English Drama (Renaissance)

The Merchant of Venice
The Tragic Life of Dr. Faustus

Compiled By

The English Dep.

Faculty of Education
English Dep.
Second Year

2023- 2024

Book Description

Faculty of Education
Second year
English dep.
2023
99

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INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare, or the “Bard” as people fondly call him, permeates almost all aspects of our society. He can be found in our classrooms, on our televisions, in our theatres, and in our cinemas. Speaking to us through his plays, Shakespeare comments on his life and culture, as well as our own. Actors still regularly perform his plays on the modern stage and screen. The 1990s, for example, saw the release of cinematic versions of *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* and many more of his works.

In addition to the popularity of Shakespeare’s plays as he wrote them, other writers have modernized his works to attract new audiences. For example, *West Side Story* places *Romeo and Juliet* in New York City, and *A Thousand Acres* sets *King Lear* in Iowa corn country. Beyond adaptations and productions, his life and works have captured our cultural imagination. The twentieth century witnessed the production of a play about two minor characters from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and a fictional movie about Shakespeare’s early life and poetic inspiration in *Shakespeare in Love*.

Despite his monumental presence in our culture, Shakespeare remains enigmatic. He does not tell us which plays he wrote alone, on which plays he collaborated with other playwrights, or which versions of his plays to read and perform. Furthermore, with only a handful of documents available about his life, he does not tell us much about Shakespeare the person, forcing critics and scholars to look to historical references to uncover the true-life great dramatist.

Anti-Stratfordians — modern scholars who question the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays — have used this lack of information to argue that William Shakespeare either never existed or, if he did exist, did not write any of the plays we attribute to him. They believe that another historical figure, such as Francis Bacon or Queen Elizabeth I, used the name as a cover. Whether or not a man named William Shakespeare ever actually existed is ultimately secondary to the recognition that the group

of plays bound together by that name does exist and continues to educate, enlighten, and entertain us.

Family life

Though scholars are unsure of the exact date of Shakespeare's birth, records indicate that his parents — Mary and John Shakespeare — baptized him on April 26, 1564, in the small provincial town of Stratford-upon-Avon — so named because it sat on the banks of the Avon River. Because common practice was to baptize infants a few days after they were born, scholars generally recognize April 23, 1564, as Shakespeare's birthday. Coincidentally, April 23 is the day of St. George, the patron saint of England, as well as the day upon which Shakespeare would die 52 years later. William was the third of Mary and John's eight children and the first of four sons. The house in which scholars believe Shakespeare to have been born stands on Henley Street and, despite many modifications over the years, you can still visit it today.

Shakespeare's father

Prior to Shakespeare's birth, John Shakespeare lived in Snitterfield, where he married Mary Arden, the daughter of his landlord. After moving to Stratford in 1552, he worked as a glover, a moneylender, and a dealer in agricultural products such as wool and grain. He also pursued public office and achieved a variety of posts including bailiff, Stratford's highest elected position — equivalent to a small town's mayor. At the height of his career, sometime near 1576, he petitioned the Herald's Office for a coat of arms and, thus, the right to be a gentleman. But the rise from the middle class to the gentry did not come right away, and the costly petition expired without being granted.

About this time, John Shakespeare mysteriously fell into financial difficulty. He became involved in serious litigation, was assessed heavy fines, and even lost his seat on the town council. Some scholars suggest that this decline could have resulted from religious discrimination because the Shakespeare family may have supported Catholicism, the practice of which was illegal in England. However, other scholars point out that not all religious dissenters (both Catholics and radical Puritans) lost their posts

due to their religion. Whatever the cause of his decline, John did regain some prosperity toward the end of his life. In 1596, the Herald's Office granted the Shakespeare family a coat of arms at the petition of William, by now a successful playwright in London. And John, prior to his death in 1601, regained his seat on Stratford's town council.

Childhood and education

Our understanding of William Shakespeare's childhood in Stratford is primarily speculative because children do not often appear in the legal records from which many scholars attempt to reconstruct Shakespeare's life. Based on his father's local prominence, scholars speculate that Shakespeare most likely attended King's New School, a school that usually employed Oxford graduates and was generally well respected. Shakespeare would have started *petty school* — the rough equivalent to modern preschool — at the age of four or five. He would have learned to read on a *hornbook,* which was a sheet of parchment or paper on which the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer were written. This sheet was framed in wood and covered with a transparent piece of horn for durability. After two years in petty school, he would have transferred to grammar school, where his school day would have probably lasted from 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning (depending on the time of year) until 5 o'clock in the evening, with only a handful of holidays.

While in grammar school, Shakespeare would primarily have studied Latin, reciting and reading the works of classical Roman authors such as Plautus, Ovid, Seneca, and Horace. Traces of these authors' works can be seen in his dramatic texts. Toward his last years in grammar school, Shakespeare would have acquired some basic skills in Greek as well. Thus the remark made by Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's welleducated friend and contemporary playwright, that Shakespeare knew "small Latin and less Greek" is accurate. Jonson is not saying that when Shakespeare left grammar school he was only semi-literate; he merely indicates that Shakespeare did not attend University, where he would have gained more Latin and Greek instruction.

Wife and children

When Shakespeare became an adult, the historical records documenting his existence began to increase. In November 1582, at the age of 18, he married 26- year-old Anne Hathaway from the nearby village of Shottery. The disparity in their ages, coupled with the fact that they baptized their first daughter, Susanna, only six months later in May 1583, has caused a great deal of modern speculation about the nature of their relationship. However, sixteenth-century conceptions of marriage differed slightly from our modern notions. Though all marriages needed to be performed before a member of the clergy, many of Shakespeare's contemporaries believed that a couple could establish a relationship through a premarital contract by exchanging vows in front of witnesses. This contract removed the social stigma of pregnancy before marriage. (Shakespeare's plays contain instances of marriage prompted by pregnancy, and *Measure for Measure* includes this kind of premarital contract.) Two years later, in February 1585, Shakespeare baptized his twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died at the age of 11, when Shakespeare was primarily living away from his family in London.
For seven years after the twins' baptism, the records remain silent on Shakespeare. At some point, he traveled to London and became involved with the theatre, but he could have been anywhere between 21 and 28 years old when he did. Though some have suggested that he may have served as an assistant to a schoolmaster at a provincial school, it seems likely that he went to London to become an actor, gradually becoming a playwright and gaining attention.

The plays: On stage and in print

The next mention of Shakespeare comes in 1592 by a University wit named Robert Greene when Shakespeare apparently was already a rising actor and playwright for the London stage. Greene, no longer a successful playwright, tried to warn other University wits about Shakespeare. He wrote: *For there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his "Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.*

This statement comes at a point in time when men without a university education, like Shakespeare, were starting to compete as dramatists with the University wits. As many critics have pointed out, Greene's statement recalls a line from *Henry VI, Part 3,* which reads, "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!" (I.4.137). Greene's remark does not indicate that Shakespeare was generally disliked. On the contrary, another University wit, Thomas Nashe wrote of the great theatrical success of *Henry VI,* and Henry Chettle, Greene's publisher, later printed a flattering apology to Shakespeare.

What Greene's statement does show us is that Shakespeare's reputation for poetry had reached enough of a prominence to provoke the envy of a failing competitor. In the following year, 1593, the government closed London's theatres due to an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Publication history suggests that during this closure, Shakespeare may have written his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis,* published in 1593, and *The Rape of Lucrece,* published in 1594. These are the only two works that Shakespeare seems to have helped into print; each carries a dedication by Shakespeare to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton.

Stage success

When the theatres reopened in 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company. Though uncertain about the history of his early dramatic works, scholars believe that by this point he had written *The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew,* the *Henry VI* trilogy, and *Titus Andronicus*. During his early years in the theatre, Shakespeare primarily wrote history plays, with his romantic comedies emerging in the 1590s. Even at this early stage in his career, Shakespeare was a success.

In 1597, he was able to purchase New Place, one of the two largest houses in Stratford, and secure a coat of arms for his family.
In 1597, the lease expired on the Lord Chamberlain's playhouse, called The Theatre. Because the owner of The Theatre refused to renew the lease, the acting company was forced to perform at various playhouses until the 1599 opening of the now famous Globe Theatre, which was literally built with lumber from The Theatre. (The Globe, later destroyed by fire, has recently been reconstructed in

London and can be visited today.)

Recent scholars suggest that Shakespeare's great tragedy, *Julius Caesar,* may have been the first of Shakespeare's plays performed in the original playhouse. When this open-air theatre on the Thames River opened, financial papers list Shakespeare's name as one of the principal investors. Already an actor and a playwright, Shakespeare was now becoming a "Company Man." This new status allowed him to share in the profits of the theatre rather than merely getting paid for his plays, some of which publishers were beginning to release in quarto format.

Publications

A *quarto* was a small, inexpensive book typically used for leisure books such as plays; the term itself indicates that the printer folded the paper four times. The modern day equivalent of a quarto would be a paperback.

In contrast, the first collected works of Shakespeare were in *folio* format, which means that the printer folded each sheet only once. Scholars call the collected edition of Shakespeare's works the *First Folio.* A folio was a larger and more prestigious book than a quarto, and printers generally reserved the format for works such as the Bible.

No evidence exists that Shakespeare participated in the publication of any of his plays. Members of Shakespeare's acting company printed the First Folio seven years after Shakespeare's death. Generally, playwrights wrote their works to be performed on stage, and publishing them was a novel innovation at the time. Shakespeare probably would not have thought of them as books in the way we do. In fact, as a principal investor in the acting company (which purchased the play as well as the exclusive right to perform it), he may not have even thought of them as his own. He would probably have thought of his plays as belonging to the company.

For this reason, scholars have generally characterized most quartos printed before the Folio as "bad" by arguing that printers pirated the plays and published them illegally. How would a printer have received a pirated copy of a play? The theories range from someone stealing a copy to an actor (or actors) selling the play by relating it from memory to a

printer. Many times, major differences exist between a quarto version of the play and a folio version, causing uncertainty about which is Shakespeare's true creation. *Hamlet*, for example, is almost twice as long in the Folio as in quarto versions. Recently, scholars have come to realize the value of the different versions. The *Norton Shakespeare,* for example, includes all three versions of *King Lear* — the quarto, the folio, and the *conflated* version (the combination of the quarto and folio).

Prolific productions

The first decade of the 1600s witnessed the publication of additional quartos as well as the production of most of Shakespeare's great tragedies, with *Julius Caesar* appearing in 1599 and *Hamlet* in 1600–1601. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men under James I, Elizabeth's successor. Around the time of this transition in the English monarchy, the famous tragedy *Othello* (1603–1604) was most likely written and performed, followed closely by *King Lear* (1605–1606)*, Antony and Cleopatra* (1606)*,* and *Macbeth* (1606) in the next two years.

Shakespeare's name also appears as a major investor in the 1609 acquisition of an indoor theatre known as the Blackfriars. This last period of Shakespeare's career, which includes plays that considered the acting conditions both at the Blackfriars and the open-air Globe Theatre, consists primarily of romances or tragicomedies such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. On June 29, 1613, during a performance of *All is True,* or *Henry VIII,* the thatching on top of the Globe Theatre caught fire and the playhouse burned to the ground. After this incident, the King's Men moved solely into the indoor Blackfriars Theatre.

Final days

During the last years of his career, Shakespeare collaborated on a couple of plays with contemporary dramatist John Fletcher, even possibly coming out of retirement — which scholars believe began sometime in 1613 — to work on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613–1614). Three years later, Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. Though the exact cause of death remains unknown, a vicar from Stratford in the midseventeenth- century wrote in his diary that Shakespeare,

perhaps celebrating the marriage of his daughter, Judith, contracted a fever during a night of revelry with fellow literary figures Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton. Regardless, Shakespeare may have felt his death was imminent in March of that year, because he altered his will. Interestingly, his will mentions no book or theatrical manuscripts, perhaps indicating the lack of value that he put on printed versions of his dramatic works and their status as company property.

