia speak ? Love and be silent.

Next comes Regan. She reiterates Goneril's profession of love but adds; only she comes too short....

that I profess,

Myself an enemy to all joys,

Which the most precious square of sense possesses.

And find I am alone felicitate,

In your dear highness love.

On hearing Regan's exaggerated declaration, we have Cordelia's first expression of disgust at the hypocrisy and fulsome flattery of her sisters.

She cannot vie with them in this shameless contest. Her love is too deep for words. She cannot coin her heart in words. This compels her to resort to reticence, which infuriates Lear. When Lear ask Cordeila :

What can you say to draw

A third more opulent than your sisters ?

Her reply is "Nothing, my Lord."

"Nothing will come of nothing" : Lear warns her, offering her a good chance. Still Cordelia insists :

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave,

My heart into my mouth : I love your majesty,

According to my bond : nor more nor less.

Lear feels deeply hurt and insulted. He had never expected such defiance and obduracy from his "best loved" daughter. He becomes mad with rage and swears by his gods and goddesses to have no relation whatever with Cordelia. This is the first of the terrible oaths to which Lear is given in his moments of rage and rashness. Violence of utterance is as much a part of his character as violence of feeling and sentiment. His tragedy lies in the fact that in moment of crisis he loses all self-control and discrimination. In such a situation, he becomes pitifully vulnerable.

Cordelia's attempt to convince Lear of the responsibilities toward her husband after marriage also fails to pacify him as he had expected to be flattered. Indeed that was the purpose of the game. The scene reminds us of Othello where Desdemona must choose between her love for her father and her husband. Invariably, Shakespeare sides with the lovers. There is no more despicable role in his plays than that of the demanding father which Lear is now assuming.

The conversation between Lear and Cordelia has invited the attention of various critics. Some critics are of the opinion that Lear's "nothing" alludes to the paradox that God created the world out of "nothing", although Lear's world suggests a lack of acceptance of this belief. Paradoxically, it is seemingly substantial love of Goneril and Regan which turns to nothing. Lear's unawareness that love is not generated or represented by material substance highlights one of the important themes of the play i.e. the theme of appearance and reality.

Cordelia's resoluteness and firmness of reply have made some critics to remark that she has inherited Lear's imperious temper. Especially her remarks, "so young, my Lord, and true"! is persistent in tone and is undoubtedly very curt. Her rude and curt reply makes it very explicit that she is not tactful in worldly matters. As a matter of fact she is so shocked at the hypocritical behaviour of her sisters that her sense of disgust drives her to the opposite extreme and she decides to have no part in such hypocrisy.

Her truthfulness makes Lear disown her, "thy truth", then, be thy dower." Cordelia, once the most loved child is now the "sometimes daughter." In his "Blind fury" Lear imagines himself as a 'dragon' and Cordelia as his victim. He loved Cordelia the most and staked all on her love and tender care in his old age. This makes his conduct more human and plausible. What Cordelia calls 'truth', Lear calls it 'pride'. There is an element of some truth in what Lear says about Cordelia.

Lear divests himself of all kingly possessions, except that he reserves

from himself the power to retain hundred knights. Dramatically, the seed for further conflict lies here. The king's relinquishment is not complete. He still clings to the title and all ceremonies and deference due to a king. This is incompatible with abrogation of responsibility. As Lear still clings to the ceremonial show because of his weak nature he can part with the reality of rule but not with its outward show. Further he makes himself dependent on his daughters with whom, he will reside by turns for a month. One can easily guess that such a situation will soon breed trouble between such a king and such daughters. And the responsibility for this will be largely Lear's.

It has been pointed out that in the opening scene, Lear and Cordelia are caught up in an intriguing situation where the most personal of human relationship is being tested on the touchstone of social conventions. The emphasis is on 'ceremony' and society rather than on the 'individual'. Lear is not prepared to look upon Cordelia as a person. He is completely blind to this aspect. In the case of Cordelia and Kent the personal is thwarted by the social and conventional. An old King demands in public ceremony a declaration of values which are so intensely personal. In both cases the reaction evoked consists in the assertion of the individual entity. "Cordelia is forced by the peculiar situation into denying herself the expression which she would have loved to give to her genuine love.....In Lear the social self, though a long-engrafted habit, has acquired a tyrannic ascendancy and in Cordelia the private self has yet not learnt the art of meaningful adjustments with the demands of any delicate social situation. Thus here we find a confrontation of two irreconcilable rigidities.....The conflict of these two aspects—social and personal of Lear and Cordelia's personalities—provides the initial situation of the tragic action of *King Lear*."

When Lear disowns Cordelia, Kent remonstrates and reminds him that he loved Cordelia most, Lear grows angry with him too. Shakespeare permits Kent a play on words, "Be Kent unmannerly when Lear is mad." We come to know that Kent is outspoken. He is seen as an archetype of simple loyal friend. However, here students must note that in his conversation with Gloucester at the beginning of the scene, Kent did not condemn the king's purpose of abdication, nor did he make any protest till Lear cast off his "sometime daughter." Thus when Kent tells Lear, "Reverse thy Doom" his purpose is, perhaps, to dissuade the king from his proposed unjust treatment of his daughter. But there are critics who believe that the sentence is aimed at dissuading Lear both from abdication and his unjust treatment of Cordelia.

Lear blinded by anger orders Kent "Out of my sight." There is more

chance in these words, for Kent picks them up immediately with :

See better, Lear; and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye.

Kent sees what is involved, Lear does not. Blindness and sight are recurring themes of the play. His vision (Lear's) is called in question. Lear swears ironically by Apollo the god of light and Kent retorts, ".....by Apollo.....Thou swear'st thy gods in vain." Ironically both invoke the power of light. But we know that Lear is blindly obsessed with his fury. Lear's wild impulsiveness, bordering on insanity is made sufficiently clear.

All his actions, his decision to divide the kingdom, his annoyance with Cordelia and his banishment of Kent, all reveal Lear's impetuosity. Without making any effort weigh or to understand Cordelia's motives he once for all disowns her for ever, although a few minutes ago such thoughts would have been inconceivable to him. His treatment of Kent, the long tried and trusted friend is similar. We are shown that passion which has a physical effect as well as moral has become a disease in him. Self-will has developed into an emotion over which he has lost control through "long engrafted condition and the enfeeblement of mental and bodily powers that old age involves so that under the influence of emotion he is practically insane. As we move further, we shall see how he is affected by the two chief results of his action, namely his own remorse and the opposition of those whom he has hitherto commanded.

After Kent is banished, the Duke of Burgundy and King of France (Cordelia's suitors) enter. They are informed that 'her price is fallen' The Duke of Burgundy refuses to marry her without dowry but the King of France announces that "she is herself a dower" and agrees to take her. King of France is the most noble-hearted person in the play. He chooses Cordelia for the love of her and not for any other consideration. His acceptance of her when denounced by Lear and rejected by Burgundy reasserts and demonstrates the existence of a right standard by which ultimately the value of all characters in the play will be judged.

In the ensuing prose conversation between the two sisters, we come to know that Goneril is a stronger character than Regan, with more originality of mind and power of initiative. The conversation foreshadows their conduct towards Lear and also confirms and illustrates the impression of his character. There is also a reference to his rashness and unruly waywardness. They resolve together to resist him. This clearly demonstrates that blindness and folly of Lear in

rejecting Cordelia and believing Goneril and Regan, we are left with no doubt there is much trouble ahead waiting for him.

Critical Comments :

There are critics to whom the initial scene appears merely fanciful, even fantastic 'fairy tale' beginning. To others, it appears a childish thing all too simple and even absurd. F.A. Boas calls the incidents of the opening scene "preposterous." The arguments of such critics rest mainly on the promise that *King Lear*, unlike any other of Shakespeare's plays, starts from, and wholly depends upon, incidents which in themselves would seem improbable, viz; the trial of affection and abdication. But it is not difficult to answer such criticism. The dramatist has every right to choose his initial situation and manipulate it according to the total design. What is more significant here in the context of *King Lear* is that the dramatist invests it with the tragic potentialities, which at first he does not seem to suggest. Harbage has a very convincing answer : "What can be made of it ? Why should that Patriarch who wishes to yield up his power and possession require of the receivers declaration of love ? Why should that maiden who honestly loves him respond only with declarations of her love of honesty ? No reason appears to be logical, its logic is its own. Prose is yielding to poetry "realism" to reality. *King Lear* is not true. It is an allegory of truth." He very wisely reminds us that "the oldest story patterns have the greatest power to touch off reverberation. No other frame work than this parable myth could have borne so well the weight of what Shakespeare was compelled to say." Moreover, the so called improbable incidents are made to appear probable through the peculiar character attributed to the King, which from the very outset rationalises the story. Hazlitt has very aptly remarked : "The character of Lear itself is very finely conceived for the purpose. It is the only ground on which such a story could be built with the greatest effect and truth." The whole tragedy of Lear's fate which inevitably involves the fate of others, springs from the fundamental mistake which he makes in this scene and of which the consequences develop to the very end. Hence the opening scene is the basis of the action of the main plot. The scene clearly reveals the character of Lear, his three daughters and two suitors of Cordelia. The situation explodes and brings into open the hidden tensions and pushes to the front the conflict between Lear and Cordelia, which in the course of time envelops all others and ends disastrously and all this is achieved by Shakespeare with utmost economy and skill.

ACT I, Sc. ii

We move to the sub-plot. The scene shifts to Gloucester's castle. The time of the scene is the day after the first scene when we see Lear abdicating his throne and banishing Kent and Cordelia.

This scene begins with Edmund's soliloquy. Edmund has no real position in the regular ranks of society, because he is a bastard; he has no inheritance to expect. His inheritance will come not from any law of natural succession but from what he can do for himself. "Legitimate Edgar", he declares, "I must have your land". Later on in his second soliloquy at the end of the scene he says, "Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit." Edmund reminds us of Shakespeare's Richard III, who in the same remorseless way was determined to get personal power, and who regarded those who opposed him as obstacle to be removed. Some of the Shakespeare's usurpers—Henry IV, Claudius and Macbeth for instance feel that they have done wrong in seizing power and are haunted by a deep sense of guilt. But Edmund is different. He pursues his way confidently, glorifying in his own cleverness. He is ambitious and ruthless. In the first ten lines of his soliloquy, we are unable to place Edmund correctly on a moral scale :

My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue ? Why brand they us
With base ? With baseness ? bastardy ?

Edmund, some critics feel, cannot be lumped with Shakespeare's "bad" characters. Here it seems, Shakespeare has made a new kind of villain out of some old materials, some fresh ones using finely the polarity of evil and charm. The first fifteen lines of Edmund's soliloquy could be easily spoken by Faulcon bridge, Shakespeare's brilliant, humorous, bastard hero in *King John* who jovially-ridicules the pretensions of his legitimate brother, makes his mother confess that she bore him illicitly, and then act with sardonic heroism to counterbalance the villainy of John. Edmund could be Faulconbride except that Shakespeare builds into this later play the materials of villainy. His villainous ways, can be seen not so much in the evil of his aims as in the planning of them.

In this first soliloquy, Edmund does not give the impression of being a villain, rather we have a feeling of him as being wronged. Some critics, even have tried to justify Edmund's behaviour. His bastardy, it is argued is not his fault. Even Coleridge thought so. Edmund is deeply wounded by his father's coarse introduction of him, "In a tone betwixt waggery and shame," Shakespeare does indicate Gloucester's indifference to Edmund's worldly advancement at court : "He hath out

nine years and away he shall again."

But as Edmund proceeds further with his speech, the real bitterness of his position is expressed. It gives us important clues to his picture of the world and the reason for his sense of deprivation. Verity states : "In this remarkable speech Edmund tries to make himself believe that he is the enemy of society merely because society has made him suffer for his illegitimacy. He pretends to be the victim who seeks the "Wild justice" of revenge for wrongs. We are reminded how malignity reaches its high watermark. Self-excuse in fact is shed the private face shown, a scheming mind displayed. We are also made to take note of Edmund's special quality. Edmund's strength lies in his wit and his charm has an immense capacity for disguise and mischief. Edmund has been called a "new man the hard-headed product of Renaissance full of individualism, mercantilism and scepticism."

After Edmund's first soliloquy, where he appears interesting, anti-conformist, conscious of his attractiveness, we see Gloucester entering, swept by Lear's folly in ACT I. Sc. i. Gloucester who did not raise a word against Lear (quiet unlike Kent), is now quite perturbed on King's abdication and Kent's banishment. Gloucester so absorbed that Edmund seeks his attention with an overt concealment of letter so that Gloucester can ask about it. The scene is reminiscent of the one in *Othello* between Iago and Othello. There is a play on the word "nothing" and the capacity of men to see. Students should always be on the look for such subtle play of words. The use of the word instantly brings to mind the encounter between Lear and Cordelia (ACT I Sc. i L-86). You would see how each time this word occurs, it adds to the meaning and emotional significance of what is happening. On Edmund's deliberate action of hiding the letter Gloucester demands of him, "Let's see" and look at the irony involved. Gloucester just does not see. Again when he says, ".....if it be nothing I shall not need spectacles." Spectacles are a symbol of what he does need. Shakespeare hits upon the characteristic human frailty by which the denial of a deficiency actually announces the deficiency.

The forged letter (Edmund is so manouveringly trying to hide yet show it to Gloucester) is again full of ironical overtones. It says word for word what the bastard thinks and much of what he says is true. Foolish old men are in danger from ambitious sons. This brings to the fore one of the important themes of the play—the Youth— Old Age rivalry.

When Edmund makes a specious case against Edgar, Gloucester fails right in with Edmund's plans. He shows what we come to recognise is his characteristic suggestiveness and he dodges the responsibility of

finding out what lies behind the superficial evidence and hence utters violent threats against Edgar. On the other hand, Edmund suggests to Edgar to avoid his father. To emphasise the danger, he tells Edgar to go armed. Edgar suspects "some villain hath done me wrong." Thus we see that Edmund is particularly nasty specimen of a 'malcontent' or "Machiavelli". He aspires to power and position and through intrigue and treachery strives to dispossess both Gloucester and Edgar. For him the end alone justifies the means. Gloucester and Edgar fall easy victim to his machinations because they are credulous and do not seem to know or trust each other enough. Edmund is the typical villain of Renaissance tragedy, intellectual and utterly devoid of all sentiments and emotions. Self-interest is the god he worships. His second soliloquy re-emphasises his hidden qualities with sharp contrast in tone and behaviour. Once Gloucester is gone, his sudden, almost savagely humorous attack on his father saves him from too much charm, yet preserves enough intellect, to sustain involvement with him. Shakespeare endows him with a dazzling rhetorical brilliance not only in pyrotechnic language but also in the power demanded in sheer breath control over the slippery word. In his last soliloquy in this scene, the possibilities of his character, though not to their full extent, are revealed. He is exultant, things have gone entirely as he wanted. "A credulous father! and a brother noble", he is sure of his success, he knows he has a father :

On whose foolish honesty,
My practices ride easy.

As the play gains momentum, we see, that Edmund will be in a hurry, he will make things happen in time, "All with men's meet that I can fashion fit."

He is insatiable, he will use anything that comes to hand—the whole Lear world is in danger from him. The subversive, dominant tone sounds clearly.

Critical Comments :

The two plots—Lear and his daughters and Gloucester and his sons, cross initially on matters of inheritance. The first scene of the play and the second are bound together by the desire of characters to acquire properly that does not belong to them. To begin with, Goneril and Regan are anxious to get and to keep that share of Lear's kingdom which rightfully belongs to Cordelia. Although afterwards Lear awards each half they do have a sort of legal right to Cordelia's third. Edmund wishes to usurp his brother's place and steal his inheritance

Act I, Sc. iii

The scene, one of the shortest in the play, takes place between Goneril and her steward Oswald. The time of this scene is "within a fortnight" after the last scene. The place of action is the Duke of Albany's castle. But there is no mistake that the castle now actually belongs to Goneril. She commands the scene. She asserts her mastery and her ownership. In elegance, the castle will rival Lear's. She regards it as a royal palace.

The evil consequences of Lear's action have begun to appear. In Act I, Sc i, Lear had pretended that he is resigning his responsibilities through weariness, and had also declared that he would now "unburdened crawl toward death." But it is made quite clear when we see him next in this scene that he is an autocratic as ever and is treating Goneril's house as his own. Goneril complains about the conduct of one hundred retainers Lear has reserved for himself. She is infuriated by this :

Idle old man,

That still would manage those authorities

That he hath given away !

She decides to insult her father when he returns from hunting by refusing to see him. She is without shame and goes to the extent of conspiring with a servant to enrage her father. "Put on what weary negligence you please". She also decides to write to Regan advising her to take a similar course in case the King chooses to go to his second daughter.

Critical Comments :

This is a short scene but an important one both from the point of view of theme and character. We have the echo of child-parent relationship—an important theme of this play. The stage is being set for the child-parent roles :

Old fools are babies again, and must be us'd
with cheeks as flatteries.

We had been from the very start made to talk of Lear's error of judgements. Even the conversation between the two sisters—Goneril and Regan—hints at that.

It is the infirmity of his age.

Yet he hath ever but slenderly known
himself (Regan)

Goneril replies : The best and the soundest of

his time hath been but rash....

The dialogue also reveals the character of Lear, Goneril and Regan, Lear, as we have seen, is self-centred, rash and headstrong. He understands neither himself nor his daughters. He starts his tragedy by a foolish judgement thinking himself to be above any wrong deed. Yet the action now reveals that he is wrong. He has fed his heart on sentimental knowledge of his children's love but he finds their love not sentimental. As G. Wilson Knight has pointed out : Thus the theme of the play changes continually into a fantastic incongruity which is implicit in the beginning in the very act of Lear's renunciation retaining 'the title and addition' of king, yet giving over a king's authority to his children.

This retention of abdicated authority enrages Goneril, who will, like Edmund, use any means, to achieve her end. Goneril, as it appears in this scene seems more angry by her father's irrational behaviour than an evil character. She has yet not been presented as completely fixed in evil though there is arrogance in her tone while commanding. Oswald is a subtle hint towards that. Hence she has been seen by the critics as a character ranging from the wicked daughter scheming her father's downfall to a harassed housewife embarrassed by an old guest's bad manners. It appears there is a dramatic requirement that she remains a dynamic character. By delaying the revelation of the various possibilities of her character, maybe, Shakespeare is trying to maintain suspense.

The scene also reveals the character of Oswald. He has been presented as a very faithful servant. His absolute loyalty towards Goneril has been interpreted by various critics as bordering on male female relationship. We see Goneril has absolute confidence in him, which is rather well-placed. He tries to serve her even beyond death.

The stage has been set for further conflicts. Let us see what complexity the action requires as it proceeds further.

Act I, SC. iv

This is one of the superbly architected scenes and a rather long one. The scene opens with a soliloquy of the banished Kent who comes disguised as Cain. Kent disguises his voice as successfully as his appearance. Kent declares his intention to serve Lear whom he loves. When Lear enters, Kent offers his services which are accepted. Kent is in the home of enemies. His recognition can mean death. He has ventured a difficult task in the light of the threat he faces. His gesture to be near the king who had earlier humiliated and banished him acquires a special significance and presents a contrast between the

forces of good and evil.

Lear enters. He will act as king. He does not merely wear the addition, his entourage is royal too. He still holds hundred knights retinue. He is still full of vigour. Back from hunting, we see him shouting for his dinner, at his fool and his daughter in the old imperious manner. He wants to see his daughter, Goneril, but is refused. We are made to take note of the fact that his commands have begun to lose their force. He orders for his dinner. His order is not obeyed. Time passes. Lear repeats his orders. There is no textual evidence that he gets his food. Lear is perhaps already getting from Goneril's servants the colder looks, she decreed. Everyone seems asleep to Lear, perhaps because they refuse to hear him. They do not acknowledge his existence. His commands dissipate in the air. He is humiliated before he is willing to admit it. There is a curious ambiguity in his admission to the knight : "I have perceived a most faint neglect of late; which I have rather blamed as mine own jealous curiosity than as a very pretence and purpose of unkindness...." Lear's growing present insecurity is self-evident. He has preferred to blame himself rather than risk acknowledging reality. After his confession to the knight he drops the loud demand for dinner, instead turns suddenly again to thoughts of his Fool. That something inward is already torturing him is made explicit when the knight tells him that ever since Cordelia's exile the Fool has much pined away. Lear's reply : "No more of that, I have noted it well", is a cry of pain, however, muted. The sympathy between Cordelia and the Fool expresses something of a shared sympathy. As Muir points out "But this delicate stroke Shakespeare gives us an insight into the characters of Cordelia, Lear and the Fool."

There is no doubt that Lear now carries a past with him and he does not want to be reminded of that.

Lear wants an assurance for his ego. He calls for his daughter Goneril, but instead enters a confrontation with Oswald. Lear's confrontation with Oswald marks Lear's second testing of ego. The first being with Kent just at the beginning of the scene "Dost thou know me, fellow ?" Kent's reply "No Sir"....indicates very subtly that Lear is anybody. However, the reply immediately followed by an assurance for his ego "but you have that in you countenance which I would fain call master." Lear's second test proves disastrous. "Who am I sir", he asks. Kent pretended (disguised as he was) not to know him out Oswald knows him not as a king but as father to a daughter. He is nothing in himself. Lear's explosion, first by a sense of last wrong as much as by present provocation, does not touch Oswald. He stands his ground in a show of considerable courage. He does not get scared of the ex-king's stare.

When Lear counters, in a kingly charge, he says. "Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?" It is in fact Lear bandying looks with a man who no longer fears his anger. Oswald's boldness is an ultimate challenge to the dignity of the once all-powerful king, must he try physically to subdue a servant? Use the whip on him? The deadlock is broken only when Kent, the first to react, Kicks Oswald and shoves him away. Lear gives Kent money for this service. However, Oswald's fall caused by Kent's kick also makes one thing more clear that Lear's vicarious triumph is a cheap one. When the Fool enters, the point gets amply focused.

Three things we know about the Fool, before he comes before us First, that Lear struck Goneril's gentleman for chiding the Fool – a kind of last straw that determined Goneril to the coming showdown (Act. I Sc. iii). Second that Lear needs the Fool, depends on him, third that Fool has pined away.

When the Fool enters, he begins by ignoring Lear. If the stage's directions are any clue, this is Fool's first entry on the stage. However, the critics differ in their views. Some of them believe that Fool must have been present in Act I, Sc. i where Lear relinquishes his kingship in favour of his daughter. But one thing, unambiguously stands revealed that he has been in constant touch with the happenings at court and is not very happy over Lear's decision. In this scene just on entering, the Fool looks straight at Kent, looks searchingly at him and may penetrate his disguise? If the Fool was present in Act I, Sc. i, the scrutiny of Kent's remarks is more meaningful. His possible recognition of Kent is ambiguous, but the possibility hangs in the pause. "Let me hire him too-" Fool ignores Lear's greeting "How now my pretty Knave". Later on when he speaks to Lear, it is to hurt him. In his bitter attack on Lear he shows concern for the preservation of property rights and in his concern a touch of the prophetic often emerges. He comments on the behaviour of the old King with impunity: "Sirrah you were best take my coxcomb." Another point which seeks our persistent attention is that Fool is not without worldly wisdom. He realises what is happening to Lear while Lear himself is completely ignorant of his loss of power. Ignoring Lear's harsh and bitter response, Fool offers to teach him a lesson in "practicality". Fool's propagandist speech for the "preservation of property" elicits a response which has the echoes of Cordelia's reply in Act I, Sc. i (Nothing can be made out of nothing). And this perhaps more than Fool's harping on Lear's poverty is what provokes the exclamatory: "A bitter fool"! Lear is willing to be taught the difference between bitter and sweet fool, but the inner, brooding in the design emerges again when Fool, playing now on differences as he did before more or less, confronts Lear with his loss

of social identity. The little song defines Lear's folly. Fool is a mirror striving to show Lear his true image. There are, says the Fool, two fools. The one in motley here (pointing to himself). The other found out-there (pointing to Lear). It provokes the next crucial question in Lear's search for himself, "Dost thou call me, fool boy ? Fool's insistence that he does, Kent's acknowledgement that Fool is not altogether Fool, does not draw from Lear any retort. Lear absorbs what he has heard, while Fool jests about the courtly monopoly on foolishness and awakens Lear's attention with the riddle about two crowns. Again Lear is reminded of his folly. Again the language is of numbers, division and earthly imagery that is reverberative. Lear's leaving of his crown is a symbol for the running motif of division into halves that leaves nothing in the centre. Fool's remonstrance smashes harder yet Lear is unwilling to acknowledge his mistake. And Lear asks Fool why he sings so much, he gives him the ultimate shame :

"....since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers....gave'st them thy all put'st down thy own breeches...."

Fool builds a climax, announcing that he would rather be any kind of thing yet he would not be Lear; for again Lear parted his wit on both sides....cut himself to the brain....and left nothing in the middle.

Fool's language vibrates with the play's pervasive imagery. He sings that Lear should play fool, marvels what King Lear and his daughters are. Then still once more he distracts Lear's response by looking off to see Goneril coming, and to make his joke :

....here comes one of the pairings,
and Goneril comes on the scene.

See, how beautifully Shakespeare climaxes the scene, with the sudden entrance of Goneril, whose presence, keeping in mind, her decree to the servants in Act I, Sc, iii, can be the cause for anxiety. But one point, here at this juncture, one point is to be kept in mind. Goneril has still not revealed her capacity for evil. The first reading of the play offers no tangible clue to it. But Goneril depends on the fact how much authentic the knights have in fact been rowdy, and if Lear is a bully, Goneril's complaining has good cause but if Lear, Fool and the knights are fine, quiet gentlemen, Goneril must see an arrant liar. But the firm of Lear denies any extreme. Perhaps this again is a part of the dramatic design deliberately manoeuvred to keep the secrets and build the suspense.

The rising tension and climax of the scene is not allowed to drop. Lear challenges the frown on Goneril's brow and the bitter Fool resumes his themes of Lear as hollow, empty without, entity, losing his shape, a

cipher :

....now thou art ono without a figure :

I am better than thou art now :

I am a Fool, thou art nothing,

To the mounting tension of the scene Shakespeare now brings the stimulus of verse in Goneril formally,- in the words that may reflect her assumption of regality, indicts the fool, Lear and the knights for quarrel and riot, Lear is speechless, Kent also does not respond. Fool says :

The hedge-sparrow led the cuckoo so long.

That it had its head bit off by its young

So went out the candle, and we were left darkling.

Note the introduction of the bird imagery. However, there is a hint on legitimacy of filial cannibalism, and the note of prophecy :

The darkness waits. Lear finds his tongue :

Are you our daughters ?

Goneril's answer reads reasonably. Again it is the fool who responds with sarcasm.

Fool has been teaching practicality to Lear. But here, we see that in his affronts to Goneril and in his repeated reminders to Lear of his reduced status, he himself is being very impractical. He is making the world intolerable both for Lear and himself.

Lear's search for his own identity is replete with a note of panic. He does not know who he is, whether he is dreaming or is awake :

Doth any here know me ? Why, this is not Lear :

Doth Lear walk thus ? speak thus ? Where are his eyes ?

Either his notion weakens, or his discernings

Are lethargied- Ha ! waking ? It's not so.

Who can tell Lear who he is ? No body, only himself. However, ironically asked, infantile desperation underlies the line; it is the question of a child who needs others to confirm the very fact he exists. Lear is losing mark of authority as king. Fool, Lear's looking glass-cruelly, compassionately tells him what is left.

Lear's Shadow :

Lear's response is curious. He doubts that he has daughters. The answer is beyond logic; the character design is now such that his identity-his substance-relies on his relationship with the daughters. The implications are dense, illegitimacy again, if these are not his

daughters, they must be bastards. It is a thought that touches terror in him. His mind misgives the makers of sovereignty, knowledge and reason that tell him he has daughters who play him false now, the dark, irrational, the subconscious, is close by. The being who calls himself Lear may be only a shadow, a nothingness, and yet uncannily more-shapeless irrational, a distorted and frightening reflection, of something mighty. Or only this encroaching shadow can tell Lear what is happening to him. Only the dark reflection within can make him know himself. The moment briefly modulates the accelerating tensions towards the great climax.

Goneril provokes Lear to explosion. Her speech is calculated for the showdown she wants. She may take pleasure in the signs of his growing anger. Her covert complaint is about his knights : "debased and bold" they infect our court with epicurism and lust, make it more like a tavern or brothel than a palace. Yet it becomes amply clear by now that Goneril has started showing her real metal. In a calm and resolute tone she lets Lear know about her newly required power. Her utter disregard for old father also is explicitly revealed. Another point to be noted is that it is only her resolute tone which helps in achieving her targets. Without any show of force, Goneril's attempt to discipline her father-king must be seen as an achievement of her personality and comment of Lear's character. How near Lear is to the fools' description of him.

Lear threatens with words as well as withdrawal. His immediate expective *Darkness* and *Devils* accompanied by *Degenerate bastard* again echoes of illegitimacy. We are reminded of Lear's words : We have no such daughter (Act I, Sc. i) is addressed to Cordelia. The symptoms of Lear's conclusion, of thought haunted by memory and passion; dominate the rest of the scene. He is so enraged and obsessed with the fit of fury that Goneril's justification "You strike my people" does not distract him. Speech comes full of exclamations. He is not addressing anybody in particular. It seems he is speaking now to everybody, to himself, to his knights, to the listening with his complains on ingratitude. His curses evoke animal images.

Albany, who comes on the scene, is astonished. He seems bewildered at Lear's anger. Albany prays to Lear to be patient and Lear cools for a moment. *Detested kite*, he calls Goneril. The curse is not as vicious as his earlier curses. However, this mood of patience is short-lived. It is soon replaced by one of remorse. The under current of self-attack comes, to the surface. He talks to himself of how Cordelia's small fault wrench'd my frame of natural from the fix place. And then he hammers at his head : "O Lear, Lear, Lear !

Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in,
And thy dear judgement out !

Albany pleads his ignorance and innocence of the whole affair. Lear in a fit of rage again, curses his daughter to be made sterile. By any standards, this is a very base and antihuman curse. But more strange than the curse is the reason for its utterance. Immediate occasion is Goneril's decision to reduce his entourage from hundred to fifty knights. She has certainly denied him his authority. She is no doubt a thankless child. But Shakespeare also at the same time makes it clear that reason does not motivate him to utter such invectives in a tone full of imperatives."

Hear, nature hear; dear goddess, hear !
Suspend thy purpose if you didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.

It is motivated by an emotional outrage, compounded by the complex, clashing feelings of this tempestuous King, former King, father, fool, beggar, child-man alone. The moment reflects Shakespeare's special mastery of multiple stimuli to sense, feeling and thought. The fierce spectacle of father and child in confrontations compels engagement with filial values. Yet one cannot help observing that howsoever vicious the filial ingratitude may be, Lear's reaction and curses are an indication of a mind bordering on insanity. Albany's comment : "Now gods that we abhor, whereof comes this ?" may be interpreted as one of horror, or of wonder, of utter bewilderment.

The ingratitude of the marble-hearted Goneril makes Lear-realise the extent of his rashness, the wrong he has done to Cordelia. Lear is almost overwhelmed by remorse when he realises the extent, of his injustice to Cordelia whose fault was but minor, but seemed ugly against the great virtue of Cordelia and his expectation from her. The guilt hangs heavy on his heart. Another point to note is Lear's ignorance of human nature. His outburst "I have another daughter" provokes pity. Similarly, his hollow threat to resume power on the one hand highlights Lear's ineffectual warning, and on the other, alerts Goneril and through her Regan and prompts them to pursue the conspiracy again. Thus this verbal combat enforces the play's movement.

The scene also throws light on the character of Duke of Albany. He does not approve of the conduct of his wife. That is why Goneril tries to work upon his fears. Albany till the end refuses to share either her fears or her machinations. Though hesitating to interfere with her plans, he is sceptical of their need or success. He ends with his non-

committal statement "Let us see what happens."

Most important of all is the way Shakespeare has taken great care in this scene to establish for Goneril an identity not subordinated to Lear's role. Her own drives begin to assert autonomy. The design includes her assumption of the power of the eldest, her own rivalry with Regan, and her unspoken revenge on Lear for his indulgence in Cordelia. Her passions have some of the flavour of her father's a power great enough to destroy her. The strong qualities in this female design emerge, and with them the first revelations of her contempt for her husband. He is not the man for her : and though she may now use him, exploit sexually his love for her, she scorns him. In this pause after Lear leaves, Shakespeare-while providing a breathing space for Lear (before Act I, Sc. v) and for a tapering off of climax gives Goneril time at the stage to assert, in her control of Albany and Oswald. She will not stop here at the break with her father; he will become incidental to her, she is launched on a course that aims higher.

To intensify the sense of the hero's isolation-a powerful motif an all Shakespeare tragedy-a compelling scenic image has been used to bridge this scene to the next-that of the castle doors closing on Lear and Fool. The King knocked out of his palace, becomes a beggar his identity changes with his situation. From now on, Lear will be in flight, in night and storm, other walls will close against him. There will be no place no territory on which to rest even for a moment, until he is led to the beggar's hovel.

Act I, Sc. v

This is a brief transitional scene. The design of Lear's lonely confrontation with himself emerges sharply in this scene. Kent's sturdy presence could provide company to Lear but he is sent as a messenger to Regan. Lear is alone, shut outside unattended, the tempest rising in his mind. Fool is there, but cold. He only half tries to outjest Lear's misery.

Lear needs to be reminded of his folly. He responds now as much to the past as to the present. The disjointed interjections of remorse and passion piece together Lear's multilevelled, responses. Fool's scare to distract him, mixed with Fool's compulsion to instruct make this an intensely threatening Scene. The scene is a step toward Lear's unbalanced state of mind. Even Lear himself has first premonition of his madness :

O, Let me not be mad, not mad : sweet heaven !

Keep me in temper ! would not be mad !

This is Lear's first appeal to heaven in which the note of humility

enters. Like all the other appeals-prayers, orders, demands-it will be denied. Lear's cry pushes the scene to climax; in the dead pause following, the Gentleman enters. It is significant that only one Gentleman is left. The old bustle of attendants is stilled, even this one will disappear from Lear's immediate train. The man's entrance is a present consciousness. Lear looks perhaps to see if there are not other attendants and then asks about the horses-impatient angry, weary, abstracted, resigned, uncertain. *Come by*, he says to Fool. His tenderness for Fool seem to grow as his anger concentrates on his daughters and his remorse on himself.

Act II, Sc. i

The scene is laid at the Earl of Gloucester's palace. The time is that of night. Considering that much of the violet and wider action of the tragedy takes place at the time of night, it becomes symbolically significant. The scene begins with a conversation between Edmund and a minor character, Curan who asks Edmund whether he has heard of "no likely wars twixt the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany." The rivalry between Goneril and Regan, hinted at in the first scene, and again in Act I, Sc. iii and Act I, Sc. i, Sc. iv is stipulated now in the opening dialogue at the Gloucester's Castle. It is less than a fortnight that the rumours spread of war between the dukedoms. The division will not be revealed when the sisters meet. "*The face of it is covered*", says Kent (Act III, Sc. i) but the physical imagery supplies ample proof.

Edmund soliloquises saying that his father Gloucester has set a watch for Edgar, who then enters. Edmund once again plays on the naive and simple Edgar by rousing his fears. Edgar has to flee when told by Edmund that Gloucester is coming. Edmund's villainy is confirmed because he wounds himself in the arm thus presenting himself as Gloucester's saviour from Edgar who was seeking to persuade Edmund to murder his father. Gloucester in a fit of rage promises to reward anyone who apprehends Edgar. Edmund is successful in persuading his father to declare Edgar a criminal and make Edmund his legal heir.

Edgar's second brief appearance still reveals little, except that he is dazed by the suddenness of danger, the confusion in the dark night and the curious play acting of his brother. This is the second time he has been shown being deceived by Edmund and then hastily escaping. He spends rest of the time in the play in disguise that he does not at first seem to exist in his own right as a character, but to be used as a foil for Edmund and as a help to the development of the other characters. Some critics find fault with Edgar's flight. It is improbable, according to such critics, that Edgar should fly instead of staying to clear himself to suspicion and at least have some explanation with

Gloucester. But sudden confusion does make even sensible men lose their heads and act very unwisely. Delius observes that Edmund tries to confuse Edgar by asking him these unexpected questions rapidly and to make him believe that he is surrounded on all sides by dangers from which immediate flight is his only escape.