Seven years after Shakespeare's death, John Heminge and Henry Condell, fellow members of the King's Men, published his collected works. In their preface, they claim that they are publishing the true versions of Shakespeare's plays partially as a response to the previous quarto printings of 18 of his plays, most of these with multiple printings. This Folio contains 36 plays to which scholars generally add *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* This volume of Shakespeare's plays began the process of constructing Shakespeare not only as England's national poet but also as a monumental figure whose plays would continue to captivate imaginations at the end of the millennium with no signs of stopping. Ben Jonson's prophetic line about Shakespeare in the First Folio — "He was not of an age, but for all time!" — certainly holds true.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

The Merchant of Venice is a controversial and difficult play, in which a modern reader must confront the darker side of Elizabethan culture. The play has been accused of racism, and many people have argued that, because of this, it should no longer be read in schools or performed in the theatre. The accusations of racism are powerful and often justified. Nonetheless, there is another side to *The Merchant of Venice*. It has been staged regularly for over three hundred years and contains a role that many of the most famous actors have longed to play. In addition, its racism has often been reversed in performance, and parts of the play have become viewed as an eloquent plea for human equality. Indeed, in some ways the play has been instrumental in changing people's perceptions of the Jewish community, and it therefore occupies a valuable place in world culture.

Synopsis

The play begins in Venice, a powerful city-state on the coast of what we now call Italy. In the opening scene, we learn the predicament of a young aristocrat named Bassanio. Bassanio has spent all of his inheritance and is now looking for a way to pay off his debts. He thinks he has found one. He has heard that in Belmont, there is a lady whose father has left her a vast fortune. Bassanio has visited her once, and is sure that she loves him. However, he cannot afford to travel to Belmont again.

Fortunately, Bassanio's best friend Antonio is a wealthy merchant and so devoted to Bassanio that he is happy to lend him the money that he requires. However, Antonio has no ready cash, because he is waiting for some ships to return. Therefore, he and Bassanio visit a moneylender. The moneylender is a Jew named Shylock. He and Antonio have a history of animosity, which revolves around their religious differences and their arguments over the morality of moneylending. Upon meeting, they fall into argument once more, whereupon Shylock devises a "merry bond." He suggests that if Antonio fails to repay the loan, he must be fined; but the fine will not be money. Instead, Shylock will be allowed to cut a pound of

flesh from Antonio's body. Antonio is confident that he will be able to repay the loan and signs the bond.

Meanwhile, we meet Portia, the lady in Belmont. She is besieged by suitors who want to marry her. But under the terms of her father's will, a man can only marry Portia if he passes a test first. There are three caskets in Portia's house: gold, silver, and lead. Each has a riddling statement attached to it. If a suitor chooses the correct casket, he will win Portia's hand in marriage. We see two suitors, the Princes of Morocco and Arragon, attempt the test and fail. Back in Venice, Bassanio prepares for his journey. He invites Shylock to his house for a meal. But the offer is, in fact, a diversion. Shylock has a daughter, Jessica, who loves Lorenzo, one of Bassanio's friends. While Shylock is visiting Bassanio, Lorenzo runs to Shylock's house and helps Jessica to escape.

She takes with her some of her father's money. The elopement is assisted by the fact that Shylock's servant, Launcelot, has decided to betray his master and work for Bassanio instead. When Shylock returns to his house he finds that both his daughter and his money have vanished. At the same time, Bassanio leaves for Belmont. Shylock tries to prevent him, but Lorenzo and Jessica have already escaped by another route. Left alone, Shylock asks another Jewish moneylender, Tubal, to find out where his daughter has gone. Tubal observes Jessica and Lorenzo on a spending spree in Genoa, where Jessica swaps Shylock's engagement ring for a monkey. Shylock is furious and thirsts for revenge. In Belmont, Bassanio arrives at Portia's house in splendid clothes. He attempts the casket test. Realizing that the riddles are describing the difference between appearance and reality, he chooses the lead casket, because it is the least impressive-looking. Bassanio is correct in his choice and wins Portia's hand; they are both delighted, and Bassanio becomes lord of Belmont. Simultaneously, Bassanio's friend Gratiano falls in love with Portia's waiting-woman, Nerissa.

However, this happiness is short-lived, as a messenger enters with bad news. In Venice, Antonio's ships have failed to arrive; every one of them has sunk. Shylock is delighted. He now has the opportunity to get his revenge on one of the Christians who caused his unhappiness. He takes Antonio to court, in order to collect his bond: the pound of flesh. Hearing the news, Bassanio and Gratiano rush to Venice with money given by Portia to repay the loan. Portia and Nerissa remain in Belmont,

saying that they will stay in a monastery and pray. But they are lying. In fact, Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as male lawyers and follow Bassanio to Venice. There, Antonio and Shylock are in court. The court is trying to find a way of preventing Shylock from claiming his pound of flesh. But the law is on Shylock's side, because the bond has Antonio's signature on it.

Shylock refuses to accept Bassanio's money in payment. He wants revenge, not money. Portia arrives, disguised as a lawyer called Balthazar. She begs Shylock to exercise "mercy" (forgiveness), but he refuses. At the last minute, Portia discovers a loophole: The bond says nothing about blood, only flesh. Portia reasons that Shylock must perform the impossible task of cutting flesh without spilling blood. She also discovers that Venetian law demands the execution of any "alien" who threatens the death of a Christian. Shylock is defeated and is ordered to bequeath his money to Jessica and become a Christian. He leaves the court a broken man.

Still in disguise, Portia tests her husband. She asks him for his wedding ring as payment for her saving Antonio. With some misgivings, Bassanio agrees. Nerissa does the same to Gratiano. Then the men return to Belmont. There, Portia, free from her disguise, asks Bassanio where the ring is. He is forced to admit that he gave it to a lawyer. Portia pretends to be devastated, and, after making Bassanio repent, she reveals that, in fact, *she* was the lawyer. Having demonstrated their intellectual superiority, the women forgive their husbands, and the play ends.

Literary and Dramatic Analysis

The first question that *The Merchant of Venice* raises is, What kind of play is this? Is it a comedy, tragedy, tragi-comedy (a play that starts tragically but ends like a comedy), or what? Written in the mid-1590s, when Shakespeare's art was rapidly maturing, it shows the playwright experimenting with a variety of forms. He had just written the three plays of his "lyric period": a comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream;* a romantic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet;* and a history play chronicling the rise and fall of King Richard II. Some aspects of *The Merchant of Venice* derive from all three of these plays: its beautiful lyric poetry, found, for example, in Lorenzo's monologues in act 5; the comic antics of the clown, Lancelot Gobbo; and the downfall of Shylock. For modern audiences, however, the play raises certain issues that have led some critics to regard this play as a "problem play"; that is, a drama that raises significant moral questions that it fails satisfactorily to resolve, as in Shylock's forced conversion at the end of act 4, scene 1.

Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* at a time when few Jews lived in England, from where they had been forcibly expelled in 1290 by Edward I. Nevertheless, the Jew remained a powerful image in English literature and drama throughout the succeeding ages (see Chapter 3). The trial and execution of Queen Elizabeths physician, Dr. Roderigo Lopez, in 1594; the revival of Marlowe's play, *The Jew of Malta;* and other events aroused renewed anti-Semitism in England and may have led Shakespeare to contemplate writing about a rich Jewish moneylender who, like Barabas in Marlowe's play, acts the role of a villain. But unlike Marlowe, Shakespeare endowed his villain Shylock with some very human qualities that evoke much sympathy. The result is an ambivalence toward Shylock that makes his role one of the most dramatically complex and compelling among all of Shakespeare's characters, and one that reinforces the sense of this work as a problem play.

Shylock, of course, is not the only important character in *The Merchant of Venice,* which takes its title from Antonio, the Venetian merchant who borrows from Shylock to help his friend, Bassanio.

Portia, the rich heiress whom Bassanio courts, is another major character, and the relationship between her and her suitors also raises important moral issues. Is Bassanio mainly after Portia's money, or is there a genuine love between the two? How does Bassanio's friendship with Antonio complicate his relationship with Portia? These are questions that the play raises and tries to resolve. To what extent they are resolved more or less successfully is something that literary and dramatic analysis must consider, as we shall do in the pages that follow.

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF HIS SOURCES

Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare borrowed freely from previously known works for his plots, characters, and themes. He also invented new twists and turns in his narrative as well as new characters to give his plays fresh appeal, often providing a new perspective on events. Writers have always done this, avoiding charges of plagiarism by their inventiveness. For Elizabethans, the important thing was not the originality of the story, but the imaginativeness of its presentation—the way it was developed, the language used to tell it, and the new slant that emerged from the tale. Shakespeare could, if he wished, invent his own plots, as he did for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest,* but for most of his plays he seemed more interested in reusing old or familiar stories and themes to see what he could do with them. By comparing Shakespeare's play with his sources, then, we can glimpse something of his creative processes at work, noting how he altered certain details and added or omitted others, and then asking what the results of the differences are.

Shakespeare's main source for *The Merchant of Venice* was a sixteenth-century Italian novel, // *Pecorone (The Dunce)* by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. In this story, Ansaldo, godfather to Gianetto, finances the young man's attempts to win the Lady of Belmonte, a rich widow who requires her suitors to consummate their love before she agrees to wed them, or lose everything they have brought with them. Twice Gianetto fails the test, because of a drink that has been drugged, until the third time, when one of the lady's waiting-women, taking pity on the young man, warns him not to

drink. Meanwhile, to subsidize this third voyage, Ansaldo has had to borrow funds from a Jewish moneylender and forfeit a pound of his flesh if the debt is not repaid on time. Enjoying his good fortune, Gianetto forgets all about the loan until it is too late, but then hurries back to Venice with more than enough money from his wife to repay the debt and save his godfather. The lady, in disguise as a lawyer, follows close behind. When the Jew refuses ten times the amount of the debt and insists on having his pound of flesh, the lady saves the day by requiring the Jew to take exactly one pound without a single drop of blood. Frustrated, the Jew tears up the bond and leaves without so much as the principal allowed to him. The young couple then return to Belmonte, where Ansaldo weds the waiting-woman who had aided Gianetto.

One immediately notices certain differences between Shakespeare's play and his main source. For example, while the moneylender is foiled in his plan to kill Antonio, he is not forced to convert to Christianity at the end; he is only deprived of the money he has lent. Another important difference is the test that Gianetto undergoes as compared with the three caskets in *The Merchant of Venice* from which Portia's suitors must choose. For this part of the plot, Shakespeare had recourse to a story in the *Gesta Romanorum,* where a young woman must choose the right casket before the king will approve the marriage to his son. Perhaps Shakespeare preferred to complicate the plot, introduce more characters, and suggest a significant moral element by having Portia's suitors tested with a choice of caskets. Through the casket plot the characters of Portia and Bassanio are also more fully developed than their counterparts in // *Pecorone.* But the ring plot, through which Portia tests the loyalty of Bassanio at the end of the trial scene, derives from // *Pecorone* and is used in the same way. Still disguised as a lawyer, Portia gets Bassanio to give her the ring she had given him earlier and he had promised never to relinquish.