Night, rumour, quick movement, all go in favour of the bastard that he can fashion fit. The theme of the sacredness of the bond between father and child is repeated. Edmund plays upon the sentiments of his moral ire against Edgar. Gloucester's immediate response mirrors Lear's *no child of mine. I never got him*. The words punctuated by the call of Cornwall's trumpets to set them apart-carry the overlying irony that Gloucester talks lovingly now to the true bastard- a "bastard" by behaviour as well as birth-and calls him *loyal and natural boy* merging with the implications of illegitimacy, or naturalness, and the idea of natural goodness is reflected in filial affection.

The flashing entrance of Cornwall and Regan renews the tension and brings the two plots together, Regan moves swiftly to Gloucester, comforting him. Regan's manner is obliquely an attack on her father whom she implicates twice. Our attention is also drawn towards Edmund and how quickly he seizes every opportunity to oust Edgar. He behaves what each character wants him to be. The marvellous suppleness of his design gets focused. To Cornwall (he does not presume on his promised inheritance), he speaks with due humility. He is a young man, as Cornwall decides-the lines are almost overburdened now with ironic echoes of natural and filial relationship-*You have shown you father ! A child like office....Natures of such deep trust we shall much need*. Edmund offers absolute loyalty.

The scene also throws light on the character of Regan. For one thing, Regan is dressed surely to rival anything Goneril can put on. Her speech to Gloucester is kindly, queenly and wears the royal plural :

Our good old friend

Lay comforts to your bosom, and bestow

Your needful counsell

Regan now, like Goneril begins to assert a separate identity, suggested in her confident relations with these men. There is much hidden evidence to show that the seeds of her fondness for Edmund are sown. Also observe Regan's double standards of values. She is outraged at Edgar's unnatural unchildlike conduct, especially when he happens to be the godson of her own father. She speaks as if it was impossible for anyone so connected with Lear to be unfilial even in the least. She clearly forgets how she herself, being not Lear's godson but his very daughter, is plotting against him with her sisters to render him

entirely helpless.

Critical Comments :

The main plot and the sub-plot are drawn together in the scene. The characters from the one plot mingle with those of the other and fresh alignments take place against Lear. The evil characters further strengthen their ranks by procuring the services of Edmund. There is a clear parallelism between the two plots. The good child Cordelia/Edgar is disinherited in each plot and his/her portion is usurped by the wicked child/children.

Act II, Sc. ii

The place of action is outside Gloucester's castle. The time is the same night as in the last scene but just before the day breaks, Oswald speaks politely of dawning. The night, the haste, the sense of the dark and the bitter cold, energise the opening. Kent has sent a long pursuit, dashing to Regan's castle. In Act I, Sc. v Kent was sent by Lear to Regan's castle with a letter. However, his welcome is poisoned by the delivery of Goneril's letter. Kent collides with Oswald—who is Goneril's trusted and loyal servant as Kent is of Lear's. Stage is being prepared for much precipitated action. Kent perhaps knows that Oswald is in possession of a letter from Goneril. Therefore, he draws Oswald into a fight first by cursing him vociferously and then by physically assaulting him. The danger to Oswald of Kent's rising anger is balanced by the comic, verbal pyrotechnics of Kent's catalogue of denigrations, and his relish of them, by Oswald's attempts to evade attack. Kent attacks Oswald because he is a good servant *super-serviceable*. But Kent himself, now being super serviceable, is a bully in the way of good service. It seems Kent must have involved Oswald into some kind of confrontations, because when Edmund comes, he comes with his rapier drawn to intervene and commands them to part. With Edmund and Kent face to face with each other with their swords drawn, the danger of sword-play becomes quite real and Kent's "*I'll flesh ye*" also has some unmistakable connotation. Especially when Regan, Cornwall and Gloucester enter and Gloucester cries, "*weapons : Arms*" the atmosphere is charged with ominous events. Between Kent and Edmund develops the mounting stichomythia that has characterised Kent's confrontations so far. He is possessed by quarrelsomeness. But Cornwall firmly stops this altercation. However, special tension marks this meeting. Kent is likely to lose his life if he is recognised. Cornwall and Regan know him well and they can mean his death. Goneril's behaviour to Lear in Act I, Sc. iv had not provoked Kent to speech. But now he knows no restraint. He breaks out. There is humour in his outburst- that a tailor must have made Oswald, a painter or a stone

cutter could-not have done such a bad job or he professes to be angered by Oswald's countenance. Despite Kent's vociferous and passionate outburst, we observe that he is a favoured character.

The Duke after listening to Kent or after examining him carefully orders the stocks. Moreover, when Kent discloses that he is King's messenger, the choice for Regan is undoubtedly underlined. We know that in this either-or position it is Goneril and not Lear who will receive consideration from Regan, Cornwall's last phrase is archetypal, reflecting a motif that lies deep in the psychic pattern of the play. *We'll teach you-the* word and timeless. "If they have an irony here, as spoken by a younger man to an older, they more importantly reflect though inconspicuously the whole world of power enforcing submission of the impulse to punishment, to bequeath guilt and shame, that colours Lear's fantasy.

I am too old to learn, Kent quotes and he is right. He will never learn, we shall see him as we proceed further.

Gloucester seeks to restrain the Duke, his patron, from stocking Kent. He beseeches Cornwall, reminding him of how the king will be insulted. Cornwall and Regan rebuff him and Cornwall commands him to follow them out.

Left alone, Kent reads a letter from Cordelia. It is presumed that Cordelia has been informed of state of affairs and will surely do something about it.

Critical Comments :

The scene is important as it further reveals the undoubted sincerity of Kent and simplicity of Gloucester. Both are trusted aids of Lear; but one is action oriented the other feels aghast at the way the events are turning. It also reveals the character of Regan. Verity points out that : "two great features of Regan's character are her cruelty and helplessness. Whenever anyone suggests something evil, especially something cruel, she quickly suggests something worse, more cruel. She delights in causing and seeing purposeless suffering-suffering for suffering's sake. She is quick of brain and of tongue, always pushing forward with a sort of alert fiendishness; whereas Goneril is composed and thoroughly business-like in her malvolence, ready to stab anyone to the heart if her schemes require it; but self-restrained and not so wanton in causing pain. One sister represents the negative principle of absolute want of feeling, the other the active principle of ill-feeling. To my mind Regan is more odious-though less formidable than Goneril."

Many critics find fault with the sudden connection of Kent with Cordelia. The event has very ingeniously contrived so much so that

Kent thinks it a miracle that Cordelia should have been so "fortunately informed" and able to communicate with him. Possibly the words should be regarded not so much as a reflection on the part of Kent as the dramatist's own way of preparing the audience for something rather improbable. However, Kent expects that fortune will smile on them again.

Act II, Sc. iii

This is a very short scene. We meet Edgar soliloquizing. Edgar to avoid capture disguises himself as Tom O' Bedlam, a mad beggar.

No scene break was indicated in Shakespeare's text for Edgar's sudden appearance; he could be "in another part of the Castle ground." His speech, however, suggests, longer light. He has come to realise that no port, no place is safe for him, "Double" time is at work. Edgar's actual experience parallels narrow actual chronology. Editors, since the eighteenth century have generally separated the scene, so Edgar may be seen as "far off or "in a wood" or "another part of England". Edgar changes in his brief soliloquy into a ragged Bedlam beggar. He strips himself of his rich clothes. On this point, Edgar's inward journey starts. He gives up, not only clothes and person, but also a way of life, from best to worst. He has momentarily "escaped the hunt", but fearful of discovery, he puts on a guise, hoping that his disguise will work. "Poor Tom : Poor Tom :That's something yet : Edgar I nothing am". As Edgar he is ruined. As Poor Tom he may not be detected. Madness in poverty not only enforces, it confers anonymity; it is the perfect disguise for it makes him a non-person.

"Edgar I Nothing Am" : Edgar's madness is not only pretence to foreshadow the reality in Lear; it has its touches of brilliant lunacy, madness in reason, as Lear will have his reason in madness. One critic has pointed out the similarity between Edgar's madness and that of Hamlet. "Edgar is like Hamlet. His ecstasy that will sometimes carry him momentarily beyond pretence is unreal. But he is not at all Hamlet...where Hamlet vacillated Edgar was active, non-reflective, met crises with decisions." With Hamlet, you say, "wait don't act in impulse". But with Edgar "it is all impulse, he acts on the moment." "A weakling in the first act, who read a book as he entered, becoming the man of action and iron who would end by killing his brother." Gardner points out that Edgar's madness brings us close to central issues raised in *King Lear*. According to Gardner, "This choice of an impoverished, vulnerable, instance disguise, takes us further towards the central consideration of the nature of man's dignity. Essential to this consideration is the familiarity of Edgar's assumed identity....and the fact that it is not exaggerated; essential too is the sympathy of

Shakespeare's manner—a sympathy that is not usually met with among the writers of the day who reflect their society's antipathy to such beggars as rogues and impostors."

Critical Comments :

This brief scene takes up the sub-plot where it was left in Act II, Sc. i and prepares us for the events in Act II, Sc. iv.

Act II, Sc. iv

The scene takes place outside Gloucester's castle. Lear enters with the Fool. The Lear who enters here has ridden through the night. Shakespeare takes care to confirm the continuity—first on a fruitless errand to his daughter now here again in the cold, suffering the persecution of the sky outside the doors of the castle. There is a contrast now in the appearance of Lear. Lear we met in Goneril's palace was the man who roared. Now he is dusty; cold and worn, may be still dinnerless. At Goneril's castle, he put on a pretence to forget Cordelia. Now his wounds are fresh. He comes a humiliated man from her palace.

Another point to take note of is that Lear is accompanied now by Fool and only one more gentleman. The process of stripping is already now under way.

The stocks where Lear sees Kent further disturbs him. He cannot imagine that any body could deliberately perpetuate such violent outrage, which is worse than murder of his messenger. So he asks Kent to explain to him in as few words as necessary how it was possible for him to deserve or for them to inflict such treatment knowing that he was king's messenger. The dialogue between Lear and Kent is designed to build in the troubled Lear a tension so fierce that at the climax, it will almost suffocate him.

The Fool's mockery of Kent, with its images of beast and man in bondage associated by sexual implications does nothing to relieve Lear's outrage. It further infuriates Lear. Even Kent's behaviour aims at further provoking Lear.

Your son and daughter found this trespass worth

The shame which here it suffers.

This persistent threatening shame puts Lear in the agony of his speechlessness. Partly, physical agony is counter pointed by Fool's harrowing meaning thereby, "If this is their behaviour, the king's troubles are not yet at the end." Verity states, Indeed his conduct (Kent's) has been ill-advised from his master's point of view. Through him Regan and Cornwall are even less disposed than before to receive

Lear kindly, Lear's treatment of Oswald has led them to inflict, an insult to the King which cannot but lead to dissension. It rouses in Lear not only bitter anger but suspicion that his daughter and her husband have sought to trick him; he insists on seeing them at once, and thus when they meet all the three are in angry and offence taking mood. In short, "Whatever, chance there might have been of Lear faring better at the hands of Regan than of Goneril is destroyed by Kent." The incident illustrates what someone has well said, that Lear's daughters are not his enemies but that even those who are devoted to him contribute to his troubles e.g. Kent here and the Fool and the knights by angering Goneril.

Lear on seeing Kent in stock immediately wants to see his daughter, "Where is this daughter ? But he wants to go alone. "Follow me not", Lear wants no repetition of his public humiliation. The pause after Lear's troubled exit is titled by the Gentleman, asking if Kent has done no more than he reported. His denial word "None" sets again the pattern of figures so often linked to Lear's value system : *How chance the king comes with so small a train ?*

The verbalisation insists on what the eye has seen : Lear is deserted. The birds have flown to a warmer south. Practical Fool, with his simple, proverbial speech, from hurt feelings preaches a lesson he himself will not learn. Others

Will Pack when it begins to rain,

And leave thee in the storm.

But I will tarry; the Fool will stay.

Most critics have stressed the Fool's loyalty. Danby says that Fool "really does believe that to follow Lear to disaster is foolishness. Absolute loyalty is irrational....Folly is an alternative to knavery, but that does not make it a virtue". This may well be part of what the Fool believes, but he acts opposite to his belief. The only foolish thing about the Fool is his absolute loyalty to Lear.

Lear is now hurried out of palace by Gloucester. Lear cannot bear the expulsion. He is vexed at the idle excuses offered by Regan and Cornwall, "Deny to speak with me ? They are sick ? They are weary ? They have travelled all the night ?"

It is significant to note that Lear himself has travelled twice as far, wearily, unfed, sickening in mind and body. Lear suspects signs of revolt and desertion, "Mere fetches; The images of revolt and flying off Gloucester's slushing appeasements intensify Lear's anger. "Vengeance ! plague, death ! confusion ! Fiery ?".....Lear is still under the delusion that he possesses the authority as King and can

summon the Duke of Cornwall and his wife. Lear's mood oscillates between that of intense anger and a partial realisation of his fault, for we hear Lear talking of forbearance and patience. He does not want to precipitate the matters. "The Duke may really be unwell." Hence he shows an awareness of his main fault..... impetuosity and hasty temper. But then the sight of Kent in stocks further provokes him and throws him into a passion....."I'll beat the drum, Till it cry sleep to death."

Lear is evidently so furious and so terrible in his anger that Gloucester gives in and goes to summon the Duke and his wife. We again have one of the fool's comments. His jingle is curious, malacious and may be taken as satirising Lear's habit of giving orders.

The painful pause that punctuates this clash of the comic and the tragic is broken when Gloucester returns with Cornwall, Regan and servants. Lear turns to face them but concentrates on Regan. Beloved Regan....O Regan.....Lear's hurt pride finds full expression on seeing Regan. "Thy sister's naught : O Regan, she hath lied sharp tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here !" whatever the balance in Lear between majesty and humanity, the sage and the Fool, the fierce and the pitiable, however, much the words are vehicles for his anger at Goneril, they are also an appeal for love, an admission of need, not only spiritual, but also physical. But Regan's first words are a defence of Goneril. And Lear is as puzzled as incredulous at "Say? how is that". Regan's repeated apology for Goneril, her suggestion that the riotous knights need restraining provoke Lear not against her but her sister "My curses on her." One caution that continues to blunt Lear's perception of Regan's purpose, its need, make increasingly evident, as the scene mounts to keep his love on being reminded that he is old." Lear says, "Dear daughter, I confess that I am old."

Age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg

That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food."

That speech is of great thematic significance. We see the mighty king on his knees, the father becomes a child to his child : the old being submissive to the young, the rich and powerful engulfed by darkening shadow of poverty becoming poor, shelter and substance. According to Helen Morris the act of kneeling symbolises the world which seems upside down. Lear is in his anxiety begins to bargain now, Regan should never have his curse, she knows what he owes him. Regan's eyes, unlike Goneril's fierce ones, bring comfort and do not burn. The sub-scene comes to an end with the clamorous horn and Oswald's arrival confirming Goneril's arrival. Just then Lear furiously asks. Who

put my man in the stocks. His furious question is ignored. Nobody answers. He will have to ask thrice. Lear's angry reaction, and the ignoring of his fierce question about the stocking heralds Goneril's entrance.

The precarious balance is between anger and fear, the need to love and the need to strike out the remembrance of power. The anticipation of poverty is finally upset and despite his intermittent efforts to stabilise it, with pleas, rage, humility, and imprecation, even comprise, disequilibrium with the arrival of Goneril increases.

Lear is the centre of many tensions now. How finds hostility living against him.

In Act, I, Sc. i we saw how each sister sought to outdo the other in an expression of love for the father. Now each tries to outdo the other in denying love to him. He is the same man, but not now a king; he says the same kind of terrible threatening things, but now he is devoid of power and to his daughters, involved in their own concerns, a nuisance. Regan made sure at the end of Act I Sc. ii that Lear would first stay with Goneril, now each tries to push him off to the other. Their professed bosoms they now withdraw, they refuse him nourishment. At the end of Act I, Goneril was not sure that Regan would support her against Lear. However, we see Regan is more hostile and cruel. Taunting thoughts flash instantly through her restless brain and find instinctive expression. Goneril does not have this malignant pettiness of her sister. Regan is blunt, unyielding and throws *dotage* at him. This is the severest blow to Lear. It shocks him, he wonders if he can survive it.

O sides, you are too tough;

Will you yet hold ?

Regan's insistence that he should return to her sister and her excuse not to keep him with herself and a continuous pressure on him to reduce the number of attendants, drives him towards madness. Rosenberg aptly says that it seeks the "reverse motion. He is in retreat and they hunt him down....." Hundred, fifty, twenty-five eating at the security Lear plays for...the numbers that mean to Lear so much....the garment of his status shrink to nothing....he begins to know the nakedness of that poverty to which the great downhill well is dragging him. He seeks for survival, physical, psychological and plumbs a further bottom, as in his most degrading bargain accepting a wickedness that is not worst....shock, shock coming quickly....the reduction of Lear to nothing. Here is the crudest ever attack in the play suddenly leaving Lear a thing-helpless, unattended. Lear reminds them "I gave you all...." and Regan says, "*in good you gave it*" this seems

to be his base, his bottom he has not leverage now, his price is fallen as Cordelia's was.

Lear now shifts to self pity. He is helpless, now gods may be indifferent to him, even against him. He, therefore only asks from them the power to resist his own weakness. Lear wants his anger to be noble, fitting a king. Gardner significantly observes. "The speech marks an imperfect beginning of Lear's redemption as human being. He begins by matching himself as King along side the pauper, to justify his status. This amounts in a way (but not yet explicitly) to critical look at the visual evidence of degree which so far he has vehemently coveted for himself."

His once beautiful daughters now become ugly, obnoxious old women. And Lear threatens to resume power and punish his daughters in a manner that shall be the "terrors of the earth." The threat, we know, is the outcome of an impotent rage. The king child is returning to the meglomania of youth.

Lear feels the strain too much and fears that he shall go mad. It turns out to be a prophetic piece of self-knowledge. Rosenberg, placing Lear's speech in its immediate context observes, "The rushing dialogue, then the shocked pause puts Lear at his great climatic speech. The lines modulated by so many contradictory needs and passions are beautifully designed to allow him to recover momentarily from the humiliation of his rebuffs; and even more, from his shameful readiness to submit to Goneril. Tirade begins, unlike the earlier curses, on a note of pleading, before it leaps to imprecations."

The scene comes to an end with Lear fleeing with the Fool into the storm that has already begun to rumble and hiss. With the shutting up of the doors of Gloucester castle upon him, his isolation and alienation from society that he once commanded is complete.

Critical Comments : The scene is theatrically one of the most important scenes in the play. We have seen in Lear a combination of conflicting impulses, proud and simple, brave and fearful, hard and soft, noble and mean, loving and hating. His final speech is a synthesis of these impulses. The hostility is directed towards other targets. Arrival of Goneril marks an important truth in the play. Two sisters align together against Lear but their old rivalry continues into a division between their husband's dukedoms—though the division has yet not come on the surface.

Short Answer Questions

Q.1. Explain the line, "Nothing will come of nothing."

Ans. The above line is taken from the first scene Act I of Shakespeare's play *King Lear*. It is Lear's utterance of annoyance and anger at the seemingly behaviour of Cordelia. She does not openly acknowledge her love for her foolish father who compels her to exhibit her love publicly, particularly in the presence of her suitor. To Lear's question as to how much she loves him, Cordelia utters "Nothing". King Lear like a mad man retaliates to Cordelia's "Nothing" and authoritatively says that "Nothing will come of nothing." Lear warns Cordelia that she will not inherit anything if she continues to be insolent. The above statement is imbued with a sense of irony as Lear, who in the beginning reduces Cordelia to "nothing" himself becomes "nothing", just a Lear's shadow at the end of the play.

Q.2. What impression do you form of Cordelia's character from the first Act ?

Ans. Cordelia is a resolute and firm person. She stands in contrast to her sisters. She is not a hypocrite like her elder sisters, Goneril and Regan who make a show of their loyalty to their father. She is honest and true to herself. She loves her father deeply but she cannot express her love as she is meek and reticent by nature. She is loyal to her father as she later protects him in the storm scene and even fights a battle to defend him. Her sisters-Goneril and Regan-flatter the king just to get an opulent share from their father's kingdom and property. But Cordelia is not money-minded. However, Cordelia is rigid and resolute; nevertheless she is honest and truthful.

Q.3. Who has spoken the line, "Let me if not by birth, have lands by wit." Also explain, its meaning ?

Ans. This line is a part of Edmund's second soliloquy in Act I, Sc. ii Edmund being a bastard is not entitled to Gloucester's property, but he is an ambitious man. He is determined to get his share by his cleverness, manoeuvring and manipulations.

Q.4. Who is Tom O'Bedlam ?

Ans. Edgar, the legitimate son of Gloucester, disguises himself as a beggar and projects himself as Tom O'Bedlam. Edgar has momentarily "escap'd the hurt" but fearful of discovery, he puts on a guise, Hoping that his disguise will work." "Poor Tom that's something yet Edgar I nothing am. As Edgar, he is ruined, as poor Tom he may not be detected." Poor Tom plays a significant part in the redemption of King Lear in the storm scene. As Lear looks at the Bedlam beggar (Tom) he

identifies himself with the poor and the naked. He realises that a king is a man first and king afterwards. Tom O'Bedlam acts as a judge in the play as the king asks him to punish Goneril and Regan disguised as cats in the storm scene.

Q.5. "Age is unnecessary. On my knees I Beg" What light does this line throw on Lear's position.

Ans. Lear has been reduced to a pitiable state. This line reveals a mighty king on his knees. He is a man reduced to poverty, he is without shelter and without substance. Kneeling symbolises the world which seems upside down. The above statement of Lear indicates that old men have no place in the world. The old parents are treated cruelly and discarded by their children. The above utterance thus emphasizes the theme of parent-child relationship or filial ingratitude in the play.

Q.6. Why do we call Edmund a-man of Renaissance ?

Ans. Edmund is considered a man of Renaissance. He possesses most of Renaissance qualities, he is ambitious and aspires for power the qualities which were propounded by the Renaissance movement and were loved most by Elizabethans. He wishes to acquire power through intrigue and treachery.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR
A Critical Study of the Text (Contd.)
Act III, Scene (i)**

This is a short scene. Verity states : "This scene lowers the pitch of the passion after the tension of the last Act, gives relief to the feelings and prepares us for the wilder mood, verging more on madness, in which Lear is next brought before us. Also it leads naturally to the arrangement (essential to the plot) by which Kent communicates with Cordelia.

The storm bursts out in all its fury. During the storm Kent has become separated from Lear and we find him questioning the gentleman, the beggar, king's last attendant, about the whereabouts of the king. In a speech laden with imagery of wild beasts, the gentleman answers that Lear is running unbonneted on the heath through the terrors of the storm.

We learn that there is already a division between the Dukes, and Kent sends the gentleman to inform to "French Party landed at Dover to report about the pitiable plight of the king and the wickedness of Goneril and Regan."

There is division,

Although as yet, the face of it be cover'd

With mutual cunning twixt Albany and Cornwall.

Critical Comments :

The critics, generally sceptical of stage storms, have admired this one for increasing "our reverence for Lear exposed" to the pelting of the pitiless storm "all the more because the storm is so real, because the gloom is so complete, and because the venerable figure of the King is only shown to us by fitful gleams, (in) the flash of lightening." The division in nature is echoed in the division within Lear, and among the people of his kingdom. By the division referred to between the Dukes, Shakespeare wants to separate Albany from the band villains.

Commenting on the importance of this scene, Verity states, "The storm is at once a fit setting for the action and a symbol of it. The convulsion in the physical world corresponds (i) with the convulsion in the moral world which has overthrown all the natural relations of family and (ii) with the tempest in Lear's own heart...."

Act III, Scene (ii)

This is one of the most poetic scenes in the play and in a way is the continuation of the storm scene. Lear is not quite yet mad, but is close to the brink. In the last scene, we see Lear out in the storm. Here he defies the storm and calls upon the all-shaking thunder to 'crack'. Nature makes ungrateful men the floodgates of heaven. One cannot miss the violence of Lear's revulsion. His defiance of nature is full of tantrum and challenges. We know that Lear's habit is to command everything and at first he commands the weather, "Blow winds....." He personalises the forces let loose in storm as destroyers.

But the fool wants no share in Lear's quarrel with the universe. He is cold, wet and shivering. He begs Lear to ask "thy daughter's blessing" because ".....here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool." Fool's suffering is physical but Lear's storm is so violent that he cannot feel the outer. He ignores the Fool. Lear has asked for annihilation and is rebuffed as all his commands, pleas, adjuration to greater powers are rebuffed by the thought executing mind. In every speech, now the storm within Lear will disorganise him, give hints of the erratic sequence of his thoughts and of the chaos to come. The command of the first speech now dissolves into self-pity, anger and scorn. He does not blame the hostile nature for its unkindness because these hostile elements are not children. He never gave them anything. They owe him nothing, then let fall your horrible pleasure, here I stand, your slave. A poor, infirm, weak and despoised- old man.... There is indeed some self-recognition in this. The King is begging to see himself a subject, a simple man. But what most colours the speech is his sense of the wrong done to him, of the conspiracy to persecute him.

But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd,
your high-engender'd battles against a head.
So old and while as this. O ! O !, tis foul.

There is an oscillation in his mood from anger and contempt to self pity. Fool now makes an allusion to shelter, cracks a joke calculated to distract Lear. But Lear is reminded of his poverty. He ignores the Fool, self-involved, speaking only to himself. He says, "No, I will be the

pattern of all patience." Kent's figure appears with a cautious enquiry. "Who's there ? Fool gives a fool's answer :

a wise man and a Fool,

This is the dialect of man, stretched to his limits; man is love and lust, wisdom and folly.

Kent describes the storm again and authenticates the terror of the scene; and emphasises Lear's ignoring of it. We have another of Lear's powerful outbursts in which he indicts the whole world. Men are on trial, they are in-danger of terrible punishment. Let the great Gods punish the hidden liars, the hypocritical, incestuous, all those who are secretly vile, who have hidden guilts. He has nothing to dread from the storm. He is more sinned against than sinning.

Again, we find in this speech a curious mixture of anger and self-pity, of self-awareness and self-righteousness which borders on self-delusion and self-ignorance. He would exclude himself from the category of the sinners who deserve to be punished, forgetting that he too has terribly sinned against nature by rejecting Cordelia. But it is only through such faltering flashes of insight that Lear will ultimately find his way of self-awareness.

Lear's speeches in the storm are riddled with contradictions, self-pity, delusion and a terrifying destructive violence. Goldberry pertinently observes, "The man who can display himself in such pyrotechnics is not altogether a poor, infirm weak and despised old man" and that his cry of pain "more sinned against than sinning" is not the whole Truth....His own heart may have been frank, at least is spontaneously intending good, which neither Goneril's nor Regan's is but it was hardly unbent enough, to others or itself to have given all. To cry as he does for all shaking thunder to strike flat that the world may destroy "ingrateful man", is for the self to run distractedly from one threat to another....In short if he is not learning a redeeming wisdom in the storm scenes, neither is he merely "posturing", he is going mad.

Kent, ultimately penetrates Lear's self-involvement and Lear is made to perceive in the storm the reality of being shut out from that hard house. He comes to himself :

My wits begin to turn :

He holds on the present and feels concerned for the fool :

Come on, my boy, How does, my boy ? Art cold ?

I am cold myself.

Lear's earlier kindness to Fool was, except briefly in Act, I Sc. v coated in jest, and spiked with anger, now he is only tender, thinks first, of

someone else.

Critical Comments :

It is perhaps the most powerful scene in the play and most crucial in understanding of Lear's character. In the scene we find Lear voicing, a great statement of defiance against the elements directed against nature not only in terms of the specific storm he is enduring but also in terms of all the forces beyond his control that threaten his life." He is in defiance against the evil of the world and against his evil daughters and he is also in defiance of the madness that he knows is overtaking him. "Passions sweep over him in gusts and the pauses in angry imprecations and denunciations resemble the intervals in the blasts of the storm which rages round him. The terrible storm which continues through most of the Act, is symbolic not only of the tempest in Lear's breast, but also of the upheaval in the world which has led to his misfortunes. "Rosenberg is a giant in it. Against the greater world of the elemental universe he may be nothing, but his assertion of somethingness guarantees his heroic dignity."

It has also been pointed out by critics that Lear's experiences in the storm lay the foundation of the change which takes place in him. The storm brings him face to face with reality. He for the first time becomes aware of the wretched plight of others, and begins to feel for the suffering of others. His wicked daughters send him to school in the storm to learn that he is now an old man to bring him to kneel to them. But he learns something quite different. His desire for revenge against his daughters remains as powerful as ever, but he gains in self-awareness and goes beyond himself to feel for others.

Act III, Scene (iii)

We now move to a room in Gloucester's castle and see Gloucester and Edmund hurrying on in whispered consultation. Gloucester complains about the treatment he has received at the hands of Regan and Cornwall. "They took from me the use of mine own house." Edmund replies, "Most savage and unnatural." Gloucester further confides in Edmund about the letter regarding the "division between the Dukes," that the French troops have already landed and that "they must incline to the king." Edmund informs the audience in a soliloquy that he would betray his father to Cornwall and thus usurp his place. To make sure that the audience does not miss the point, considering Edmund's loyalty to the Duke's camp, Shakespeare permits Edmund to end his speech with the aphorism. "The younger rise when the old doth fall."

Critical Comments :

From this point the threads of plot and the subject are tightly interwoven; since Gloucester's intervention on Lear's behalf and the suspicion that he is acting with "France" lead to a closing of the relations between Edmund and Cornwall and Regan, and ultimately to what befalls Gloucester himself through them.

The scene also highlights the character of Gloucester and Edmund, Gloucester is caught between pity and policy, between loyalty of the heart and head. His house has been confiscated because of his compassion for the old King and he has been threatened with perpetual displeasure. Gloucester's native faith in his bastard son also comes to the front. How savage and unnatural his so called loyal and natural boy appears as soon as he betrays 'nature' in the interest of "loyalty and an earldom". Whereas Gloucester has made his decision to help the King-to loyal -the bastard chooses betrayal-treachery. Another important point to keep in mind is that Gloucester in the sub-plot like Lear in the main plot, is a father betrayed by his own child.

Act III, Scene (iv)

The scene opens with Lear and Kent on the heath before the entrance to the hovel Kent declares the terror of the unnaturalness of nature :
The tyranny of the open night's rough.

For nature to endure.

Kent invites Lear to enter the hovel, Lear refuses. The tempest outside helps him to forget the tempest raging within. He is heedless of the storm. He is in a stage of imbalance. Lear will endure the storm. He is in tears, moved by his own suffering but sensitive to Kent and Fool. He cannot be still, he imagines himself between a bear and the roaring sea. He defines his obsession :

The tempest in my mine

Doth from my sense take all feeling else

Save what beats there

As Rosenberg points out : "The reality of the body is crucial to the image of Lear now. His writing mind refuses the messages from the body; he does not even know he is cold. The over loaded feverish mind ravages the flesh; as the reason slips, is checked less surely, slips again. His over extended body begins to decline towards the utter exhaustive of the mind.

What beats in his brain, he says is *Filial ingratitude* and the thought, unleashed, hurts him violently into a see-saw from one thought to its counter.

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to it ?

Again Lear is obsessed with self-pity

Pour on : I will endure :

"In such a night as this ! O Regan, Goneril ! Your old king father,
whose frank heart gave all."

It is relevant to quote Rosenberg here, "Not only filial ingratitude but also inward anxieties torment him; the problem of giving or not giving is a central motif in Lear's design. The self-doubt in the design that will plague him may emerge now, in the unspoken thought that his self-image is a lie, that he is not kind that his heart is not frank : This may help remind him of how precarious his sanity is."

O ! that way madness lies; let me shun that :

No more of that;

There is a very short momentary retreat to present reality from his obsessions, before he finally succumbs to insanity. His concern for Kent and Fool, his insistence that they shelter first is a sign of mind stabilising.

Oh boy, go first. You houseless Poverty.

Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.

Mark the change in Lear's tone and also mark the royal courtesy of Lear to his Fool. The Fool now appears to Lear's new-awakened human heartedness, symbol of all the helpless defenceless humanity. And Lear's prayer is also not to gods, but to the poor. "The prayer", says Rosenberg, "So far in spirit from his earlier abjurations, moves Lear into a different dimension. A new world seems to have broken in on his mind. He is alone with his best thoughts."

Lear kneels down in a generous mood of humility one of deep compassion but no self-pity. It is significant to observe that his last prayer is addressed not to gods as he had done earlier, but to men, urging pity for the defenceless. It is a prayer to the prosperous to share their excess to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. Lear no longer asks the gods to make men more just, now he asks men to do as much for gods. He keenly feels for the misery of poverty. Though rejected and despised, exposed and humiliated, he still does not include himself among the poor. He is praying not for himself but for others. He exhorts others to act feelingly and generously towards the poor. For once, there is a frank and regretful acknowledgement of his himself having failed to act in that fashion. However, one thing stands revealed in this prayer that Lear has learnt the art of necessity that makes vile things

precious, need has compelled his attention-and he has responded breaking at last out of the cage of his ego. "But Lear must journey beyond easy tragic redemption on and on. In none other of the major tragedies is hope so often evolved and then annihilated."

When the Fool enters the hovel, inside the hovel is Edgar, and upon the Fool's entrance he takes on an "an antic disposition (the appearance of madness) singing : "Fathom and half poor Tom" heightened, the Fool comes out saying there is a spirit in the hovel. Lear and Kent step across the threshold to see and Edgar disguised. "Didst thou give all to thy daughters?" he asks, "And art thou come to this ?"

Lear shows clear signs of madness, "Lear's mind, assaulted by a sense of rejection and mistreatment, wrecked by the rain, lightning and thunder too fierce. Kent calls it unnatural, unbearable, suffering an accelerating accumulation of feelings of self-doubt, shame, terror and upthrust of impulses he has always repressed, now, suddenly harrowed by a vision of the shrieking madness that has been terrifying him with foreboding Lear's mind yields." We shall talk of Lear's madness in more detail in the ensuing lessons.

Poor Tom's apparition maddens Lear partly because Tom incarnates Lear's most dreaded imaginings. Now Edgar plays the part of madness (as Tom) for safety's sake, there can be dramatic motivations also. He knows the King, may be he has served him also. In his flight he must have put up with hunger and cold. Hence his suffering is real as well as calculated. Lear's presence must have shattered him. The shock may be both physical as well as psychic. Lear in his obsession declares that he must have been brought to this condition by his daughters. But Edgar offers nothing. He does not extend a comforting or an assuring world to Lear. Does he want to infect Lear with fiends ? As Rosenberg puts, "He certainly forces on Lear's troubled mind a fearful image of suffering madnes." Moberly observes, "the latent madness against which Lear had been struggling bursts into violence at the sight of strange and awful object which Edgar has made of himself, and he wishes to reduce himself, like to a state of absolute and unmitigated nature." Bracke remarks, "Some tone or inflection in Edgar's voice has reached the father's heart, and he bitterly recalls the supposed unfilial conduct of his elder son, and he links it with Lear's daughters. Edgar, instinctively feeling this, preserves in his Bedlam cry to drown the betrayed sound of his voice and maintain the impression of his assumed character." Hence starts Lear's stripping. Lear tears off his clothes to discard all the borrowed furnishings of civilization and to be "the thing itself, and to identify himself with poor Tom, the houseless

poverty."

Kent and the Fool rush up to stop Lear's disrobing. The Fool's urgent warning of Gloucester's advent freezes the action. Edgar continues playing the mad man. He keeps crying : "This is the foul fiend Flibberti Gibbet." Gloucester now attempts to persuade Lear to go with him. He has decided he cannot obey all of the regulations of Lear's daughters, and it would seem that pity for the old man moved his heart. Gloucester draws up a close comparison between his own plight and that of Lear.

Lear is not interested to go with Gloucester. He prefers to stay and speak with "the philosopher, the wise Theban."

Critical Comments :

It is necessary to explain that Gloucester does not recognise Kent. It is also made clear from his entrance that he did not recognise his son-Edgar.

In this scene we are given a picture of "the real madness of Lear, the feigned madness of Edgar (and) the babbling of the Fool" (Coleridge). Edgar's madness is mostly idiocy or nonsense, with little of that element of reason and coherence which makes mental derangement like Lear's so ghastly. Edgar's affection, if real, would inspire Lear's terror and pity. The fact that the two characters are brought together thus strengthens greatly the connection between the main plot and the sub-plot. The climax of the main theme is reached when Lear enriched by a new human sympathy, humbles himself to prayer, Lear seems to have become human in his madness. Shakespeare appears to be questioning appearance and reality here with a vengeance.