Another difference that Shakespeare introduced involves the subplot of Lorenzo and Jessica. Here he probably drew on Marlowe's play, where Barabas's daughter, Abigail, falls in love with a Christian and wishes to marry him. Barabas foils their hopes, first by having Abigail's lover killed and then by killing his daughter, who has converted to Christianity and entered a nunnery. Shakespeare

did not follow these unfortunate details but turned instead to another Italian novel, Masuccio's fifteenth-century//*Novellino,* story 14, in which an old miser has a lovely young daughter whom he carefully sequesters at home. Nevertheless, she successfully elopes with a clever young nobleman, despite all the precautions her father has taken. After the couple are happily married and the bride becomes pregnant, a feast is held to which the old father is invited and becomes reconciled with his daughter and her husband. In this story, unlike Shakespeare's adaptation of it, no question of an interfaith marriage is raised.

Shakespeare resorted to some other sources for several details in his drama, but these are the main ones. Even from this very brief summary we can see how he reshaped them to fashion what is essentially a new and more complex rendering. The whole issue of conversion to Christianity is a new element in Shakespeare's representation, but equally important though in a different way are the dramatic construction, the characterizations, and the poetry of *The Merchant of Venice,* to which we must now turn.

POETIC AND DRAMATIC PATTERNS

Despite its controversial or problematic nature. *The Merchant of Venice* contains some of the most lyrical and lovely passages in all of Shakespeare. Many of these passages, like Portia's famous lines on the quality of mercy (4.1.181-99) or Lorenzo's on music and the beauty of the night (5.1.54-65), are worth committing to memory. These set speeches, as they are sometimes called, like the arias in a Verdi opera, delight audiences even as they help develop the dramatic action. But Shakespeare's prose is also important, and we sometimes forget that he was not only a consummate poet but an excellent prose writer as well. Shylock's defense of himself at 3.1.50-69 is one of the most spirited and vigorous pieces of prose ever constructed. Taken out of context, it is often used as a vindication of Shylock's humanity, but in context it works not only as that but as a criticism of Christian behavior. Like Portia on mercy, this is one of the most memorable speeches in the play.

Although Shakespeare at first followed his predecessors among Tudor dramatists in using a great deal of rhymed couplets, by the

time he wrote *The Merchant of Venice* blank verse had become the mainstay of poetic drama. It continued to be used throughout Elizabethan drama and during the reign of James I, gaining in strength and virtuosity while it ever more closely resembled the spoken language of men and women.

Blank Verse

Blank verse basically consists of ten-syllable, unrhymed lines with alternating stresses on the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth syllables. The stresses may vary—sometimes a good deal—for a number of reasons. For example, when the author wishes to bring emphasis to a word that might not otherwise be accented, or when he simply wishes to avoid falling into too regular a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, which can become monotonous. Occasionally, to signal the end of a scene as at 1.1.184-85, or a stretch of sententiae (proverbial wisdom), Shakespeare used rhymed couplets, often varying the meter at the same time, as at 2.7.65-73.

Songs also are important in Shakespeare's plays. *The Merchant of Venice* contains only one song, but it is a very important one. It appears in 32 as Bassanio approaches the caskets to make his choice. Critics have commented on how the first three lines all rhyme with "lead." They argue that this song seems to be a clue Portia gives Bassanio, directing him how to choose the right one, especially since no such song appears in the other casket scenes with the Prince of Morocco or the Prince of Aragon. Be that as it may—Bassanio does not seem to hear the song, and Portia's integrity would be seriously damaged if it is true—the song provides a pleasant interlude and preparation for the theme of Bassanio's speech, "So may the outward shows be least themselves" (3.2.73 ff.).

Image and Metaphor

As we might expect in a play about merchants, much of the language derives from commercial transactions, even when it may appear rather inappropriate, as when Portia addresses Bassanio

after he has chosen the leaden casket:
You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am. Though for myself alone
I would not be ambitious in my wish
To wish myself much better, yet for you
I would be trebled twenty times myself,
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,
That only to stand high in your account
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends
Exceed account. But the full sum of me
Is sum of something which, to term in gross,
Is an unlessoned girl. . . . (3.2.149-59)

Nerissa and Graziano's phrasing in the speeches that follow soon after, when they announce their wish to be married too, reemphasize the commercial aspect of the transaction. Nerissa comments that they have seen their wishes "prosper" (3.2.187), and Graziano speaks of the "bargain" of the faith that Portia and Bassanio have pledged to each other (32.193). Near the end of this part of the dialogue, when Graziano proposes a bet, "We'll play with them the first boy for a thousand ducats" (3.2.213), money once again becomes a pronounced consideration.

Since Shakespeare was writing for a largely literate audience and not merely for the masses that also populated his theater, he felt free also to use many classical allusions. Graziano combines both kinds of language when he greets Lorenzo and Jessica at 3.2.239: "We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece." Here he compares Bassanio and himself to the ancient argonaut Jason on his dangerous voyage to Colchis on the Black Sea in quest of the golden fleece, one of the most famous prizes in classical literature. The speeches of the Prince of Morocco in 2.1 are studded with classical allusions, although he gets some of them wrong, an indication of the way Shakespeare makes fun of his pretentiousness. For example, the prince confuses the story of Hercules and Lichas playing at dice with another story of Hercules thrown into a rage by the

shirt of Nessus. Shakespeare's audience would have picked up the allusions and understood how Morocco mixed them up.

Shakespeare's audience was also steeped in biblical lore. With the advent of the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible and other English translations made available under Elizabeth I's Protestant rule, more and more English people read Scripture on their own, besides hearing it read to them in church every Sunday. Shakespeare could count on his audience therefore to grasp the allusions made directly, as in Shylock's account of Jacob and Laban in 1.3, or indirectly, as at 3.1.80-81 where Shylock alludes to the curse upon his people mentioned in Matthew 27.25 and Luke 13.34-35. Like metaphors, these allusions extend the frame of reference and thus help provide a broader context for the play than might at first seem apparent.

Although no single strand of imagery pervades *The Merchant of Venice* in the way that imagery of blood pervades *Macbeth* or imagery of disease pervades *Hamlet,* the frequent suggestion of music contributes significantly to the play's atmosphere, according to Caroline Spurgeon, who pioneered the study of image patterns in Shakespeare's plays. The two great moments of emotion and romance—Bassanio's casket scene and especially Lorenzo and Jessica's evening scene in 5.1—are dominated by music. Lorenzo summons musicians to play while he and his wife await Portia's return, commenting, "Soft stillness and the night/Become the touches of sweet harmony" (56-57). He is then moved to remark on the music of the spheres, the heavenly harmony that exists in "immortal souls" (60-65). But as the music begins to play, Jessica says she is never merry when she hears sweet music. She means that music puts her into a mood of contemplation, and in a long speech Lorenzo explains the reason for that, alluding to the poet Orpheus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The point of those passages, in part, is to restore the play to the realm of romantic comedy, disturbed as it was by the events of the trial scene in the immediately preceding act. It also looks forward to what happens at the end of the scene: the reunions and reconciliations of the other two married couples and the good news that Portia delivers to Antonio, Lorenzo, and Jessica. As elsewhere in Shakespeare, music is the symbol of harmony. By contrast, in act 2, where a good deal of music and revelry is suggested, Shylock declares his antipathy to masques and music (2.5.28-36), one of many contrasts the play develops between Shylock and his antagonists.

Many poetical images appear throughout *The Merchant of Venice* consistent with the lyrical spirit that pervades much of the play. Salarino's pageant of argosies at 1.1.9-14 is one such example. Using an elaborate simile, he compares Antonio's state of mind to his sailing ships tossing on the ocean, an image he continues in his next speech. Jessica's comments on her embarrassed disguise as a boy as she prepares to elope with Lorenzo is delightfully witty, as she comments on the nature of love, invoking the image of blind Cupid, the little love god:

I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me.
For I am much ashamed of my exchange.
But love is blind, and lovers cannot see
The pretty follies they themselves commit;
For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
To see me thus transformed to a boy. (2.6.34-39)

Antonio's description of himself as a "tainted wether of the flock" (4.1.113-15) is a rather different example. It shows how Antonio interprets his state of mind in the final scene before Portia enters; he then vises another image to reveal further the depth of his despondency.

Stage Conventions

Like his fellow dramatists, Shakespeare used a number of stage conventions, or artificial dramatic devices, to develop his plots. Perhaps the most difficult Elizabethan stage convention for modern audiences to grasp is what is called impenetrable disguise. When Portia appears as Dr. Balthazar in 4.1, neither her husband, Bassanio, nor anyone else recognizes her or Nerissa, disguised as her clerk. On stage their costumes, makeup, and voice intonations all help conceal their true identities, but even so, the audience, who have been apprised beforehand, easily recognizes who they are, though their husbands cannot. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Oberon says he is invisible but remains in plain view of the audience, he is invisible to the characters on stage. This requires the same imaginative acceptance as other stage conventions, such as the aside and the soliloquy. When a character speaks an aside, for example, only the audience hears him or her, notwithstanding

that the speech is perfectly audible to everyone on stage. An example of such an aside is Shylock's speech as Antonio enters at 1.3.38-49. Lancelot Gobbo's monologue that opens 2.2 is an example of a soliloquy, a speech spoken to the audience that, like Hamlet's famous soliloquies, allows us to hear what a character is thinking and is similar to the voice-over technique used today in films and television dramas.

All conventions, like the overall illusion that dramatic representation involves, depend on an audience's acceptance of what Samuel Taylor Coleridge called a "willing suspension of disbelief." While a good deal of Shakespearean drama is realistic, not all of it is: ghosts appear, as *in Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth,* and gods descend from the heavens, as in *As You like It* and *Cymbeline.* At the end of *The Merchant of Venice* at least one unexplained miracle occurs, when Portia announces that three of Antonio's argosies have safely come to harbor, and Lorenzo alludes to another when he says that Portia drops manna in the way of starved people (5.1.294-95). The reality that Shakespeare appeals to more than any other is the reality of the imagination, which is more powerful than any other kind of reality.

Characterization

Discussion of reality prompts a discussion of the nature of dramatic character. To what extent are the characters in Shakespeare's plays, and specifically those in *The Merchant of Venice,* "real" people? Some critics argue that dramatic characters, like characters in a novel, are not real but convey only the illusion of people in real life. They lack any existence before the play begins as well as after it ends. As Prospero says in *The Tempest,* their "little lives are rounded with a sleep." The illusion, however, is sometimes so powerful that we cannot help thinking of dramatic characters as actual historical personages. While few people today would go so far as to describe the girlhood of Shakespeare's heroines, as one ninteenth-century critic, Mary Cowden Clarke, did in a book bearing that title, many modern critics do not hesitate to explore the psychological motivations that underlie a character's actions. Character motivation of course is important in any play or novel; without sufficient motivation a character's behavior will lack credibility.

This is where illusion and reality meet.

A discussion of *The Merchant of Venice,* therefore, inevitably involves character analysis, just as all of Shakespeare's plays do. Some analysis will continue to baffle us as it has done others. What, for instance, is the cause of Antonio's melancholy, announced in the play's opening line? Solanio and Salarino offer some explanations, but Antonio rejects all of them. We never do find out the reason, and Antonio himself remains baffled. At the end he seems relieved to know that his ships have all come in safely to harbor, but does that end his melancholy? And what caused it in the first place? Since the play does not provide the answers to these questions, we can only speculate on the reasons.

Bassanio's motivation in seeking out Portia is by no means simple, either. While he undoubtedly finds her attractive, as she does him, is love the main motivation for Bassanio's quest? Or does her wealth also have a lot to do with it? Can the two motives be separated, or are they inextricably intertwined? Probably the latter, as is the case with some other couples in Shakespeare's plays. (Shakespeare may be a romantic, but he is not a sentimentalist.) And what occasions Jessica's long silence at the end of the play? Her last words are, "I am never merry when 1 hear sweet music" (5.1.69). Lorenzo then reads her a lecture on the power of music to alter states of being in people as in animals. While his explanation may be convincing, is it altogether so? Or is something else bothering Jessica? In many recent productions, directors make a good deal of her apparent brooding on events (see Chapter 7), although in a comedy it is expected that she should be as joyous as the other couples who enter Portia's house.

Finally, what motivates Shylock to accept conversion to Christianity as a means of saving his life? For a Jew, the one biblical command that may not be broken is the command not to take any other God before Jehovah. Shylock clearly violates this command, as he has violated other commands in his faith. Have the Christians broken his spirit to such an extent that he no longer has any integrity left whatsoever? Or is he merely a craven moneylender after all? His behavior has sometimes been interpreted either way, for in this respect the play remains tantalizingly ambiguous. Again, is

Antonio's mercy really that, or is it a more sinister kind of revenge than even Shylock's demand for his pound of flesh was? Some critics favor the first explanation, arguing that Shakespeare's audience believed salvation could come only through Christianity. But others, especially in our post-Holocaust days, find the demand for Shylock's conversion not unlike the cruelty of the Spanish inquisition.

Multiple Plots and Subplots

Shakespeare borrowed not from one but several sources for *The Merchant of Venice,* fusing the casket plot, taken from the *Gesta Romanorum,* to the quest plot in Ser Giovanni's // *Pecorone.* He did this not only to vary his narrative, but also to contrast different types of characters with the different types of caskets. Morocco, Aragon, and Bassanio all differ from each other, as they differ from the first group of suitors mentioned in act 1, scene 2. Shakespeare also inserted the subplot of Jessica and Lorenzo's elopement to show yet another kind of romantic courtship. At the same time, this subplot brings out aspects of Shylock's character that may make him more or less sympathetic. Much depends on how it is interpreted and portrayed, particularly on how we see Shylock's relationship with his daughter. She claims "Our house is hell" (2.3.2), but Jessica may simply be a discontented young woman bridling at her father's austerity. Shylock, however, may not be the kind of loving parent she wants and needs, a factor motivating her rebelliousness.

Juxtaposition in Elizabethan Drama

One of the basic techniques of Elizabethan drama, which was performed without intermission from start to finish (act intervals came later in the seventeenth century), was the juxtaposition of scenes, one against the other. In this way the action of the scenes could be seen to comment upon each other. For example, Antonio's melancholy opens the play and is followed in the next scene by Portia's world-weariness. Shakespeare evidently intends a comparison or contrast between the two important characters and expects us to notice how their problems are ultimately resolved—if they are.

Sometimes the juxtapositions occur within a scene. In act 3, scene 1, Solanio and Salarino begin by discussing Antonio's disasters at sea and then turn to Shylock's misfortunes as the latter enters. What does Antonio's ill luck have to do with Shylock's lament for the loss of his daughter? What makes Salarino, after taunting Shylock rather unmercifully, bring up Antonio's losses at sea? Are they merely idle gossipers, or do they have some sinister motive? The play offers no answer to this question, but note that it is precisely here that Shylock first says that he may foreclose on his bond with Antonio. Only a deeply disturbed individual could see in that action anything like an appropriate revenge for Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo. It smacks of the worst kind of spitefulness, however justified it might otherwise appear. Later on, in the trial scene Portia will juxtapose the advantages of mercy as opposed to justice and instruct all those present as well as Shylock on the quality of mercy. She delays resolving the difficulty Antonio is in until almost the last moment not only to heighten the suspense of the scene and intensify the dramatic events that follow, but also to give Shylock every opportunity to relent.

Finally, Shakespeare retains the ring plot from // *Pecorone* for his last two scenes, compounding it by having Nerissa also get her ring back from Graziano. Through the ring plot these wives teach their husbands a good lesson about marital loyalty, which in their view supersedes the loyalty between friends. For this reason, Portia gives the ring to Antonio to return to Bassanio, thereby symbolically indicating her supremacy over her male rival regarding Bassanio's devotion.

Thematic Development

Several themes have already been suggested in the foregoing analyses of language and character, such as the relation of mercy and justice, the nature of love, and the bonds that connect or tie one human being to another. Themes are the underlying ideas that help to unify the action of a play and develop its meaning. They can be identified in various ways by focusing on key words or images and their repetition throughout the play. Recurrent or contrasting actions by the characters may also suggest themes, just as analysis of the relationship between main plot and subplot often

does. Sometimes what seems to be merely a comic interlude may suggest a major theme, just as Lancelot Gobbo's scene with his father suggests the relationship between parent and child that is very much at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice.* Similarly, the dramatic structure of a play may suggest its organizing principle and thereby one of its major themes. For a play need not be limited to a single theme, but on the contrary may have several important themes worthy of analysis.

The major theme in *The Merchant of Venice* is the theme of bondage and bonding. The play deals with all kinds of ties: between father and child, between friend and friend, between master and servant, between creditor and debtor, and so forth. But perhaps the most important bond of all is the one that connects one human being with another, implicit in most of the other types of ties found in this play. The first line of the play also suggests another kind of bond—the way Antonio seems tied to melancholy, a melancholy he is at pains to understand but is unable to. His friends, Salarino and Solanio, try to help him sort out his feelings, but to no avail. Then other friends, Bassanio, Graziano, and Lorenzo, appear. It is not entirely clear what the relationships are between them and the other two friends, who leave the scene rather abruptly, but Antonio reassures Salarino and Solanio that, whatever coolness may have grown between the two groups, these two men are very dear to him. A comic interlude follows during which Graziano tries to cheer up Antonio, as Salarino and Solanio had tried earlier. His jocularity notwithstanding, Graziano delivers some acute observations, such as the way men occasionally try to secure a reputation for wisdom by appearing grave and silent. He then leaves with Lorenzo so that Bassanio may talk privately with Antonio.

The rest of the scene shows the strong bond that ties these two friends together. They are more than just friends; they are almost like father and son, reflecting the relationship between Gianetto and Ansaldo in Shakespeare's source, // *Pecorone.* But the relationship here is at a later stage, for Bassanio is already in debt to Antonio and is uneasy about once more asking his friend for funds, especially since they will be used to woo a lady for his wife. The potential conflict between friends and lovers (soon to become

spouses) is thus introduced, but throughout the play Antonio tries to act as generously as he can. He is even willing, when it comes down to it, to pledge his life so that Bassanio can have sufficient funds to make a good impression when he goes to Belmont to see Portia.

The next scene focuses on another kind of bond, the one that ties a daughter to her father's will. Although Portia at first bridles at this obligation (1.2.21-25), under Nerissa's tutelage she recognizes the virtue inherent in her father's requirement that whoever marries her must first choose the right casket. As Nerissa says, Portia's father was "ever virtuous," and at his death he was inspired to good purpose, sensing that whoever chooses the right casket will be the one Portia will "rightly love" (1.2.27-32). Later in the play, the bond between parent and child is developed in other ways: comically in the scene between Lancelot Gobbo and his father (2.2), and more seriously in the relationship between Shylock and Jessica, who not only deserts her father, but also her religion—another bond that is not as easily broken as Jessica may think. The third scene introduces several different but related kinds of bonds. The first is the commercial bond, the agreement between creditor and borrower for a certain sum of money. But the bond that ties enemies to each other is also present as well as the attempt to overcome a historic enmity and enter a new relationship. Shylock's attitudes are very peculiar. The contradictions and inconsistencies in his speeches are only part of his strange behavior.

On the one hand, he says he hates Antonio and resents his behavior toward him (1.3.38-49, 103-25); on the other hand, he would be friends with Antonio and have his love (1.3.133-38). To this end he is willing to offer a loan *at no interest.* For a moneylender this gesture is most unusual, and it takes Antonio by surprise. Despite Bassanio's reluctance to let his friend enter into the agreement, Antonio goes ahead with the "merry bond," which involves the forfeiture of a pound of his flesh if he defaults. He feels very confident that his ships will come in well before the due date and supply him with enough money to repay the debt easily (1.3.153-56, 178). Rightly or wrongly, he believes Shylock has had a change of heart; he remarks to Bassanio, "The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind" (175).

Earlier in this scene, when Bassanio invites him to dinner, Shylock rejects the invitation, asserting allegiance to his religion (1.3.30-35). But in act 2 Shylock goes off to dine with Bassanio and his friends after all. His explicit motive, or what he says to Jessica, is "to feed upon /The prodigal Christian" (2.5.14-15). One can't help suspect, however, that he may still be trying to ingratiate himself further with Antonio, who will be there, too. Whatever the case—and these motives are not mutually exclusive—this is the first indication that Shylock's tie to his religion may not be as strong as it seems, regardless of his knowledge of the Hebrew bible, which he expounds in 1.3, or his membership in a synagogue (3.1.122-23).

Act 2 develops thematically many of the bonds already discussed and introduces others. Portia's suitors, for instance, are bound by the terms of their choice: if they pick the wrong casket, they must leave at once, tell no one about the choice, and remain unwed for life (2.910-15). During the scenes with the princes of Morocco and Arragon, Portia also shows the obligations of courtesy, and only after they leave does she reveal her true feelings toward them, which are just as unfavorable as those toward her earlier suitors (1.2.38-108, 2.7.79, 2.9.78-79). Lancelot Gobbo's monologue in 2.2 comically develops the motif of the bond between master and servant, which is further developed in Shylock's attitude toward him (2.5.45-50; cp. 1.3.172-73). These ties are not indissoluble; nevertheless, they require some searching of one's conscience to break them.

Act 3 dramatizes the breaking of some bonds and the forging of new ones. Word arrives that one of Antonio's ships has been lost. Meantime, Jessica has eloped with Lorenzo, and Shylock mourns his daughter and his ducats (2.8.12-22, 3.1.23-35, 75-91). When, after mocking Shylock's despair, Salarino mentions Antonio's ill fortune, he (more or less inadvertently) ignites Shylock's desire for revenge, which he justifies in his long speech identifying himself, as a Jew, with all humanity, including Christians (3.15 5-69). His claim that Christians have taught him to be vindictive may be arguable, but neither Salarino nor Solanio disputes the claim, interrupted though they are at this point by a messenger summoning them to Antonio's house. The scene concludes as Shylock, receiving

unwelcome news of Jessica's spendthrift ways from Tubal, pledges to exact his forfeit if Antonio defaults on his debt payment. While this is going on in Venice, at Belmont Portia and Bassanio enjoy an idyllic time together and have fallen in love. It is questionable whether Portia's clear preference for Bassanio leads her to assist him in making the right choice of caskets by having a song sung, whose first three lines rhyme with *lead* (3.2.63-65). She overtly insists that though she is tempted to aid Bassanio, she will not (3.2.10-12), and some critics take her at her word. Nevertheless, it is only here, in Bassanio's casket scene and not in the others, that any music is played. Has Portia thus violated her bond? Bassanio, of course, may be too engrossed in meditation while the song is sung, pondering the inscriptions on the caskets and making his decision. When at length he chooses the right casket, Portia is overjoyed, as everyone else is, and Graziano and Nerissa also announce their engagement. So the bonds of matrimony are forged, sealed by the rings that Portia and Nerissa give their husbands. Into this scene of festivity intrudes the news from Venice, that Antonio's ships have all been lost and he is forfeit to Shylock. Bassanio is stunned, but Portia leaps to his aid as a good, rich wife should, sending him immediately back to Venice with more than enough ducats to satisfy the debt Antonio owes. She only insists that they be married first, without taking any time to consummate the act. After Bassanio and Graziano leave, she turns her household over to Lorenzo and Jessica (3.4.24-40), who have come to Belmont with Salerio bearing the ill tidings, and she announces her plan to Nerissa to follow their husbands to Venice disguised as men (3.4.57-84). Violating the propriety of their sex by doing so, they are bound to a higher obligation—to help their loved ones where and as they can.