Act III, Scene (v)

This is another brief scene in a room in Gloucester's castle. The scene shifts back to the sub-plot with Cornwall remarking : "I will have my revenge era depart this house."

We see Edmund at the height of villainy as also of his fortune. He betrays his father to the Duke of Cornwall by producing the letter. The bastard is following his pragmatic deity; he gives way not to loyalty but disloyalty. Edmund produces the letter for Cornwall's attention, using the tactic he had first used to fool Gloucester. He reminds Cornwall how significant the letter is :

If the matter of this paper be certain. You have mightly business in hand....

Cornwall responds with the appropriate reward. The bastard is the Earl of Gloucester.

Critical Comments :

Some critics believe that Shakespeare is contrasting the mad world occupied by Lear in the previous scene with the sane world. But if this is true, the supposedly and the apparently sane world in the room in Gloucester's castle is really deeply and dreadfully insane. According to Coleridge, "The intervention of the fifth scene, is particularly judicious, the interruption in the sixth scene."

Act III, Scene (vi)

Gloucester conducts Lear and others to a farm-house near the castle. Kent thanks Gloucester for the kindness. Gloucester leaves them to bring further help for them. Lear's wits give way completely under his impatience." He is tormented with the thoughts of wrecking vengeance upon his daughters. Then suddenly there is a change of mood. He would not be arbitrary. He would give them a fair trial before he punished them. Lear sets up his mad court consisting of Poor Tom and Fool and Kent. Lear seats Poor Tom as a learned justice and begins the magnificent trial of the cats. The first is a grey cat. "Arraign her first", says Lear, "it is Goneril...She kicked the poor King her father," Another cat crosses the stage and Lear attempts to arraign it also. The little dogs (Lear calls them Tray, Blanch, and sweet heart) enter and bark at Lear, "In his desolation, feeling deserted by all who have fawned on him, Lear imagines his dogs barking at him." Moberley suggests that dogs start barking at him, master." Hazlitt comments : "All nature was as he supposed, in the conspiracy, against him and the most trivial and insignificant creature concerned in it were the most striking proofs of its malignity and extent."

The fool and Poor Tom (Edgar) humour the King's phantasy, and in a way amplify Lear's central frenzy. Kent pities the King and tears come unbidden to Edgar's eye who can hardly keep us his counterfeiting. Edgar tries to scare away the imaginary dogs and at the same time chants a spell to get rid of them. Moved with pity, he tries to help the king, to assure him that he is not entirely deserted. Lear's mind, perhaps reassured by Edgar's gesture, reverts to the trial again. He wishes (the court) to hang and dissect Regan's heart and find what is there that has made her so depraved, cruel and wicked. Lear asks, "Is there any cause in the human physical make-up which makes hard hearts ?" Lear is most bewildered by inhumanity of his daughters and knows what is there that makes them such hard hearted.

Kent makes Lear lie down and have some rest which he surely needs. The fury of the trial over, Lear almost collapses, exhausted. He imagines himself to be in his own bed and gives 'instructions to draw the curtain.

The Fool says, "And I'll go to bed at noon". Several meanings of this quizzical utterance of the Fool are given by Muir. Budd suggests that, "that broken-hearted, exhausted the Fool is presaging his own death, which he feels is about to come upon him, this early in life." Another editor remarks : "The Fool's function, to reflect Lear's folly in his professional, particular mirror of truth, is finished. The King in his madness now beyond reach of the Jester's sharp sanity and as Lear invited poor Tom, the apparent Bedlam beggar, into service the Fool sees his own service finished. Dramatically, the Fool's function has been both destructive, redeeming, keeping open the wounds of Lear's suffering and clarifying his awareness." Rosenberg comments "Like Lear, Fool has been worn by the exile, and the storm, unless his appearance now portends mystery, the noon time bed will certainly be a grave, he has been declining it through the cold he hates so much, the ravaging storm, the fear of pursuit, the flight, the estrangement from Lear."

Gloucester returns and asks Kent to move the King to Dover without any loss of time as he has come to know of a plot against Lear's life.

The stage is emptied except for poor Tom who delivers a much debated soliloquy (in couplets) beginning "when we our betters see bearing our woes we scarcely think our miseries our foes." From Edgar's soliloquy we come to know that he has less compassion for Lear than gratitude. Seeing another's misery has lessened his own....

When that which makes me bend makes the king bow

He childed as I fathered !

"These lines equated Lear's evil children with Edgar's cruel father, but it bears the prophetic implication too, that Lear regresses to childhood as Edgar moves towards maturity, towards fathering his own father."

Critical Comments : The scene is climactic. The madness which has threatened the king for sometime now completely overwhelms him. The assumed madness of Edgar, "The babblings" of Fool, and the real madness of Lear are again brought together and contrasted in the mock trial of his daughters we have a glimpse of a change in the depths of Lear's being. "Lear scarcely rescued from the fury of nature," says R. Peacock; "his ideas scattered by suffering conducts a trial of his daughters. It is an illumination that produces from the sub-conscious the effects of order. At the moment of greatest break-down, we are given a judgement that represents amidst chaos the memory of civilisation. Moral assumptions are at the centre of tragedy."

It has further been pointed out by a critic that the mock trial cannot be dismissed as a lunatic fantasy; in addition to suggesting a

rightness...Lear's attitude, it is of considerable structural significance "To discover the real effectiveness of the scene, we must consider it in its structural relations. We should recall that in Act I, Sc. (i) Lear also held a trial of his daughter. What is the ironic contrast between that and this ? Which is more just ? Is the real more 'sensible' than the mad one ? Even more marked is the relationship between Lear's arraignment of his daughter in Sc. (iv) and Cornwall's arraignment of Gloucester in Sc (vii) come so close together that we can hardly fail to take them, in part, as comments upon each other.

Act III, Scene (vii)

Immediate preparations for war mark the opening of this scene and the next act. The scene takes place in Gloucester's castle. The first part of it is full of hurried action. The scene opens with Cornwall informing us that France has landed at Dover. The king has been helped by Gloucester to escape. Noises are high. Cornwall is on the guard. Albany must be warned urgently to arm. Communication between allies must be swift. The traitor Gloucester must be caught at once. Regan wants to hang Gloucester. Goneril wants to blind him. Cornwall reserves to himself the decision, though he will, in fact do what his strong-minded sister-in-law says. The mood of haste is further intensified by Cornwall's prodding of Edmund. Goneril and Edmund leave to let Albany know of it. When Goneril goes off alone with the splendid new Earl (Edmund) Regan cares enough to notice and recall later how they were eyeing each other. This rising dissonance between the sisters will importantly sustain the tension of the next two acts.

The second part of this scene presents a very horrid spectacle. It deals with the humiliation of Gloucester and his blinding on stage by Cornwall in a most cruel manner. Goneril before she left with Edmund had suggested such punishment. And Regan, after one eye has been gouged out viciously prompts Cornwall, to blind the other too.

One side will mock the order. One of the servants of Cornwall bids him to hold his hand. Gardner comments on this : "As so often Shakespeare the reaction is more important than the action. Here the first servant's challenge itself justifies the incident. The active, immediate self-denying intervention of the commoner would be more remarkable to Shakespeare audience than the Common place insensitivity of power. Loyalty in servants is often demonstrated and commanded, directly and indirectly, but this instinctive revulsion, and the transcendent assertion of human 'kindness' is something exceptional, and essential to the meaning of *King Lear*".

Cornwall draws his sword upon the servant and they fight. Regan stops the servant from behind. But before he dies, he gives a fatal wound to

Cornwall. Gloucester's second eye too is gouged out.

Gloucester in agony calls out for Edmund. Regan tortures him further, wickedly informs him that it was Edmund who betrayed him. The old man makes a real tragic discovery, all in an instant, he loses his sight and ironically gains it. It is a hard lesson but at least Gloucester's inner sight is restored. "Then Edgar was abused". Gloucester cries : "Kind gods forgive me and prosper him." Gloucester is thrown out to "smell his way out of Dover." The two servants are left on the stage. They predict that heaven's vengeance would overtake her, and leave to find Poor Tom to lead Gloucester where he would fetch some flax and white of eggs to apply to his bleeding eyes.

In the theatre, the blinding of Gloucester is almost intolerable. Verity states : "This incident of mutilation ("mutilation is always more horrible than murder") has been much criticised as being physically repulsive and therefore alien from the sublimity and moral beauty of a pure tragedy." "I will not", says Coleridge, "disguise my conviction that on this point the tragic in this play has been urged beyond the uttermost mark and the plus ultra of the dramatic." "Still" as Tieck notes, "the incident though it takes place on the stage, need not be seen by the audience, and Shakespeare, we may suppose did not intend it to be. It can be concealed from the spectators by the arrangement of the stage and the grouping of the characters, especially the attendants. Moreover, its barbarity is consonant with the most savage tone of the whole play. Again, it is some satisfaction to us that the deed is not done without a protest from one of those present and that it brings its own nemesis instantly. Editors cite other cases of scenes of mutilation of the Elizabethan stage and the pseudo Shakespearean, thus *Andronicans*. (Act II, Scene. vi) is still more repulsive."

Critical Comments : With the blinding of Gloucester both the main plot and the sub-plot reach their climax and now the centre of action tends to shift to Dover where the events will move forward toward their resolution.

The wounding of Cornwall brings the assurance that the forces of retribution to punish the evil doers have after all bestirred themselves. It raises the hope of some re-establishment of order and human values which have been so seriously thwarted and threatened.

Act IV, Scene (i)

The heath again. We see Edgar again in the role of poor Tom in the stage soliloquizing. He is not too disconsolate with his state, and thinks that so long as there is life there is hope :

The worst returns to laughter :

Because from the worst condition there can only be a change for the better. Gardner commenting on the last two lines of his soliloquy comments : "The victim of the storm owes nothing to elements that are different.....this stoicism follows from the idea that the conflict of elements is welcome, since it reduces man to the lowest that is the most hopeful state." The opening soliloquy of Edgar underlines the paradox of possession and dispossession in the play. But his sight is biased as he sees his father 'poorly led'.

The focus is on Gloucester now. We are made to take note of Gloucester's concern for the well-being of others. He does not want the old man to come to any harm for helping him. Gloucester's goodness glimmers through his torturing pain and misery. We find in him a see-saw going on between self-pity and compassion. Another paradox of the play comes to fore when Gloucester says :

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes : I stumbled when I saw;
Gloucester's resistance to insight has been time and again referred to in the play. But now he is fully aware of his folly and maltreatment of Edgar. He craves to have him within his touch.

Oh! dear son Edgar.

The food of thy abused father's wrath;
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again.

The speech is crucial, because only here does Gloucester make clear that he has been abused, so that Edgar can perceive Edmund's treachery.

Old man recognises the poor Mad Tom. The concern for the poor and for social justice that Swinburne perceived in Lear indicates Gloucester's design here. It is linked with man's capacity to love, and also with his animality. Gloucester recalls the last night's beggar, who made him think both of man, his son and man the worm the very least animal. His bitter remark :

As flies to wanton boys are we to Gods.

They kill us for their sport,

has sometimes been taken for the theme of the play. But Rosenberg comments, "No, it is part of the zig-zag of Gloucester's design, he is blaming the gods now for all that man, the worm does to his kind. This is not insight but inblindness, unseeing has not helped. About the gods it says, "If they exist and have power, then indeed the man-worm's case is desperate. But it needs no gods to explain casual cruelty." Gloucester has himself been a "wanton boy". Edgar's madness now

reveals an option of kindness or hurt, and the choice is both. Edgar too, will be sometime a wanton boy. There is a kind of compulsion in it :

Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow

Angering itself and others.

Gloucester dismisses the old man and entrusts himself to poor Tom to lead him to Dover cliff, in a language, somewhat similar to that of Lear (Act III, Sc. iv) Gloucester wishes to share what is superfluous with them, with the poor so that each may have enough. He gives his purse to poor Tom, and promises to give "something rich" which he has about him to repair his misery, from that place; he says he will "no lending need." It is not difficult to guess, that in his present state of despair, Gloucester wishes to commit suicide. According to Rosenberg, "Once more Gloucester must not be made to appear kind and sympathetic in his suffering, lest the imbalance, the equation with a more sinewy Lear, his compassion is always tinged with self-pity, shadowed by his crucial despair."

Gloucester's complexity is crucial now because it must reciprocate with Edgar's ambiguous impulses. Edgar's motive to continue in disguise remains shrouded in mystery. Why does Edgar with old love, deny his identity, play fool, deprive Gloucester of his dream of seeing Edgar in his touch even if he has not heard Gloucester's cry of his love for him. Gloucester's power to pursue is gone, Edgar need fear him no more, then why withhold ? Revenge ? Punishment ? Sullenness ? According to Rosenberg : "Edgar's fooling is masochistic as well as sadistic-angering itself and others. Something of the design of Edgar's complex ambivalence, that will lead him while "nursing" his father to torture him and himself-will show in his physical imagery, and especially now naive spectators were divided in their expectations, will he take his revenge on his father ? Or will he offer comfort by revealing himself ? He remains ambiguous, presents himself as "Mad Tom", Gloucester wants, leading to Dover, to go to his King within a world of ambiguity and ambivalence. Edgar comes to fulfil his decision :

Give me thy arm :

Poor Tom shall lead thee.

He guides his stumbling father, Gloucester stumbles after, we are left to imagine towards what goal, Dover or suicide.

Critical Comments : The scene shows a further movement of forces of retribution towards Dover, and a development in Gloucester which in a way is at once similar-and dissimilar to that of Lear in his extremity. Gloucester is like Lear in his new-born sympathy for the poor. But he is unlike Lear in his capitulation to despair. Lear is a titan and will never yield.

Act IV, Scene (ii)

We are before the Duke of Albany's palace. Goneril and Edmund come on stage. Goneril wonders why her husband has not come out to receive her. He is now, Oswald reports to her, "within, but never man so changed." He was indifferent to the landing of the French forces, now was he pleased to hear to Gloucester's treachery or the loyal services of Edmund.

For sometime, we have been hearing rumours of division between Albany and Cornwall. Now we discover that Albany unlike the villains, has a conscience. Goneril misinterprets his change of heart : "It is the cowish terror of his spirit that dares not undertake." She then gives Edmund a favour and a kiss. "My fool", says she, "usurps my body." She sends Edmund back to Cornwall to make preparations to meet the French forces. "The residual sense of war and manhunt becomes visual in the splendid presence of Goneril and the bastard. These two will be the prime movers of the assault on Lear and the throne, they will sound the rising dominant tones that power the disequilibrium of the play until Lear's return."

Albany enters and accosts Goneril, "You are not worth the dust which the rude wind blows in your face." Then follows a furious encounter between Albany and Goneril in which he berates her and denounces her for her treatment of her royal and aged father "Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile : says he and accuses her of mad, blood list." She accuses him of being a coward and a moral fool and he counters; "Thou art a fiend, woman's shape doth shield thee."

The quarrel is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger who informs Albany of Cornwall's death at the hands of his own servant who tried to prevent his gouging out Gloucester's eyes. He also learns about Edmund's treachery to his father and swears to revenge. The messenger delivers a letter to Goneril from Regan. The news of Cornwall's death disturbs Goneril as she fears that Regan, now being as widow may frustrate her designs upon Edmund.

Critical Comments : The scene is important in several ways. It advances the action considerably. Transformation in Albany is a significant factor in the further development of action. The balance of power against Lear is shifting. With Cornwall dead, the old king's enemies are now his two vile daughters and Edmund. In Albany's declaration there is some slight re-establishment of a normal, moral order. Whereas Edmund is a source of strength to Goneril and Regan, Goneril's adulterous love for him and Regan's passion would divide and destroy them both. Commenting on the relationship of Goneril, Regan and Edmund, Rosenberg comments : "This sexuality, in the persons of

Edmund, Goneril and Regan has sometimes by moralist critic been equalled with simple lust, as if these depraved creatures could only love obscenely, but this again oversimplifies Shakespeare's complex design. He takes care to stimulate that these "villains" have grace and beauty and he gives them worthy language. Goneril embracing Edmund, as she welcomes him to his castle perhaps so warmly, partly because Albany has not come to meet her, earns so much dignity for her passion as for her aggression. She is no Cordelia, to love tenderly, but she is designed to care for Edmund intensely. To see her as simply lascivious or serpentine is another way of reducing the whole Lear's equation to morality. Goneril's passion, like her ambition, is oversize, Lear size. She would be a queen with a king of her choice. She has some of the nature of Lady Macbeth-whose love was not necessarily lust because she was an accomplice to murder. Goneril's emerging individuality, establishing a line of action not solely dependent on Lear's fate, is important in sustaining the architectonic notes of this fourth act. Lear is thought of as having plot and subplot; in fact another plot begins to develop here, the Goneril-Regan, Edmund-Albany complication to intensify the dialectic of the action. These four drive hard toward their own tragic denouement and none with more force than Goneril."

Act IV, Scene (iii)

Kent and gentleman have arrived at the French Camp near Dover. To lessen the risk of offending his audience with French invasion (because despite all the sympathy for Lear the Elizabethan audience could not have appreciated an invasion by the French on England. Shakespeare reports that business of state has called the French King back across the channel. On his side are the Marshal of France, Monsieur La Far, and, Cordelia. Much of the scene depends on a report how Cordeila took the news that was reported to her. She took it well. "She was a queen over her passion." But then it is revealed that Lear will not see Cordelia because of his "Sovereign shame.

Critical Comments : Dramatically the scene is important, as it describes Cordelia's grief on hearing of her father's suffering and the remorseful Lear's refusal to meet her. However, the language in which the gentleman describes the way Cordelia took the news is some how too baroque. Some critics have wished the scene should be omitted and some producers have omitted it. The Folio also omitted the whole scene. Nonetheless, the gentleman's speech is one of the most gentle passage in the play.

Act IV, Scene (iv)

The scene opens with Cordelia describing her father's condition.
Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds.....all the idle weeds
that grow in our sustaining corn.

The audience has yet not seen Lear reduced to this state. Cordelia would give anything to restore her father. A doctor present on the scene suggests the remedies to exist.

A messenger enters to announce the approach of the British host. Cordelia prepares to go to meet them with the words :

O ! dear father

It is thy business that I go about.....

No blown ambition doth our arms incite,

But love, dear love, and our aged father's right.

Critical Comments : The scene reintroduces Cordelia, who has been long absent from the stage, and continues to display the theme of Lear's madness. Both are preparatory to their final meeting. Cordelia, whom we meet in this scene, is no more precisely 'calculating' as she was in the opening scene of the play.

One cannot miss the note of irony here. Cordelia is solely guided by the love of her father. But she is ignorant of the fact that Albany is determined to reinstate him and the sole fact which makes the Duke oppose her is the presence of her French troops on the British soil.

Act IV, Scene (v)

This is a significant scene. We are in a room in Gloucester's castle. A conversation between Regan and Oswald opens the scene. Albany's army is on the move to meet the threat of a foreign invader.

Regan talks to Oswald about Goneril's letters to Edmund and then say of Gloucester : "It was great ignorance....to let him live." She then returns to the subject of the letter to Edmund that Oswald hears. "Why should she write to Edmund ?" She tries to persuade Oswald to give her the letter. Thus the passionate rivalry between Goneril and Regan for the hand of Edmund comes to the surface as a potential force of the disruption for their wicked alliance against their aged father. She tells Oswald that this lady (Goneril) has been casting amorous glances at Edmund, with "Strange and most speaking looks." She ends the passage with : "I know you are her bosom." Regan tells Oswald to tell Goneril that "My lord is dead, Edmund and I have talked."

And more convenient is he for my hand.

Than for your lady's.

We also learn that the blind Gloucester, wherever he goes, arouses pity and turns people's hearts against the wicked trio. Edmund therefore goes out to find him and put an end to his life.

There is a link to the next scene set here. Regan promises reward for Gloucester's death. Oswald is at once with her here and goes off to seek, as well as carry Goneril's letter. Johnson comments, "I know not why Shakespeare gives to Oswald, who is a mere factor of wickedness, so much fidelity. He now refused the letter and afterwards when he is dying thinks only how it may be safely delivered." Verity suggests that Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature taught him that almost, if not quite, every man has some touch of goodness in him; and he is always fair to his villains.

Act IV, Scene (vi)

We saw in the last scene that Oswald had gone one way to search for and kill Gloucester. In this scene we see Edgar stealthily lead Gloucester to Dover. Other men are out seeing Gloucester, before the scene ends. Oswald fondles him and tries to kill him to claim his reward, promised by Regan.

In this scene, action moves rapidly. Edgar prevents Gloucester from committing suicide and makes him believe that he has been saved from his terrible fall from Dover cliff by miracle. The entire manipulation of the situation by Edgar is a master-piece of make-believe. Through suggestion and vivid description that follows :

You do climb up it now : look, how he labours,

He is able to convince Gloucester that they are struggling hard to reach the top of the hill.

He very vividly-describes the famous Dover cliff :

"Come on, Sir, here's

the place stand still.

How fearful...."

Budd comments on these lines : "The imaginative vigour of such a speech calls up more vivid picture than any painted scenery could do. By suitably preparing our imagination and emotions, Shakespeare enables us to accept, without any sense of ludicrous "Gloucester's attempt at suicide."

Verity states : "The picture is meant to be imaginative rather than precise. Edgar purposely exaggerates so as to increase the effect of the miracle "which Gloucester is to think has been wrought in his favour. Various touches, however, suggest that Shakespeare was describing what he had seen. Johnson objected that the description was too

detailed : "He that looks from a precipice finds himself assailed by one great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction. But this overwhelming idea is dissipated and enfeebled from the instant that the mind can restore itself to the observation of particulars, and diffuse its attention to distinct object. The enumeration of the ploughs and crows, the sapphire-man and the fishers, counteract the great effect of the prospect (view) as it peoples the desert of intermediate vacuity and stops the mind in the rapidity of its descent emptiness and horror." The Knight's answer to this objection seems conclusive viz, that the dramatic necessity of these details lies in Gloucester's blindness. "The mode in which Edgar describes the cliff is for the special information of the blind Gloucester, one who could look from a precipice. The crows....the.....sapphire gatherer, the fisherman.....each of these, incidental to the place, is selected as a standard by which Gloucester can measure the attitude of the cliff. Transpose the description into generalities and the dramatic propriety at least is utterly destroyed. The height of the cliff is then only presented by an image to Gloucester's mind upon the vague assertion of his conductor."

Convinced by Edgar's description of Gloucester's fall and how he was saved by the old man Gloucester now reconciles himself to all his suffering and misery. Edgar states his reason for handling Gloucester's grief as he does. He does in fact save Gloucester from despair as he believes that "Gloucester's life will not be worth living unless he reconciles himself to his misfortunes."

Why I do trifle thus with his despair.

is done to cure it.

According to Rosenberg : "Darker ambiguity shadows Edgar's design : he asserts kindness but acts cruelly, he promises a cure or despair, but withholds the obvious remedy, his acknowledged identity and love. He prepares his father to "reconcile" with reality. He has metaphorically prepared his father to accept the image of a mighty fall from a lofty height to a base, a bottom where at last Gloucester can stand, but he urges the blind old man to look up without disclosing the one solid reality that reconciles Gloucester to never seeing."

Absent since Act III, Scene vi, Lear now appears on the scene fantastically dressed with wild flowers. Lear talks incoherently flitting from thought to thought as associations lead him on. But there is much method in his madness. Muir observes "Lear's mad speeches have an undertone of meaning and although he leaps from one subject to another it is often possible to see that there is a subconscious

connection between them." Lear seems to recognise Gloucester and his thoughts inevitably run on his daughter's cruelty, and on the general depravity, vice, corruption and injustice. It is a world without shame, where monsters of the deep would devour each other with relish. Its falsity and evil are indeed revolting.

"Let copulation thrive", says Lear. For Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to his father than my daughters got "between the lawful sheets." Gloucester is very much moved, "O ruined piece of nature", he addresses Lear "Dost thou know me?" And Lear, jesting cruelty, answers, "I remember thine eyes well enough, dost thou squint at me?" Gloucester explains that he is blind but Lear will not listen to him. Lear's speeches are full of anguish. He continues his tirade against the world and bemoans its topsy-turvydom. The whole structure of order, Lear believes in, comes crashing. The old standard of order, justice, and chastity collapse.

Cordelia's messengers approach Lear but he does not wish to be rescued and after some words runs away. The time has come for Edgar to reveal his identity to his father which he does very gently but the recognition is interrupted by the entrance of Oswald who, spying Gloucester, thinks to kill him and gain the reward offered by Regan. His sword is out but he has not reckoned on Edgar. Oswald and Edgar fight and Oswald is slain.

Edgar takes Goneril's letter to Edmund from Oswald's pocket. It is an admonition to slay Albany. "There is nothing done, if he returns the conqueror", she writes "Then am I the prisoner, and his bed my goal, from the loathed whore of deliver me, and supply the place for your labour." Doubtless Goneril is one of the most despicable daughters in literature. Edgar has a name for these people, "O murderous lechers." Drums sound in the distance and the scene ends with Edgar leading Gloucester to a place of safety.

Critical Comments : The scene as we could see, falls into three parts. The first contains the famous description of Dover Cliff and Gloucester's rescue from despair by Edgar the second juxtaposes the plight of Lear and Gloucester in the height of their suffering and the third mainly concerns itself with the unravelling of the plot. The main plot and the sub-plot in this, finally merge together and the play begins to take its shape.

Act IV, Scene vii

This scene takes place in the French camp. For the first time since Act I, Sc. (i) there is a glimpse of certainty after so much disharmony. Soft music is playing literally as well as figuratively. This music is heard, for

the doctor has ordered a melody to quiet Lear's spirits. After the frenzy of madness, the sound of soft music comes as a boon. Cordelia and Lear meet in this scene.

Cordelia thanks Kent, who supported her so sturdily when the King divided his kingdom and Lear in his times of adversity. It seems or rather is suggested in the text that Cordelia recognises Kent, though Kent still keeps his disguise.

Lear has been asleep all the time. Cordelia prays to God

Cure this great breach in his abused nature !

Servants then carry Lear in on a chair. While he sleeps they dress him in fresh raiment. Lear is wakened to louder music and Cordelia's cry :

Oh my dear father ! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made !

Lear wakes and laments that he has been revived from his grave

You do me wrong to take me out of the grave :

Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound upon a wheel of fire,

He looks bewildered around. Slowly he recovers from his delusions, Cordelia presents herself :

"Sir, do you know me ?

You are a spirit, I know, when did you die ? and Cordelia replies : "Still Still far wide Lear !"

Let him be alone a while, the doctor says, and they wait as he seeks to know in the simplest of poetic language, if this is Lear. Where have I been ? Where am I ? Then, there is a note of self-pity : I am mightily abused. The implication of torture persists. He repeats the scene in Act I, Scene iv when, before another daughter, he seeks to reassure himself of his identity, to hold off tears of his weakening consciousness :

This is not Lear !.....

Does Lear walk thus ? (Act I, Sc. iv)

....lethargied ?....waking ? (Act I, Sc. iv)

And now he says : I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
of my condition :

Cordelia, addressing him still by the formal "Sir", kneels for his benediction. Lear also kneels. There is an echo of much earlier

kneeling, but mostly a touching ironic repetition and reversal of his gesture before Regan. Cordelia does not allow him to kneel. But the helplessness of the old King gets revealed :

Pray, do not mock me,

Lear moves slowly but with a felt purpose, toward the crucial fact of his identity. He is not worried about anything except one, recognition, he hardly dares acknowledge this :

For, as I am a man

And then comes the climax. He recognises Cordelia :

I think this lady

To be my child Cordelia.

Cordelia : And so I am, I am.

Lear : There is a fear of rejection too :

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

I know you do not love me : for your sisters.

Have as I do remember, done me wrong :

You have some cause, they have not.

Again, after a few lines he says :

Do not abuse, me.

Commenting on this scene Rosenberg states : "Again the double meaning : do not dupe me, do not misuse me. Seeking to locate himself, reminded of his kingship, he flees into introspection of thought, mind wandering, melancholia. Self-pity, a new threat of madness isolates him. The battle for sanity is precarious."

Cordelia is so moved that she cannot speak. The doctor comforts her. Faint signs of the great rage dormant in Lear are hinted in the design. The doctor cautions Cordelia against reviving the past. As one critic has put it : "This until now subtextual undercurrent of the danger of returning madness is one of the dominant notes that has tensed this idyllic scene."

Critical Comments : This scene is almost the exact antithesis of most of those that have passed before. Betrayal, monstrous greed, and lust are for the moment finished and Lear is transfigured in his complete-self-knowledge and restored senses. When Lear kneels down before Cordelia, we have a glimpse of a completely changed Lear. Suffering has made him humble. Cordelia is also changed. The pride and intractability that marked her at the beginning of the play are gone and now she appears almost saintly in her dutiful relationship to her father.

The scene ends on the suggestion of another battle. Edmund, leading Cornwall's army allied with Ablany's powers, comes on pace. All will hang on this battle. Kent muses and as Gentleman has warned, *the arbitrament is like to be bloody*.

Short answer questions

Q.1. Comment on the significance of the storm in Act III Scene of *King Lear*.

Ans. The storm is very significant in the scheme of the play. It is a fit setting for the action of the play. The convulsion in the physical-world corresponds with the convulsion in the moral world which has overthrown all the natural relations of family. The storm corresponds with the tempest in Lear's own heart.

Q.2. What change do you find in Lear's character once he himself has suffered rejection and poverty ?

Ans. Lear is a changed man. His exposure to stark and elemental reality makes him aware of the wretched plight of others. He begins to feel for the sufferings of others and thus gains self-awareness.

Q.3. "He childed as I fathered" who has spoken this line ? What does it convey ?

Ans. Edgar in Act iii Scene vi, utters this line. This is a part of his soliloquy wherein he equates Lear's evil children with his own cruel father. The line clearly reflects that Lear has regressed to childhood. Edgar has moved towards maturity, fathering his own father.

Q.4. Comment on the theme of filial ingratitude in *King Lear*.

Ans. The theme of filial ingratitude forms an important matrix in the design of *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan in the main plot and Edmund in the sub-plot are the archetypal evil children. Goneril and Regan rob the King of his self-hood even and turn him out on a stormy night. Edmund on the other hand, manipulates to get Edgar disinherited to inherit Gloucester's estate. He collides with the forces who maltreat the King and Gloucester.

Q.5. "Explain the lines :

When we better see

bearing out woes :

We scarcely think our miseries our foes.

Ans. These lines form a part of Edgar's soliloquy in Act iii, Scene vi. When Edgar meets Lear who is in a disarrayed state of mind, he is overwhelmed in sympathy. In this speech Edgar contends that when we see our superiors or elders bearing the miseries as we do then our own miseries lessen.

Q.6. Explain the line, "I am more sinned against than sinning."

Ans. This line is spoken by King Lear. It reflects his resentment against the social order and against the working of this universe. In this kindness, Lear distributed all his kingdom among Goneril and Regan. Now that he has given everything to his daughters, he has been insulted, humiliated and banished by his daughters. So he feels aggrieved against the social order and considers himself as the one who is "more sinned against than sinning." This shows a mixture of his anger and self-pity.

Q.7. Discuss Shakespeare's concept of Nature in *King Lear*.

Ans. Nature in *King Lear* has several meanings. Different characters use it in varied contexts and interpret it variedly. King Lear's Nature is kind and benevolent. Though out of desperation he hurls abuses at his daughters, yet his nature is bountiful. His abuses are a part of his momentary reaction against the thankless children. He addresses Nature as dear goddess. Edmund's nature is cruel and malvolent. It believes in violence, bloodshed and destruction. He himself indulges in cruelty and violence. Nature also means a part of firmament which furthers moral disorder. Gloucester says, "These late eclipses in the sun and sea portend no good to us."

Suggested Questions

1. Analysis the character of King Lear in light of the scenes discussed in this lesson.
2. Act III is one the most significant Acts of the play. Discuss in reference to the plot, theme and the important characters in the play.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR
A Critical Study of the Text
Act V, Scene (i)**

The scene opens at the British camps near Dover. Men armed for war in all their sound and panoply, colour the stage, confirming Gentleman's warning : "This large pageantry will, as before give way to intimate insects, which will be followed by spectacular confrontations involving the whole stage modulated again, by intense emotional cameos."

Edmund, magnificent, sets the initial tone as he leads his forces in and looks for his ally. His characterisation of Albany casts light backward, contemptuously, he wonders if Albany has been able to hold to his last decision.

He's full of alteration

And self-reproving.

But Regan quickly shifts to more personal considerations. The relationship has clearly developed. Still in order to be sure she asks, "Do you not love my sister"? Edmund answers formally, "In honoured love" but that is not at all what Regan means, "But have you ever found my brother's way to the forfended place?" She asks and Edmund answers "That thought abuses you." Of course; he continues to deny the accusation and Regan warns him, "I never shall endure her."

More sound and sight of war Albany, Goneril and their army enter. There is an echo of private war too, Goneril would rather lose battle than Edmund to Regan.

Albany's inner division marked by Edmund manifests itself. The situation has its ambiguities. A French army, on English soil fights for the right. Edmund leads troops. Albany is whipsawed by conflicting values. His speech breaks into erratic phrases. He will fight, but reluctantly. He fights against the king but for his kingdom. He could not be valiant unless honest-and his rationalizations demonstrate how very much he doubts the honesty of his present motives. He is full of

alteration and self-reproving. On this speech of Albany (LL. 20-25) Verity states : "Omitted in the Folio and probably corrupt in some way the lines seem to be a kind of apology and explanation, showing that Albany does not wish to appear as the willing associate of Goneril and Regan in their conduct towards Lear and defining his (Albany's) position in the whole affair. 'I could never' he says, fought in a bad cause, but as for this business, it concerns us in so far as the king of France, with certain others, is the invader of our country not in so far as he is the supporter of Lear, i.e. it is in the former character (invader) alone that France is resisted by Albany". The lines were perhaps intended, by Shakespeare, to reconcile the audience to the various parts which circumstances force the moderate Albany to play.

Edmund's : "Sir, you speak nobly", matches Albany's sincerity. Regan is unmistakable! "Why so much quibbling?" Goneril too, "let's fight the war, not each other." Albany yields to their scornful practicality, and he and the bastard agree to play strategy, but the private wars continue. A council is called in Regan's tent, but Regan will not leave Goneril alone with Edmund for a moment.

Sounds of war continue. The Lear-army approaches Edmund : Regan and Goneril sweep off to their public and private battles. Edgar disguised intercepts Albany to accept Oswald's letter. Edgar leaves, however, to confirm the contents of the letter, he would appear, after the battle, when summoned by herald.

In the meanwhile in the evil-doer's camp, destructive forces have been gathering ahead. Edmund's ambition grows and he is busy exploiting the situation to assume power. In the soliloquy which he delivers at the end of the scene he says, "To both these sisters have I sworn my love : each jealous of the other. Neither can he enjoy if both remain alive." This soliloquy reveals Edmund's soaring ambition and his design. He is frankly now playing for the throne. The way to it requires marriage to Regan or Goneril and one must die to make it possible. If Regan dies then Albany must die, to let Goneril manage this. In any case, Lear and Cordelia must die. He will allow nothing to stand in his way.

Critical Comments : The scene carefully juxtaposes the military problem and the love triangle. For the first time they are forcefully brought and the solution of one may, it seems, provide the solution to the other. We know French army would not be allowed to win. Audience would not have relished it. There is also a dramatic problem. The victory of the French army would mean a happy ending for the play. That defeats the essence of the play. Dramatically the love triangle

also needs a solution. If Ablany dies in war, as Edmund hopes, one of the sisters even could die in war but the idea of poetic justice, absolutely is defeated; an evil-doer meets a heroic death. Hence, it seems Shakespeare has different plans. Let us see how he executes them.

Act v, Sc. ii

The opening direction projects Lear into the on going war. This suggests that Lear himself may wear some kind of arms, be part of the battle by leading "Loyal" British soldiers, as well as the French ones. It means Lear is once more the image of a king.

Edgar deposits his father by a tree in the field between camps. He says, "Pray that the right may thrive." Edgar leaves, "If ever I return of you again, I'll bring you comfort."

Where Edgar goes during the battle we never learn. Like Kent, he seems withdrawn from it as if Shakespeare held off engaging, these two "loyal" figures in a battle that reflects the play's dialectic, where "right" the restoration of Lear depends on "wrong" a foreign invasion.

Gloucester sits alone as the war rages. The text suggests no sight of battle, only sound, alarm and retreat. This absorbs the war quickly into the flow of action. Edgar returns. His promise of comfort broken, and the flight imagery is enforced again. Away ! Away, A place of greater safety must be found for Gloucester since Lear and Cordelia have lost and have been taken prisoners. The old man despairs, "A man may not even here." But Edgar under the pressures of the hour is more practical. Men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither-" Ripeness is all." They depart.

The line "Ripeness is all" has been called one of the most important philosophical statements in the play. Perhaps the idea conveyed is, that we should be ready for death. "Ripeness", says 'Rosenberg, "implies fullness, but also the moment when the growing thing is plucked....before the rot decays it. Ripeness means unalloyed religious affirmation, connoting an "acceptance of order as the final reality" (Heilman), a learning "to accept with deep inner Joy" (James Jones). "What man must learn in the Lear world is to live with disorder; there is no help from Heavens. Joy is transitory, patience is the best to **hope** for, and not likely."

Critical Comments : The scene is so short that it hardly makes any sense to us. But limitations of the Elizabethan stage were considerable. Surely, however, this is the briefest battle in dramatic history. Mr. Speeding comments on the abruptness of this scene, remarking how the momentous battle to which our expectation has

been directed so pointedly is discussed in the most summarized fashion and contrasting Shakespeare's practice else where : his remarks quoted by Furness are : "In other cases a few skilful touches bring the whole before us-a few rapid shiftings from one of the field to another, a few hurried greetings of friend or foe, a few short passages of struggle, pursuit or escape give us token of the conflict which is raging on all sides; and when the hero falls, we feel that his army is defeated. As a contrast with all other battles in Shakespeare, observe (this one)....This army so long looked for", and on which everything depends passes over the stage and all our hopes and sympathies go with it. Four lines are spoken. The scene does not change, but alarms are heard, and 'afterwards a retreat' and on the same field over which that great army has this moment passed, fresh and full of hope, reappears with tidings that all is lost, the same man who has left the stage to follow and fight in it. Mr. Speeding argues that there has been a wrong division of the Acts, and that Shakespeare meant Act IV to extend to line 4 of this scene and Act V to begin with Edgar's words : "Away, old man" line 5, the battle then takes place between the Acts, and the impression of hurry which the present arrangement conveys is removed.

But the very fact that "all our hopes and sympathies go with" the army which is beaten seems a reason why the contest should be passed over lightly. Moreover, the great length of the play may have weighed with the dramatist.

Act V, Scene iii

The wheel is come full circle. All the principal characters reappear in this last scene to "caste the wages of their virtue and the cup of their deservings." The denouement is rapidly achieved and the guiltless fall with the guilty.

The scene is full of bustle and incidents. Edmund enters the British camp with fanfare, leading Lear and Cordelia as prisoners. Cordelia addresses the king saying "we are not the first who with the best meaning have incurred the worst." The last line is characteristic of Cordelia :

"Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters ?" Clarke points out there is a "bitter sarcasm in the simplest words thoroughly characteristic in the woman of quiet expression with intense feelings." Lear protests against Cordelia's suggestion vehemently. He wishes to forget Goneril and Rogan completely. After he has regained his Cordelia, he wants to have no truck with these daughters. As Rosenberg points out : "Lear rejects reality : he will not see these

daughters and these sisters. His four exclamatory no's may contain elements of anger, fear, revulsion : certainly suggest, in context, the impulse to escape." Verity highlights a complete reconciliation between the king and his child, a reconciliation in which his former feeling of "sovereign shame" (Act IV, Sc. iii) has no part. This is the result of complete reconciliation that Lear in a kind of joyful invitation calls Cordelia :

Come Let's away to prison.

He offers his young daughter, separated from her husband, a life with her old lather in a cage; a fixed life, where they will sing like birds. He now wishes to build a dream-world of his own around Cordelia-nothing else is needed. Lear's fantasy is full of magic, of wonder in its stipulation of power over time as well as space and mind. These lines describe with an incomparable simplicity the new idyllic world, Lear wishes now to build. How complete is the purgation and chastening of Lear's former pride and ego ! How complete is the reconciliation-the perfect establishment of the final relationship between father and daughter which had been so rudely disrupted in the opening scene.

Edmund orders that Lear and Cordelia be taken away. There is a suggestion in Lear's speech to accept adversity with patience. Commenting on these emotional line (LL 20-5) Dr. Bucknell says : "This is not mania, but neither is it sound mind. It is the emotional excitability often seen in extreme age, as it is depicted in the early scenes of the drama, and it is precisely true to the probabilities of the mind's history, that this should be phase of infirmity displaying itself at this moment. Any dramatist other than Shakespeare would have represented the poor old king, quite restored to the balance and control of his faculties. The complete efficiency of filial love would have been made to triumph over the laws of mental function. But Shakespeare has represented the exact degree of improvement which was probably required in circumstances, namely restoration from intellectual mania which resulted from the combined influence of physical and moral shock, with persistence of the emotional excitement and disturbance which is the incurable and unalterable result of passion exaggerated by the malign influence of extreme age."

Edmund hands the captain of the guard a letter, instructing him that if he follows its directions, he will win a noble fortune. The letter, we later learn orders the captain to murder Lear and Cordelia.

Albany enters accompanied by Goneril, Regan and soldiers. Entourage, loyal British will provide the ground on which the main figures play out their tragedy. Albany demands the prisoners. Edmund says that he has sent them to a place of safety and that their disposition must be

debated in a fitter place.

At this time

We sweat and bleed; the friend hath lost his friend;

The lines reveal the character of Edmund. He is always alert to the opportunities of time. His speech is thoughtful. This is the speech of a would-be-king reflecting Edmund's sensitivity to the undercurrents swirling round him.

Albany is at last absolutely firm. He takes Edmund, not as the brother he would be but a subject. Now the rivalry that began between Goneril and Regan, in Act I, Sc. i culminates. Regan, using the royal we, claims Edmund as her surrogate to cuckold Albany. When Regan insists that she gives Edmund the right to royalty, he becomes the best. Albany cuts a sour joke on Edmund's ambition :

That were the most, if he should husband you.

Regan's retort awakens many echoes from the earlier acts :

Jasters do oft prove prophets

So does Goneril's imagery :

That eye that told you so look'd but a- squint

Regan, deadly sick now, in worthy words, and with gesture of love, formally makes Edmund her lord and master. When Goneril objects and Albany says it is not her business, Edmund boldly, and arrogantly replies :

Nor is thine, Lord

Albany reacts with insult. Half-blooded follow, yes. He halts the ritual that would establish Regan's investiture of Edmund with curiously clear reason. Not reason but hurt and anger move him, he will half-confess that he is a cuckold. He arrests Edmund for treason; and links to it his own beautiful wife-gilded serpent. It is now clear that Albany has read Goneril's letter to Edmund, which Edgar had handed over to Albany in Act V, Sc. ii. Hence, he tells Regan as, "For you claim, fair sister.

I bar it in the interest of my wife;

She is sub-contracted to this lord

And I her husband, contradict your bans.

If you will marry, make your loves to me,

My lady is bespoke.

And Goneril utters : an interlude, thereby meaning what foolishness. "The difference is design between the two sisters as intensified their

rivalry. Regan, always more feminine, ends by speaking lines worthy of a romantic heroine. Goneril under the pressure of shameful exposure, becomes harsher, more masculine, more terrible. Goneril's arrogant remarks at Regan reflect not only her response to the triangular tension, but also a larger design : a mounting nervousness that will end in her passionate, self-destructive act.

Albany throws down his glove to challenge Edmund and Regan again complains that she is sick. Goneril in an 'aside' says, "If not, I'll never trust medicine." It is now certain that she has poisoned her sister. Edmund accepts the charges against him with an honourable sounding speech. The world as Lear knew has not changed. The appearance is still not reality. The villain still seems honourable. Regan complains of growing sickness and is led to Albany's tent.

A herald enters to make the formal statement of challenge against Edmund declaring him to be a traitor, but before any one can accept, Edgar comes on stage. He begs to be allowed to meet Edmund. Asked who he is, he answers, "My name is lost yet am I noble as the adversary," Hot words are exchanged. Edgar and Edmund fight. Edgar makes one mortal thrust and Edmund falls.

Goneril claims Edmund has been illegally vanquished. "Thou are not vanquished, but beguiled; She cries." Albany shows Goneril the letter she had written to Edmund.

Shut your mouth dame,

Or with this paper shall I stop it. Hold, Sir;

He gives the letter to Edmund, Goneril then cries that she is the rightful heir, not her husband and Albany answers, "Most monstrous."

There is a sudden shift in Goneril's arrogant and flippant attitude. She has come closer to breaking. Rosenberg comments, "In Edmund's death she glimpses the crashing of all she had build in her fantasy. She cares not for Albany, and when he tries to frighten her with her letter, she tries to tear it as much from frenzy as wishing to destroy it." That Goneril is desperate now, becomes clear from Albany's comment.

Go after her she's desperate;

The speech also reveals Albany's character.

"...Albany has much more dimension than revengeful husband. He looks behind all his-fury at her lies, a commitment that will move him even beyond her death-and that will do much to sustain the scene until Lear's return.

Edmund on the brink of his death has realised his guilt and asks Edgar :

If thou are noble. I do forgive thee.

There is also an implication here, that despite Edmund's vaunting ambition, his bastardy has spurred him on to vile deeds. Edgar reveals himself in a speech ending on the note that immorality comes home to roost :

Cost him eyes....."

And Edmund says,

"thou hast spoken right, is true;

The wheel is come full circle : I am here"

Commenting on these lines Verity states : "Edmund's villainy has worked out its own nemesis", and it is a nemesis as has been well said, "of exquisite-exactness." He "meets his death in the very moment of his success, at the hands of the brother he has maligned and wronged, while the father he has deceived and sought to destroy is the means by which the avenger has been brought to the scene" (Moultron). As for Edgar, his impulse to charity is his true motivation. According to Elton, "Edgar erases his (brother's) last moment by offering.....comfort in the term. Edmund, only is able to comprehend....According to Rosenberg "But the shadow side of Edgar's fierce, troubled design still functions. The character has too much validity; to be merely humble and gentle; Edgar's confidence in the trickster's moral nature for blinding a man of adultery" Are all, bastards to die, all adulterers to lose their eyes in his theology ? is a measure of his own bitter morality : he offers Edmund to ease, rather reminds him of wrong done, even blames him for being a bastard. But this is secondary mainly he uses the occasion to attack his father's sexuality again."

There is now a pause in the action filled by the conversation between Edgar and Albany, wherein Edgar reveals to Albany his identity and tells his own story and how he assumed his disguise and looked after his blinded father, Gloucester and the manner of his father's death. Edgar also refers to his meeting with Kent.

Tension resumes with Gentleman is rush. His characteristic shouts, evoking, overlapping cries from Albany and Edgar, lead to the most difficult lines in the play for modern audiences to take seriously, unless very carefully controlled, about the bloody knife :

"Tis hot : smokes

Gentleman's message is shaped for suspense revives audience's concern for Codelia :

It came even from the heart of O, she's dead

Albany shouts :

Who dead ? speak man
 He is silent with pain as Gentleman replies,
 Your lady, sir, your lady and her sister,
 By her is poisoned; she hath confessed it,
 Edmund hurts Albany with a brilliant pun on sex and death, Edmund
 will die bravely like the smug bridegroom of Goneril as well as Regan :
 I was contracted to them both : all three
 Now marry in an instant.

When Albany recovers, it is to ask that bodies be produced. Albany
 considers this catastrophe a judgement from the heavens calculated to
 make us tremble, not extort our pity. Shakespeare, it seems is clearly
 manipulating our response to the tragedy.

Kent enters saying that he has come to bid good night to the King.
 Albany, in the midst of this horror, has completely forgotten about King
 Lear and Cordelia.

"Great thing of us forgot ?

But once the dead sister is brought in, Albany immediately forgets
 again, at the sight of Goneril.

"Seest thou this object, Kent ?"

His hurt is deep to be aggravated by Edmund's reply :

"Yet Edmund was beloved :

The one the other poison'd for my sake.

And after slew herself."

His boast is brutal to Albany. Even so, Albany acknowledges. Reminded
 of his great love, great hurt, he takes one last look. Then he tells the
 attendants to cover their faces.

In his distraction, he has for the third time, forgotten Lear and
 Cordelia, that he is only reminded when Edmund, more tender-minded
 after the evidence that he is lovable, invokes this temporal sense.

"Nay send in time" : as Edmund had given order for their murder.

The dying Edmund says :

"Some good I mean to do

Despite of mine own nature

It has been recently pointed out : "Throughout the play he (Edmund)
 has been scheming to triumph against a society that denied him
 equality. Goneril and Regan were attracted by their nature to his
 austere unscrupulous virility. Now as he dies, with a touch of irony he
 asserts his fulfilment. And the good deed he achieves despite his

nature follows upon the surprised recognition as if from outside his nature that "Edmund was beloved." It is one of Shakespeare's moments of revelation when the wicked and the sordid becomes a grace. The fleeting effect is heightened by the emotionally worn enigmatic agreement of Albany : "Even so, cover their faces."

Albany, unthinking, panicky, now urges haste. He utters a prayer :

"The gods defend her !"

The prayer remains unanswered and rejected. Because immediately after this, Lear comes in, carrying Cordelia's limp body. Edmund's body is carried out as Cordelia's is borne in. The youngest die here-the "bad" young son and the "good" young daughter.

Lear's speech :

How ! How ! she's gone for ever'

Mixed with rage, grief, desperate love, ego, pride abstraction, stupefaction is one of the simplest speeches yet charged with so many emotions. His grief yields to sudden hope when he asks for a looking glass perhaps he is still alive. But hope is clashed and reflected in the dismay of Kent, Edgar and Albany. Cordelia has died certainly. There is no illusion, no hope. Her certain death and Lear's false hope, reflect the final dissolution of the world, chaos. The last judgement, Lear is again on the brink of madness. Depending on false hopes Lear frantically is looking for signs of life-breath in Cordelia. He refuses to be distracted by Kent : "Prithee away", Lear does not hear that this is Kent, he is intent on keeping Cordelia alive. As hope fades, rage resumes :

"A Plague upon you, murderers, traitors all."

Lear then says that he killed the slave that slew Cordelia : Kent reveals his identity.

Albany who has never understood the King, believes him to be completely mad. A messenger enters with the news that Edmund is dead and Albany says, "that's but a trifle here." Albany makes a belated attempt to restore the moral order, saying that "all friends shall taste the wages of their virtue," but for Lear it is too late. As some sudden convulsion in Lear startles Ablany and he cries out : O, see, see !

And Lear says : "And my poor fool is hanged !"

The critics agree that these words refer to Cordelia and not to the Fool because at such a moment Lear's thoughts would not stray from the dear child over whom he is bending and his next words also allude to her and moreover, Lear had seen Cordelia being hanged "No, no, no life." Rosenberg significantly observes on these lines : "If Lear's hand strays it is not far from the centre," the lines are as sparingly sane as

they are uncompromising. After the echoing noise, Lear may ask his first question out of bewilderment but more often it emerges in grieving anger. It may be meant not for the bystanders, but also for any gods or any power that made him for it challenges the whole cosmic system; what kind of world is this when animals live, and not Cordelia? That man's dearer life seems cheaper than beasts? But any implications are secondary to the personal pain, the design, the felt grief of the suffering figure, so universal now because it is a pain of man, but never so universal as to blur the individual design."

Lear feels a sense of suffocation and imagines that it is caused by the tightness of his clothes. With perfect humanity and humility he asks for help from anybody standing near him and when he receives that help he expresses his thankfulness, (for the sense of relief he experiences) far the need served. It is quite a different Lear who felt a similar need in the storm scene "His plea is not, as before promulgated or ordered but requested, not king but agonised man accepts help, and says humbly, "thank you, sir, Edgar draws attention, "His faints ! My lord, my lord !"

Lear dies apparently of a broken heart, moaning over the body of his beloved Cordelia. Kent and Edgar act Regents. Kent declines. Edgar accepts sadly proclaiming his inadequacy. Albany shows an acute sensitiveness when he says :

The weight of this sad time we must obey
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say
The oldest hath borne most : we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

It has been pointed out that the conventional thing would be to make a speech of dedication consoling his new subjects, promising them better time. But Albany insists that this is no time for promise and rejoicing. He will speak what he feels. Lear has gone, his place can never be filled.

Critical Comments : In this great poetic scene, Shakespeare draws together as many of the threads of the play as possible. The action which had hitherto been very complicated and involved, becomes clear. The villains are destroyed by their wrong deeds and crimes. But, people being what they are, can we expect much permanent improvement? What is the nature of life? Whether Lear suggests permanent resignation to forces beyond our understanding and control or whatever it offers us a ray of hope for the future, is the major issue and it remains unsettled. As one critic has put it, "The dark, deadly, grimly comic world of Lear evokes so wide and intense a range of

response on so many levels of consciousness because it reflects so many varieties of human possibility from the transcendent to the animal. So many that it must defeat any attempt to enclose its meaning in licensed formulae such as redemption, retribution, morality etc. We may find some rest in the assurance that Shakespeare shares our preference for love over hate, honesty over falsehood, loyalty over disloyalty, order over disorder : but we cannot go to extract morals from this play; that order will triumph, love conquers all, suffering redeems, recompense waits in the next world unless we invest them. The playwright describes, he does not prescribe. Only a tragic vision as vast as one of his own comes from Lear.

We have taken you through the text of *King Lear* and hope that you have been able to comprehend, at least, the general contents of the play. As suggested earlier, *King Lear* is the profoundest of Shakespeare's tragedies. Therefore, before we study important aspects of the play, let us first discuss *King Lear* as a tragedy.

King Lear as a Tragedy

Critical opinion about *King Lear* has been divided. Hazlitt calls it the best of Shakespeare's plays. According to Swinburne, it is the "greatest work of man." The play has often been compared with the classical Greek dramas and has been regarded to be the noblest spiritual utterance since Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Yet *King Lear* remains a problem. Charles Lamb says; "Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted." Thackeray is quite conscious of the fact that it was blasphemous to say that a play of Shakespeare was bad and found *King Lear* in performance a bore!" Tolstoy deplored the completely false "effect" of Lear running about the heath, his conversation with the Fool and all these impossible disguises, his failure to recognise the accumulated deaths. Bradley regarded the play as Shakespeare's greatest work but "too huge for the stage and he brought to light a long list of gross improbabilities such as Edgar's and Kent's continuing in disguise well after the purpose of disguise had been served. Gloucester's willingness to believe when Edmund shows him the forged letter, that one son could write to another when both are living in the same house. Gloucester's failure to show surprise when suddenly during the fight with Oswald his escort drops into peasant dialect; Gloucester's determination to go to Dover to commit suicide as if there were no other way or place of dying, and finally Edmund's long delay in telling of his order on the lives of Lear and Cordelia after he himself is mortally wounded and has nothing to gain, all these seem incredible. What Lamb and Bradley and a host of other critic said later on was perhaps felt by Nahum Tate in 1681. Nahum Tate replaced *King Lear's*

tragic ending by a happy one. King Lear and Cordelia are saved in the end. Edgar is shown to be Cordelia's lover and in the end he marries her. However, modern analysis of *King Lear* is not subject to such conditions or limitations as enumerated by Lamb or Bradley. It is no longer very relevant to call the play "too great for the stage." Modern criticism thus applies altogether different tools to analyse this great and tantalising work of art. As Maynard Mack implies, King Lear has many "Subtexts", and it is open to many interpretations.

Finally the question needs to be asked/what kind of tragedy is *King Lear* ?

It is customary to start with Aristotle's *Poetics*, while discussing tragedy. At the time of Renaissance, European critics frequently discussed the fundamental points of Aristotle's tragic theory. There is no certain evidence to show that Shakespeare was familiar with Aristotle's concepts of tragedy or that he wrote keeping those specifications in mind, yet some of Shakespeare's tragedies do conform to some of the principles of tragedy as recommended by Aristotle. Similarly *King Lear* also has some nearness to the classical tragedy.

In section XIII of the *Poetics*, Aristotle states that the tragic hero should be, "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortunes are brought about not by vice or depravity but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous."

Lear is renowned and prosperous, his division of kingdom and banishment of Cordelia can be attributed to a failure of judgement or understanding and not to any vice or depravity. In the beginning of the play only, the outward signs of royalty in Lear are visible, but the inward and spiritual graces that make a king are absent. His petulant behaviour betrays him when he banishes Cordelia. Lear's "error of frailty" comes to the fore when we compare him with Gloucester. There are many similarities in their situation. Both are aged fathers wronged by their children. But Lear is a tragic hero, Gloucester is not. The destiny of Britain is linked to the fate of Lear. Gloucester is a public figure only in so far as he is related to the king. More strikingly we can visualize the kind of poetic justice implied in Edgar's comment on their father to Edmund :

The Gods are just : and of our pleasant vice,
 Make instruments, to plague us
 The dark and vicious place where thee he got
 Cost him his eyes.

Even Gloucester himself alludes to his vice regarding the circumstances

of Edmund's birth, "there was a good sport at his making." Even the Fool observes that Lear has been a fool but not a knave in Shakespearean practice as in Aristotelian theory. It is a basic assumption that the hero of a tragedy must be a great man, however, fallible. Some critics however, are of the view that Lear does not rise through the play to tragic grandeur, or that he is not as tragically grand as Hamlet or Othello are. An old king, carrying the dead body of his young daughter in his arms and tottering about on the stage at the most incites sentimental kind of pathos and not the real feelings of pity and fear which Aristotle states, are aroused by a tragedy. It is not out of place to quote G. Wilson Knight here : "Lear is selfish, self-centred. The images he creates of his three daughter's love are quite false, sentimentalised; he understands the nature of none of his children and demanding an unreal and impossible love from all three, is disillusioned by each in turn. But, though, sentimental, this love is not weak. It is powerful and firm planted in his mind as a mountain rock embedded in earth. The tearing out of it is hideous, cataclysmic. A tremendous soul is as it were incongruously geared to a purile intellect. Lear's sense proves his idealised love figments false, his intellect snaps, and as the loosened drive flings limp the disconnected engine of madness, spins free and the ungeared revolutions of it are terrible fantastic." This then in the basis of the play's greatness linked to purity. Lear's instincts are themselves grand, heroic, noble even. His judgement is nothing. He understands neither himself nor his daughters. Lear starts his own tragedy by foolish misjudgement, "Lear's fault is a fault of mind a mind unwarrantable become selfish and foolish." His error of understanding primarily leads him to his tragedy. He reasons though but his reasoning is faulty. He insists on the undeniable proposition that love can be measured as if it were a material quantum of a certain size or shape. In his intellectual confusion, he forgets that deeds rather than words are the symbols of love. Hence he is easily taken by the meaningless abstractions and hyperboles of Goneril and Regan and completely ignores the meaning of Cordelia's precise metaphor :

I love your majesty,

According to my bond, nor more nor less.

When his failure of understanding is coupled with his failure of imagination, suffering begins. He fails to perceive that a king cannot be a king without a crown. He abdicates authority but retains paraphernalia. Hence, Lear invites tragedy, by three errors of understanding errors with regards to the nature of kingship, the nature of love, and the nature of language. As the mistakes are committed by a man of action, a man whose action is a public action

they assume tragic proportions. Lear imposes on this world his erroneous conclusion about children and court. Though Lear is basically responsible of what happens to him we tend to sympathise with him because of the nature of his action to his suffering. He suffers tremendously but refuses to be cowed down by suffering.

In section XIV of the *Poetics*, Aristotle draws our attention to the kind of circumstances which are most conducive to the creation of a tragic effect, and states,

.....When the tragic incident occurs between those who are near and dear to one another-if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill a brother, son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother or any other deed of the kind is done these are the situations to be looked for by the poet.

Gloucester attributes all discords to planetary influences yet his statement is a significant clue :

Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide....and the bond crack'd
twist son.....and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction
against child: there's son against father : the king falls from level of
nature, there's father.

There is little doubt that the tragic impact of *King Lear* is acute in its vivid portrayal of human beings turned predatory monsters, the desecration of the most fundamental bonds that link human beings. Goneril and Regan both die in the cause of love. Edmund has been wronged for no fault of his in his childhood. Lear also wrongs Cordelia. But our sympathy remains with the old King. Because the attitude of Goneril, Regan and Edmund is "unnatural." If the sanctity of the relationship between parent and child cannot be taken for granted then mankind becomes a rootless mass. Like Aristotle, Shakespeare seems to have realised that once unnaturalness taints the basic unit of civilised existence, the family, the inevitable result is holocaust, which overwhelms the good as well as evil.

Thus, the play is not the tragedy of an individual, it is instead a tragedy about the very nature of life. Good, Shakespeare shows us, does exist; but is it, he asks, always illusory ? In the complex character of Lear, the Man's two contrasting views of Nature are presented. His two evil daughters, Goneril and Regan represented the self seeking or unrestrained natural impulse and their flattering words deceive the old king because he follows the same impulse in himself without recognising its evil. In his fury, he banished Cordelia and Kent, accusing them of pride because they refuse to flatter him as he desires. The development of the play consists fundamentally in the process of his self-recognition. First, he comes to experience the

reality of evil in his two daughters whose ingratitude deeply wounds both his paternal affection and his human pride. This arouses a storm of rage in his mind, which is shown in the drama projected upon the outer world of nature. In this storm Lear descends to the very depths of degraded human nature, in the strange yet congenial company of this Fool and a mad beggar, whom he recognises as representing man's true condition on earth :

"Thou are the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art."

At four score and upward, he has the courage to discard his self obsessed image, and to reach out to other human beings as independent entities, and not merely as his children or his subjects. He comes through the events of the day to a horrible knowledge of himself and of life itself.

If in Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall and Oswald, Shakespeare shows hard, self-seeking love, in Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and Fool, we see sincere and devoted love. And these two groups are "strongly and violently contrasted." Goneril and Regan derive Lear to madness. Cordelia 'redeems nature from the general course which twin have brought her to.' Cordelia represents the noble view of nature as a source of bounty and beneficence of kindness and forgiveness. In her nature appears fully human and yet adorned with the super added gift of divine grace pointing to that supernatural ideal which is to be the reiterated theme of Shakespeare's final play.

III

Themes

We have been drawing your attention to various thematic aspects of the play while analysing the text. It would, however, be useful to have another look at some of the major themes.

King Lear is the story of a disaster which occurs when an old king divests himself of royal authority and distributes his kingdom among his daughters, believing their false display of love as genuine. Though he divests himself of state responsibilities he cannot abandon the power he wields as a king. Thus as the play proceeds, we understand that the King neither understands himself nor his daughters. Shakespeare uses the story as an opportunity to discuss many themes, such as, the relationship between parents and children, between ruler and ruled, youth and age and to explore the meanings of the word "natural" and "unnatural" and to impress upon the lessons of patience. There were clearly defined norms of conduct of Elizabethan at all levels. Conformity to these conducts was true to nature. The

Elizabethan believed that the universe, the globe, the country they lived in should, all "Naturally be orderly and harmonious."

God had planned a universe, the earth at the centre with the stars and planets swinging harmoniously around it, each in its place. Similarly, on earth the king, the nobility and the ordinary people should move in their appointed ways never straying. Everyone and everything from God himself to the meanest living creature, and even to plants and stones, had an allotted place in this 'great chain of being.'

When order

God willeth us firmly to keep

But Lear's world is all topsy-turvy. Gloucester sums up the ruinous disaster which constitutes the theme of the play. Lear's love for Cordelia cools, friendship falls off between Lear and Kent. Gloucester is distraught by the extraordinary goings on in the kingdom.

"Kent banished thus ? And France in 'choler parted ? And the King gone tonight ?"

This was also a belief among the Elizabethans that tragedies on earth were caused by unusual appearance in the heavenly bodies like comets or eclipses. We have a glimpse of these views in Shakespeare's play quite often. After, Othello has murdered his wife he cries :

'Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse of sun and moon.' Similarly, in *King Lear* Gloucester exclaims :

"These late eclipses in the sun and sea portend no good to us...love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities mutinies, in countries discord, in palaces treason, and the bond cracked betwixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction, there's son against father : the King falls from the bias of nature, there's father against child."

Nature, he suggests not only reflects but actually furthers the moral disorders of mankind. We know, there are daughters who revolt against their father, subjects who revolt against their king, sisters who betray each other, wives who betray their husbands. These are not only personal sins, but an upsetting of order of the universe. The order of nature stands threatened.

The word 'Nature' has been used in a variety of context in the play. The word appears like refrain punctuating the text at some important moments. Prof. J.F. Danby makes detailed study of this theme in the book, *Shakespearean Doctrine of Nature*, (1949). He goes to the extent of suggesting that *King Lear* can be regarded as a play dramatising the meaning of the single word 'Nature'. Many characters in the play use the word, each according to his own nature. However, two important

uses primarily come to the light, i.e. Nature-universal order and the order of Nature; secondly, human nature and the social order. There is a basic relationship between Nature-the world of man and Nature. The idea that microcosm is mirrored in the macrocosm that man is miniature of the universe and that there is a sort of interdependence between the two, is basic to the play. This lends a cosmic dimension to the tragedy of *King Lear*.

The very first clash in the play, that is between the king and his most beloved daughter Cordelia results from the commitment of each to his or her own natures. The King's behaviour is determined by the norms of hierarchical property. Hence he cannot tolerate any interference when Kent tells the King that by distributing the kingdom between the two daughters and banishing the third he has committed an evil act.. Therefore, when Kent entreats "revoke thy doom", the King retorts :

"Since thou has sought to make us break our vow."

which we drust never yet, and -with strained pride

to come between our sentence and our power

which nor our nature nor our place can bear.

The king attempts to present his own rejection of Cordelia-rejection of her by Nature, "a wretch whom Nature is asham'd/Almost acknowledge her." In fact this brings us to the most important aspect of the play the child parent relationship. Lear takes it for granted that unquestioning obedience to the wishes of a parent is the only law that is prescribed for a child by Nature. The claims of a father collide with the claims of a king. The forces of threatening scene and the seed of later tragic developments lie in this fateful combination of the most public offices the human society has evolved. Those who look at the opening scene as of mere fairy tale begin to miss the entire point. It is difficult to say whether Lear is more of a king or, a father. He is incapable of answering this question as we are. He cannot, and hence, the violence of his reactions. The tragedy as if has been recently suggested springs from the clash of the personal and the social values espoused by various characters and their rigid adherence to only one set of them at a particular time.

Lear's later troubles also arise from this confusion of his two positions (Kingship and Parenthood). The clash between him and his two elder daughters derives from their entirely different attitudes towards his claims and privileges as father and as king. Lear, when he rejects Cordelia and defends Goneril and Regan does so on the basis of their accord with natural hierarchy. But they attack Lear's need for his royal image (though he has resigned all power and possession) as being

inconsistent with the practical needs of well-run household. When Lear pronounces his terrible curses upon Goneril, it becomes quite obvious that he is beseeching Nature to deny her the fulfilment that comes from the love and obedience of children because she has denied it to her own father :

Hear, nature hear ! dear goddess hear !
 Suspend, thy purpose, if thou didst intend
 To make this creature fruitful !
 Into her womb convey sterility !
 Dry up in her the organs of increase;
 And from her derogate body never spring
 A babe to honour her ! If she must teem,
 Create her child of spleen, that it may live
 And be thwart disnatured torment to her !
 Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
 With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
 Turn all her mother's pains and benefits.
 To laughter and contempt, that, she may feel
 How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
 To have a thankless child?

The ambivalence of the King's attitude becomes still more apparent when he goes to Regan in the hope of better treatment.

On the one hand, is the natural order, that children owe allegiance to their parents, on the other, is his reminder to Regan of 'Half of the kingdom and as sort of bargain. Regan is not the one to respect any natural bond. She even refuses to recognise the psychological need that is fulfilled by Lear's retainers and reduces the entire question to one of physical need :

O, Sir you are old :
 Nature in you stands on the very verge
 of her confine : you should be ruled and led
 By some discretion that discerns your state
 Better than you yourself.

The movement of the play culminates in Lear's discovery that the natural hierarchy on which he has based his claims as king and father has no existence as an objective fact. It binds only those who acknowledge its sanctity.

Like Lear, Gloucester is also a self-righteous father who assumes that his treatment of his children has been in accordance with the highest kind of parental love prescribed by Nature. However, the nature of their love is self-regarding. Both profess that their love is selfless but do not know how valuable it is. The very fact that both Cordelia and Edgar are accused of unnatural behaviour point out the essential hollowness of their proclaimed selfless love. This gross error to understand the nature of their children brings the tragedy of their life. And the development of dramatic action brings them to an acknowledgement of their blindness.

Edmund belongs to the clan of Goneril and Regan. If Goneril and Regan recognise no natural obligations towards their father, once he has surrendered everything to them, Edmund also like them does not consider Gloucester to be anything more than a means towards the achievement of the property and title, that society denies him. And Edmund declares : "Thou, Nature, are my Goddess."

In the pursuit of the desires, Edmund refuses to acknowledge any moral, social or legal restraints. He dismisses with contempt "the plague of customs", deriving from "the curiosity of nations" "the nice distinctions which the laws of nations make in defiance of nature and commonsense." This is Edmund's creed and he pursues it with a remarkable consistency to the extent not only of inheriting his father's estate which rightfully belongs to Edgar.

"Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land :

If not by birth.....by will."

He aspires to acquire royal status, by letting Goneril and Regan take their rivalry for his "love to the point where one will be destroyed by the other. But Shakespeare makes the contrast quite obvious. The bonds of natural affection that link the other characters have no meaning for these ruthless characters who are ultimately consumed by this very ruthlessness. In case of Edmund, Nature does not permit defection, when he shows an inclination to disown her in the end :

"I pant for life. Some good I mean to do

Despite of mine own nature."

The conflict between the two opposed views of what is 'natural', and what Nature means, is basic to the play. Robert Speaight is right in pointing out : "Both for Edmund and Kent... the new man and the old..... Nature though differently understood, is the ultimate sanction. For Edmund, she consecrates an impulse, for Lear she enshrines a principle."

Nature of Shakespearean Tragedy

Another theme quite allied of these is that of the conflict between Youth and Age. It is first voiced by Goneril and Regan, in their private whispers in the closing lines of the "infirm and choleric years", of their father and they decide to "do something in the heart." It is voiced more fully in what Edmund attributes to Edgar while poisoning the mind of his father, Gloucester, against him, and a little later crystallised by him to pithy aphorism :

"The younger rises when the old doth fall."

which serves as his own dangerous philosophy of life. Professor R.S. Heilman in his book, *The Great Stage : Image and Structure in King Lear* draws our attention to the two-fold views of age presented in the play. According to him : "On the one hand age is allied with Nature. It has a certain position to which a certain response is obligatory. If man adhered to the order of the whole, he cannot withhold from the age what is its due from an ordered humanity.....respect and loving kindness. On the other hand, age becomes an isolated fact whose significance lies only in its relevance to the situations of those who must deal with it and they are under no obligation to apply to it any other standard than that of interest. Their views are pragmatic. The pragmatists are Goneril, Regan and Edmund. Nearly all the characters in the play regard age as having established right within the realm of humanity."

Lear, Gloucester and Kent are old. They represent an older order and stand on the verge of decay. Lear and Gloucester display the signs of decay of physical and mental faculties. The Fool's remark that Lear has become old before he has acquired wisdom is itself an indication of Lear's mental senility. It is this mental senility which prevents the old Lear to understand the true significance of his young daughter's remark, "So young. My Lord and true."

The old father wants the response to reassure him of his future security and the tender youth asserts the right to grow according to her own nature. The seeds of tragedy are sown when Lear accuses Cordelia of a fault which she has not committed.

Lear is senile, Gloucester is naive. But the fact remains that both old men have grown in years but not in age. Hence, his readings to accept what Edmund has to say about Edgar to him. When Lear abandons Cordelia and banishes Kent, Kent retorts, "See better, Lear", and when Edmund tries to hide the supposed letter from Edgar, Gloucester says :

"Let's see, let's see" and is completely unable to see anything beyond

the surface meaning of the words. The examples are self-revealing. The decay of mental and physical faculties due to old age is certainly emphasised in the presentation of Lear and Gloucester in the beginning of the play. Coleridge has rightly pointed out : "In Lear old age is itself a character."

However, the physical or mental deterioration in no way justifies a rejection or exploitation of them by others. Rather, such an exploitation arouses our sympathy. When Lear is thrown out of the Gloucester's castle in a hostile weather he remarks :

In such a night

To shut me out ? Pour on; will endure !

In such a night as this ! O Regan; Goneril !