Act 3, scene 3 is a prelude to the trial scene (4.1), showing Shylock's adamant refusal to relinquish his hold on Antonio. He stands on Venetian justice, he claims, which cannot allow any divergence without risking its credit in the world. Antonio concedes as much (3.326-29), as later the duke does, too. A state is bound to observe and enforce its laws, as Shylock well knows. He thus appears to have the upper hand here and during the first part of 4.1. When Portia appears in disguise as a doctor of laws with Nerissa as her clerk, she recognizes the justice of Shylock's claim at first and

pleads with him to show mercy. But Shylock feels no compulsion to be merciful, whereupon Portia argues that the quality of mercy is not "strained," or forced (4.1.181-202). Men are not bound to be merciful; mercy issues from a generous and forgiving spirit. Her words fall on deaf ears, unfortunately, and Shylock proceeds with his claim to exact his forfeit.
Just as he is about to do so, despite the pleas from all concerned,

Bassanio choosing the casket; illustration by Gordon Browne in *The Works of Shakespeare,* ed. Henry Irving and Frank A. Marshall (1888), vol. 3. Portia interrupts him with another piece of Venetian law about which Shylock is unaware. The moment resembles that in Genesis, when Abraham, having bound his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord, is interrupted by an angel and prevented from going through with his act of human sacrifice, which is so adverse to everything Judaism stands for (see Gen. 22.1-14). By her action, Portia not only saves Antonio's life, she also saves Shylock from violating his own humanity by performing an extremely cruel, not to say inhuman, deed. Only she does not stop there. Caught in a web of his own making, Shylock then tries to leave with the money Bassanio has offered him, but he is not allowed to receive so much as his principal. The law, which Shylock has insisted he is bound to, has yet another hold on him: as an alien in Venice (Jews were not allowed to be citizens), his life and all his possessions are forfeit to the state, insofar as he had designs against the life of a true Venetian citizen.

Here the duke's mercy is spontaneous, contrasting directly with Shylock's refusal earlier to show any mercy at all. Antonio's mercy is more considered and deliberate, and for modern audiences more problematical. First, Shylock must agree to bequeath all he possesses at his death to Lorenzo and Jessica; second, he must convert to Christianity. A careful reading of the play will show that however difficult Shylock finds these conditions, they are not impossible. For he has not been a truly religious Jew. He has not been deeply bound to his religion, for no Jew would insist on such diabolical vengeance as Shylock has done. That is why when he enters the duke's court (4.1.14), he enters alone. Neither Tubal nor any other member of the Jewish community in Venice accompanies him. (In the National Theatre's production in London in

1999, Tubal does enter but leaves when he sees Shylock determined to go through with his action against Antonio.) His forced conversion may repel us today, though it probably did not repel Shakespeare's audience, who may have seen this as Shylock's best chance for salvation. Nevertheless, Shylock's pain at the end, and his admission that he is ill, leaves many on stage and off feeling uncomfortable.

The last act is important for restoring the play to something more closely resembling romantic comedy. The main action involves the rings that Portia and Nerissa, in their disguises, have extracted from their husbands. Despite the men's promises never Graziano giving Portia the ring; illustration by Gordon Browne in *The Works of Shakespeare,* ed. Henry Irving and Frank A. Marshall (1888), vol. 3. to part with the rings, at Antonio's urging Bassanio yields and sends Graziano after Portia with his ring (4.1.445-50). We do not see how Nerissa gets the ring from Graziano, who shows her the way to Shylock's house to deliver his deed of gift to Lorenzo and Jessica, but it is she who first denounces her husband for having given the ring away (5.1.141-65). What follows is an object lesson to the husbands, teaching them to respect more completely the vows they make to their wives and, by implication, all of the bonds that unite them as husband and wife. By accepting Antonio's pledge of his soul to guarantee Bassanio's honor, Portia also establishes the priorities she feels are necessary for her future household.

CONCLUSION

Like any literary artifact, a Shakespearean play is a complex structure that uses a variety of techniques. Thematic and dramatic structures, including verse patterns, prose, imagery and metaphor, characters, theatrical conventions, multiple plots, and the juxtaposition of scenes—each contributes to the overall design and meaning of the play. Close reading and analysis of these patterns lead to a richer and fuller experience, bringing us ever closer to the heart of Shakespeare's work. In addition, analysis of Shakespeare's source materials and of the ways in which he adapts them to his own purposes also helps bring us closer. Because Shakespeare's works are as complex as they are. involving ambiguities that reflect the profound depths of human experience, analysis and

discussion may seem endless, but the deeper one probes, the more fruitful the results.

QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN AND ORAL DISCUSSION

1. Discuss questions of genre that *The Merchant of Venice* raises. What elements of tragedy does it include? What are its comic aspects? Is Shylock a tragic victim or a comic villain, like Marlowe's Barabas?

2. The modern critic Northrop Frye says that in a well-constructed comedy not all of the moods are comic in the sense of festive. He also says that in comedy not all of the characters advance toward the new society of the final scene; a character or two remain isolated from this action like spectators of it. In *The Merchant of Venice* who fits this description? Is it important that such characters should be included in comedy, and if so, why?

3. Another critic, John Baxter, says that Shakespeare reveals "a complex awareness of life." What do you think he means by that? What are the identifiable components of this non-simplistic view of life in *The Merchant of Venice,* and how are they developed?

4. Analyze carefully as a piece of poetry Portia's speech on the quality of mercy (4.1.181-99). What are the principal poetic devices that she uses? How, for example, is mercy like a "gentle rain"? What biblical allusions does she employ, and how do they operate in her speech? Do the same thing for other set speeches in this play.

5. Analyze Shylock's prose speech at 3.1.50-69. How does his use of rhetorical questions work? What effect do his repetitions or parallelisms have? How powerful is the speech, and to what do you attribute its overall effectiveness?

6. Organize a debate about the song, "Tell me where is fancy bred" (32.63-72) as Bassanio decides which casket to choose. Have one side argue that Portia unfairly leads Bassanio to make the right choice, because she has fallen in love with him. Have the other side argue that the song is a harmless interlude used simply to vary the

casket-choosing episode; moreover, Portia has already explicitly said that she will not teach Bassanio how to choose (32.10-12) and that if he loves her, he will choose correctly (2.2.41).

7. What is Shylock's motive at 4.1.84-86 for rejecting the money offered him and insisting on the forfeit of the bond? When the moneylender is frustrated in his attempt to kill the merchant, why does Shakespeare continue the episode, bringing in additional penalties against Shylock, including the requirement that he convert to Christianity?

8. Find as many biblical allusions as you can in *The Merchant of Venice.* How does each one function in its context? Why, for example, does Shylock recount the story of Jacob and Laban to Antonio in 1.3? What effect does it have? Do the names of the Jewish characters—Jessica, Tubal, Chus (who is mentioned but does not appear), as well as Shylock—carry any special significance, given their biblical origins?

9. What is Graziano's dramatic function in *The Merchant of Venice?* He is Shakespeare's invention, not found in any of his sources. So is Nerissa. What does their relationship add to the development of the play, thematically as well as dramatically?

10. How do Venice and Belmont contrast with each other? In what sense is Belmont a pastoral retreat from the world, especially the world of business, lawsuits, politics, and the like?

11. Organize another debate on the issue of Christian anti-Semitism in the play. Is it adequate grounds for Shylock's revenge? Or does Shylock go too far? What about his conversion to Christianity? Is Antonio justified in making this a condition of Shylock's reprieve?

12. Write a sixth act to *The Merchant of Venice* in modern English about the married life of Portia and Bassanio, Nerissa and Graziano, Jessica and Lorenzo. How do you imagine they get on with each other? Where do Shylock and Antonio fit in, or do they? Do they become friends at last?

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Classical and Renaissance Concept of Male Friendship

From ancient times through the Renaissance, friendship between men was regarded as the highest form of social relationship, even surpassing that between man and woman in matrimony. In Plato's *Symposium,* for example, Socrates places male friendship higher on the scale of love than he does marriage between the sexes. Homosexual love did not have the stigma it later came to bear in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but Socrates did not consider that the purest or highest form of love. Stories of the devotion between male friends abound in classical literature and throughout later ages. In the Bible, the devotion between David and Jonathan became proverbial. The willingness of one friend to give his life for another was the true test of friendship.

In *The Merchant of Venice* the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio is tested in precisely this way. While some recent stage productions of the play treat it as a homosexual relationship, at least where Antonio is concerned, Shakespeare only barely suggests that this might be the basis of their friendship, especially when Solanio and Salarino discuss Antonio's parting from Bassanio as he leaves for Belmont (2.8.36-53). Portia seems to recognize the threat their relationship may pose for her marriage to Bassanio, and it may account for her use of the ring plot at the end of the play. Since she also recognizes the depth of her husband's love for his friend, she is willing to defer the consummation of their marriage until the problem of Antonio's forfeiture is resolved (3.2.241-324).

The biblical story of David and Jonathan appears in 1 Sam., beginning in chapters 18.1-15 and 19.1-10, continuing through chapters 20.1-43, 31.2-3, and ending with David's lament for Jonathan (2 Sam. 1.17-26). It concludes with the famous lines: "Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan. Very kind hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty overthrown, and the weapons of war

destroyed." Another famous story portrayed the friendship of Damon and Pythias, which Elizabethan playwright Richard Edwards (1523-1566) made into a play that was performed before Queen Elizabeth by the Children of the Queen's Chapel, probably at Christmas, 1564. Damon and Pythias (ca. 1564) may also have been The story of Damon and Pythias as Edwards dramatizes it contrasts the devoted friendship of the two Greeks against the false friendship of two Sicilians, Aristippus, a philosopher, and Carisophus, a scheming parasite. When Damon and Phythias visit Syracuse in Sicily, accompanied by Damon's servant, Stephano, Damon makes the mistake of telling Carisophus that he wants to go around and see the city, whereupon Carisophus informs the tryannical ruler, Dionysius, that Damon is a spy. Dionysius arrests Damon and condemns him to death. When Damon asks permission to go home to set his affairs in order, Pythias offers himself as a hostage to guarantee his friend's return within three months. Dionysius agrees, but as the day set for Damon's return arrives, Damon does not appear. Pythias is prepared to sacrifice himself for his friend, when Damon appears, running to turn himself in. The two friends argue about who should die. Dionysius becomes so impressed with their devotion to each other that he experiences a moral conversion and frees both of them on condition that they accept him into their fellowship.

Early in the play, their servant Stephano describes the friendship between Damon and Pythias:

These two, since at school they fell acquainted,
In mutual friendship at no time have fainted,
But loved so kindly and friendly each other.

performed at Merton College, Oxford, early in 1568.

As though they were brothers by father and mother.
Pythagoras learning these two have embraced,
Which both are in virtue so narrowly laced
That all their whole doings do fall to this issue,
To have no respect but only to virtue:
All one in effect, all one in their going,
All one in their study, all one in their doing.
These gentlemen both, being of one condition,

Both alike of my service have all the fruition.
Pythias is joyful if Damon be pleased,
If Pythias be served, then Damon is eased.
Serve one, serve both: so near, who would win them?
I think they have but one heart between them. (ed. 1571; scene 5, lines 240-71)

The nature of friendship has inspired many discourses on the subject, from classical times to the present. One of the most famous and highly regarded in the Renaissance, often cited by others, was the Roman orator Cicero's *De Amicitia* (Of Friendship). It was translated by Elizabeth I's godson, Sir John Harington in 1550, but was already very influential. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), or Tully as he is also known, was the most famous orator of his time. He was also an important politician and statesman during the period of the Roman republic. He actively opposed Julius Caesar during the Roman civil war, but after it ended, Caesar forgave him and he lived as an honored Roman under the dictatorship. Cicero was not a member of the conspiracy against Caesar, which led to the dictators assassination, but he did not oppose it, although he and Marc Antony were bitter enemies. After Octavius Caesar conquered Rome, Antony persuaded him to have Cicero executed.