Your old kind father whose frank heart gave all.

O ! that way madness lies : let me shun that;

Gloucester knows his duty at a time such as this;

My duty cannot suffer to obey in all your daughter's hard commands :

Though their injunction be to bar my doors,

And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you,

Yet have I ventured to seek you out.

And bring you where both fire and food is ready.

The 'pragmatists' – the new people in power reject the old but there are a set of other characters who respect them and give them regard and status due to them. No doubt, those who show sympathy to these old and banished people have to undergo punishment, face humiliation and disgrace. Kent is put in stocks, Gloucester has to pay the worst ever price for his loyalty to the king and old age. His eyes are gouged out. Nevertheless the part of the dialectic of the tragedy lies in its assertion that the desecrators of the dignity of the old are aberrations from the human norms. The very fact that rejection or exploitation of the old by the young arouses sympathy, sufficiently makes the point obvious. The most ignoble designs and the cruel deeds of the villains do not prevent the sense of human kindness from asserting itself. Hence, Cornwall is killed by his servant. Oswald is done away with, blind Gloucester wherever he goes-"he moves/All hearts." Another significant point to be noted is that it is not only the old who come to the rescue to the old (Kent leading Lear, Gloucester coming to the rescue of Lear, the old man leading Gloucester), the conduct of servant, the reactions of Cordelia, Albany and Edgar admit 'no cause' as sufficient to justify the denial of love and "protection" to the old.

Lear, as we have observed, is a Promethean character. Despite his age,

he possesses a tremendous capacity to endure the sufferings that come on his way. This particular aspect of Lear's character brings us to the theme of patience. Like Nature, Patience runs like a refrain, throughout the play. The play takes up for examination man's place in the universe. Is there any freedom for him to operate? Can he shape his destiny? What remedy, if any, is available to man like Gloucester and Lear who find the world toppling over their head? Gloucester, we know, gives way to despair, Lear hurts defiance. But the play certainly preaches the lesson of endurance and patience.

Lear, from the very beginning is a titanic character. He knows, it is unbecoming for a king to yield before hostile circumstances. Hence when his emotion takes possession of him, he is conscious that he is falling from the standard of human behaviour expected of him. As the tears roll down his cheeks, he says to Goneril :

I am asham'd

That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus :

That these hot tears, which break from me perforce.

Should make thee worth them.

And later on he refuses to betray his grief to the sympathetic eyes of Goneril and Regan :

You think I'll weep :

No, I'll not weep :

I have ful' cause of weeping, but this heart

Shall break into a hundred thousand fragment

Or Ere i'll weep

He maintains his self-control.

No, I will weep no more-in such night

To shut me out ! Pour on; I will endure :

Lear strives to acquire patience, "the pattern of all patience." His encounter with Edgar dressed as poor Tom, makes him realise that the loss of kingdom or the deprivation of the love of one's children is not the worst kind of human suffering that can befall man. There is much more to endure.

Gloucester also learns his lesson, his 'Patience' from Edgar. We know that Gloucester accuses the gods of killing mankind for their sport.

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods.

They kill us for their sport.

Gloucester sees no justification for his own suffering. He seeks

deliverance through suicide :

O you mighty gods

This world I do renounce, and in your sights.

Shake patiently my great affliction off :

If I could beat it longer, and not fall

To quarrel with your great opposeless wills.

My Snuff and loathed part of nature should

Burn itself out.

It is again Edgar who convinces him that there is some providential design in his continued suffering. Edgar impresses upon him the necessity of "Patient thoughts."

Lear and Gloucester, the two men face inhuman callousness and cruelty. But for Edgar, they would have been overpowered by their sufferings. Edgar 'the King's philosopher'-himself an embodiment of the virtues of endurance and patience-imparts these qualities first to the king, then to his father. However, Edgar himself has learnt the part of this lesson from viewing Lear's suffering. His own sense of suffering as a hunted fugitive trying to escape the wrath of his father seems insignificant to him when he sees the dispossessed king driven insane by the ingratitude of his daughters. He thus, acquire self-detachment to appreciate the suffering of others :

When we our betters see bearing our woes,

We scarcely think our miseries our foes,

Who alone suffer most in the mind

Leaving free things and happy shows behind :

But then the mind much sufferance doth over skip,

When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.

Thus having seen what Lear has to endure, he himself becomes capable of "free and patient thoughts" so that he goes on to say.

How light and portable my pain seems now,

When that which makes me bond makes the king bow;

He childed as I father'd Tom away,

Mark the high noises, and thy self betray,

When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee,

In thy Just proof, repeals and reconciles thee.

Hence, Gloucester resolves :

Henceforth I'll bear Affliction till it do cry out itself

"Enough, enough and die.

Lear speaks to the blind Gloucester in an idiom identical with that of Edgar :

Thou must be patient, we came crying hither :

Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air We wail and cry.

But the ultimate test of Lear's endurance comes when after the defeat of French forces both the King and Cordelia are taken as prisoners. Even at the fag end of his life, he has courage and physical strength to kill the assassins of his daughter. He is killed by the shock that Cordelia will never return to him, but even in his last moments he tries to rise above despair to cling to the hope that there is some final message from Cordelia to him. Kent makes very appropriate comments :

The wonder is, he hath endured so long :

He but usurp'd life.

The words of Albany which conclude the play sum up the theme of the play :

The oldest hath borne most : we that are young

Shall never see so much, nor live so long.

Because of emphatic insistence on ideas such as repentance, forgiveness, patience and endurance, many critics have labelled it a Christian play about a Pagan World. Such critics consider Cordelia a "Christ-like figure", symbol of truth, highest moral rectitudes, "even as Nature herself. Cordelia, especially in the later scene "shines like a candle in the 'general darkness like a good deed in a naughty world." The play, according to them, is far from being pessimistic. It is relevant to quote Kenneth Muir : "The play is not as some of our grand fathers believed, pessimistic and Pagan : It is rather an attempt to provide an answer to the undermining of traditional ideas by the new philosophy that considers all in doubt. Shakespeare goes back to a pre-Christian world and builds up from the nature of man himself, and not from revealed religion, those some moral and religious ideas that were being undermined. In a world of lust, cruelty and greed with extremes of wealth and poverty, man reduced to his essential need, not wealth, nor even physical freedom but rather patience, social 'fortitude and love'. Needs perhaps, above all mutual forgiveness, the exchange of charity and those sacrifices on which the gods, if there are any gods, throw incense." The various speeches of the various characters indicate Shakespeare's views but the dramatist remains in the background, but he shows us his pagan characters grouping their way towards a recognition of the values traditional in his society. But these are the very values, which humanity needs.

Man must endure
Their going hence, ever as their coming hither
Ripeness is all.

This is much indebted to stoic humanism as it is to the Christian philosophy of endurance. Rosalie Colie is right in interpreting Ripeness as "self-realization, realization of responsibility for one's self and others, such realization carries no guarantee of happiness. Muir's version of the play certainly presents *King Lear* as marking doctrinal and didactic statements. *King Lear* is quite explicitly profoundly concerned with the moral repercussions of desires and actions. It presents an aura of imaginative experience that constantly moves from philosophical to moral and metaphysical speculation. The slanderous of pride, passion, aspiration are constantly transforming as it were, into the virtues of humility, gentleness and endurance, the qualities and values associated with Christianity. But then, to read *King Lear* as Christian allegory or to turn *King Lear* into a morality play, is to undermine it as a tragedy. To sum up, we can say that the play forces us to "contemplate what, day in and day out, we prefer to forget : What it can mean to be human. Its character jumps as we do, to their premature conclusion : Gloucester sees men as a game for the goods, but later he calls the gods 'ever gentle'. Albany sees the operation of justice in the death of Cornwall. Cordelia says the gods are 'kind'. In life, there are indications of Providence and demands upon fortitude, on occasions of despair. The end is of woe and nakedness. But the play shows humanity at the cliff edge of its own imaginings."

Short Answer Questions

1. Explain the line "Ripeness is all".

Ans. This line constitutes one of the most important philosophical statements in the play. "Ripeness" conveys the idea of fullness. Perhaps the idea conveyed is that we should be ready for death. The line also hints at the important thematic current of the play. Joy is transient, patience is the only solution.

2. Comment on the last scene of *King Lear*.

Ans. SCENE iii of ACT V is the best scene in the play. The wheel is come full circle. All the important characters are present on the stage. The complicated web of action gets clear. The villains are destroyed by their wrong deeds and crimes. Nothing remains but to settle the succession, for the state must go on. Albany appoints Kent and Edgar as Regents. Kent declines, Edgar accepts, at the same time proclaiming his inadequacy.

3. Why does Lear suffer ?

Ans. Lear suffers because he lacks self-knowledge. He is ignorant, tempestuous and rash. Though he divests himself of state responsibilities, he cannot abandon the power he wields as a king. Therefore, he suffers.

Suggested Questions

1. Comment in detail on the ending of *King Lear*.
2. Discuss the theme of madness in the play.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR

Plot in King Lear

In lesson 13, we discussed some of the important themes of *King Lear*. Let us now examine how the thematic substance receives formulations in the plot of the drama.

King Lear differs from other major tragedies of Shakespeare in one thing. It has a sub-plot. And it is for the first time in this play that Shakespeare departs from the method of using the sub-plot conventionally. Usually the sub-plot is comic in nature and depicts the fate of the minor characters and two plots touch each other only tangentially during most of the action. The dramatic focus is primarily on the major plot with the sub-plot providing comic relief or as opportunity for a complication of the story. But in *King Lear* the sub-plot is as fully developed as the main plot; and both are woven into each other almost from the beginning of the play. Gloucester is as important in the sub-plot as is Lear in the main plot. The point may be better understood if Gloucester is considered the 'protagonist' in the sub-plot. As W.R. Elton has rightly remarked, "In this drama of duplicity and betrayal, the doubleness of man's nature and the irresolution of his mysterious sojourn on earth are mirrored in the two protagonists."

The entire developing action from the initial situation (first scene) to the resolution of denouement (the last scene) is called Plot. In a good play there is very close connection between the opening situation and all other situations that follow it. The opening situation is the cause and the following situation is its effect. The end of play follows as a natural conclusion from its beginning. It has its own logic and inevitability built within itself. Therefore, it will be appropriate if we start from the opening scene.

The initial lines in the play set in motion the pattern of qualities. From the talk between Kent and Gloucester we get a clue to the Albany-Cornwall anti-theses, the division of the kingdom, and the observation that "equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's share." Similarly, Edmund-Edgar antithesis is made

obvious. The legitimate Edgar is, to Gloucester, 'no dearer in my account' than the illegitimate Edmund. And when Lear come on the stage, we have yet another confrontation-conflict between social and personal. It has been recently pointed out that in the "opening scene", Lear and Cordelia are caught up in an intriguing situation where the most personal of human relationships is being tested on the touchstone of social conventions. The emphasis is on 'ceremony and society' rather than on the 'individual'. Lear is not prepared to look upon Cordelia as person. He is completely blind to this aspect. In the case of Cordelia and Kent the personal is thwarted by the social and conventional customs. And old king demands in a public ceremony a declaration of values which are so intensely personal. In both cases the reaction evoked consists in the assertion of the individual entity as distinct from the social and conventional. Cordelia is forced by the peculiar situation into denying herself the expression which she would have loved to give to her genuine love.....In Lear, the social self, through a long-engrafted habit, has acquired a tyrannic ascendancy, Cordelia the private self has not yet learnt the art of meaningful adjustment with the demands on any delicate social situation. Thus, here we find a confrontation of two irreconcilable rigidities. And the seeds of tragedy are sown. We have a king who insists upon the untenable proposition that love can be measured as if it were a material quantum of a certain size or shape. He understands neither the nature of love nor the nature of kingship (he abandons the symbols of regality but wants to possess authority) nor the nature of language, hence he is easily won over by the hyperbolic declaration of love by Goneril and Regan and fails to understand the real meaning of Cordelia's "I love your majesty. According to my bond, nor more nor less." We have a daughter who is equally self-willed and in this clash of wills much is at stake. Further, while near the beginning, the state, the family, as well as the protagonists' hearts' are split (Gloucester's old heart is crack'd, it is crack'd) at the end, with the family severed and the state still go'd. Lear's voice would 'crack' the heavens and both old men die, their hearts split and bruised.

Close parallelism between the two plots have been noticed by the critics. It is pointed out that both deal with parent-child and youth-age relationship. In both cases parents do wrong to one of the children to benefit the other children at the expense of the first. Both parents are shown acting against Nature and their best judgement. Both parents suffer from spiritual blindness and one of them is later inflicted with physical blindness as well. Both through their intense suffering and love of their wronged children recover true insight. The madness of one

and the blindness of the other, create a state of mind in which both fathers become aware that they have failed the children who loved them, and develop the humility necessary to beg and to accept their forgiveness. In both cases their hearts crack when once again they have been reconciled to their despised children and when their gall has been transformed into boundless love, pure and selfless.

From Act III onward, the two plots do not run separately. They become one, Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester aligns with Goneril and Regan, the evil daughters of Lear. These characters, combined, constitute the evil forces or the new powers which usher in chaos and threaten the stability of the accepted order. Similarly Edgar the virtuous and the good son of Gloucester becomes the 'philosopher' and the spiritual guide to Lear and Gloucester and awakens them to self-realisation and to identify their personal suffering with the common destiny of mankind.

Shakespeare's use of double plot has been criticised by critics like Granville, Barker and A.C. Bradley. According to Barker, "*King Lear* among the great tragedies adds to its plot a sub-plot fully developed. And it suffers somewhat under the burden. After a few preliminary lines we have a full and almost formal statement of the play's main theme and a show of the characters that are to develop it, followed by a scene which sets out the sub-plot as fully, the two scenes together form a sort of double dramatic prologue." Bradley contends that the double plot chiefly contributes to Lear's "structural weakness" and points out the improbabilities' and inaccuracies which occur in the sub-plot. Bradley's charge also takes into account the question of reader's and audience's response. He contends : "By the side of Lear, his daughter, Kent and the Fool who are the principal figures in the main plot, stand Gloucester and his two sons, the chief persons of the secondary plot. Now, by means of this double action. Shakespeare secures certain results highly advantageous even from the strictly dramatic point of view and easy to perceive. But the disadvantages were dramatically greater. The number of essential characters is so large their actions and movements are so complicated, and events towards the close crowd on one another too thickly, that the reader's attention, rapidly transferred from one centre of interest to another, is overstrained. He becomes, if not intellectually confused at least, emotionally fatigued." The more recent criticism, however, exonerates Shakespeare from the charges of being simply repetitive and instead brings to light its dramatic effectiveness, its ingrained cohesiveness and underlying unity and cosmic nature of this tragedy. It has been considered an instrument of complexity, the assurance of a multifaceted ambivalence." W.R. Elton traces the reasons of this

duplication in Renaissance convention and holds the view, "I suggest that there may be no real loss of economy since Lear and Gloucester stand for recognisably antithetical religious position in this tragedy of man's relation to the heavens." Some critics excuse the use of double plot or 'double action' as Bradley calls it, on the grounds that it universalizes ingratitude and intensifies the tragic effect.

As pointed out earlier, both Lear and Gloucester are 'muddled'. But there is basic difference in their dramatic stature. One is a titan-invincible, other is cautious, wry politician-easily won over by others. One is built on a heroic scale, the other is a conventional, puny, mortal. One suffers through his own pride and ego, the other is duped by his own son. Unlike Lear, there is no thunder in Gloucester's voice. Lear is a man of action. He imposes on his world the erroneous conclusion about children and court. Whereas Gloucester as a contrast accepts rather than imposes. His error of understanding is that he easily fails under the influence exerted upon him. He is the passive man and is not ready to be at quarrel with world or with himself. As Robert B. Heilman says, "Lear without questioning his own rightness, imposes his will upon others; Gloucester accepts the will of others without effectively questioning their rightness. Thus Lear and Gloucester are, in terms of structure, not duplicates but complements....." The roles continue consistently throughout the play. Lear is active, vigorous, aggressive. He fights against his daughters to the bitter end and refuses to give in. Even at the end, we have a glimpse of the old King in his usual self a commanding and demanding figure. He kills the slave who hangs Cordelia. He gains insight due to his suffering but is not taken over by it. Gloucester feels of his sense of duty towards the old king when he makes a choice not to succumb to the threats of the new people in power :

If I

die for it, no less is threatened we, the King
my old master, must be reliev'd,

Suicide is his final decision. Though the situation of Gloucester parallels that of Lear in so many ways, his actions throughout lack depth and intensity so that he does not achieve heroic stature, the qualitative difference between the implications of the king and that of his courtier is best expressed by the Gentleman who watches Lear running away from Cordelia's servants, believing them to be his gaolers :

A sight most pitiful in the meanest wretch.

Past speaking of in a King !

The suffering of "the meanest wretch" does inspire our pity but it does

not bring with it any implications beyond the personal, whereas the suffering of a king carries overtones of a cosmic upheaval. This contrast is clearly evident in the differing nature of our reactions to the suffering of Gloucester and that of Lear. As B.G. Lyons has put it : "The verbal and the usual simplifications of sub-plot do merely provide a contrast with what goes on elsewhere in the play; they help to reveal the nature of Lear's sufferings are heroic because they cannot be accommodated by traditional formulas, moral or literary, and the sub-plot exists partly to establish that fact."

Once we agree that the sub-plot is not merely the duplication of the main plot and as W.R. Elton contends : "Indeed, the device may rather be an agent of clarity, assimilating to drama's limited economy, the intellectual freight of this cosmic tragedy. For in one respect the double action is related to the fashion in which the play may be said to 'think', the work being. In its own terms a developed and dialectical argument examining the total conception of human existence under the heavens and delving also into hell, the drama is structurally consonant with Shakespeare's most epic or total play." Let us then examine what dramatic purpose does it serve ? The play takes up for study some of the local human problems such as child-parent relationship, youth-age relationship, madness and reason, patience and endurance. The double plot helps sustain unity and maintain interest by its alternation of characters and events reflecting the focal problems. It lends universality to the tragedy, when we are filled with fear and awe, finding ourselves face to face with a universal moral chaos. Furthermore, one story of horror serves as a means of approach to the other and helps us to conceive its magnitude. That the two fathers should commit the tragic error of understanding the true nature of their children and be put to suffering by the bad ones and rescued by the good ones becomes an archetypal kind of a situation intended to comment on the universal nature of this tragedy. As Robert B. Heilman puts it : "The completeness of the play, its cosmic inclusiveness, which we sense without being able to put our finger upon it is in part attributable to this double focused presentation of the tragic error of understanding."

Besides Gloucester-plot also serves in accentuating Lear's suffering and in facilitating the elaborated contrapuntal movements. Gloucester's physical suffering intensifies Lear's mad frenzy; hence it lends the central situation-sharper reality. Some of the significant situations and events are enriched with the help of the double plot. In Act I, Sc. I we see Lear involved in his own duping while in Act I, Sc. iii, Act II, Sc. i, Act III, Sc. iii Gloucester becomes an instrument of deception, Edmund being the manipulator. The nature of deception is analogous but the stature in character, as mentioned earlier is different. The contrapuntal movement

of the play continues. Gloucester continues to be guiled but Lear's education starts from Act I, Sc. IV itself and continues till Lear achieves his final insight in the storm scene, first by the Fool, then by 'philosopher' Edgar. Lear is able, earlier than Gloucester, to identify his personal suffering in the context of the common destiny of mankind. In Act II, Sc. iv, Act III, Sc. iv, the two protagonists are brought together on stage for comparison. The impression left is that where mental suffering serves to animate Lear, Gloucester's blinding produces deeper passivity and an implicit pre-suicide renunciation of the world of action. Gloucester's attempt at self-destruction contrasts, in its futile with Lear's heroic challenge to the elements. And in Act IV, Sc. VI madman and blindman are brought together and confronted and we see all the difference between these two characters. In most of the play, Gloucester plot re-enacts the story of Lear's plot and echoes the main themes (hence the charge of repetition) but in the concluding lines and the last scenes we see the reversing of the order. It has been noticed by many critics that the Gloucester plot gets underway after and ends before the Lear plot. Gloucester's 'suicide' and 'restoration' pave the way for Lear's 'rebirth' scene his union with Cordelia. And Gloucester's death off stage anticipates Lear's last earthly movement.

W.R. Elton compares the use of double-plot with the use of parallel idea in *Hamlet*. According to Elton : "If *Hamlet* shows the nature Shakespeare deliberately exploiting parallel ideas for dramatic effect, for example, the various attitudes towards the ghost, the sentinels. Hamlet and Horatio in Act-I the more complex Lear reveals him employing such ideas to provide the very structure of the play itself." Lear and Gloucester stand for recognizably antithetical religious position of man's relations to heavens. According to Elton : "Further, if Hamlet's play-within-the-play holds the mirror up to nature, Lear's double plot holds the mirror up to the heavens themselves. Just as Cordelia reflects the respect of steadfast love, Edgar of unchanging pity, and Kent of virile loyalty. Gloucester generally mirrors, Lear's all-too-human side, as the heavens mirror Lear's royal demigod or Promethean site. In addition while *Hamlet's* play within the play centripetally reflects its hero in relation to his corrupt courtly audience, Lear's play within the cosmos, with the gods as spectators more centrifugally throws the image of mankind against the questionable heavens. After a certain point in Lear, for example, human actions are invoked to show the heavens more just."

Characters

Now we are in a position to take up the study of characters in *King Lear*. As a matter of fact in our study of the action, themes and imagery of

the play, we have come to know (judge) them in relation to the world they inhabit. Let us first start with King Lear.

King Lear

Lear is the protagonist of the play. He is the chief centre of our interest. We meet him in the opening scene and the most striking impression made by him at his first appearance in the play is that of a king deeply attached to the sense of his own will and legality. He is a king whose word is the law. He is given to have the things in his own way. He is unpredictable and also impulsive. He is an old man who has reigned for a life-time, so that the expectation of flattery and obedience from others has become a deeply ingrained habit. Hence, he is rigid and uncompromising in his attitude. His announcement of his abdication is, therefore, riddled with contradictions. He parts with authority and possessions and yet wants to keep a show of them with him : "The name and all the additions to a King." He gives away all, yet he does not give it away freely. There is a dichotomy between the intention and the deed. As George Orwell has pointed out : "Lear renounces his throne but expects everyone to continue treating him as a King."

He acts freely in a situation of his own choice. But the situation does not respond to his design and wishes. He always looks inward in the direction of the satisfaction of his own ego, rather than, outwards in the direction of the recognition of other's claims. Thus he creates a new situation for himself and for all others a situation which is ominous. We see, when we see him first, that he is overwhelmed by a sense of his generosity to his children and expects it to be reciprocated with an equal generosity in their professions of love for him. Cordelia's non-compliance so infuriates him that he disowns her and bestows his kingdom to his elder daughters. Kent's intervention earns him also the exile. When Lear banishes Kent and Cordelia accusing them of "pride" in failing to flatter him the audience is fully aware of the irony of the situation. Shakespeare leaves us in no doubt about Lear's obsession with his own privileges which blind him to the "truth" of his youngest daughter and his loyal courtier. And the trouble is, he does not know it, and what is worse, he is unwilling to accept the truth. With the titanic passions he has the volcanic bursts he is given to and an incapacity to judge his friends from his foes, falsehood and flattery from sincerity and love an utterlack of discernment with which he is inflicted he has initiated his own tragic doom. There comes a complete reversal of his position. As the Fool says, 'he has made his wicked daughters his mother, "He has made them his masters and has reduced himself to 'Lear's shadow.' The scolding by Goneril in Act I, Sc. IV suddenly brings home to Lear the reversal of their hierarchical

relationship when he asks her, "Are you our daughter?" The implications of his question are: Is this the manner in which the daughter of a king should talk to her father, especially when he has voluntarily surrendered half of his kingdom to her? He begins to realise that his attempt to retain the name and all the additions to a king after his abdication have turned out to be a mockery as the Fool says that he is now 'a Zero without a figure.' It is this fear of the loss of his royal identity which makes him say, "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

For his question to be answered, the protective shell of his regality must break, and the essential "unaccommodated man" must be exposed. Suffering and shocks proportionate to his stupendous will be needed to break the hard shell of his titanic ego, to enable it to establish a living contact with the world outside, to discover new insights to reshape his vision and his world. No wonder it makes King Lear one of the most terrible tragedies which questions all our established notions of man and universe and leaves us awe-struck (and chastened) face to face with the stark reality of the human situation in a world which we can but half comprehend. And Lear sets himself on a long journey which is arduous and troubled where as Keats has said, Repeated shock again awaits, him on road to the valley of sour making?

Even before he rushes into the storm, he has been shaken out of his complacency: "O reason not the need." For the first time, he has been driven to look at such proposition as need with some feeling: to look upon possession in a new light necessary for human life (civilized life) pushed to juxtapose "basest beggars" "poorest thing" and himself (King) in the same category, all equally vulnerable. "Man's life is cheap as beast's. And it touches him so close that he cries out; "O fool I shall go mad!" yet the shell is only a little cracked a small chink in it appears. As he rushes out into the storm. Regan speaks for all those (and it includes all present except Gloucester) who least care as to what happens to Lear.

"To wilful men

The injuries that they themselves procure

"Must be their school-masters."

Of course Lear has a lot to learn and beyond need and patience, that he speaks of in this speech, he must learn pity and beyond pity, love.

Out in the storm, he identifies the storm outside with the storm within. He learns of man's helpless state the elemental facts about life from which he had hitherto completely shut himself away. He calls upon the storm dreadful summoners to execute Justice upon a corrupt society.

Lear becomes the mouthpiece of a universal accusation. It is not only Goneril and Regan but the whole society that stands at the Bar. This world like Hamlet's is out of order every bit of it fallen. As one critic has pointed out. "On the heath, a mad shadow confronts a mad world, for the storm is described in a way that makes it simply not a storm but chaos come again, the cracking of nature's moulds. "The turning point of the scene is the appearance of Tom. Lear goes mad. Edgar (Tom) serves as a visible symbol of man as Lear in his delusion, reduced to the level of beast 'is man no more than this.' The unaccommodated man is no more than a mad naked beast. Lear's process of regeneration starts when he feels with the piteous suffering of the Fool, for whose sake he agrees to seek a shelter and whom he ushers first into the protection of the hovel. Then it surges up into universal pity of suffering humanity. Lear bursts into a prayer which he addresses to no deity but the dispossessed of the earth, poor naked wretches. In this prayer, Lear finds his human identity. In this complete identification with the suffering humanity, Lear tears the 'lendings' from his own body. Paradoxically it is in his vision of the sub-human, in this contemplation of the mirror of his" own degradation that Lear begins to find his own humanity. From overweening pride, security and obstinacy, he moves through rebellious anger, despair and madness to patience, to humanity and to a new recognition of truth and goodness : In the great storm of events he suffers a sea change purged by suffering.

In the mad scenes, the process of regeneration continues. The twin motifs, the scorn for humanity and an awakening, feeling of kinship with humanity, continue to play against one another. On the surface, picture of lechery, corruption and deceit follows the supreme recognition that we are all sinners, that we all share in everybody else's guilt. "None does offend none. I say none." That is way his madness is not, as Arnold Kettle says, "So much a breakdown as a break through."

There are two facets of his madness. The retrospective in which he is haunted by the filial ingratitude of his daughters and his own gullibility when he conducts the trial of "love and the illumination in which he begins to understand that no human being can dictate the terms on which life is to be based. It is about this phase that Edgar most appropriately uses the phrase "Reason in madness". Because it is only when Lear is able to place his own suffering in the context of the general human condition that he is able to bear it patiently :

Thou must be patient, we came crying hither.

Thou knowst the first time that we smell the air

We wail and cry,
When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools

As Ian Kott has pointed out as in the case of Hamlet there is a method in his madness; "madness in King Lear is a philosophy, a conscious cross-over to the position of the clown."

With patience, Lear also learns humility while in the retrospective phase he complains bitterly against the unkindness of Goneril and Regan to him. In the illumination phase, he is overcome by shame at his own cruelty to Cordelia.

That stripped her from his benediction, turn'd her
to foreign casualties.
to his dig-hearted daughters.

A new Lear is born in the scene of his reunion with Cordelia. He recognises now as the highest value the sanctity of human affections, the personal relationship of selfless love. And he sees them at the end embedded in Cordelia, as they move together to the prison. He has renounced everything else, including any idea of revenge upon his ungrateful daughters.

Gloucester

Both Lear and Gloucester are tragic heroes. As Lear is the hero in the main plot, Gloucester is the hero of the sub-plot. Like Lear, Gloucester is also essentially a good man.

He is introduced to us before we meet Lear. The play opens with his and Kent's entrance. First thing we learn about him is his incapacity to judge the appearance of things, his indulgence in extra-marital relations and producing a bastard, his want of tact, and the coarseness of the manner of his reference to Edmund in the presence of others. Then in Act-I. Sc.ii the sub-plot gets under-way. We learn that Gloucester is conservative, superstitious, gullible, rash, immoderate in his reaction to things and incapable of distinguishing appearance from reality.

It is quite common to compare Lear and Gloucester. Both fathers, it is said, are equally blind to the nature of their children, so that they become easy victims of the deceit practised against them by the children who do not love them and as a consequence, disinherit and cast off the children who do. However, in Gloucester's case there is some difference. The status of the two children is different. Edgar, the legitimate son has been brought up by Gloucester in the normal course. Edmund, on the other hand is illegitimate and has been denied the love

and respect of the father and society respectively. "He hath been out for nine years, and away we shall again." Gloucester must than indeed be a "credulous father" to be taken in by the machinations of Edmund, a comparative strange, against Edgar whom he claims to love "so tenderly and entirely." Like Lear, he might have consulted his non-rational, experiential awareness of his child's quality. Yet Gloucester is the object of manipulation. His error of understanding is that he too easily falls under the influence exerted upon him. He is the "passive man," who is too ready to fall in with whatever influences are brought to bear upon him. His gulling, as Bradley points out, reminds of gulling of Othello.

Gloucester is the man who falls into step with the world. He fell in with the worldliness that took sexual morality lightly. Years later even, he refers to Edmund's origin. Then he falls in with Edmund's suggestion : about the evil-purpose of Edgar. Finally he falls in with, does his best to get on with, Goneril-Regan tyranny when Regan and Cornwall order that Kent be placed in the stocks, Gloucester is fully aware of the disrespect this would apply to the king. However, this protest is summarily dismissed by his new masters, and all that he can promise Kent is to 'entreat' for him. His whole tendency toward conformity which is quite in tune with his astrological habit of mind, makes him passive. He is one character who believes. "If these late eclipses in the sun and the moon portend no good to us" what can we do about it ? Lear's abdication provokes remonstrance from Kent but Gloucester lacks the moral stamina of Kent. We know he is more worldly wise, as compared to Lear. When Lear insists in Act II, Sc. iv that :

The king would speak with Cornwall, the dear father would with his daughter speak

Lear still believes that he can claim the privileges of kingship and fatherhood, but Gloucester knows the way of the world much better than him and accepts the fact that these privileges are not to be claimed by Lear but to be granted by the new people in power. And it is in tune with Gloucesters character to fall in line with the new powers because he respects the natural bonds in all relationship. He lays a lot of emphasis on "bias of nature" the natural bonds in all relationship at all levels and the threat to human society when these bonds are broken, Gloucester plainly has doubt about the way things are going. Yet he accepts the status quo. It simply does not occur to him that he can take a stand. That he voluntarily seeks what is evil is simply that he too easily yields to that in which he should see evil. As Robert A Heilman points out, "Gloucester is the passive man who is too ready to

fall in with what ever influences are brought to bear upon him. He is the man falls into step with the world, especially when to be out of step would mean a stern quarrel both with the design of the play and the respective characters of Lear and Gloucester, that throughout the play that whereas Lear is active, things keep happening to Gloucester. Lear combats his daughters furiously and dashes of his own will out into the night; Gloucester is betrayed, is captured and tortured.

However, Gloucester gains in moral stature when he decides to aid Lear and he has to pay dearly for loyalty. Gloucester's defection from the camp of new powers invites the most horrible revenge from Goneril, Regan and Cornwall. With his blinding, the trial of Gloucester begins. Like Lear, he needs much, and like him he has to learn it the hard way. His blindness offers the same way to regeneration as Lear's torment and madness in the storm. Being himself rendered utterly helpless a miserable outcast-he learns to pity the poor and the unfortunate. He prays that let "this superfluous and last-dieted man" feel the power of heaven quickly. But whereas Lear is always a vigorous, aggressive figure, he lights his daughters to the bitter end, even in his madness, he imposes his personality upon others, Gloucester, gives in and yields to despair :

As flies to, wanton boys, are we to the gods.

They kill us for their sport :

and he resolves to commit suicide. It is Edgar who creates the illusion that he has led Gloucester to the cliff.

The first truth that Gloucester learns after he has been blinded is that he has been completely mistaken in trusting Edmund. His immediate desire is to beg the forgiveness of Edgar :

Oh ! dear son, Edgar

The food of thy abused father's wrath :

Might ! but live to see thee in my touch,

I say I had eyes again.

Though unknowingly, but Edgar does become his inner eyes. Hence he learns to generate beyond the darkness of despair to a capacity to "bear free and patient thoughts." When Gloucester finally learns that it was Edgar who :

become his guide

Led him, begg'd for him, sav'd him from despair :

He is overwhelmed by a sense of his own sins, which had been so underservedly and so disproportionately forgiven by his wronged son so

that :

his flaw'd heart,

Alack too weak the conflict to support !

Twixt two extremes to passion, joy and grief.

Burst, smilingly.

Edgar

The roles performed by Edgar in the play are various, enigmatic and puzzling. We know that he is the eldest legitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester. We are introduced to him in the opening scene (Act I, Sc i). Gloucester mentions about him, that too, not by name, but by his status, and we see him very little in the play. There is much dramatic ambiguity so far as his character is concerned. There is no effort on the part of the playwright to make us understand why he should fall such an easy victim to scheming Edmund. The contrast becomes sharper if we consider Cordelia the good child (as Edgar is in Gloucester plot) in Lear Plot. Cordelia completely sees through the hypocrisy of her sisters though Lear is gullible. Here we see, Edgar is as gullible as his father that both fall victims to Edmund's scheming mind. After Edgar flees, we see him then in the last act when he reveals his identity. He goes into disguise first as poor Tom and latest as a rustic. And it is only at the end of the play he reveals his identity and now he himself has suffered, sustained and served his father in his misery. He gives no reason for why he did not disclose his identity to his father earlier.

As poor Tom, he becomes a visual symbol of "the thing itself"-the man as Lear is. As one who leads his blind father, he becomes a very symbol of the very opposite of poor Tom of devotion and those qualities which raise man above the level of the beast. In this combat with Edmund (in which he destroys him) he becomes the symbol of justice, of good triumphing over evil. This has given rise to the question whether we can consider Edgar to be a dramatic character in the ordinary sense : Is Edgar "character or function"- (Leo Kirschbaum has explained this view in his essay-" Banquo Edgar : Character to Function ?" published in *Essays in Criticism* (9 January 1957). Bethall also believes in this line of argument. According to Bethall, "in the treatment of Edgar' propriety on the place of the naturalism yields to the needs of symbolic expression.

Edgar's credibility as a character is not established even by Edmund's reference to a brother noble.

whose nature is so far from doing harms.

So complete is this identity in every sense, eclipsed by the presence of

his brilliantly portrayed half-brother that it is only the assumption together different personally as Poor Tom, which enables him to act rather than be acted upon. Perhaps this is to be conveyed by the concluding words of the soliloquy in which he announces his intention to disguise himself :

.....Poor Tom !

That's something yet : Edgar I nothing am.

And this new pretence (identity as Tom) also epitomises for us the beneficent sympathy of creatures for one another. As Tom he becomes. "The philosopher" to Lear and spiritual guide of Gloucester. (When Oswald approaches we see him yet assuming another identity that a peasant) Edgar's succession of emblematic disguise creates the impression that he has no self. The critics consider him not as a major character but as a whole host of minor characters choric in function. Moreover, Edgar's central disguise as Poor Tom is so powerfully conceived that Poor Tom becomes character in his own right. The dramatic device as a matter of fact helps the play right to focus on some of the central issues of the play. No doubt, the audiences' and the readers' task becomes difficult as the play demands a kind of "doubleness of vision." The hell fiends that he loses in the storm scene can be appreciated only if we are able to forget that they are caused by a perfectly sane person early. Similarly the stoic acceptance of suffering as man's natural destiny and hence the need for pretence in the face of despair, can be displaced if we were constantly to remember that "the Philosopher" is no ordinary man and beggar but a fallen nobleman. Once this "doubleness of vision" (that we believe and disbelieve in the independent existence of Tom) is acquired the charge that Edgar seems to be endowed with a choleric function is belied. He becomes a character and not a function. It will be difficult, then, to reconcile to the transformation of the "Philosopher" into the militant challenger of evil forces - Edmund.