Written in the year 44 B.C., *De Amicitia* takes the form of a dialogue among Gaius Laelius, a renowned Stoic and elegant orator, and his two sons-in-law, Quintus Mucius Scaevola, a distinguished lawyer, and Gaius Fannius Strabo, a historian and tribune of the plebians. The time is 129 B.C., shortly after the death of Scipio Minor, who was Laeliuss best friend, and is the occasion of the discourse. The following excerpts include some of the principles of friendship that Cicero advocated and that Renaissance authors admired.

FROM CICERO, *DE AMICITIA* (44 B.C.)
(Trans. Sir John Harington, London. 1550)

They which behave themselves, and do so live that their faith, their honesty, their uprightness and liberality is allowed, and in them neither

covetousness, neither treachery, neither rashness is seen to be, and beside
this be of great constancy . . . all these like as they be taken for good men, so we think them worthy to be called, who follow nature, the best guide of well living, so far as mans power can lead them. For this methinketh
I do spy, that we are so born together as there should be among all men a certain fellowship. And the greater the fellowship should be, the nearer that everyone cometh to another. And therefore citizens be dearer to us than foreigners, and kinsfolk nearer than friendfolk. For toward these Nature herself hath bred a friendliness. But in this there is not surety enough, for in this point friendship passeth kindred, in that kindred may be without good will, but friendship can no wise lack it. For take away good will, and friendship loseth; but cousinage keepeth still his name.

But how great the virtue of friendship is, it may hereof best be understood,
that of innumerable companies of mankind, which nature herself hath knit together, it is a thing drawn and brought to such a strait, that friendship is always joined either between two, or else between few. For friendship is nothing else but a perfect agreement with good will and true love in all kind of good things and goodly. And I know not whether any better thing hath been given of God unto men, wisdom excepted, than this same friendship. Some set riches before, some health, others power, and others honor, many also pleasures. But certainly this last is for beasts, and those other uppermore be fading and uncertain, and be not so much within the compass of our wisdom as within the fickleness of fortune. But they which place our chiefest weal in virtue do therein very well; and yet, this same virtue it is which both engendereth and upholdeth friendship. Neither may friendship by any means be without virtue.
. . . What sweeter thing can there be than to have one with whom thou darest so boldly talk all matters, as with thine own self? How should the profit of welfare and prosperity be so great if you had not some which should rejoice so much thereat as yourself? But as for evil plight and adversity, it were hard to bear them without such a one as would bear the same more grievously than yourself. To conclude, all other things that are desired, each one to each man serveth the turn, as riches for use, wealth for worship, honor for praise, pleasure for delight, health to want

grief and to do the office of the body. Friendship containeth more things in it. Withersoever you turn, it is at hand. It will be kept out of no place; it is never unreasonable, nor ever troublous. Therefore, neither water, nor fire, nor air, as they say, do we in more places use than this friendship.

And now I d o not speak of the common or mean sort of friendship, which yet delighteth and profiteth, but of the true and perfect, as theirs was, which being few are soon told. For friendship maketh welfare the goodlier, and evilfare—by sundering and parting of griefs—the lighter. And where friendship hath in it many and great commodities, yet this exceedeth all the rest, that she forecomforts us with the good hope that is to come. She suffereth men's hearts neither to faint nor yet to fall, but he that beholdeth his friend doth, as it were, behold a certain pattern of himself. Wherefore in friendship the absent be present, the needy never lack, the sick think themselves whole, and—that which is hardest to be spoken—the dead never die. So great honor, remembrance, and desire breedeth in them toward their friends. By reason whereof their deaths be thought happy, and others' lives be much praised. But if you should take out of the world the knot of friendship, neither can there any house, neither any city be able to continue; no, not the tillage of the land can endure. And if this cannot be understood hereby, yet of strife and debate it may well be perceived, how great the power of concord and friendship is. For what house so steady, or what city stands so fast, but through hatred and strife it may be utterly overthrown? Whereupon, how much goodness resteth in friendship it may easily be judged.

Elizabethan Marriage

The position of women in Renaissance England was quite different from their position today. Women had few rights. For example, they could not attend university, they could not vote or be elected to political office, and they had very limited control over their own property. As children, they were utterly subjugated to their parents, especially their fathers. As wives, they were under the domination of their husbands, who had control of all their personal property. Women had little recourse to the law, which of course admitted no women as judges or attorneys. That is why Portia, capable and intelligent though she maybe, must assume the disguise of Dr. Balthasar in *The Merchant of Venice* when she appears in the trial scene. To enter a man's world, as she and Nerissa do in act 4, they must appear as men. At first, like Rosalind in *As You Like It,* they joke about it (3.4.60-80), but during the trial they behave generally very seriously indeed.

The ideal woman in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was one who, at least in men's minds, was submissive, meek, obedient to her lord and master, virtuous, soft-spoken or (better) silent, and modest in both dress and comportment. Were she otherwise, for example, if she dared to oppose her husband's will, she was subject to his discipline, which could involve a beating, or possibly worse. Petruchio's treatment of his shrewish wife, Katherine, in *The Taming of the Shrew* after they are married would not be considered extraordinary, and certainly not illegal.

Patriarchy was thus the order of the day. Men ran the family, the church, business and trade, the courts, and every other major social enterprise. Women, after all, were the weaker sex, weaker in every sense—intellectually, emotionally, and physically (compare Hamlet's phrase, "Frailty, thy name is woman," 1.2.146). It was only proper, therefore, that women should be subordinated to men. Women were relegated to housekeeping (again, under male supervision) and the breeding of children. The concept of patriarchy, moreover, derives from Scripture, where, according to Gen. 2.18, woman was created as "a help meet" for man. The patriarchs,

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, later ruled as head of the family and founded the lineage of the children of Israel. But patriarchal structures were and are not limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition. They exist in many other cultures, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Chinese and Japanese in Asia, and in many African cultures, where again women are regarded as less capable than men. Only recently have women fought for and won more rights than they ever had before, at least in the West, although the movement is gradually spreading throughout the rest of the world. In Shakespeare's England patriarchal control began at birth, where children were concerned. Fathers had complete charge of their offspring and could do with them what they wished. Parental consent was required for marriage. A father could bestow his child in marriage as he saw fit, and the child had little or no recourse, although his or her agreement was advisable, if not required, to forestall rebelliousness or unhappiness. In *Romeo and Juliet,* for example, Juliet's father, Old Capulet, advises her suitor Paris to win Juliet's heart first before he gives his consent to the marriage (1.2.14), but later he orders Juliet to marry Paris, regardless of her feelings (4.5.137-95). Elopements, available to both male and female children, provided one escape from parental tyranny, but they were rare and hazardous.

Unlike Romeo and Juliet, who were in any case of the wealthy aristocracy, young people in sixteenth-century England tended to marry late: the national average for women was between twenty two and twenty-five; for men, twenty-four to thirty. People married late because they needed to have the economic resources to maintain a family before marrying. The Fool in *King Lear* comments on the dangers of reckless, early marriage:

The codpiece that will house,
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse,
So beggars marry many. (3.2.25-28)

Overhasty marriages could and often did lead to poverty for impetuous couples.

The average age for women in the upper levels of society entering their first marriages was lower, however, than that of other

women. Hence, fathers took whatever precautions they could to insure that their daughters did not marry unwisely, that is, to a fortune hunter or other undesirable man. If the daughter was still unmarried at the time of her father's death, his will sometimes carried provisions to restrict her freedom of choice or run the risk disinheritance. The conditions in the will of Portia's father are extraordinary— for example, that her husband must choose the right casket—and probably not enforceable legally, but they are a dramatic device to show her father's care for his daughter, that is, his concern that she not choose her mate unwisely. Although Portia in 1.2 bridles against those conditions, she ultimately recognizes their significance and determines to abide by them, even after she finds Bassanio, the person she truly loves.

In Elizabethan England, church weddings were not required for a binding marriage, although of course the Church did its utmost to insist on its role in blessing all unions between men and women. Ecclesiastically as well as legally, all that was required for a marriage to be binding was for the couple to make their vows to each other before witnesses. Notwithstanding, in *The Merchant of Venice,* before sending Bassanio off to Venice to try to rescue Antonio, Portia demands that they first go to church and get married (32.301). Once a couple wed and the marriage was consummated, they were bound to each other forever. Divorce was difficult if not impossible, certainly among all but the aristocracy, and then only for the reason of adultery.

Intermarriage between faiths was severely frowned upon; in fact, it was forbidden, unless the non-Christian member of the couple converted. Preachers cited Scripture to this effect, both from the Old and the New Testament. In this respect, the marginal gloss—the annotations in the margin—found in the Geneva Bible beside Gen. 24.3-4 is instructive. There Abraham commands his eldest servant to get a wife for his son Isaac not from among the daughters of the Canaanites but from his own country. The annotation reads: "He would not that his son should marry out of the godly family." A further gloss on verse 37 says: "For the Canaanites were accursed and therefore the godly could not join with them in marriage."

For Christians, Jews fell into the category of the ungodly, or infidels (despite her conversion, Graziano still refers to Jessica as an "infidel" when she arrives at Belmont with Lorenzo, 3.2.216). But in the New Testament allowance was made for some intermarriages. In 1 Cor. 7.14, for example, Paul says: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband." The Geneva Bible glosses: "Meaning, that the faith of the believer hath more power to sanctify marriage than the wickedness of the other to pollute it." Nevertheless, in 2 Cor. 6.14, Paul warns against intermarriage: "Be not unequally yoked with infidels; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" Although Jessica believes she is "saved" by her husband, who has made her a Christian, Lancelot Gobbo continues to tease her unmercifully on her intermarriage with Lorenzo (3.5.1-23).

After marriage, a wife's possessions reverted to her husband's control, as Portia recognizes when Bassanio chooses the lead casket and thereby wins the right to make her his wife. Since she is in love with him, she does not demur; on the contrary, Portia says she wishes she were "A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich" for his benefit (3.2.154). "Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted," she says:

But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants.
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. (3.2.167-71)

While this may sound strange to modern ears, indeed, offensive even to those who are not feminists, to an Elizabethan it did not. Morally as well as legally it was regarded as only right and proper, as many Christian preachers taught and sermonized. A treatise published in London in 1632 called *The Law's Resolution of Women's Rights: or, the Law's Provision for Women: A Methodical Collection of such Statutes and Customes, with the Cases, Opinions, Arguments and Points of Learning in the Law, as Do Properly Concern Women,* makes the point quite clearly in Book III, Section VIII: "That which the Husband hath is his own":

But the prerogative of the Husband is best discerned in his dominion over all eterne things in which the wife by combination divesteth herself of property in some sort and casteth it upon her governor, for her practice everywhere agree with the theorick of law, and forcing necessity submits women to the affection thereof. Whatsoever the husband had before the coverture either in goods or lands, it is absolutely his own, the wife hath therein no seisin [i.e., right of possession] at all.

The foundation for these views lay, again, in Scripture, in Adam's lordship over Eve and the later patriarchs' rule over their families. At the macro/micro level, as the king was the supreme head of the state, the husband was supreme head of the family. The Protestant Reformation did nothing to change this; instead, it repeatedly stressed wives' subordination to the husbands. It would be centuries before this arrangement changed, although in many practical affairs women in fact did exercise a good deal of control in their families and, when taken by their husbands into business, in commercial enterprises as well.