Tom, away !

Mark the high noises and thyself be wary

When false opinion, whose wrong thoughts defile thee,

In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.

Edgar's encounter with Oswald in Act IV, Sc. vi marks the change in him; he seizes the letter from Goneril to Edmund and kills the messenger. His catalogue of the sins of Edmund now can be extended to include those committed against others besides his father and brother :

I protest,

Measure thy strength, youth place, and eminence,
 Despite thy victor sword and fire-new fortune,
 Thy valour and thy heart, thou art a traitor,
 False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father,
 Conspirant 'gainst' this high illustrious prince.

Despite such a long catalogue of sins, Edgar willingly extends "charity" to Edmund. Such an act is in tune with the character of a man who possesses an ability to place his personal suffering within a cosmic perspective. But his comments about Gloucester :

The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices,
 Make instruments to plague us :
 The dark and vicious place where thee he got
 cost him his eyes.

Especially when he knows that his father is dead, sounds very uncharitable and displays a crude vindictiveness. Some critics find it hard to adjust the variety of roles, that Edgar assumes. According to Goldberg : "Edgar is most lethal character" in the play. Goldberg argues that the man who proclaims one moment that he is,

A most poor man, made tame to Fortune's blow, who,
 by the art of known and feeling sorrows.
 Am pregnant to good pity.

find the next moment that (for the best of reasons) he has to kill Oswald. He is the one who (likewise) kills Edmund and also kill Gloucester.

However, there is no ambiguity so far as, sustaining "the good state" is concerned. The very fact that the initiative passes to Albany the sole survivor of the Lear family and Edgar - the sole survivor of the Gloucester family-Shakespeare wants to take into account the surviving noble and good forces.

Albany

Albany is introduced in the opening lines of the opening scene by Kent: "I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall", His merit has not been fully appreciated by King Lear while dividing his kingdom among his daughters. It is the first judgement in the play on both Lear and Albany.

In the crucial opening scene, he appears to be a passive character. He allows himself to be over-ruled and over - shadowed by his domineering and demonic wife and his too brief an appearance on the stage till Act IV, Sc. ii further projects him as a minor character.

The first occasion when Albany emerges as a distinct character in his confrontation with his wife, Goneril regarding reducing the number of Lear's retinue of hundred knights. It is often by presenting such contrasts that Shakespeare reveals characters. Goneril herself lives by practising 'hypocrisy'. It is but natural that she attributes the same kind of duplicity to others. Lear, she fears, "may enguard his dotage with their powers/And hold our lives in mercy." Albany, however, is distressed by the suspiciousness of his wife : "Well you may fear too far." She dismisses contemptuously Albany's compassion for Lear's "milky gentleness" and "harmful mildness". The subordinate position that he occupies in his relationship with Goneril, he gives the impression of being a very mild man. He hardly inspires the hope that he would ever be able to stand up against her.

Goneril, Regan and Cornwall-the forces of evil-unite to deprive Lear of the last vestiges of his royalty, Albany weans away from them. He is not a party to all, to what they do. Even in their blinding of Gloucester, Albany comes out openly against his wife :

What have you done ?

Tiger, not daughters, what have you perform'd ?

A father, and a gracious aged man,

Whose reverence, the head-lugg'd bear would lick,

Most barbarous, most degenerate ! have you madded.

Could my good brother suffer you to do it ?

A man, a prince, by him so benefited !

The inhumanity and ingratitude of these 'evil' characters is much to bear with. His sympathy for Gloucester is heightened by the Earl's loyalty to King Albany, in turn resolves :

Gloucester, I live

to thank thee for the love thou show'st the king.

And to revenge thine eyes....

Krishabaum has rightly pointed out : "That which has been weak and ineffective has been changed through the very fact of evil itself to something ethically aware and strong but not quite active to something ethically aware and strong but not quite active leadership." But we see Albany constantly growing and maturing. Henceforth, we find him involved in serious moral conflict. He is torn between his indignation at the monstrous wrong done to the King and the need for doing him justice and his patriotic duty to drive out the French troops which have landed on the British soil under Cordelia in support of the King."

The Albany, we meet in the last act has fully grown in stature. He now

acquires the strength which can deal with characters like Edmund :

Sir, by your patience,
I hold you but a subject of his war.
Not as a brother

"Like Regan and Goneril :

For your
Claim, fair sister"
I bar it' in the interest of my wife
Tis she is sub-contracted to this lord,
And I, her husband contradict your bans,
If you will marry, make your loves to me,
My lady is be spoken.

Throughout this scene he shows the qualities of self-possession, strength and confidence, irony and intellectual vigour. Thus it is in the fitness of design that at the end of the play he and Edgar have been left to perform the important task to reorder the world which lies in ruin, which, he with his nobility, firmness and tact, can discharge.

The weight of this sad time we must obey. So long as there are characters like Albany the world is not gloomy and sordid. Gonerils, Regans, Cornwalls and Edmunds remain ineffectual in the end. Those who left all vestiges of humanity to capture royalty, power and throne lie dead. It has rightly, suggested that the emergence of Albany as a person great in psychological strength, great in physical power, great in speech, great in piety and morality from a nonentity with which the play began, is enough to save King Lear from the charges of "pessimism".

Kent

The play opens with the speech of Kent. His speech involves a judgement, both on Albany and Lear. As the play proceeds we see that Kent is invariably right in his judgement. When Edmund is introduced to him, he comments, "I must love you and sue to know you better." As the scene unfolds itself we come to know of some other important traits of his character-his courage (moral as well as physical) his loyalty to Lear, his understanding of the character of others and his personal integrity. He reminds us somewhat of Gonzalo in *The Tempest*. No doubt, he is less polished than the Italian courtier, but stronger in character and equally philosophic and composed in endurance of adversity.

He knows that Lear is erring in the judgement of his daughters. He tries to warn him. When threatened, not to come between the "Dragon

and his wrath", he is not cowed down but dares the consequence, not on account of pride, but on account of his love of truth and love of his royal master, and his true concern for him. He knows that his conduct as a subject might be considered as insolent but the care to his master's well being is so great that he finds no alternative :

.....be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad
To plainness honour is bound,
When majesty falls to folly.

The violation of hierarchial propriety stems from his devotion. It is as true and sincere as is Cordelia's love for Lear. J.A. Barish and M. Waingraw point out : "Nevertheless his devotion presupposes an even more fundamental devotion to the truth, and it therefore serves only the truth in Lear-in "Royal Lear-and not the caprices of vanity or senility.

When Kent is banished he puts on a disguise and follows Lear as servant loyal and devoted as ever. He becomes his protector and tries to shield him from the insults that Goneril seeks to heap upon him through her steward, Oswald, having himself defied his master when he saw him doing wrong, Kent has nothing but contempt for the base servility of those like Oswald who are willing to obey the most evil commands of their masters: knowing nought, like dogs, out following."

It is the sight of Kent in stocks which shocks Lear into some kind of realisation in relation to Goneril and Regan. Lear cherishes the illusion after he has been humiliated by Goneril, Lear he will get better treatment from Regan. But the ill treatment Regan and Cornwall extend to Kent, makes Lear is highly conscious of the fact that he is now a creature to be treated with contempt. But in storm, unprotected, unguarded, Kent again comes to Lear's protection. He not only looks after him but also musters political support for him writing to Cordelia. His devotion is throughout selfless. His character is all a piece.

Some critics have questioned the dramatic utility of Kent being in disguise even after there was no need for him to continue doing so. In conjunction with the numerous disguises of Edgar, visual and audial it has been considered a dramatic device to portray the several faces of human goodness even at times, when evil seems to be rampant. When evil finally in the death of Goneril, Regan and Edmund seems to have come to a still Kent is invited by Albany to "Rule in this realm" Kent can no longer now serve the new masters, he must follow the old one on the final journey.

The Fool

Touchstone in *As You Like It* and Feste in *Twelfth Night* are the Fool's predecessors. The character of the Fool is Shakespeare's innovation. The Fool as a character represents two characters familiar to the Elizabethans the court-jester and the Fool or comic bufoon. The jester was a tactful man who was admitted to a position of peculiar intimacy and freedom of speech and enjoyed the perilous privilege of touching on his master's faults. The comic Bufoon was an interior being, whose duty was rather to amuse by ticks and grotesque nonsense. Verity states : "The Fool in *Lear* fulfils two functions corresponding with his two fold character. He emphasises the tragedy of events, and relieves it."

He emphasises tragedy because in his character as jester, he exposes the folly of his master's action and its consequences. He serves an agent of clarification prompting Lear towards recognition of bitter truth. He is "the voice of Lear's conscience reproaching him." When Lear cries, "Who is it that can tell me who I am ?" The fool answers, "Lear's shadow." In his jibes he enigmatically or satirically emphasises what Lear has done : "May not as ass know when the cart draws the horse ? Thou madest thy daughters thy mothers. Thou givest them the rod and put down thine own breaches." Through his songs, parables and riddles the Fool tries to make Lear aware of the contradictions which are inherent in his conditional abdication. If he has given up political power he must also give up the title of the king which need that power to sustain it. If his daughters are the rulers of the kingdom, he must also accept to be ruled by them in their homes and if he has surrendered the privilege of maintaining an independent household he must inevitably find himself among the houselots. As Ian Kott has rightly put it "In *King Lear*, it is the fool who 'deprives majesty of its sacredness."

But the Fool is neither heartless nor a cynic. Profound sorrow underlines his trusting witticism. In spite of the fact all his tags and snatches to Lear consist of prudential philosophy. The philosophy, which he himself follows is just the opposite. His conduct is inspired by the noblest of all philosophies-that of love, devotion and self-sacrifice. He follows Lear into the storm and suffers willingly such terrors to which it exposes him. He does so in order to comfort Lear, to outset his heart struck injuries. He forces himself to be more full of suffering than he used to be, and gives a slightly ribald touch to his wit by introducing veiled sexual allusions and innuendos. By closely relating the Fool's observations to Lear's present condition, Shakespeare saves them from becoming incongruous. The Fool's jests provide relief without really

taking the mind off from the tragic situation.

The Fool serves another dramatic function also. 'The Fool, we have seen is the most devoted, besides Kent, the follower to Lear. In Act II, Sc. iv, he addresses, the disguised Kent :

That Sir which serves and seeks for gain
And follows but for form
will pack when it begins to rain
And leave thee, -in the storm
But I will tarry; the Fool wilt stay.

Kent and Fool are explicitly linked with Cordelia. Kent, the Fool and Cordelia represent the same set of values. The Fool also mirrors the basic conflict of the play between the forces of Edmund and Edgar—those who are entirely motivated by self-interest and those who are inspired by self-less love. "Next to this folly the reason of Edmund becomes grotesque and absurd." Moreover, it is through his (the Fool's) helplessness that Lear loses his self-indulgent obsession. While the Fool shivers in the cold night, Lear for the first time recognises that he too has responsibilities in relation to others. That is why he invites Kent and the fool to enter the hovel before him. The gesture is accompanied by Lear's prayer for forgiveness to the "poor naked wretches" of whom he has taken too little care as king."

Considering the significance of the Fool's contribution to the regeneration of Lear, it is dramatically appropriate that Shakespeare should prepare the audience for him before he enters the stage. We know that he is the only important character who is not present in the opening scene. We first hear of him, before we actually meet him in Goneril's grumblings in Act-I, Sc. iii, against the unruly and riotous conduct of Lear's followers. Then in Act I, Sc. iv we see Lear shouting simultaneously for his dinner and his Fool. Where is my Fool ! I think the world's sleep. We come to know that since Cordelia is going to France "the Fool hath much pined away". Thus before we actually meet him, his relations with the important characters in the play have been firmly established in our mind. However, though absent from the opening scene, he fully grasps the implications of Lear's abdication. Dramatically, his function is to make Lear conscious of his folly, once that function is achieved, the Fool disappears from the scene in the third Act only. His place has been taken by Edgar the "philosopher" "You Sir, I entertain for one of my hundred."

Cordelia

The importance of Cordelia as a character in the play is much greater

than the duration of her presence on the stage. She makes a very brief appearance in the play. She appears only in four scenes and speaks merely 32 lines yet she leaves a powerful impact. As one critic has remarked : "Everything in her seems to lie beyond our view and affects us in a manner which we feel rather than perceive." She helps to focus the values at stake in the play. Her asides, in the opening love-test scene, seem to perform almost a choric purpose. They alert us to the falseness of the declarations by her sisters. Cordelia stands for all that is normal in humanity and agreeable to the moral sense. In contrast to her, Goneril and Regan appear so repellent that the imagination reverts continually.

Cordelia is presented at length in the opening scene. Her strength is shown at the outset. There may be an "indiscrete simplicity" as Hazlitt says, in her reluctance to gratify Lear's request, but it certainly requires a strong will and nerve to show such structure. There is a note of self-possession and insight into character in her curt dismissal of Burgundy. She makes a right and appropriate assessment of her sisters and acts accordingly, with foresight and practical sense. Everything about her shows that she has what one calls strength of character and capacity. Some critics believe that she along with Lear is the true architect of the tragedy. She in a way is responsible for the initial shock, which, like an engine, wrenched, turned all his love into gall, and makes him act in a rash manner which sets into motion the whole chain of events which culminates in their tragic death. Such critics accuse her of pride, ego and stubbornness. She is very much, they feel, a daughter of her father, Robert B. Heliman points out : "Yet Cordelia is more complex than some critics have been willing to admit, for there is in her some mixture of what Coleridge called sullenness, a recusance, a stubborn antipathy to disciplining, restricting action which involvement in the world makes inevitable. The unfettered personality may in some contexts be the right moral goal, but may lead to a narrow protection of self, it is not a moral substitute. Lear will not rule, and he will not accept the terms of speech imposed by experience. There is a clash of will, each combatant bent on self-protection. Lear's withdrawal ironically evokes Cordelia's withdrawal, the daughter springs from father. In this reading Cordelia becomes a part of the tragic substance rather than a mere innocent and pathetic victim of the forces clashing in the world."

Cordelia leaves her father more in sorrow than in anger. Between Act I and Act IV Sc. iii, when we hear about her from the Gentleman, she suffers terribly sharing on report; the agony of the suffering, humiliation and 'that rejection' of her father by her wicked sisters. She lands at Dover with French forces to right her father's wrongs.

Dramatically this interval between their next meeting was necessary. Both Lear and Cordelia needed to be further chastened of the residual dross of ego and pride, shame and personal hurt. No emotional barrier should not stand between them. The scene of their meeting is one of the most touching in the whole drama.

There is a deliberate attempt to present her return in terms of the advent of the spring to relieve the bleakness of winter. Her smile and tears are like "sunshine and rain at once." She herself prays that some magic herbs grow to remedy the distress of her father that some magic herbs grow to remedy the distress of her father.

All bless'd secrets

All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth.

Spring with my tears.

Associated with the regenerative power of spring is the restorative power of music, when Lear is to be awakened.

O you kind gods,

Cure this great breach in his abuse nature

Th' unturned and jarring senses, of the wind up
of the child-changed father.

As she had in opening scene tried to make Lear aware of the irrelevance of a legalist's bond to the relationship between parent and child, so now she rejects his attempt to define the relationship in terms of cause and effect. The basis of his thinking about this three daughters recalls the love test at the beginning of the play.

I know you do not love me, for your sisters

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong :

You have some cause, they have not,

Because he had given shares of the kingdom of Goneril and Regan, they owed him love by denying which they have done him wrong. Since Cordelia had refused to express her love in hyperbolic terms and had consequently been given nothing by him, he has no claims upon her. With her, "No cause, No cause" she gently but firmly insists that cold logic has nothing to do with the bond between them it is either unconditional or does not exist.

The question of Cordelia's death has perplexed the critics. Some allege that there is no poetic justice. The good as well as the bad die. G. Wilson Knight states : "To be hanged after the death of her enemies, in the midst of friends, is the last hideous joke of destiny. So is the fact that Lear is still alive and has recovered his sanity for this. The death of Cordelia is the last and most horrible of all the horrible

incongruities." They are others, however, who think her as a "Christ-like figure", symbol of truth and dying and suffering for humanity. Nevertheless, despite various interpretations, Cordelia's death remains enigmatic. Yet the overall impression of her character is expressed in Lear's own words when he called her "A soul in bliss, a spirit." There is in truth a something not of this world in her ethereal purity of love and self-sacrifice.

Goneril and Regan

Coleridge considered Goneril and Regan as representing "pure horror". In order to heighten the effect of horror, Shakespeare does not let them appear more often but when they are present, Coleridge says, "Not a sentiment, nor an image which can give pleasure on its own account, is admitted."

At their first appearance in the play these sisters give the impression of being fully prepared to flatter their father. It seems they had an advance information about what the king intends. The style of their speech is deliberately designed to be formal and rhetorical. Because of the complicity between the two sisters, the differences in their appearance and reality are often ignored.

Goneril is more formidable. Her eyes shine with the fierce burning light. Lear addresses her differently even in the scene. Goneril possesses ingenuity and a more scheming brain and can anticipate the events. She is quick in taking decisions which are always action-oriented. She does not tolerate opposition. She pursues all her plans unscrupulously. She not only initiates the action but also dominates the situations and persons. She is the one to send written instructions to Regan at each crisis. Even in the face of grave situations, she can preserve an unruffled indifference.

Regan, possesses a more feminine bearing. Lear calls her "dearest Regan" and applies the epithet "well-favoured". Regan though more cruel than Goneril has not her originality and sharpness. She catches up ideas quickly and echoes what others have said. She looks for support and "headful council." She lacks the capacity to take decisive action as her own responsibility and does not feel quite comfortable in the enormities, to which her sisters lead her. Regan in fact, gives one the impression of being just as evil-hearted as her sister and even more "Willing to wound", but intellectually inferior and without the conscienceless, iron-will which makes Goneril as terrible as some destructive force of Nature.

But Regan is more cruel than Goneril. To her purposeless infliction of pain is a positive joy, Goneril has a cause for grievance. There is a

method in her monstrosities, a purpose in them. King's clamours and ritous train of knights are the real irritant. To some extent, Goneril is justified also as they can really go against the norms of a well-run household. Once Goneril knows the cause and object of grievance nothing stands in her way to trample it under foot. But Regan has the petty lust of cruelty, the persecutor's satisfaction in seeing others suffer. She draws a sinister kind of pleasure in inflicting pain on Kent and Gloucester. Out of all his three daughters, Lear is most ignorant of Regan's character. He believes that Regan cannot "bandly nasty words." But she proves more foul mouthed than Goneril even.

Together these sisters aim at harming not only the kingdom of Lear but his total alienation and extinction Frye points out : "They are not revealed as evil until they separate him from what is felt of his society. The outcry made about their cruelty in cutting off his 'train' seems excessive first but is deeply rooted in the convention of the play. The act shows that, they do not merely 'seek his death' they seek rather his annihilation. To murder Lear, and thereby get the noisy old nuisance out of the way would show less malice than wipping out the society he commands and letting him go on living."

So long as they have a common objective, the sisters can "hit together" but when they become rivals for the love of Edmund, they are ruthless in relation to each other as they have been in relation to others. The most powerful comment on their obsession with lust comes from the mad Lear. Shakespeare uses his freedom as a dramatist to forge an imaginative link between the daughter's 'doing and the father's tirade' :

Down from the waist they are centaurs.

Though women all above.

But to the gridle do the gods inherit

Beneath is all the fiend's : there's hell there's darkness.

There is the sulphurous pit.

So lacking are Goneril and Regan in the ordinary feminine emotions that it seems impossible to consider them as normal women. It seems as if they are female forms assumed by the devil. They are several times associated with the source of all evil in Albany's remonstrance with Goneril :

She thyself, devil !

Proper deformity shows not in the friend

So horrid as in woman.

.....

However thou art a friend

A woman's shape doth shield thee

And in his reference to her as "This gilded serpent." The two who had united only for the purpose of destroying others ultimately turn against each other, their deaths, unlike that of Edmund, have no touch of redemption.

Cornwall

Cornwall more or less is an echo is his wife, Regan. But at some crucial moments in the play, his savagery stands unequalled. The first of these occurs when he puts Kent in stock knowing fully well that the king will not relish it. His behaviour is insolent to the extent of hurting the king and his attendants. Not only that he feels no gratitude of sense or obligation towards the king from the whom he has inherited half of kingdom. The close of Act II exposes Cornwall's savagery when he shuts up the doors of the castle and retreats into shelter and throws the king out into the storm. The innate sadism finds expression in the sense of exultation with which he supervises the blinding of Gloucester :

Bind fast his corky arms.

.....

Bind him, I say.

.....

To this chair blind him,

.....

Fellows, hold the chair,

Upon these eyes of thins I'll set my foot.

Out, vile jelly !

Where is thy lustre now.

Nemesis overtakes him as he stands drunk with power, confident that no one dare challenge anything he does.

His character, as Verity states, excites 'extreme disgust.....' For instance, his habit of heartless jesting, is itself a revelation of meanness and malice and cruelty. He has not even one redeeming merit, or hint of a merit unlike even the "smiling rogue" Oswald, who is at least a loyal servant.

Edmund

Edmund makes a fascinating study of the manner in which a misdirected intelligence can manipulate other human beings for its

own ends. He bears on him the marks of a "valiant storm". He possesses intellect, great resources and self-reliance. Fostered by his peculiar life, and is an able and brave soldier, a handsome and an attractive person, and in spite of all his evil-doing, he is not without instincts for doing good. But these instincts 'have been repressed, and the possibilities of a career within the moral law, marred, by one fatal flaw of his father, his illegitimacy.

When Gloucester introduces him to Kent, he, as Colreidge puts it "hears his mother and licentious levity." This is followed by the announcement that as in the preceding nine years he will again be sent away from court. Thus, a homeless outcast, he has never known the good influences and associations among which Edgar has grown up. As Verity puts it : "...all the evil in him must have been fostered by his existed upbringing." His soliloquy at the beginning of Act I is a powerful vent of his feelings of resentment borne out of his status as an outcast. "The plague of custom" denies him what he considers to be his due. He thus has roots neither in the society nor in the family. He has come to regard himself as the natural enemy of society and all its lies and obligations. There is in fact something impersonal about his wickedness. It is the "wild revenge" taken by the spirit of revolt against injustice.

I see the business

Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit

All meet that I can fashion fit.

Gloucester's attitude towards Edmund, shrewd understanding of the nature of his father and brother - "A credulous father and a brother noble-make it possible for his 'practices ride easy.'" "Thou nature, art my goddess." He is up against society and owes no allegiance to it. He decides to follow 'nature' with unbridled pursuit of his self-interest. Through cunning machinations, deceit and without least compunction, he follows his heartless philosophy and almost reaches the pinnacle of ambition. On the way to it he betrays his father, his brother reduces them to the extremes of penury, of misfortune, intrigues with Goneril and Regan, promising his love to both, conspires with Goneril against the life of her noble husband. Albany passes orders on the lives of Cordelia and Lear as he despatches them to prison. "He is", as one critic has remarked, "cynical, cold-blooded, cruel, treacherous, inhuman." A typical renaissance 'malcontent' he topples all established authority and traditional hierarchies of power.

In spite of his villainy and his close alignments with devil's party, Edmund never becomes despicable. Agreed, he does not have natural goodness and nobility of character but what he has been deprived of accounts for what he is.

Goneril and Regan have no access to what Edmund realises in the end. Moved by Edgar's forgiveness of the wrong, he has done him by the account of his father's death, and by the love for him, which prompts Goneril and Regan's destruction of each other, he determines to do some good despite his own nature. He tries to save Lear and Cordelia, but it is too late. Ultimately he realises that the total disregard of human law and custom has brought him illusory gains. But any last minute reversal of the inexorable consequences of human actions would have been contrary to the direction in which the play moves. The nature Edmund worships cannot be disowned so easily. Thus, Edgar remains to rule the kingdom, and the ambition of Edmund carries him to grave.

Suggested Questions

1. Critically analyse the statement that Lear's daughters are not his only enemies, but that even those who are devoted to him contribute to his troubles.
2. What role does Cordelia play in the action of *King Lear* as a play ?
3. How far is it correct to consider *King Lear* as a christian play ?

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : Dr. FAUSTUS

Life : Christopher Marlowe's name is one of the best known of all the Elizabethan dramatists, before the arrival of William Shakespeare. Like many other famous personalities of that distant period, the details of Marlowe's life are relatively unknown and some aspects of his life are decidedly shrouded in mystery. However, the persistent research of recent scholars has unearthed a few significant aspects which have hitherto remained unknown. It is known now, for instance, that Marlowe was born in 1564 in a middle class family of a shoemaker of Canterbury. He was the most educated in his family and managed to reach Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, on a scholarship.

When Marlowe qualified for his M.A. degree in 1587 there was some hesitation on the part of the university authorities to award him degree. They suspected him of having links with the Roman Catholics who at that time were regarded as enemies of the State. However, on the intervention of the highest authorities of the government, the university was persuaded to award him the degree. It is generally believed now that Marlowe had acted as a government spy in forging links with the Catholics.

Soon after his graduation, Marlowe renounced clergyship-the career for which he had been educated. Instead, he became a playwright and a free lance man of letters. From 1587 when he left Cambridge University to 1593 when he died at the age of 39, there are several dark areas in Marlowe's life about which modern reader knows nothing. From the various and often conflicting revelations made so far, the image of Marlowe that emerges is that of highly intellectual, iconoclastic, bold and fiery young man. He was extremely outspoken and often gave free expression to heretical and atheistical ideas. That he showed little reverence for Moses, Jesus Christ and the Bible has been gathered from the writings of several of his contemporaries. It is also alleged that he had homosexual tendencies. Perhaps the manner of his death – he was killed in a tavern fight after a drinking session with a few shady characters – is a proper finale of the life that was mysterious and tempestuous.

Works : In the last six years of his life, Marlowe produced a remarkable body of drama on which his present reputation mainly rests. Earlier, he

had written a play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (published in 1591) which T.S. Eliot has praised as a remarkable play, but which is strongly suspected of having been written with a collaborator.

It is believed that the collaborator was Thomas Nashe. His first major play, ***The Great Tamburlaine***, written in two parts, was first produced in the winter of 1587-88 and was an immediate success. The two parts of his play have been hailed as great work of art exhibiting unity of structure and thought. The play brings to light the character of an extraordinary man, the non-Christian, Tamburlaine, who for his brutality, ruthlessness and overweening pride wins admiration but at the same time is to be condemned and detested according to the moral Christian values of Marlowe's time. Marlowe, in spite of the doubts cast on him, is a didactic writer. In the character of Tamburlaine, Marlowe has shown that the achievements of an evil person may win him admiration, but ultimately this evil becomes the cause of his downfall. To the Elizabethan audience, there was never any doubt that Marlowe had written anything but highly didactic plays. Besides, ***Tamburlaine*** has several passages of strong passion and intensity which add a high poetic quality to Marlowe's work. The evidence of this poetic quality is to be seen in all of Marlowe's works including *Dr. Faustus*.

The Jew of Malta (performed in 1588) is built around the character of the Jew Barabas whose suffering in life, under pressures of a thoroughly corrupt and materialistic society, harden him into a monster who excels in ruthlessness and opportunism. Thus like Tamburlaine, Barabas fits in the pattern of the devil hero that is the hallmark of Marlowe's plays. *The Jew of Malta*, however, depicts evil and corruption not only in the hero but in the whole world. The monstrous hero and the morally rotten social environment are in perfect harmony with each other. The play has portions of great dramatic power and has been generally compared with Ben Jonson's *Volpone* for its biting irony and black humour.

Edward the Second, is a historical play that depicts the fall of King Edward II of England. Edward is shown as an unfit king who has homosexual relationships with his favourites. At the end of the play, he is overthrown and then murdered by his rival Mortimer who also forms a sexual liaison with Edward's queen. Critical views differ on whether the play is primarily about Edward's fall or Mortimer's rise (and ultimate fall). In either case, Marlowe continues to depict the world where meanness and evil are widespread. And sooner or later, the human being is engulfed by the all pervasive corruption. And the one factor that pushes man to destruction is his thirst for power. Tamburlaine, Barabas, Edward, Mortimer and Faustus are after power which destroys their humanity and turns them into evil and monstrous characters.

Before we come to *Dr. Faustus*, it is appropriate to mention that in addition to the works already mentioned, Marlowe wrote another play, *The Massacre at Paris* (acted in 1593) which is rather an insignificant play full of bloodshed and thunder. Another work of Marlowe that should be mentioned here is a long poem called, *Hero and Leander* (written in 1593). It is generally believed to be his last work, written only days before his death. It is said that Marlowe left this poem incomplete. George Chapman finished it after his death.

Marlowe's Place in Elizabethan Drama : As stated in the beginning of this lesson, Marlowe's position in Elizabethan drama is next only to that of Shakespeare. Actually, both the playwrights are contemporaries, with the difference that when Marlowe's plays had already taken him to the peak of his artistic maturity and fame, Shakespeare was still struggling with some of his earliest plays. Consequently, one importance of Marlowe that is easily recognised by critics is his impact on Shakespeare. Several parallels have been drawn between Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays to bring out the influence. *Dido* is supposed to have been reflected in *Antony and Cleopatra* and the parallels between Edward II and Shakespeare's *Richard II* are too obvious. Thus Marlowe's role is to be seen as a precursor of Shakespeare, one who paved the way for the greater playwright. Again, Marlowe's dramatic art is characterized by originality in both theme and style. The prologue to his play, *Tamburlaine* runs like this :

From Jigging veins of riming mother wits.
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war.
Where you shall hear the *Scythian Tamburlaine*,
Threatening the world with high astounding terms.
And scouring kingdoms with his conquering sword.

It is obvious from the above lines that Marlowe was reacting against the stage conventions of his day which he found to be clownish. The playwrights who still wrote within the narrow limits of time were contemptuously called "riming mother wits." In response, he advocated blank verse, which though already practised by some of his contemporaries, became a very effective and supple medium of dramatic expression in his hands. Marlowe's contribution to the blank verse was to make things easier for Shakespeare. Further as can be seen from the last two lines quoted above, Marlowe created in his drama a new concept of the tragic hero. The tragic protagonist was to be a larger than life, extraordinary man. He was to be a villain hero and his downfall was to be regarded as the tragedy of ambition.

Another way of recognising Marlowe's tragic art is to say that it was in consonance with the spirit of the Renaissance. For his secular views, unconventional morality and restlessness, Marlowe himself is a complete product of the Renaissance in every sense of the term. And like the author, his characters too display the Renaissance spirit — they have ambition, a hankering after adventure and power and desperate spirit that is unsatisfied with small achievements. Thus, whereas Marlowe's life and work reflect the major characteristics of the Renaissance, he is ahead of his times in being an innovator and a trend-setter in both style and subject matter.

Introduction to Doctor Faustus : Almost all the scholars approach *Dr. Faustus* by discussing three important aspects of the play—its date, authorship and the real text. An earlier view is that *Dr. Faustus* had been written in 1588, soon after, *Tamburlaine*. But now the prevailing view is that 1592 is the date of its authorship. Again a particular school of critics believes that Marlowe is not the sole author of the play; he had a collaborator. It is believed that the comic scenes and the old man's speeches are the work of another hand. The name of Thomas Nashe and Samuel Rowley are mentioned in this connection. What has contributed to the confusion is the existence of two very different texts of the play, both of them claimed by critics as original. One published in 1604 (commonly called A text), is shorter and is without several of the comic scenes. The 1st edition of the play (called B text) is longer and generally regarded to be more authentic. However, the controversy about these aspects of the play still goes on. It may be mentioned here that lengthy discussions about the date, authorship or the text are of interest mainly to the research scholar, to an average reader these matters are of very little interest.

Source : Johannes Faustus was a real man who lived in Germany in the early 16th century. Even during his life time, he became a famous magician, and after his death some stories of the supernatural began to be associated with his name. By 1587 A.D. 'the name Faustus had acquired mythical dimensions and someone in Germany in that year actually wrote down the history of "John Faustus". The book was very popular and was soon after anonymously translated into English and was called *Damnable Life*. By all accounts, this *Damnable Life*, served as a source for Marlowe's play. Thus, the story of Faustus, was well known in England when Marlowe's play made its appearance. Consequently, the appeal of the play lies not in its story, but in the unusual treatment it received from the author.

Story : In brief, the story of Marlowe's play is about this Faustus, a German scholar of theology, law and medicine, who has already earned a great reputation. But he is bored as he reaches the limits beyond which he cannot push his studies. So he begins to learn magic which he hopes will

not only add vastly to his knowledge, but will also help him gain immense power. Although he has rather hazy idea of what he would do with this power he means to have a good time and also play the good Samaritan occasionally. So while the two German magicians, Valdes and Cornelius are giving him final lessons on sorcery, the Bad Angel and the Good Angel appear. Of course, the Good Angel warns Faustus of the danger of forgetting Christ and God, whereas the Bad Angel reminds him of the power and glory which lie ahead. These two creatures, who are the stage representation of the split nature of Faustus's conscience make several appearances during the play and their significance is to be discussed in a different context. The scholar friends of Faustus express their concern when they are informed by his servant, Wagner of the liaison of his master with the magicians.

In the meantime, in answer to Faustus's incantation, Lucifer (Satan) and his deputy Mephistophilis appear. Through Mephistophilis, Faustus strikes a deal with Lucifer according to which Faustus will surrender his soul to Lucifer after twenty four years, but for that duration Lucifer must fulfil every desire of Faustus. Whatever he wants will be granted and Faustus will enjoy unlimited power, knowledge and wealth. The bargain is struck when Faustus writes and seals it in his own blood. In return, Mephistophilis is assigned on permanent duty with Faustus to look after his needs.

Faustus begins by acquiring knowledge of both the temporal and the spiritual world. Then he is introduced to the Seven Deadly Sins. Next, Faustus goes on his travels around the world to solve more mysteries of Nature and then arrives at Rome where Pope Adrian is holding his court for the trial of one Burno who had challenged the Pope's authority. At first, by posing as two holy Cardinals, Faustus and Mephistophilis confound the Pope and his companion and then Faustus becomes invisible and plays havoc at the Pope's feast. In the scene meant for comic effect, Faustus even beats up the Pope who howls and screams with fear.

As Faustus has won more fame for his travels and his learning, he is invited to the court of Charles, the German Emperor. There Faustus entertains the Emperor by conjuring up the spirits of Alexander and Darius. Next, he turns Benvolio, an insolent lord, into a stag. Later Benvolio, and his friends try to kill Faustus, but he again punishes them by turning them into various animals. In several other scenes, Faustus's marvellous powers are demonstrated. Often he has fun at the expense of stupid or cunning persons.

By now, Faustus is reaching the end of his twenty-four years. As he stares into the fires of imminent hell, the torment of his soul grows, a mysterious

old Man appears and reminds Faustus of what he has lost— his chance for redemption under God's mercy. And before the last hour strikes, Faustus has one final wish. He wants to see and enjoy Helen, the most beautiful woman that the world has known. This wish is also fulfilled. Finally, in a scene of great mental torture and soul's agony, Faustus's soul is taken away by Lucifer and his friends. The story ends with the obvious moral that the choice of wrong path brought ruin on Faustus.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q. Which is Marlowe's first important play ? What is its theme ?

Ans. *Tamburlaine* was the first major play written by Marlowe. It was written in two parts—*Tamburlaine, Part-I* and *Tamburlaine, Part-II*. The two parts of the play have been considered great work of art. The play portrays the character of Tamburlaine and contains the theme of hero-worship. The hero Tamburlaine wins our applause for his extra-ordinary courage, spirit of adventure and overweening pride. However, his brutality and ruthlessness and his cruel behaviour towards the fellow kings and emperors is detestable. He majestically sits on the chariot and asks the kings and emperors to drive his chariot like horses. Towards the end when he challenges the Prophet Mohammad to save the Muslim kings who are going to be his victims, Tamburlaine catches fever and falls down dead in the battlefield. The play contains the theme—Pride hath a fall. Marlowe reveals to us that an evil person may prosper for sometime, but ultimately this evil becomes the cause of his downfall.

Q. In what respect has Marlowe influenced Shakespeare ?

Ans. Shakespeare and Marlowe are contemporary dramatists of Elizabethan age. When Shakespeare was still writing his earlier plays, Marlowe had already finished his plays and established his reputation as a dramatist. Marlowe is thus a predecessor of Shakespeare. The critics have observed that Marlowe had an impact on Shakespeare; the latter was greatly influenced by Marlowe's use of blank verse in drama. Marlowe was also the first dramatist in the Elizabethan age who introduced poetry in drama. Shakespeare was influenced by Marlowe's introduction of poetry as it was an innovation in the field of drama. Shakespeare liked Marlowe because the latter broke all the stage conventions like the unity of place and action and produced a unique drama.

Q. Discuss in brief Marlowe's contribution to Elizabethan drama.

Ans. Marlowe's contemporary dramatists such as Thomas Nashe, Samuel Rowley, Lily and others were writing dramas within the stage conventions. They strictly maintained the unity of place, time and action in drama. Marlowe broke away from all these conventions and produced a unique drama. He introduced blank verse in the drama and it was his greatest contribution to

the development of Elizabethan drama. Marlowe's blank verse was later very much liked by Shakespeare.

Q. Write a brief note on Marlovian heroes.

Ans. Marlovian heroes are essentially extraordinary characters. They follow the principle, that "Nature teaches us to have aspiring mind." They are very ambitious and aspire to perform great feats. They have the spirit of adventure and perform wonderful deeds. Tamburlaine, who is an ordinary shepherd in the beginning, fights several battles and becomes the mighty emperor of the world. Mortimer, who is very ambitious, dethrones King Edward II and himself occupies the throne in the play, *Edward II*. Doctor Faustus enters into an unholy alliance with the Devil and enjoys great power on the earth. Marlovian heroes are essentially evil characters. Tamburlaine, Barabas, Mortimer and Faustus, all are evil characters, though they win the admiration of audience by their wonderful deeds.

Q. What is the difference between Shakespearean heroes and Marlovian heroes ?

Ans. Shakespearean heroes are basically noble characters, though there are few exceptions. King Lear, Hamlet, Caesar, and Othello are noble characters. Marlovian heroes, on the other hand, are evil characters. Shakespearean heroes commit crimes but they are full of repentance and seek redemption towards the end of the play. Marlowe's heroes on the other hand, never repent, except Faustus who repents for a few moments, without any dramatic effect. Though Marlovian heroes do not repent, they, like Shakespearean heroes win sympathy and admiration of the audience. Shakespearean protagonists develop a sense of tragic reconciliation with their destiny while Marlovian heroes die, unreconciled to their Fate.

**CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : Dr. FAUSTUS
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEXT**

**(Note : The text used for critical study is : Doctor Faustus, edited
by John D. Jump, M/s Methuen and Co. Ltd., London)**

Doctor Faustus consists of twenty scenes loosely strung together. In addition to these, the Chorus makes four appearances : in the Prologue, after the seventh scene, again after the tenth scene and in the Epilogue. It is also believed that scenes, particularly those dealing with the Horse-Courser episode are later additions, being the work of another hand. Consequently, the play in its present form is an amazing product which, in spite of its diverse constituents, holds marvellously together. Even though the plot is episodic, the reader is hardly made aware of the absence of design in the organisation of material. What lends continuity or consistency to the plot is the development of a single action that of the fall and the inevitable damnation of Faustus. What is being suggested here is that Marlowe is quite unlike Shakespeare who generally devoted more attention to the craft and the structure of his plays. Still, Marlowe's play is rather poetically conceived and in its present form does not suffer in its impact even though it is without the benefits of an organic structure.

The Chorus is a dramatic device which was fast disappearing during the Elizabethan period. Originally, the Chorus was a part of Greek drama where besides functioning as narrator, it fulfilled many other theatrical and dramatic requirements. In Greek drama, the Chorus consisted of a group of men or women who occasionally danced and sang formal odes, highlighting the importance of the Divine 'will' against human endeavour. However, in Marlowe's play, the role of the Chorus is quite limited, it is mostly that of providing narrative to fill the gaps in the dramatic presentation.

The Prologue : Here the Chorus informs us of Faustus's childhood, schooling, and his scholarship. It also states what is generally regarded as a simple but very suitable description of Faustus's problem :

Till, swollen with cunning of a self-conceit,

His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting heavens conspired his overthrow ;

Faustus's story, the Chorus informs us, is a typical case of man who suffers the consequences of his own pride and arrogance born of knowledge. To illustrate this, Marlowe employs, rather implicitly, the imagery of the Greek legend of Icarus who was a familiar Elizabethan symbol of self-destructive ambition. Icarus, in the Greek mythology flew too high and too close to the sun when his father gave him wings made of wax. But the wings melted and Icarus fell to his death. In this sense, Faustus is also an over-reacher whose fall is inevitable. So even before the play starts, the Chorus has prepared us for the end.

The first scene depicts Faustus in his study, debating with himself the limitations of Medicine, Law, Divinity—the subjects which he has already mastered. He finds no great satisfaction in any further pursuit of them. Medicine reminds him of a limitation that although he can restore health to another man, he has no control over the cycle of birth and death. Similarly Law is uninspiring and deals with 'external trash'. Divinity reminds him too much of sin and death. The only subject which excites him now is magic which will open to him a "world of profit and delight, of power, honour of omnipotence". It is obvious that Faustus has rather mixed-up ideals of what he wishes to achieve through magic. However, two things for the present make a strong appeal to his imagination—unlimited knowledge and power. His desire for knowledge, unlike that of Socrates, is not for truth, but for the sake of power. And his power would be superhuman—the power over life and death. And Faustus is elated to think that the possession of these will raise him to the level of a god.

"A sound magician is a demigod", he declares. His sin is therefore, Satanic. Just as Satan had challenged God's authority, Faustus is attempting to subvert God's kingdom by assuming heavenly powers. A little later, the Bad Angel puts it in a more forth-right manner : "Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky, Lord and commander of these elements." After the departure of the Angels, Faustus bursts out into a megalomaniac speech, expressing his plans to acquire wealth, power, knowledge. Whereas he would learn everything about strange philosophy, he would also have a wall of brass up all around Germany. In lines 81-96 of scene I, Faustus lets his imagination run wild with anticipation of the fruits of magic that he is going to enjoy. The first scene ends with Faustus's declaration, supported by fellow magicians, Valdes and Cornelius, that their future will be served by magic. A few words may be added here on the appearance of the two angels. Up to scene vi, the angels make four quick appearances which correspond with the time of Faustus's early flirtation with Lucifer. It is a phase of Faustus's

life when there is still scope for his turning back. The Good and Bad Angels are stage representations of Faustus's inner conflict between good and evil. But this is only an obvious psychological explanation and it helps to draw our attention to Faustus's mental anguish that surfaces more clearly in the later scenes. We should not forget that Marlowe or his audience had not the slightest doubt about the actual existence of such spirits. From scene vi to scene xvii, the Angels disappear completely, to correspond with Faustus's total submission to the influence of Lucifer. Their last and crucial appearance is in the middle of scene xix when only one hour of Faustus's life is left. But the importance of that visit should perhaps be more appropriately discussed in its proper context. In general, the two Angels help bring out a sharper dramatic clarity of the religious theme; bring into clear focus the contrasting images of Faustus's alternative and strengthen the impression of Faustus's free choice and responsibility in his own actions.

In scene ii, the two scholars are informed by Faustus's servant, Wagner, of his master's recent alliance with the magicians. The scholars, besides providing Chorus type commentary on Faustus's fate, also stand for the normal, healthy scholarship which Faustus has now abandoned. They also represent Faustus's only contact with humanity which he serves in this scene. The scholars will appear again at the end of the play to discover Faustus's body and lament his death.

It is in scene iii, that Faustus conjures, after his Latin incantations of magic, the spirit of Mephistophilis (also spelled as Mephostophilis). His conversation with Mephistophilis is quite revealing in that it sets up a very exact and unambiguous relationship between Faustus and Satan. Faustus seemed to be under the impression that merely by learning to exercise the proper words of magic, he could achieve unlimited power. So when Mephistophilis appears Faustus orders him thus :

I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,
To do whatever Faustus shall command,

But he soon discovers that the powerful Mephistophilis takes his orders only from Lucifer. To Faustus's question as to why he has then come, Mephistophilis replies :

For when we hear one rack the name of God,
Abjure the scriptures and his saviour Christ,
We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul.

In a statement that leaves us in no doubt about Faustus' complicity in his fate, he declares that he is ready and eligible for Lucifer's favours as he has dedicated himself entirely to Beelzebub. In this present mood,

This word 'damnation' terrifies not him,
For he confounds hell in Elysium :

These lines not only show that Faustus is eager to strike any bargain with the Devil, they also reveal his extraordinary interest in hell. There are usually two notions prevalent in Western literature; one is the picture of hell as a physical reality, a place full of fire, smoke and brimstone. The other is the notion of hell as condition of the human spirit which can engulf him at any time or at any place. So far Faustus seems to think of hell as far off reality which does not concern him immediately. Mephistophilis, on the other hand, strives to penetrate Faustus's consciousness by talking of hell as a condition of the mind or the spirit of man. One of the few resolutions of the play, at the end, is the convergence of these two notions of hell in Faustus's mind. When Faustus questions Mephistophilis as to how Lucifer came to be thrown into hell and further how Mephistophilis came out of hell, as he has now, the latter replies :

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

The famous passage clearly broadens the meaning of the hell, from being a place of physical reality to spiritual condition, but the significance is lost for Faustus at least for the time being. In his arrogance, he chides Mephistophilis for advising him against the frivolous ambitions. Even though Mephistophilis has warned him through various means, Faustus obstinately refuses to recognise his sins. So riding his horse of ambition, he commands Mephistophilis to convey to Lucifer his proposal of a bargain for unlimited power and enjoyment in return for surrendering his soul after twenty four years. The scene ends with lines expressing Faustus's wildest dreams :

Had I as many souls as there be stars,
I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.
By him I'll be great emperor of the world,
And make a bridge through the moving air.

What is established here beyond doubt is Faustus's own responsibility in his choice of evil and its consequences. Even Mephistophilis's warning is brushed aside as Faustus is carried away by fantasies of glory and power. Of course, Faustus's speeches, as common in all of Marlowe's heroes are highly imaginative and lend poetic grandeur to what is obviously a devilish purpose.

The next scene (iv) is obviously a parody of the previous scene. Faustus's servant, Wagner gets hold of a clown named Robin and by giving him some money, forces him to become a bonded servant for seven years. When Robin remonstrates, Wagner conjures up two devils to threaten him. Robin, as expected, runs up and down the stage howling with fright. Besides making caricature of the bargain with Satan, the scene which follows, this comic sub-plot provides an interlude that brings about a much needed release of tension. It also creates the impression of the widespread nature of disorder that comes with Faustus's evil. The bonded slavery of Robin is a ramification of Faustus's slavery to Satan. The kind of evil that Faustus has generated does not remain isolated, it gets disseminated into the lives of smaller characters.

Scene v opens on a rather unexpected note. The previous resoluteness of Faustus is shaken and for the first time we see clear evidence of a deep internal struggle that shakes his inner being. In the first fifteen lines, Faustus realizes with great anguish that his soul is on the point of being lost forever to the devil.

Why waver'st thou ? O; something soundeth in mine ears,

'Abjure the magic, turn to God again !

Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.

To God ? He loves thee not;

The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite.

This inner debate, of which Shakespeare was to make such a successful use in this tragic characters, is an innovation in the Renaissance drama to which Marlowe's contribution has been a significant one. The dialogue with self, at once makes Faustus a complex and a tragic being whose human frailty is recognisable in terms of our own experience. To make sure that the dramatic impact of this situation is not lost on anyone, Marlowe makes the two Angels appear to carry on the debate at a more objective level.

However, Faustus now hurriedly summons Mephistophilis only to be informed that Lucifer demands the contract of the soul to be written in Faustus's own blood. To Faustus's question as to why the devil so tempts the human beings, Mephistophilis's answer is significant : the devil tempts others because "to the unhappy, it is a comfort to have, companions in misfortune." No false hopes are offered here. On the other hand, the stark honesty of Mephistophilis only stresses the importance of Faustus's free-choice in earning his damnation. In a scene of strong dramatic impact, Faustus cuts open his arm to use his blood for signing the contract. As a further warning of the unnaturalness of his act, Faustus's blood congeals. The rebellion of the blood against the deed indicates the Christian faith in

the basic goodness of man whose self-will and actions are causes of his evil. Appropriately then, Mephistophilis has to bring fire from hell to unfreeze Faustus's blood so that the contract may be written. And Faustus concludes the writing with the words, *consummatum*—it is finished—ironically using Christ's last words on the cross. Suddenly, at this point, a strange inscription appears on Faustus's arm. It says *Homo fuge*—Fly, O man!—and causes a deep turbulence in Faustus's soul :

Homo fuge! Whither should I fly ?
 If unto God he'll throw me down to hell,
 My senses are deceived, here's nothing writ,
 O yes, I see it plain; even here is writ,
Homo fuge! Yet shall not Faustus fly.

So dejected is Faustus that Mephistophilis has to summon the devils and spirits dressed as clowns to cheer up Faustus's spirit.

Faustus now reads aloud the contract before he hands it over to Mephistophilis. The scene, one of the most important in the play, reaches its high point of drama in his reading. However, before it ends, two more things happen, first Faustus questions Mephistophilis probingly about hell, once again displaying a rather academic interest in the subject. Mephistophilis's reply only elaborates his earlier comment (sc .iv) on hell. "Hell hath no limits." Rather than being a far off place of actual existence, hell is a condition of the spirit—the spirit in anguish of which Mephistophilis is a living example. So "Where we are is hell." And since Faustus's mind is preoccupied with the gains of his recent contract, he rationalizes the fear of hell by saying that he enjoys sleeping, eating, and working and if all this is available in hell, then he would rather be in hell than anywhere else. There is a full evidence here that Faustus as earlier, refuses to take hell seriously. One of the important progression in the play is Faustus's jocular treatment of hell to his total and painful awareness of it. The second event is that Mephistophilis conjures up a consort for Faustus and gives a magic book whereby he may learn to procure for himself anything. Faustus now completely belongs to the Devil's party.

Critics have pointed out that no sooner has Faustus signed the contract, it is broken by Mephistophilis on two points; First, when Faustus demands a wife, marriage being a Christian institute, Mephistophilis only brings him devil dressed as woman for his pleasure. Secondly, to Faustus's question, "Who made the world" Mephistophilis refuses to give an answer. This situation is an indication of things to come when Lucifer gradually tightens his control over Faustus.

Scene vi brings the first set of repentance in which Faustus curses

Mephistophilis for his damnation. Faustus's love-hate relationship with Mephistophilis thus comes to the surface during moments of his awareness of loss. Mephistophilis's reply once again reinforces the apparent theme that Faustus is not a victim of any manipulation, but is entirely responsible for his condition. Faustus's remorse once again brings forth the two Angels who carry on the now familiar debate between sin and repentance. Faustus's speech from lines 18 to 37 is one of those memorable passages in Marlow's plays which are known for their imaginative and poetic excellence. Faustus describes his inner torture and suffering at the price he is paying for his pleasure :

Scarce can I name salvation, faith or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
"Faustus, thou art damned!" Then guns and knives,
Swords, poison, halters and venom'd steel
Are laid before me to dispatch myself ;.....

Still , he can turn his attention to the compensating pleasure he has earned in the bargain. The very thought of this pleasure is enough to spur him on to fulfil his contract with the devil and not repent:

Have not I made blind Homer sigh to me
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death ?
And, hath not he, that build the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistophilis ?

It is vacillation of this type as shown in the two passages quoted above that makes Faustus a human being. His suffering, his self-reproach, his moments of doubt, his inner anguish on the one hand; and his vast ambition, his bravado, his imaginative dream of power and pleasure on the other hand, make him a real but a complex character. Also in many ways, Faustus is a creature of paradoxes. And one recurring paradox is the mixture of delicate sensibility and vulgar grossness in his personality. Whereas there are numerous scenes which serve as evidence of his grossness, passages such as quoted above prove him to be the creature of cultured sophisticated taste. He has used his magical powers to hear the wonderful voice of the famous Greek poet, Homer who has sung to him of the lives of the great lovers, Alexander and Paris (Oenon). Then, Amphion, the Greek legendary musician, the magical power of whose harp moved the stones of their own accord to build the walls of the city of Thebes, has also regaled him (Faustus) with his extraordinary music. Are such rare pleasures not worth the price of his soul, asks Faustus ?

Next begins the questioning of Mephistophilis regarding the secrets of 'divine

astrology'. Faustus is disappointed to learn that Mephistophilis has nothing very new or startling to add to the knowledge he already possesses. Then comes the crucial question: "now tell me, who made the world"? And Mephistophilis's refusal to answer the question throws Faustus into a fit of anger and depression. There is evidence here that Mephistophilis who was under contract to serve Faustus in every way, has begun to dictate and control the latter's life. He warns Faustus against asking such questions and reminds him to think only of hell as he is damned. In a short period, Faustus who was set to be master of the world, has himself become a slave. In the very brief interval in which Mephistophilis departs to fetch Lucifer, Faustus breaks into a genuine cry of distress when he says :

O Christ, my saviour, my saviour,

Help to save distressed Faustus's soul.

Lucifer and his companion, Beelzebub warn Faustus that by involving Christ he is violating his contract. Faustus is, at once, cowed and promises to behave in future. This is a far cry from his earlier dreams of doing freely whatever he wanted to do. It only shows how effectively he has been sold over to the devil. If the play is a story of Faustus's assertion of independence from God, it is also a record of Faustus's struggle against the devil for the preservation of his freedom. Of course, such a struggle is essential in view of the contract he has signed.

To bring some cheer to Faustus's depressed mood, Lucifer now conjures the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery. The parade of the Seven Deadly Sins, besides being an obvious moral satire, is meant to be a sort of ritual—a rite of initiation—to induct Faustus into the ways of the devil. He himself provides a clue to the function of this scene when he declares that the sight "will be as pleasant to me as paradise was to Adam on the first day of his creation." The correspondence with Adam's innocence only heightens Faustus's villainy by contrast and makes his speech ironical. At the end of the show, Lucifer promises more delights. Faustus, who is now completely subjugated by Lucifer, promises to behave himself.

The seventh scene is another comic interlude that provides an ironic and parodic commentary of Faustus's life. It depicts the clown Robin, who has left Wagner's service and has stolen one of Faustus's magic books to play his magical tricks with Dick. The purpose, as in scene iv is to make us aware of the slow but continuous dissemination of Faustus's evil. The scenes of trickery, slapstick and horse-play present in visual terms the reality of Faustus's bargain with the devil. The comic action merely illustrates the ironic contrast between Faustus's original dream and his actual accomplishment. The scene ends with the Chorus telling us of Faustus's travels in pursuit of the pleasure and knowledge.

There follows, in the description of the Chorus and also in Faustus's own narration of his travels, some of the most colourful and exotic poetry of this play. According to the Chorus, Faustus first climbed the fabled Mount Olympus and then riding his chariot drawn by magical dragons, he toured the clouds, the planets and the stars. Faustus himself tells us in passage of powerful visual appeal, that he has already visited the stately town with walls of flint and deep entrenched lakes; then witnessing Paris he viewed the river Main fall into Rhine; and finally passed through the gorgeous building of Naples. Some other beautiful cities of Italy—like Venice and Padua are mentioned. Then in a long passage, Mephistophilis describes the splendours of Rome; the seven hills, the flowing river, Timber, the four stately bridges and the double cannons that guard the castle. Actually there is much more. The purpose of these passages is to provide pure pleasure in the imaginative creation of what would normally be scenes of great visual beauty. This kind of documentary technique must have left Marlowe's audience gaping with wonder and praise.

SHORT-ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q. What is the significance of Icarus in the play ?

Ans. The Greek Legend of Icarus was popular in Elizabethan age. The imagery has also been used by the Marlowe to highlight the character of the hero Faustus. Icarus in Greek mythology flew too high and too close to the sun when his father gave him wings made of wax. But the wings melted with the heat of the Sun and Icarus fell to his death. In this sense, Faustus is also an over-reacher whose fall is inevitable. Faustus is a victim of overweening ambition. Like Icarus, he wants to soar high. He visualizes the world of profit, power, honour and omnipotence. He wants to control the wind and clouds. He wishes to raise the dead to life again. In brief, he wishes to be powerful like God. However, like Icarus, Faustus falls down as he is put to eternal damnation in the end.

Q. Discuss Marlowe's concept of Hell.

Ans. Marlowe depicts two notions of Hell in *Doctor Faustus*—One is the picture of hell as a physical reality, a place full of fire, smoke and physical suffering. The other is the condition of mind and attitude to life. Faustus thinks of hell as a far-off physical reality which exists far away from this earth. Mephistophilis, on the other hand, considers hell as a condition of the mind or the spirit of man, At the end of the play, however, both these ideas of hell are dawned upon him. Faustus feels the terrors of hell at the psychological level and undergoes mental agony. His anguish portrayed in scene xix amply demonstrates that he has been deprived of eternal bliss that he might have enjoyed if he had not made an agreement with the Devil.

Q. Why does Faustus want to have his control over the cycle of birth and death ?

Ans. Faustus is full of pride and arrogance. He feels dissatisfied with all the branches of learning. He is ambitious and over-reacher. He aspires to enjoy unlimited power on this earth. He craves for a world of "honour, power and omnipotence." He has saved thousands of men from plague, but his grievance is that he is just an ordinary man. He wishes to become a superman as he wants to have control over the cycle of birth and death.

He wants to make men live eternally and wishes to raise the dead to life again. He raises the spirit of Alexander and his paramour. Likewise, he raises the dead Helen to life again with the power of magic. Douglas Cole says that Faustus's intentions represent usurpation upon God. Faustus wishes to have a control over life and death and become as omnipotent as God.

Q. Why is Faustus's sin considered Satanic ?

Ans. Faustus's sin is Satanic. Just as Satan had challenged God's authority, so does Faustus attempt to subvert God's kingdom by assuming heavenly powers. Faustus behaves like a Satan. Like Satan, he wishes to snatch power from God. Like Satan, Faustus is insolent and proud. Faustus makes an alliance with the magicians and wishes to exercise the black magic in order to acquire more powers on this earth. Faustus belongs to the Devil's party. He build an altar to Beelzebub and is prepared to offer him the lukewarm blood of new born babes. Above all he makes an alliance with the Devil and sells him his soul that God had given him as a pledge. All the deeds of Faustus are Satanic.

Q. What is the significance of the Good and the Bad Angels in the play ?

Ans. The Good and the Bad Angels play a significant role in the development of action in the play. They appear in scene ii as Faustus shows his willingness to pursue black magic. He thinks that a sound magician is a demi-god. The angels continue to appear repeatedly up to scene vi. The good and the bad angels are stage representations of Faustus's inner conflict between good and evil. They signify the spiritual combat waging in Faustus's soul. The Bad Angel advises Faustus to become as powerful as Jove is in the sky while the Good Angel advises Faustus to avoid incurring the heavy wrath of God. Again the Bad Angel prompts Faustus to enter into alliance with the Devil but the Good Angel advises him to repent and love God, because the alliance with the Devil would mean a defiance of God.

**CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : Dr. FAUSTUS
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEXT (CONTD.)**

(Scene viii)

After having visited many wonderful places all round the world, Faustus's travels now bring Mephistophilis and him to Rome where the Pope is holding a feast to celebrate St. Peter's Day. In an essentially comic scene, Faustus plans with Mephistophilis's help a rather weird entertainment for himself.

By cunning in thine art to cross the Pope
Or dash the pride of this solemnity,
To make his monks and abbots stand like apes,
And point like antics at his triple crown.

Faustus's clowning at the expense of the Pope must have been highly pleasing for the English audience of Marlowe's own time when the schism between the Catholic and the Protestant churches had freed England from the influence and control of the Pope. The actual scene which Faustus barges into is one that shows the proud Pope Adrian holding trial of a rival Bruno who now stands as a prisoner in the court. In the long discourse with Bruno, the Pope claims to hold the degree for all power on earth. In the light of this claim, Faustus's manhandling of the Pope demonstrated too well to the Elizabethan audience that the Pope's position was weaker than even that of the devil's. It is in the next scene (Scene ix) Faustus begins to foul up the solemn feast and ridicule the helpless Pope. He frees Bruno by a stratagem and both Faustus and Mephistophilis become invisible and snatch up food from the Pope's table. When the Pope crosses himself, Faustus beats him up. The riotous pranks of Faustus and the frightened howling of the Pope and the friars make it quite a hilarious scene.

The comedy continues into scene x where the clowns Robin and Dick, having stolen a cup from the tavern, play tricks with the wine-seller and then to frighten him conjure Mephistophilis who curses them for their senseless clowning. Marlowe once again employs comic parody as a sort of shadow play to focus attention on Faustus's doings. In scene xi, Faustus is at the court of the Emperor Charles who is one of the numerous admirers of the famous scholar. From here on, in scenes xi to xiv, is depicted the

Benvolio episode. Benvolio, a heady and arrogant nobleman at the court, insults Faustus with disbelief and contempt when the latter is busy conjuring the spirits of Alexander the Great and his paramour. When the show is over, Faustus plants two horns on Benvolio's head to punish him. Benvolio had boasted that if Faustus could conjure Alexander, he (Benvolio) would become Actaeon. (In Greek mythology, Actaeon intruded upon the goddess Diana and her friends while they were bathing. The goddess turned him into a stag to punish him.) On the Emperor's intervention, however, Faustus removes Benvolio's horns. Later, Benvolio and his friends, to avenge the insult, waylay Faustus and try to kill him. Faustus has them beaten as severely by the devils and plants horns on their heads. To escape ridicule, Benvolio and his friends retire to a lonely castle "till time shall alter these our brutish shapes". Thus ends the episode which only shows the degradation of Faustus who had set out to attain external knowledge but is now content to play the court jester and gets mixed up in common brawls.

The next three scenes from xv to xvii, show this drift even further. Faustus is shown cheating like a common crook by selling a horse to Horse-courser. But when the man rides his horse through water, it disappears-being it was only a magical creature. The Horse-Courser returns and attacks the sleeping Faustus and goes away thinking that he has cut off one of Faustus's legs. Quite unexpectedly, before falling asleep Faustus has suddenly reminded himself that his time is running short. It is after a long break that remorse reappears in Faustus's speech. His anguish and pain have become sharper since last we had evidence of it :

What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemn'd to die ?

The fatal time draws to a final end;

Despair doth drive distrust into my thoughts.

This, however, is a very brief intrusion into Faustus's privacy, because there immediately follows a scene with the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt whom Faustus entertains by building a castle in the air and by bringing fresh grapes from the other hemispheres. These are cheap tricks and the arrival of the clowns, including the Horse-courser further adds to the entertainment of the royal personages as he strikes the clowns dumb.

It is only in scene xviii that seriousness returns to the play. Wagner, acting like the chorus, informs us that Faustus is perhaps going to die, as he has made a will. Faustus grants a special request to his friends by conjuring the spirit of Helen for them to marvel at. But it is the Old Man whose Christ-like posture and appeal fill Faustus's heart with remorse and regret. Unlike the Good Angel whose threats and warnings seemed to come from an angry and wrathful God, the Old Man speaks gently of love and pity. So great is his effect on Faustus that the latter grabs a dagger

from Mephistophilis in order to kill himself. It is at exhortation of the Old Man that Faustus stays his hand and promises to ponder over the possibility of repentance :

Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now ?

I do repent, and yet I do despair;

Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast.

What shall I do to shun the snares of death ?

This annoys Mephistophilis so much that he threatens to tear Faustus's body into pieces. Faustus begs his forgiveness on his knees—so much for his freedom. Here is an additional evidence of Faustus's growing loss of will and surrender to the devil. However, Faustus blames his temporary wavering on the Old Man and asks Mephistophilis to torture "that base and aged man". Mephistophilis's reply, "His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul" reminds us only too well of Faustus's own complicity in his fate. And it is as if to dispel Lucifer's displeasure for his recent wavering and to "keep mine oath I made to Lucifer" that Faustus asks, Helen to be brought back so that he may enjoy her love. Thus comes the famous passage on Helen's beauty. If the Old Man's curses that follow, the Helen passages are to be taken as testimony, then Faustus's sexual union with Helen's spirit is more of an irrevocable capitulation to Satan than the mere satisfaction of an appetite.

The Helen passage is the most talked about and controversial in the play. One view held by a number of critics is that the passage represents the irony of Faustus's life. It is argued that the entire pattern of Faustus's life is a repetition of ironies—the widening gulf between his dreams and their fulfilment. This is true of his so-called dream of union with the most beautiful woman in the history of the world. Helen of Troy often considered by the Elizabethan writers as a symbol of destructive beauty and sinful reality combines well with the imagery of fire so prevalent in the play. So, according to these critics, Faustus's happiness is only illusory and self deceptive. Writes Douglas Cole : "Helen whose beauty caused Troy to burn will do the same for Faustus; the immorality offered by the kisses of a demon lover is an eternity in hell; the soul that is sucked forth cannot be given back again; hell and not heaven is in these lips; the flames of jupiter that destroyed admiring Semele are the flames of this Helen's abode which will destroy a hopeless Faustus. Wanton Faustus, like Arethusa, will hold burning sun in his arms, but not without fiery pain. The fires of hell which, extraordinarily enough, have gone unmentioned in a play dealing so directly with hell and its punishments, now leap forth in the images of flame evoked by Helen. And again, Cole writes, "The scene in which Faustus embraces the demonic Helen is, in purely visual terms, the culminating emblem of

Faustus's disordered union with Hell". This scene is closely linked to the debate whether or not there is a steady deterioration in Faustus's character in the play. Obviously, the view that the Helen passage is ironical also supports the contention of Faustus's decline. But there are critics who reject the above view and among them Nicholas Brooke (in "The Moral Tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*") has made a convincing case because they find the speech about Helen quite assertive, exultant and convincing. It is in following this line of thought that the following analysis is offered. The three parts of Faustus's speech can be looked at separately. The first part is the most famous :

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

The high points of this passage are Faustus's wonder and total submerging with beauty. The sheer poetic power and the amorous appeal of these lines come from Faustus's single-minded and sensually charged attention of Helen's beauty. The passage is renowned for its pure poetry and is a tribute to Marlowe's powers of imagination. It also makes us forget Faustus's earlier grossness and shows him to be capable of an immense aesthetic enjoyment. No wonder then that in the next part of the passage, Faustus casts himself into the mould of mythology by his self-identification with Paris, the prince of Troy, whose rash love affair with Helen had been the cause of the famous War of Troy :

I will be Paris, and for love of thee
Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sack'd,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest,
Yea; I will wound Achilles in the heel
And then return to Helen for a kiss.

Faustus's imaginative re-enactment of the ancient past lends a new dimension and dignity to his character. The revelation of a new aspect of his character—his love of beauty—makes him more of a Renaissance character whose fulfilment is enough compensation for all his misery and torture. His identification with Paris who fights with Helen's husband, Menelaus and his imagined killing of the great Achilles raise him to a

heroic stature—for the time at least—in his own eyes and ours too.

The final passage is a culmination of Marlowe's romantic imagination and a renowned homage to beauty :

O, thou art fairer than the evening's air
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars,
 Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
 When he appeared to helpless Semele,
 More lovely than the monarch of the sky
 In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms,
 And none but thou shall be my paramour.

The rather free use of hyperbole in these lines does not distract us from their sheer poetic strength. Helen, matching the beauty of a thousand stars is brighter than the god Zeus when he appeared to Semele (Mother of Dionysius) in his divine splendour and she was destroyed by his lightning. She is more attractive than the reflection of the sun in the fabled spring of Arethusa.

Scene xix is dramatically the most powerful of the play. It is also the emotional climax of the play in which the tragic emotions that have been building up inside Faustus now break loose. The pity and terror that he generates are very strong and are aided by the visual effect of the rising throne and the gaping hell. Further, accompanied by the comments of the Good and the Bad Angels, the scene contains the longest soliloquy of Faustus—his death speech which is powerful and moving account of his desire to be saved, his helplessness and his anguish.

At first, Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistophilis appear together to announce that Faustus's hour has come. Mephistophilis, who is a philosophical type, out of the unholy trinity, regards Faustus with pity and contempt when he declares :

Fond world long, now his heart-blood dries with grief,
 His conscience kills it, and his labouring brain
 Begets a world of idle fantasies
 To overreach the devil; but all in vain :
 His store of pleasures must be sauc'd with pain.

In the presence of these devils who remain invisible to all but Faustus, the latter confesses his sins to his scholar friends. His repentance has come too late and is half-hearted as he himself says, "But Faustus's offence can never be pardoned; the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus."

It is remarkable here how vividly do Faustus's thoughts dwell on God and

Heaven. This not only sharpens by contrast the reality of hell that is ready to swallow him, but also lends added dignity to Faustus's character. In sharp contrast to his previous submissiveness and fear of Satan, Faustus now calls upon God openly to have His forgiveness so that he may be saved. The scholar who had earlier rebelled against God, now rebels against Satan. His parting request to his friends is to pray for him.

At this stage Mephistophilis rather strangely comes forward and owns up his responsibility in Faustus's demnation :

I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice,
 'Twas I that, when thou were on the way to heaven,
 Damn'd up thy passage; when thou look'st the book
 To view the scriptures, when I turned the leaves
 And led thine eye.

This is perhaps belated attempt by Marlowe to show that Faustus, besides his own free willed evil, was also exposed to outside manipulation. However, it does not at all weaken the conviction strenghtened by the events of the story itself—that Faustus has only himself to blame for his damnation and his tragic end.

The Good and the Bad Angels now perform a chorus-type function. Alternating their speeches, they make explicit the mistake Faustus had made in choosing hell over heaven. The Angels here are supposed to embody the audience's response by telling Faustus what he has missed and how he is going to suffer. As a visual representation of what he has missed, a colourful and magnificent throne descends to the stage, to the accompaniment of music. The throne represents all the glorious prizes Faustus would have received, had he opted for God against Satan. The Good Angel's parting declaration "The jaws of hell are open to receive thee," is well timed as the stage direction shows at this moment that "Hell is discovered." The Bad Angel who now takes over, begins a graphic description of hell which at present is part visual and part imaginary. He takes us on a tour of hell, pointing out the various points of interest and explaining their importance.

There are the furies, tossing damned souls
 On burning forks; their bodies boil in lead;
 There are live quarter's broiling on the coals,
 That never can die; this ever burning chair
 is for o'er-tortur'd souls to rest them in:
 These that are fed with sops of flaming fire
 Were gluttons and lov'd only delicacies
 And laugh'd to see the poor starve at their gates

But yet all these are nothing; thou shalt see
 Ten thousands tortures that more horried be.

One of the challenging aspects of staging *Doctor Faustus* at any time has been the visual representation of hell on the stage to match the above description which is unusual, to say the least, and it gives a lot of scope for an imaginative interpretation of the scene.

In a more serious way, the description of hell finally provides the answer to Faustus's persistent past queries about hell. To Faustus's cries: "O I have seen enough to torture me" the Bad Angels persist in rubbing his nose in the dust when he declares, "Nay, thou must feel them; taste the smart of all". In this way the once far off hell has come closer and finally engulfed Faustus. The outside hell that Faustus can clearly see and shudder at, is supposed to be an exact manifestation of his inner hell. The two concepts of hell discussed previously—finally merge into one in the present scene.

Faustus's soliloquy that follows (L. 134 to 190) is a piece of superb dramatic poetry, rich in imagery and emotional appeal. Also, the dramatic impact of this scene is immense because it fits very well in the structure of the play. Faustus was alone in his study when the play started. At the end too, he is alone in his study. After twenty four years of a bargained life, like the twenty four hours of the day, he is back where he started. Thus the cyclic pattern of the dramatic action brings forth a new tragic dimension. As the zero hour draws near, Faustus tells us that only one hour of his life is left. Time is, therefore, Faustus's greatest concern. His impassioned plea to time to stop moving is contained in the following lines :

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
 That time may cease, and midnight never come;
 Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
 Prepetual day; or let this hour be but
 A year, a month, a week, natural day,
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul.

However, time runs on, the zero hour draws closer and the suspense increases. Marlowe's clever manipulation of the 'time' element adds a great deal to the effect. Actually out of the last hour, the second 'half-hour' is shorter than first half. This helps to accelerate and precipitate the action in the closing scenes.