Review Questions

IDENTIFY THE QUOTATION

Identify the following quotations by answering these questions:
* Who is the speaker of the quote?
* What does it reveal about the speaker's character?
* What does it tell us about other characters within the play?
* Where does it occur within the play?
* What does it show us about the themes of the play?
* What significant imagery do you see in the quote, and how do these images relate to the overall imagery of the play?

1. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree; such a hare is madness the youth to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple. But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband.

2. Who riseth from a feast
With that keen appetite that he sits down?
Where is the horse that doth untread again
His tedious measures with the unbated fire
That he did pace them first? All things that are
Are with more spirit chased than enjoyed.

3. So may the outward shows be least themselves;
The world is still deceived with ornament.

4. The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.

5. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?

6. My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring.
Let his deservings and my love withal
Be valued ’gainst your wife’s commandment.

7. If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take
A breed of barren metal of his friend?

8. Why, all the boys in Venice follow him,
Crying, His stones, his daughter and his ducats.

9. Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise. I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

10. Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in we cannot hear it

TRUE/FALSE

1. T F Jessica steals money from Shylock.

2. T F Portia refuses to submit to the casket test.

3. T F Bassanio compares Portia to the Golden Fleece.

4. T F Shylock’s wife once gave him a ring.

5. T F Antonio is Jewish.

6. T F Shylock wins the trial.

7. T F Gratiano marries Jessica.

8. T F Morocco chooses the golden casket.

9. T F There is a death's head in the silver casket.

10. T F According to the song, fancy is engendered in the eyes.

11. T F Portia takes on the name of Balthazar when she disguises herself.

12. T F Shylock is legally entitled to take a pound of flesh from Antonio.

13. T F Jessica and Lorenzo are left in charge of Portia's house when she leaves.

14. T F Old Gobbo is deaf.

15. T F Launcelot got a Moorish woman pregnant.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Does Shylock

a. Borrow money from Bassanio
b. Lend money to Bassanio
c. Lend money to Antonio

2. Which of the following characters does *not* get married at the end of the play?

a. Portia
b. Gratiano
c. Antonio
d. Jessica

3. Which of these concepts does Portia describe as the most important principle in the courtroom scene?

a. Mercy
b. Justice
c. Money

4. Who designed the casket test?

a. Portia
b. Portia's father
c. Portia's mother

5. Where do Lorenzo and Jessica escape to?

a. Belmont, then back to Venice.
b. Genoa, then on to Belmont.
c. Belmont, then on to Genoa.

6. Launcelot is:

a. Shylock's servant who defects to Bassanio
b. Bassanio's servant who defects to Antonio
c. Antonio's servant who defects to Shylock

7. What is the 3,000 ducats?

a. The money Jessica steals from Shylock
b. The forfeit on Shylock's bond
c. The money Antonio and Bassanio borrow from Shylock

8. How does Tubal help Shylock?

a. He searches for Jessica
b. He lends him money
c. He tries to prevent Jessica from leaving

9. What is Bassanio's occupation described as in the text?

a. A merchant and a traveler
b. A soldier and a scholar
c. An idle lord

10. Which of the female characters disguise themselves as boys during the course of the play?

a. None of them
b. Portia and Nerissa
c. All of them

11. Antonio says "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad," to

a. Bassanio and Gratiano
b. Shylock and Jessica
c. Solanio and Salerio

12. Which character is the "fool"?

a. Launcelot
b. Antonio
c. Old Gobbo

13. What does Jessica swap her father's ring for?

a. A parakeet
b. A stoat
c. A monkey

14. "Balthazar" asks Bassanio for:

a. A loan
b. His ring
c. A monkey

15. What does Shylock bring with him to the courtroom?

a. A knife and scales
b. Leah's ring
c. 3,000 ducats

FILL IN THE BLANK

1. Launcelot Gobbo and Jessica both run away from _____.

2. Antonio loses all his money because _____.

3. Bassanio, Gratiano, and Jessica all give away a _____.

4. Shylock demands _____ as the penalty for nonpayment of his loan.

5. Lorenzo tells Jessica about the music of the _____.

6. The Prince of _____ boasts about his exploits in the wars.

7. Shylock leaves Jessica alone when he visits _____'s house for dinner.

8. _____ is made a prisoner when he becomes bankrupt.

9. The Prince of Arragon chooses the _____ casket.

10. Gratiano marries _____.

DISCUSSION
Use the following questions to generate discussion:

1. Despite accusations of racism, *The Merchant of Venice* continues to be performed across the world. Do you think this is right, or is the play unacceptable for a modern audience? Give reasons for your answer.

2. To what extent does Portia conform to conventional Renaissance ideas about how a woman should behave?

3. It has been suggested that *The Merchant of Venice* depicts characters exerting different types of control or "bondage" over each other. What examples can you find to support this claim? Do the characters escape from their "bondage"?

4. Is Bassanio an uncomplicated and somewhat bland romantic hero? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Do you read *The Merchant of Venice* as a vindication of Christian teaching? Discuss, with reference to Renaissance opinions, not modern ones.

6. In your opinion, which character in the play is the most obsessed with money? Consider the question carefully and give reasons for your answer.

7. Which does the play depict as more important: friendship or love? What do you think we are supposed to conclude about friendship and love at the end?

8. Do you think that Jessica is portrayed as an admirable character?

9. Some people find the character of Launcelot Gobbo annoying, unfunny, and irrelevant to the plot. How would you argue against this view?

10. There are three rings in the play, belonging to Bassanio, Gratiano, and Shylock. Comment on what happens to these rings, their importance to the plot, and their relevance to the issues discussed in the play.

The Tragic Life of Dr. Faustus
By
Christopher Marlowe

Play Summary

Faustus becomes dissatisfied with his studies of medicine, law, logic and theology; therefore, he decides to turn to the dangerous practice of necromancy, or magic. He has his servant Wagner summon Valdes and Cornelius, two German experts in magic. Faustus tells them that he has decided to experiment in necromancy and needs them to teach him some of the fundamentals.

When he is alone in his study, Faustus begins experimenting with magical incantations, and suddenly Mephistophilis appears, in the form of an ugly devil. Faustus sends him away, telling him to reappear in the form of a friar. Faustus discovers that it is not his conjuring which brings forth Mephistophilis but, instead, that when anyone curses the trinity, devils automatically appear. Faustus sends Mephistophilis back to hell with the bargain that if Faustus is given twenty-four years of absolute power, he will then sell his soul to Lucifer.

Later, in his study, when Faustus begins to despair, a Good Angel and a Bad Angel appear to him; each encourages Faustus to follow his advice. Mephistophilis appears and Faust agrees to sign a contract in blood with the devil even though several omens appear which warn him not to make this bond.

Faustus begins to repent of his bargain as the voice of the Good Angel continues to urge him to repent. To divert Faustus, Mephistophilis and Lucifer both appear and parade the seven deadly sins before Faustus. After this, Mephistophilis takes Faustus to Rome and leads him into the pope's private chambers, where the two become invisible and play pranks on the pope and some unsuspecting friars.

After this episode, Faustus and Mephistophilis go to the German emperor's court, where they conjure up Alexander the Great. At this time, Faustus also makes a pair of horns suddenly appear on one of the knights who had been skeptical about Faustus' powers. After this episode, Faustus is next seen selling his horse to a horse-courser with the advice that the man must not ride the horse into the water. Later, the horse-courser enters Faustus' study and accuses Faustus of false dealings because the horse had turned into a bundle of hay in the middle of a pond.

After performing other magical tricks such as bringing forth fresh grapes in the dead of winter, Faustus returns to his study, where at the request of his fellow scholars, he conjures up the apparition of Helen of Troy. An old man appears and tries to get Faustus to hope for salvation and yet Faustus cannot. He knows it is now too late to turn away from the evil and ask for forgiveness. When the scholars leave, the clock strikes eleven and Faustus realizes that he must give up his soul within an hour.

As the clock marks each passing segment of time, Faustus sinks deeper and deeper into despair. When the clock strikes twelve, devils appear amid thunder and lightning and carry Faustus off to his eternal damnation.

About *Doctor Faustus*

The Faust legend had its inception during the medieval period in Europe and has since become one of the world's most famous and oft-handled myths. The story is thought to have its earliest roots in the New Testament story of the magician Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24). Other references to witchcraft and magic in the Bible have always caused people to look upon the practice of magic as inviting eternal damnation for the soul.

During the early part of the fifteenth century in Germany, the story of a man who sold his soul to the devil to procure supernatural powers captured the popular imagination and spread rapidly. The original Faust has probably been lost forever. In various legends, he was named Heinrich Faust, Johann Faustus, or Georg Faust. But whatever his first name really was, this Faust was apparently a practitioner of various magical arts. A cycle of legends, including some from ancient and medieval sources that were originally told about other magicians, began to collect around him. One of the most widely read magic texts of the period was attributed to Faust, and many other books referred to him as an authority.

Later in the fifteenth century, around 1480, another German magician gave further credence to the legend by calling himself "Faustus the Younger," thus capitalizing on the existing cycle of legends about the older Faust. This later Faust was a famous German sage and adventurer who was thought by many of his contemporaries to be a magician and probably did practice some sort of black magic. After a sensational career, this Faust

died during a mysterious demonstration of flying which he put on for a royal audience in 1525. It was generally believed that he had been carried away by the devil. Owing to his fame and mysterious disappearance, popular superstition prompted many more stories to grow up around the name of Faust, thus solidifying the myth and occult reputation of the legendary character of Faust.

During the sixteenth century, additional stories of magical feats began to attach themselves to the Faust lore, and eventually these stories were collected and published as a *Faust-Book.* A biography of Faust, the *Historia von D. Johann Fausten,* based upon the shadowy life of Faust the Younger, but including many of the fanciful legendary stories, was published in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1587. That same year it was translated into English as *The Historie of the damnable life and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus.* In both these popular editions of the *Faust-Book,* the famed magician's deeds and pact with the devil are recounted, along with much pious moralizing about his sinfulness and final damnation. In fact, the moral of the story is emphasized in the title of the English translation. It was in these versions that the legend took on a permanent form.

When the Renaissance came to northern Europe, Faust was made into a symbol of free thought, anticlericalism, and opposition to church dogma. The first important literary treatment of the legend was that of the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe.

Marlowe, unfortunately, allowed the structure of his drama to follow the basic structure of the *Faust-Book,* thus introducing one of the structural difficulties of the play. The first part of the book (through Chapter 5) showed Faustus' determination to make a pact with the devil, and after this is accomplished, the large middle portion of the *Faust-Book* handles individual and unrelated scenes showing Faustus using his magic to perform all types of nonsensical pranks. Finally, the *Faust-Book* ends with Faustus awaiting the final hour of his life before he is carried off to eternal damnation by the agents of the underworld.

Marlowe's rendition of the legend was popular in England and Germany until the mid-seventeenth century, but eventually the Faust story lost much of its appeal. The legend was kept alive in folk traditions in Germany, though, and was the popular subject of pantomimes and marionette shows for many years.

The close of the eighteenth century in Germany was a time very much like the Renaissance. Before long, the old Faust story, with its unique approach to the problems of period, was remembered. The German dramatist Lessing (1729-81) wrote a play based on the legend, but the manuscript was lost many generations ago and its contents are hardly known.

Perhaps the most familiar treatment of the Faust legend is by the celebrated German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the rare giants of world literature. A brief outline of Goethe's *Faust* will show both similarities and differences in the handling of this famous theme.