Next, Faustus sees Christ's blood in the sky and hopes that only one drop of it will suffice to save his soul. But the repentance, if it is at all repentance, comes too late and there is no help. So, as his hope weakens, he is not only tormented by Lucifer but also has a vision of the angry and the wrathful God who "stretcheth out his arm and bends his ireful brows." Faustus now

desires to hide himself from "the heavy wrath of God". The earth will not open up and shelter him; the stars will not draw him up like a foggy mist; and when the clock strikes to indicate that only half an hour is left, Faustus implores God to show him royal mercy imposing a limit—say a thousand years—on his sentence in hell. No help is forthcoming and Faustus's last wish is to be an animal who would not be worried about his soul. According to Pythagoras whom Faustus invokes, the souls lived on for ever, either in heaven or in hell. Thus Faustus who had earlier repudiated his humanity and renounced God, once again repudiates his humanity in another way, that is paradoxically to get back his humanity.

The last Scene is the epilogue in which, after the devils have taken Faustus away, his scholar friends discover his limbs "all torn as under by the hand of death." The scholars and then the chorus enter to speak their elegies and to draw the moral that "unlawful things" the practice of which is not allowed by heavenly powers, should be shunned.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q. What is the dramatic significance of Scene xix of *Dr. Faustus* ?

Ans. Scene xix is the most significant scene in *Dr. Faustus*. It builds the climax and highlights the theme of Christian thought and places the hero in the limelight. Faustus now realizes the sin he has committed against God and makes an endeavour for repentance : He sees Christ's blood in the sky and hopes that only one drop of it will be sufficient to save him. He repudiates his humanity to get back his humanity, i.e., he wishes to become an animal which faces extinction at the time of death. If Faustus becomes an animal, he will not face eternal damnation. According to Christian theology, Faustus's alliance with the Devil means defiance to God and it will lead to his eternal damnation.

Q. Write a brief note on Faustus's address to Helen in the play.

Ans. Faustus addresses Helen of Troy who was the most beautiful woman of the world at that time. However, for the Elizabethans she was the symbol of destructive beauty. Faustus thinks he can enjoy bliss in the company of Helen. But it proves only an illusion and self-deception, Douglas Cole believes that Helen whose beauty caused Troy to burn will do the same for Faustus. "The immorality offered by the kisses of a demon lover is an eternity in hell; hell and not heaven is in these lips." "The flames of Jupiter that destroyed admiring Semele are the flames of Helen." "Helen's abode will destroy a hapless Faustus." However, the Helen passage is sheerly poetic and beautiful.

Q. Discuss the thematic significance of Scene X of *Dr. Faustus*.

Ans. The scene shows that the Pope of Rome is humiliated and insulted by Faustus. Pope wishes to hold a trial of Bruno who stands as a prisoner before him. Pope wishes to sentence him to death for he has conspired against Pope.

Pope sends the Cardinals of France and Padua to the Emperor to seek confirmation of the punishment. Faustus and Mephistophilis, with the power of magic induce the Cardinals to deep sleep. Both Faustus and Mephistophilis take the place of the Cardinals and confirm to Pope the death-sentence on Bruno. Pope hands over Bruno to Faustus and advises him to burn Bruno to death. Faustus takes advantage of the situation and by his clever stratagem sets Bruno free. He even manhandles Pope. The manhandling of Pope reveals that the Pope's position was weak in that age.

Q. Discuss the significance of the comic Scene iv in the play *Dr. Faustus*.

Ans. Scene iv is an important comic scene. It makes a satirical commentary on the previous scene. In Scene iii Faustus is willing to strike a bargain with Lucifer. The bargain is that Faustus will enjoy unlimited power on this earth for twenty four years and in lieu of this he will surrender his soul to Devil when he dies. Scene iv is a parody of Scene iii because in Scene iv Faustus's servant Wagner gets hold of a clown, Robin and by giving him some money, forces him to become a bonded servant for seven years. As Robin shows his unwillingness to become a slave, Wagner conjures up two devils to threaten him. Robin runs up and down the stage and cries with fear. This scene makes a satire on Faustus's alliance with the Devil. There is a continuity of theme : the comic scene supplements the major theme of the play—Faustus's contract with the Devil.

Q. Discuss the significance of Scene x of *Dr. Faustus*.

Ans. Scene x is a comic scene. In this scene Robin and Dick—the two jokers—steal a cup from the tavern and play tricks with the wine seller. They conjure Mephistophilis to frighten the wine seller. But Mephistophilis curses them for their foolishness. This kind of a shadow play presented in this scene makes a satirical commentary on the deeds of Faustus. This scene shows that Faustus's activities are frivolous and meaningless. As the jokers play cheap tricks, so does Faustus play magical tricks to please the Emperor Charles and the Duke and the Duchess of Vanholt. The Horse-Courser episode in which Faustus sells a magical horse shows his indulgence in meaningless activities. The comic situation presented in this scene makes a satirical comment of Faustus's capitulation to Satan.

Q. Comment upon the Helen passage in the play *Dr. Faustus*.

Ans. Helen passage is very significant in the play. Helen, the extremely beautiful woman of the world, is now demonstrated in the form of a devil in the play. Helen is considered the symbol of destructive beauty as she caused the burning end of Troy. Helen who destroyed the city of Troy will also ruin Faustus. Douglas Cole says that, "the immorality offered by the kisses of a demon lover Helen is an eternity in Hell; hell and not heaven is in these lips." Faustus's union with Helen is in fact his union with hell. Faustus's sexual liaison with Helen affirms his alliance with Satan. However, it may be said that Faustus's celebration of beauty and his imaginative recollection of the ancient past (Was this the face that launched a thousand ships) show that Faustus was a man of Renaissance.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : Dr. FAUSTUS

1. A note on the structure of Doctor Faustus :

It has been pointed out that the structure of *Doctor Faustus* is defective. The play does proceed in an organised fashion but after Scene iii, it deteriorates into a series of comic scenes, showing Faustus indulging in vulgar and cheap tricks of horseplay. As has already been stated, there is a widely held view that these scenes were later additions made by another writer. There is decidedly a lack of sustained good writing making the middle part of the play weak and full of trivial episodes which amount to "mere diversion". This aspect of the play has already been discussed briefly. What needs to be added here is that there is another view that regards the so-called structural weakness to be a deliberate and an organic part of the play and to be in consonance with the part of the story which shows Faustus at the lowest depth of the moral degradation. "The (middle) scenes illustrate the growing emptiness of the way of life Faustus has chosen," says J.B. Steane. Goethe had remarked, on reading Marlowe's play : "How greatly is it all planned!" Another way to justify *Doctor Faustus's* design is that it has a "philosophical structure," meaning thereby that the scenes which seem to be poorly written reflect the poor spiritual quality of the hero. This point of view is quite convincing and saves the play from the criticism that Marlowe is guilty of bad writing, particularly in the middle part of the play.

2. Doctor Faustus and the Morality Tradition

For the structure and design of *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe draws heavily from the medieval English tradition of Mystery and Morality plays. Therefore, to fully understand all the significant aspects of the play, it is necessary to know, however briefly, the main features of the Mystery and Morality plays.

The Mystery plays which constitute the beginning of drama in England, continued to be staged almost till Marlowe's time. These plays were essentially religious and dealt primarily with the theme of damnation, which was brought by the working of Lucifer and other agents of evil. The

human protagonist was usually a man cast in the image of king Herod who stood for arrogance and pride and whose end inevitably brought damnation and despair. In a way, the Mystery play attempts to reenact the story of Adam's Fall.

The English Morality plays form a stage of development in which the responsibility for damnation shifts from divine agencies to human factor—man's open and free choice of evil. In a didactic frame-work, the Morality play depicted the battle ground between the forces of Good and Evil in which abstract virtues and vices were actually personified. The Angels and Seven Deadly Sins led by Lucifer often paraded the stage. A special character was the figure of Vice who became the main instrument for moral destruction of man. Vice was often a comic character who acted as a protagonist. Both physical affliction and spiritual despair formed the retributive action which overtook the sinful man.

It is obvious to any reader of *Doctor Faustus* that this play follows strongly in the tradition of the Mysteries and Moralities. However, Marlowe's clever dramaturgy puts the traditional devices to more subtle and organic uses, though Prof. Boas claims that the Morality devices fit "awkwardly" with Marlowe's play.

The abstract forces of good and evil are well represented in *Doctor Faustus*, although the main action represents the consequences of man's capitulation to evil. As is usual in the case of the Morality hero, Faustus represents all mankind; especially his freedom of a moral choice in a Christian context makes him a more universal figure. The Good and the Bad Angels are strictly in the 'Morality' tradition, although in Marlowe's hands their presence is more functional and integral to them. The introduction of the Seven Deadly Sins is another "Morality device, with the difference that in *Doctor Faustus* they do not play an active part in Faustus's downfall. Then, although the important figure of Vice is absent from the play, its close parallel is in the character of Mephistophilis. However, as has already been pointed out Mephistophilis is in no large way responsible for Faustus's evil and damnation. And there are numerous instances of the comic manifestations of evil which is also based on the 'Morality tradition'.

Several critics have noted that Marlowe had deliberately reversed the use of the Morality devices in his play to emphasize the fact that Faustus is responsible for his own destruction. Marlowe does so, according to a critic Douglas Cole, because he is after a different form of ironic effect, a form which emphasizes at every opportunity, Faustus's wilful alliance with the Devil. This form of Morality which tends to evoke the final effect, is contained in Nicholas Brooks's well known essay : "The Moral Tragedy of Doctor Faustus."

The Character of Doctor Faustus :

Unlike Marlowe's other plays, *Doctor Faustus* really contains a single character. The supernatural beings—the Good and Bad Angels, the Seven Deadly Sins, Mephistophilis, Lucifer and the numerous devils—have an allegorical meaning. And the rest of the characters are projections of Faustus's fantasies. Therefore, Faustus is the only character who attracts our attention for an analytical study notwithstanding the view that since Marlowe's plays, particularly *Doctor Faustus*, are primarily concerned with ideas, his heroes are not delineated.

It is undeniable that the character of Faustus represents the spirit of the Renaissance and through him Marlowe was depicting the conflict of the old and new values in his own age. The Renaissance promoted a rather restless tendency of mind which encouraged exploration of new areas of knowledge and achievement. Faustus's spirit of adventure, his enormous curiosity and tormenting desire for knowledge make him a Renaissance superman who is condemned to tragic failure and who becomes a martyr to a stronger set of values which belonged to the orthodox medieval past. Moreover, some of the new Renaissance values consisted of the pursuit of power, wealth, adventure and beauty, And as has been demonstrated in the previous lesson, these new values were amply embodied in the character of Faustus. In this context, Faustus's character emerges as a grand and dashing rebel who wins greater admiration from the modern reader.

It is generally believed that Marlowe has purposely created Faustus in such a manner that his revolt against God arouses our sympathy and admiration. One of the best known statements of such a romantic view of Faustus is given by William Hazlitt who seems to be highly impressed by the dashing personality of Faustus, says Hazlitt: "Faustus himself is a rude sketch, but a gignatic one. This character may be considered a sketch of fear and remorse. He is hurried away, and as it were, devoured by a tormenting desire to enlarge his knowledge to the utmost bounds of nature and art, and to extend his power with his knowledge. He would realise that "all the fictions of a lawless imagination would solve the most subtle speculations of abstract reason; and for this purpose, he sets at defiance all moral consequences, and leagues himself with demonial power with fate and metaphysical aid." Other critics have thought that Faustus doesn't deserve this punishment and that the last scene fills us with love and admiration for Faustus. On the other hand, critical views have regarded Faustus as a sinner whose suffering represents the orthodox Christian attitude towards evil. Actually, it is a combination of both the views which forms the basis of an understanding of Faustus's tragedy.

Another aspect of Faustus's character which is of immense interest to the

modern reader is his psychological condition at the various stages of his life. His early calculated indifference to the true nature of his actions and their consequence, the momentary flashes of doubt and despair and specially the final shattering anguish—all these form a development that provides interesting psychological material. The over-all impression of Faustus strengthened by the presence of the Good and Bad Angels, is that of a divided spirit who constantly wavers between physical delight and guilty conscience, between visions of an earthy paradise and anguish of a damned soul. Also, several critics have tried to show that Faustus is the most autobiographical of all Marlowe's heroes. That is, in Faustus, Marlowe was depicting some of the moral and psychological conflicts through which he himself was passing.

The biographical aspect of Faustus lends him another kind of psychological interest. Marlowe's biographers have tried to show that he was atheistical, a powerful intellectual and certainly a rebel against the traditional values of the Church and society. Yet Marlowe understood and feared the strength of the older moral and theological system. And the character of Faustus may have been Marlowe's artistic and imaginative projection of an inner struggle that was personal and meaningful to his own entire life. *Doctor Faustus*, according to Paul Koacher "is among other things, an utterance of Marlowe's fears for his own destiny as a free thinking rebel from the laws of a Christian cosmos. But the important fact is that an unfolding in Marlowe's play leads him to choose the theme of the helplessness of even the most titanic human nature (ego) before God."

A note may be added here on the relationship between Faustus and Mephistophilis which has psychological overtones. As Harry Levin points out, Mephistophilis is Faustus's 'alter ego' and both develop a sort of love-hate relationship for each other. Mephistophilis is neither a villain nor a tempter. Unlike the Morality figure of Vice, Mephistophilis does not lure Faustus into sin. Rather Faustus is his own tempter and his own destroyer. Mephistophilis only shows understanding and sympathy occasionally mixed with contempt for Faustus. He even tries to discourage Faustus from his outrageous plans. Within a short time of their meeting each other, Faustus asks what has caused the fall of Lucifer. Mephistophilis describes that it was because of "aspiring pride and insolence." Thus the most eloquent and convincing warning to Faustus comes from the truthful, the tortured and the philosophical Mephistophilis himself. It is also Mephistophilis who gives one of the most memorable descriptions of hell as conditions of mind and soul—"where we are is hell" and "All place shall be hell that is not heaven." Faustus's rejection of God assumes two main aspects in the action of the play. Faustus becomes an atheist and an Epicurean and these two sides

dominate his character. It is evident in this context that Faustus as atheist is more impressive than Faustus as Epicurean. The scenes depicting his appetites at work and the scene of merry-making are rather insignificant. On the other hand, Faustus's confrontation with God, through an open contract with the devil, reveals his strength and imaginative qualities.

The most important aspect of Faustus is the moral religious burden that his soul acquires through an act of defiance of God. In other words it is that overwhelming self-willed evil of his character which leads to the damnation of his soul. It is this aspect of Faustus on which most of the critical commentaries have been written. What is most obvious in this context is the fact that Faustus's sin is pride (in its special Christian connotation) which he commits deliberately not only in wilful blindness but also in his self-deception throughout his life. His sensuality, animality and curiosity are all manifestations of a spirit in disorder after it has been served from its moral roots. Actually, Faustus's predicament in this strict Christian sense makes him a representative of all mankind. Faustus is Everyman whose sin is a re-enactment of the sin of Adam. What saves him from being a typical Morality hero, are the strength of his passion, the reaches of his imagination and the psychological revelations of his terror and agony. In this sense, he is a real convincing man of flesh and blood and although his condition is universalized, we treat him as a living human being.

A controversy has often been carried on as to the development of Faustus's character after committing his sin. W. W. Greg among many believes that after the signing of the bond with the devil, there is a gradual deterioration in Faustus's character. This so-called decline is manifested in Faustus's frequent recourse to cheap trickery and horseplay. And the lowest point in his decline is reached when he commits the sin of sexual intercourse with Helen. After Faustus enjoys sex with the spirit of Helen, even the Old Man who has mysteriously appeared as Christ-figure, gives up Faustus and abandons him to his fate. This line of thinking leads us to believe that towards the end, Faustus has become a total slave of his appetites and his sexual enjoyment with Helen is as significant as his contract with the devil.

However, what is perhaps more appropriate is the view that even though Faustus goes through a decline, there is a lifting up of the spirit towards the end when he achieves almost a heroic stature. Surely, Faustus is not a cringing or a pathetic figure near his end. In this connection, J.B. Steane observes : "He is inevitably one of a class or type, the young extremist, eager and buoyant with a brilliantly energetic, inquiring mind intoxicated by his enthusiasm, heady in his dislikes and fundamentally superficial in both. But the character develops. After the Vatican scene, the boyish quality disappears and there is a sense of ageing. "The keynote of the weak Vanholt scenes is Faustus's boyishness, and

in the two later scenes with the scholars it is a quieter and more mature Faustus who is admired." Faustus's end is marked by a display of his soaring imagination and the restlessness of his spirit. And especially his poetry and eloquence save him from being a creature of abject misery. As Prof. Boas points out, Faustus's interest in Helen is not merely sexual; he "apostrophizes Helen in the diction of medieval chivalry". But more than anything else, what stands out most at the end are Faustus's suffering of conscience and his awareness of the spiritual hell in which he has landed.

It is also in the final scene that Faustus's character assumes a tragic dimension. Unlike the traditional Elizabethan tragedy which depicted the fall of a great man from prosperity to adversity, Faustus's fall and suffering are more of a spiritual than material kind. His fall, like Adam's archetypal fall from paradise, unleashes his suffering and evil. The tragic effect of Faustus's fall is related not to the material prosperity that he might have enjoyed, but to the spiritual blessedness that might have been his reward. Consequently his suffering does not consist of physical hardship or material loss, it comprises the suffering and despair of his mind and spirit. Says Douglas Cole, "Because of its echo of the fall, the tragedy of Faustus is the tragedy of man not in his relationship to other men, but, in relationship to God, spelled out in bold, direct and uncompromising term which are grounded firmly in the theology of Christian church." As a human being, Faustus's tragedy strikes us convincingly because of his growing sense of damnation and his sense of sinfulness. Further in the expectation of being something more than God, Faustus only separates himself completely from God, alienating himself in the process from other human beings also. What keeps our interest in him alive is that the possibility of his repentance remains open.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q. Write a brief note on the Morality plays.

Ans. The Morality plays originated in the Pre-Shakespearean era. They essentially dealt with religious themes such as the themes of sin and damnation, the fall of Adam, the rebellion of Lucifer, etc. The Morality plays are different from the Mystery plays in which the hero is not responsible for his tragedy. His tragedy is attributed to the divine agencies or to the evil forces like Lucifer. But in the Morality plays, the responsibility for damnation is attributed to human factor—man's open and free choice of evil. The Morality plays depicted the conflict between the forces of Good and Evil. The Good and Evil Angels and Seven Deadly Sins were presented on the stage. Vice often acted as predominant character in these plays.

Q. Comment upon the structure of the play, *Dr. Faustus*.

Ans. There is a controversy about the structure of the play *Dr. Faustus*. Some of the critics point out that the structure of *Dr. Faustus* is defective. The play lacks unity and the middle part is weak as it points to diversion. The comic scenes are full of cheap tricks and seem to have no connection with the theme of the play. On the other hand the genuine critics think that the plot of *Doctor Faustus* is well-knit. The comic scenes inserted in the middle supplement the main theme of Faustus's damnation as they parody the alliance of the hero with Satan and his consequent spiritual degradation. J.B. Steane says that the middle scenes point to the growing emptiness of Faustus's character and hence are quite relevant to the whole design. Goethe remarks :

"How greatly is it all planned"!

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : Dr. FAUSTUS

Dr. Faustus as a Tragedy

Tragedies by Marlowe generally claims to have a classical antecedent. The death of Tamburlaine recalls the destruction of the hero in Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*, while "the conjurations, flying chariots and apparitions" in *Doctor Faustus* have dramatic precedents in Seneca's *Medea*. Marlowe rediscovers and utilizes certain antique themes of tragedy. Greek tragedy is primarily concerned with the pride and accomplishment of man. In such a tragedy the common human virtue mistakes itself for the super-human virtue. It challenges divine wrath, and its presumption is punished fittingly in the end. It is the mystery of the tragedy that the pride which makes the hero also destroys him. Marlowe follows the pattern of Greek tragedy.

Tamburlaine and *Dr. Faustus* celebrate the apparitions and the power of man; the presumption of one (*Tamburlaine*) is checked by death; and the presumption of the other (*Dr. Faustus*) meets the heavy wrath of God.

Marlowe's tragic world continues to be mostly evil and corrupt and his tragic protagonists are engulfed by this all-prevalent corruption. They are proud, ambitious and have thirst for power. They draw their ambition from the motive, "Nature doth teach us all to have aspiring mind." The main factor that causes their destruction is their thirst for power. *Tamburlaine*, *Barabas*, *Edward*, *Mortimer* and *Doctor Faustus* are after power which destroys their humanity and makes them evil characters. Marlowe's tragic hero is essentially an extraordinary man whose downfall is to be regarded as the tragedy of ambition or presumption.

Dr. Faustus is perhaps the first great poetic tragedy in the English language. Like *Tamburlaine*, it is the tragedy of presumption. *Faustus* is proud and arrogant, swollen with self-conceit. With impatient scorn, he rejects philosophy, medicine, law and divinity because they do not "make men live eternally" or raise the dead to life again. *Faustus* rejects the human arts not because "they puff up but because they do not puff up enough." He perverts both divine and human values by asking each art and knowledge how well it serves his "self-conceit." *Faustus*'s declaration that "a sound magician is a demi-god" forces us to recognize the presumptuous nature of

his ambition. He evidently aspires to be something more than man.

The tragic tale of Doctor Faustus falls into three parts; the temptation and fall of the hero, his life as a wonder-working magician and his death and damnation. Faustus dominated by the lust for knowledge, is tempted to strike a bargain with Lucifer, who after providing him with pleasure and power for twenty four years will get his soul away in hell. Before the bargain is struck and the blood-bond signed, Faustus is warned by the Good Angel against incurring God's wrath, and by Mephistophilis who tells him that Lucifer fell because of "aspiring pride and insolence", the sin which Faustus is now determined to commit. Again the congealing of Faustus's blood and its forming the words *Homo Fuge*, is also admonitory in effect. But Faustus is too headstrong to heed these warnings. He abjures God and the Scriptures and leagues with the Devil in the hope of becoming something more than a man. He now exploits the dearly bought power. He brings about rampage in the Vatican, insults the Pope, conjures for Charles V and revenges himself upon a heckler; conjures for the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt; tricks a horse dealer and when the horse-dealer retaliates, takes his revenge on him too. It is for the world of profit and delight which these escapades represent that Faustus has voluntarily bartered his soul. Since the period of twenty-four years is drawing to an end, Faustus now apprehends the horror of hell where he will be confined to damnation. He wavers between repentance and despair. The Old Man advises Faustus to repent, "Yet thou hast an amiable soul if sin by custom grows not into nature." But Faustus lacks faith in the mercy of God and leads himself to despair. "Damn'd art, thou, Faustus, damn'd despair and die". Faustus in the agony cries that his offence can never be pardoned. The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved but not Faustus. Still Faustus commits two more sins and is damned when he seeks revenge upon the Old Man, his would-be saviour and indulges in the love of Helen. "Love and Revenge are insurances against salvation," says Greg. Moreover, in making Helen his paramour, Faustus commits a sin and excludes the grace of heaven from his soul.

Finally, Lucifer comes and dismembers Faustus's body; rends his heart and takes his precious soul away to hell for damnation. Obviously, Faustus has been tricked. The omnipotence that he wanted to achieve has turned out to be illusory. He has, in fact, exchanged "knowledge for shadows and felicity for eternal torment." However, in the final scene, Faustus's character assumes a tragic dimension and he achieves almost a heroic stature. In his great monologue in Scene vi, Faustus shows himself agonizingly aware of the heavy wrath of God against which his Good Angel had warned him. Having prided himself on his self-reliance, and having

striven to be more than a man, he now longs to be less than a man. He wishes he could be a creature wanting soul, some brutish 'beast' which at death would face mere extinction and not eternal damnation. Faustus desperately seeks to turn to air, to be sucked up like mist into the clouds to be changed to little water drops and fall into the ocean and never be found. He curses his parents for engendering him. He offers to burn his books of magic. He exclaims to the scholars: "O would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read a book." Faustus is, no doubt, ascribing his downfall partly to his learning.

It is only in the last moments of his life that Faustus becomes aware of the sin he has committed against the Holy Spirit and of the spiritual hell in which he has landed himself. But his realization comes too late when there is no time left for repentance or amendment. The critics who view the play from the orthodox Christian attitude feel that Faustus's damnation is the apt punishment for his self-conceit and defiance of God.

Critics like Douglas Cole feel that *Doctor Faustus* is fundamentally a tragedy of the spirit because "the play does not rely on the representation of physical pain and destruction for its tragic effects." They argue that the whole play is based on the spiritual combat waged in the protagonist's soul. In the play, men are not involved in mutual betrayal; the dramatic light is focused glaringly on one man alone, a man "who of his own conscious wilfulness brings tragedy and torment crashing down upon his head, the pitiful victim of his ambition and desires." The play is primarily concerned with depicting the spiritual crisis of Doctor Faustus whose fall and suffering are more of a spiritual than material kind. The tragic fall of Faustus deprives him, not of the material prosperity but of the spiritual blessedness that he might have enjoyed if he had not renounced the scriptures and God. The tragedy of Faustus occurs not in his relationship to other men but in relationship to God "spelled out in the bold, direct and uncompromising term which are grounded firmly in the theology of Christian Church."

Still there is another group of critics who feel that Faustus is "more sinned against than sinning"; his punishment is greater than the crimes he has committed. Maitland, who acknowledges that Faustus is a sinner, remarks that Faustus does not deserve the fearful punishment finally inflicted upon him. Cunningham also expresses the liberal view that the "last scene of *Doctor Faustus* fills the soul with love and admiration as for a departed hero". Wagner regrets that Marlowe was not liberal enough to allow Faustus finally to escape damnation. According to U.M. Ellis-Fermor, "The sin for which punishments are meted out to Faustus is more often alluded to than explained. Faustus has been foolish and frivolous, but never criminal." Philip Henderson sees the play as "simply a parable of the fight for intellectual freedom." F.S. Boas wonders "what occasion for repentance

there was in a life passed largely in academic debates with Mephistophilis." Contrary to this, critics like James Smith and Lily B. Campbell justify the damnation of Faustus; they judge the deeds of Faustus in terms of the Christian concept of sin and damnation. It is only by combining both the critical views that we can have a full understanding of Faustus's tragedy. For latest criticism on Christopher Marlowe and Dr. Faustus visit the sites on google.com.

The Theme of the Play

Doctor Faustus is the last and the finest of Marlowe's plays. As a heroic play, *Doctor Faustus* celebrates power, beauty, riches and knowledge (Renaissance qualities). As a Morality Play, it vindicates humility, faith and obedience to the laws of God.

The opening chorus in the play exhibits most of the Renaissance qualities all embodied in the protagonist; self-conceit, soaring spirit, egoistic ambition, passion for knowledge and power, belief in magic and necromancy. The hero contemplates the world of "profit and delight, of power, honour and omnipotence". He examines the branches of higher learning-Philosophy, Medicine, Law and Theology but rejects them because they do not satisfy his demands, because they do not make him sovereign. He pursues knowledge not for the sake of truth but for power, superhuman power, the power of the life and death. His fundamental grievance is; "Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man." Dissatisfied with his status and power, he would like to control the winds and clouds, would like to make men live eternally or to raise the dead -the activities which belong to God alone. In dwelling upon the advantages that he will derive from the exercise of concealed art, Doctor Faustus displays his ardent curiosity, his desire for wealth and luxury, his nationalism and his longing for power. Such qualities essentially mark him as a man of Renaissance. Faustus craves for gold from the East Indies, from the depth of the ocean and for pleasant fruit and princely delicacies from America. Valdes refers to "the Indians in the Spanish colonies, and to annual plate fleet which supplied the Spanish treasury from the new world." All the things were keenly cherished by the people who lived in the Elizabethan age. Faustus's dream of power and wealth fits well into spirit of the Elizabethan age because the Elizabethans too had become ambitious through geographical and military exploits. The Renaissance qualities of Faustus had a great appeal for the contemporary audience. At the same time, Faustus's fall is also equally significant. In Faustus's tragic fall, Marlowe is reminding his audience of the tragic possibilities of a renaissance spirit. Faustus's hellish fall gives a warning to all Christians to avoid the pitfall of Science. Brockband rightly observes that "passion for knowledge is in itself a virtue, but diverted from the

service of god it threatens to become totally negative and self destroying." Viewed from the angle of Christian Theology, *Doctor Faustus* vindicates Christian faith and obedience to the laws of God. Christian theologians believe that "all sins consist in turning away from the godly things which are truly lasting and in turning towards things which are changeable and insecure. A man who becomes proud, curious and self-indulgent is caught up in another life which compared to the higher life is death." If the soul goes out of the way to imitate God and wills to take pleasure in its own power, it is liable to be punished. There is no denying the fact the Doctor Faustus is an atheist. He is pledged to pull down Christian churches. His anti-religious temper is visible from the way he brings about rampage at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. Faustus is also proud, curious and self-indulgent. In raising the dead, Faustus imitates God and in leaguering with the Devil he defies God. In the Christian view of the world, defiance to God is a sin that will lead to despair and deepest suffering. Douglas Cole remarks that Faustus's desires represent a usurpation upon God. His sin is the sin of angels. Some critics have described Faustus's fall as Adam's archetypal fall. Faustus's quest for knowledge urges him to taste the fruit of the tree that led to the fall and punishment of Adam. And Faustus's deprivation of the everlasting bliss and his isolation from God are similar to those of Adam. Cole remarks that because of "its echo of its Fall the tragedy of Faustus is the tragedy of man not in his relationship to other man, but in relationship to God."

Faustus's tale has attained universal significance. His deliberate choice of the sin in a Christian context adds universality to his figure and career. Faustus is, in fact, Everyman. In Everyman the tragic flaw of pride, wilfulness causes blindness to the nature and destiny of man alienating man from God. The play also depicts the conflict between the good and evil through the two Angels. And this conflict which is the representation of Faustus's spiritual combat is, in fact, conflict of the humanity caught up in the moral choice between the good and the evil. Some critics have witnessed universal appeal even in Faustus's voluptuousness which has been regarded as the most common human weakness, and for this reason the comic scenes which parody the sensual. A doctor's career has been considered "a conscious artistic effort toward dramatic universalization of the Faustian theme."

Dr. Faustus also reveals the theme of the helplessness of even the "most titanic ego" before God. Man is a helpless creature in the hands of the super power. Faustus confesses his weakness before the Deity though he remains unreconciled throughout. He is led off shrieking, shattered by a superior power but without love in his heart.

It has also been said that the general theme that runs in Marlowe's major

plays (**Tamburlaine, The Jew of Malta, Edward II and Dr. Faustus**) is the theme of isolation. The tragic protagonists must act in isolation from society. This is because Marlowe himself felt "not merely an aloofness but a positive enmity to the generality of mankind". Marlowe also depicts an individual confronting a hostile universe. *Doctor Faustus* is no exception to these themes. In **Doctor Faustus** a single giant figure, consumed with the hunger for empire is at war with an "inimical world order." Faustus is also an isolated being; we find him alone in his study in the beginning and so is he alone in the end. Faustus's scholars rally him for becoming "over solitary". They also leave him to his solitude in the end.

Critics have also observed that *Doctor Faustus* is among other things, an utterance of Marlowe's own views as a free-thinking rebel. Through Faustus, Marlowe finds fault with prayer and the harshness of the Christian dogma. The Christian dogma puts forth the belief that man must commit sin and be damned for ever. Faustus is appalled by the injustice of this dogma which consigns all men inevitably to damnation and, therefore, rebels against Christianity and God by renouncing God and leaguering with the Devil.

The reward of sin is death: that is hard.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

Why then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die:

Ay, we must die an everlasting death

What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera:*

What will be, Shall be! Divinity adieu!

But Faustus makes the fatal error of ignoring the fact that man, though condemned to sin, can be redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ if he has faith in the mercy of God and he repents for his sin. Since Faustus thinks that his sins can never be pardoned, he has no belief in the mercy of God, and since he lacks faith, he is doomed in the end. In fact, Faustus thinks of his sin in a Calvinistic sense, that is God bestows grace only upon those men whom he had selected for salvation while the Catholics believe that grace can be obtained by any man who honestly seeks it. Thus "contrition, prayer and repentance" which the Good Angel recommends to Faustus are the means to redeem a sinner. But to Faustus, these are illusions "and fruits of lunacy", because he is blind to this concept of Christianity. Thus, it is through Faustus that Marlowe criticizes prayer, hell and the harshness of Christian dogma, and then covers them safely with the usual orthodox replies. But the dramatist never overthrows the

Christian concept by his iconoclastic views. The true Christian thought remains intact. It is, for these reasons, that the play has been found "Christian in conception and import."

The Character of Mephistophilis

Mephistophilis is a better and malignant spirit deprived of "everlasting joy". He appears as a devil in the beginning of the play. His original and initial form was too ugly to look upon. On Faustus's demand, he appears in the traditional form of an "old Franciscan Friar".

Mephistophilis was Lucifer's accomplice in the conspiracy against God and was damned eternally. He is not "a pliant creature", as Faustus has taken him for; he refuses to serve Faustus or meet his frivolous demands; "Be it to make the moon drop from the sphere, or the Ocean to overwhelm the world". He tells Faustus in cool decisive terms; "I am a servant to great Lucifer. And may not follow these without him."

In the play, Mephistophilis plays a prominent part. As Edward had his evil genius in Gavaston (*Edward II*), Barabas his demonic familiar in Ithamore (*The Jew of Malta*) so has Faustus his "alter ego" in Mephistophilis. Mephistophilis is Faustus's right hand. Without him, Faustus would not have conjured the dead spirits or displayed his wonders to the world. Herry Levin says, "The man (Faustus) has an extraordinary affection for the spirit (Mephistophilis), the spirit of a mysterious attraction to the man".

Mephistophilis is regarded as "the nearly omniscient stealer of soul", but in the play, he comes to get the "glorious soul" of Faustus only after the latter has already shown his willingness to blaspheme God. He is neither an "operative villain" nor a Satanic tempter. Unlike Valdes and Cornelian, he offers no tempting speeches and offers no enticement. He offers no prospects of power and glory. Faustus tempts himself and he succumbs to temptation which he alone has conjured up. Rather, Mephistophilis suffers for him, sympathizes with him and above all understands him. He holds up a mirror to Faustus's aspiring pride and insolence, but Faustus refuses to look into it or see the fall he is re-enacting. Mephistophilis describes the fall of Lucifer, an angel most dearly loved of God as the result of "aspiring pride and insolence" but Faustus is too blind to learn from this warning. It has been said that the most eloquent and convincing warnings to Faustus come from the truthful and tortured Mephistophilis. Thus Mephistophilis is freed from the role of a tempter in the drama; never in the English drama before Marlowe had a devil acted in such a way.

Mephistophilis's loyalty to Lucifer is unquestioned. He is anxious to expand Lucifer's kingdom by winning over "inclined souls". Although Mephistophilis is not a tempter but once Faustus has entered into contract with Lucifer, he

keeps a strict watch on the doctor, lest the latter should go back on his agreement. After Faustus has succumbed to the temptation of the Evil Angel, Mephistophilis takes upon himself the task of diverting him and "each diversion turns out to be a snare, a delusion".

Mephistophilis is an intellectual philosopher. Faustus enters into an academic debate with him; he discusses Geography, Astronomy and Theology with him. Mephistophilis's description of Hell is indeed very memorable, for he describes hell in terms of spiritually agonizing suffering. To him hell is the condition of the mind and soul. "Hell hath no limits/nor is circumscribed, for where we are is Hell/All places shall be Hell that is not heaven".

Though a devil, Mephistophilis is not without a conscience. Like any human being he feels pained in torturing others. He is aware of his alienation from God, of his deprivation of eternity and joy.

"Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss" ?

Commenting upon Mephistophilis's character, Harry Levin says, "What Mephistophilis approximates, with his subtle insight and his profound sympathy, is the characterization of Profiry, the examining magistrate in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." J.P. Brockbank says that "Mephistophilis promptly displaces Faustus as the intellectual centre of the play. His eloquence sticks to the facts and sheds the airy and fiery qualities which continue to characterise the fantasies of Faustus. For a comparably urbane devil, skilled in theology and capable of finesse, we should have to look outside the English and German traditions of Italy...."

(Mephistophilis also presents a contrast to Faustus. He has a negative view of evil while Faustus believes in its positive satisfactions. To Faustus, Hell is a fable; to Mephistophilis, it is reality. Faustus's confidence in the positive and substantial power of Lucifer makes him Manichaen¹ while Mephistophilis with his moral objectives is Augustinian².)

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1. One who believes in Manichaenism. Manichaenism is a religious system according to which "man was created by Satan in his image, but contains portions of light".
 2. One who believes in St. Augustine's doctrines; the chief of which were "immediate efficacy of grace and absolute predestination."