Heinrich Faust, a learned scholar, feels that none of his many achievements has provided him with satisfaction or a sense of fulfillment. He yearns to gain knowledge of truth and the meaning of existence. Faust turns to magic in the hope of finding a way to transcend human limitations. When Mephistophilis appears to him, Faust is willing to make a pact with the devil but includes many conditions in his agreement. He will yield his soul only if the devil can provide him with an experience so rewarding that he will want the moment to linger forever. But this experience will have to combine extreme opposite emotions such as love and hate at the same time. Furthermore, Faust knows that his essential nature is one of upward striving, and if the devil can help him strive upward enough, then Faust will be at one with God. There is no mention of the traditional twenty-four years of servitude.

In Part I of Goethe's drama, Faust attempts, with the devil's help, to find happiness through emotional involvement. He has an exciting but tragic relationship with the beautiful and chaste Gretchen which ends in her disgrace and death, but Faust is much chastened by this experience. In Part II, he tries to satisfy his craving through temporal accomplishments and exposure to all that the world can offer in terms of ideas and externalized gratifications. He attains an important position at the Imperial Court, learns much from the figures of classical antiquity, woos Helen of Troy, wins great victories, and is renowned for his public works, but none of these things gives him that complete satisfaction which transcends human limitations.

When Faust's death approaches, the devil is there to claim his soul, but a band of heavenly angels descend and carry him off triumphantly to heaven.

The chief philosophical difference between Marlowe's and Goethe's treatments lies in the final scene of the drama, where Marlowe's Faustus is dragged off to the horrors of hell but Goethe's Faust is admitted to heaven by God's grace in reward for his endless striving after knowledge of goodness and truth and his courageous resolution to believe in the existence of something higher than himself.

Furthermore, Goethe introduced the figure of Gretchen. The Faust-Gretchen love story occupies most of Part I of the drama, whereas Marlowe confined himself to showing tricks performed by Doctor Faustus.

Goethe's great tragedy struck a responsive chord throughout Europe and reinforced the new interest in the Faust story. Since his time, it has stimulated many creative thinkers and has been the central theme of notable works in all fields of expression. In art, for instance, the Faust legend has provided fruitful subjects for such painters as Ferdinand Delacroix (1798-1863). Musical works based on the Faust story include Hector Berlioz' cantata, *The Damnation of Faust* (1846), Charles Gounod's opera, *Faust* (1859), Arrigo Boito's opera, *Mefistofele* (1868), and Franz Lizt's *Faust Symphony* (1857). Even the motion picture has made use of the ancient story, for a film version of Goethe's *Faust* was produced in Germany in 1925. But most important, the legend has continued to be the subject of many poems, novels, and dramatic works, including the novel *Doctor Faustus* (1948) by Thomas Mann and the poetic morality play *An Irish Faustus* (1964) by Lawrence Durell.

Each succeeding artist has recast the rich Faust legend in terms of the intellectual and emotional climate of his own time, and over the past few centuries this tale has matured into an archetypal myth of our aspirations and the dilemmas we face in the effort to understand our place in the universe. Like all myths, the Faust story has much to teach the reader in all its forms, for the tale has retained its pertinence in the modern world. The history of the legend's development and its expansion into broader moral and philosophical spheres is also an intellectual history of humankind.

Character List

Doctor John Faustus A learned scholar in Germany during the fifteenth century who becomes dissatisfied with the limitations of knowledge and pledges his soul to Lucifer in exchange for unlimited power.

Wagner Faustus' servant, who tries to imitate Faustus' methods of reasoning and fails in a ridiculous and comic manner.

Valdes and Cornelius Two German scholars who are versed in the practice of magic and who teach Faustus about the art of conjuring.

Lucifer King of the underworld and a fallen angel who had rebelled against God and thereafter tries desperately to win souls away from the Lord.

Mephistophilis A prince of the underworld who appears to Faustus and becomes his servant for twenty-four years.

Good Angel and Evil Angel Two figures who appear to Faustus and attempt to influence him.

The Clown The clown who becomes a servant of Wagner as Mephistophilis becomes a servant to Faustus.

Horse-Courser A gullible man who buys Faustus' horse, which disappears when it is ridden into a pond.

The Pope The head of the Roman Catholic church, whom Faustus and Mephistophilis use as a butt of their practical jokes.

Charles V, Emperor of Germany The emperor who holds a feast for Faustus and at whose court Faustus illustrates his magical powers.

Knight A haughty and disdainful knight who insults Faustus. In revenge, Faustus makes a pair of horns appear on the knight.

Duke and Duchess of Vanholt A couple whom Faustus visits and for whom he conjures up some grapes.

Robin An ostler who steals some of Dr. Faustus' books and tries to conjure up some devils.

Rafe (Ralph) A friend of Robin's who is present with Robin during the attempt to conjure up devils.

Vintner A man who appears and tries to get payment for a goblet from Robin.

Old Man He appears to Faustus during the last scene and tries to tell Faustus that there is still time to repent.

Seven Deadly Sins, Alexander, Helen of Troy, and Alexander's Paramour Spirits or apparitions which appear during the course of the play.

Chorus A device used to comment upon the action of the play or to provide exposition.

Summary and Analysis Chorus

Summary

The chorus announces that this play will not be concerned with war, love, or proud deeds. Instead, it will present the good and bad fortunes of Dr. John Faustus, who is born of base stock in Germany and who goes to the University of Wittenberg, where he studies philosophy and divinity. He so excels in matters of theology that he eventually becomes swollen with pride, which leads to his downfall. Ultimately, Faustus turns to a study of necromancy, or magic.

Analysis

The technique of the chorus is adapted from the traditions of classic Greek drama. The chorus functions in several ways throughout the play. It stands outside the direct action of the play and comments upon various parts of the drama. The chorus speaks directly to the audience and tells the basic background history of Faustus and explains that the play is to concern his downfall. The chorus is also used to express the author's views and to remind the audience of the proper moral to be learned from the play itself. The opening speech of the chorus functions as a prologue to define the scope of the play.

The chorus speaks in very formal, rhetorical language and explains that the subject of this play will not be that which is usually depicted in dramas. Instead of a subject dealing with love or war, the play will present the history of a scholar. The purpose of this explanation is that, traditionally, tragedy had dealt with such grand subjects as the history of kings, great wars, or powerful love affairs. Consequently, Marlowe is preparing the audience for a departure in subject matter. Most frequently, tragedy is concerned with the downfall of kings, and Marlowe's tragedy does not fit into this formula since this drama deals with the downfall of a man of common birth.

The Icarus image is used in the opening passage to characterize the fall of Faustus. Icarus was a figure in classical mythology who because of his pride had soared too high in the sky, had melted his wax wings, and subsequently had fallen to his death. This classical image of the fall of Icarus reinforces the Christian images of the fall of Lucifer brought out in

Scene 3. Both images set the scene for the fall of Dr. Faustus during the course of the drama.

Another image used by the chorus to describe the situation of Faustus is that of glutting an appetite by overindulgence. Throughout the play, Faustus is seen as a person of uncontrolled appetites. His thirst for knowledge and power lead him to make the pact with the devil which brings about his downfall. The chorus points out the dangers involved in resorting to magic. It makes clear that Faustus is choosing magic at the danger of his own soul.

Summary and Analysis Scene 1

Summary

Faustus is alone in his study reviewing his achievements. He concludes that he has attained preeminence in all fields of intellectual endeavor. He disputes superbly and has mastered all treatises of logic. He is such a skilled physician that he has saved whole cities from the plague. He knows all the petty cavils of law but he finds them drudgery. In theology, he takes two scriptual passages which indicate that all men must eventually die and dismisses them. After reviewing his achievements, he decides that necromancy is the only world of profit, delight, power, honor, and omnipotence. He then has Wagner summon Valdes and Cornelius, who will help him conjure up spirits.

While Faustus is waiting for the two German scholars, the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel advises him to lay aside the "damned book" of magic and read the scriptures. The Evil Angel appeals to Faustus' ambitions. Faustus becomes absorbed in a vision of what he will be able to do by the power of magic.

When Valdes and Cornelius appear, Faustus welcomes them and tells them that he has decided to practice magic because he has found philosophy, law, medicine, and divinity to be unsatisfactory. Valdes assures Faustus that if they work together the whole world will soon be at their feet. Faustus agrees and tells the two men that he plans to conjure that very night.

Analysis

The first question to be faced in connection with the entire drama is the reason for Faustus' yielding to the practicing of magic. In the opening of the scene, Faustus reviews the most important intellectual fields of endeavor and feels that he has mastered these areas so completely that there is nothing left for him. Not only is he learned in philosophy, but his medical skill is the best that can be attained by human knowledge. His mastery of law only serves to show him the drudgery involved in the practice. Finally, theology has not provided him with any final or satisfactory answers.

Faustus reads from the Bible that the reward of sin is death and then reads that if people think they are not sinners, they are deceived. For Faustus, this appears to doom humans from the beginning. Disgusted with the hopelessness of theological study, he turns to the practice of magic. But Faustus' reasoning is very ironic, for he has read both passages out of context. Although he is a learned man in divinity, he overlooks the obvious meaning of the passage. For instance, Faustus ignores the second part of the passage; he reads "the wages of sin is death" but does not finish it with "but the gift of God is eternal life."

Since Faustus thinks that he has achieved the end of all the various studies of the university, he is dissatisfied with the powers that he has gained from them. Although Faustus is a most learned man, he finds himself confined by mere human knowledge. In other words, he feels the limitations of human knowledge and decides to turn to magic to discover greater powers.

According to traditional Christian cosmology, the universe is viewed as a hierarchy which descends from God, through the angels, then humans, the animals, and finally to inanimate nature. Everything has been put in its proper place by God and each should be content to remain there. According to this view, it is dangerous for a person to attempt to rise above the station assigned to human beings and it is also forbidden to descend to the animal level. Ambition to go beyond one's natural place in the hierarchy is considered a sin of pride. Consequently, Faustus' desire to rise above his position as a man by resorting to supernatural powers places his soul in dire jeopardy.

Marlowe indicates this risk in the line "Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity." Consequently, the first scene sets up the conflict between the limitation of human knowledge and the desire to go beyond their position in the universe.

The biblical quotations Faustus mentions refer to the concept of sin and death. The entire drama deals with the problems of sin and death and immortality. One of the things Faustus is trying to escape is the limitation of death. On the one hand, he alleges that he does not believe in death, but at the same time he spends all his time finding ways to escape it, especially by resorting to necromancy. At the end of the scene, he makes the statement that "this night I'll conjure though I die therefore." What he does not realize is that by resorting to necromancy, he will die a spiritual death also.

The appearance of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel is a holdover from the earlier morality plays. The medieval plays often use abstractions as main characters. The appearance of these allegorical abstractions functions to externalize the internal conflict that Faustus is undergoing; they symbolize the two forces struggling for the soul of Faustus. Throughout the play, these angels appear at the moments when Faustus critically examines the decision that he has made.

After the departure of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel, Faustus has a vision of what he will accomplish with his new magical powers. Some of his dreams demonstrate his desire for greater insight into the workings of the universe, and others suggest the noble ends for which he will use his power. Those desires should later be contrasted with what Faustus actually does accomplish. After receiving his powers from Mephistophilis, Faustus never does anything but trivial and insignificant acts; he resorts to petty tricks and never accomplishes any of the more powerful or noble deeds.

This first scene is filled with ironies. Basically, Faustus is so confident that his new powers will bring about his salvation, he never realizes that, quite to the contrary, they will bring about his damnation. He even refers to the books of necromancy as being "heavenly," whereas in reality they are satanic. He asks Valdes and Cornelius to make him "blest" with their knowledge. Throughout the scene, Faustus uses religious imagery and language to apply to matters which will finally bring about his own damnation.

Summary and Analysis Scene 2

Summary

Two scholars come to Wagner to inquire about Faustus. Instead of giving a direct answer, Wagner uses superficial scholastic logic in order to prove to the two scholars that they should not have asked the question. After he displays a ridiculous knowledge of disputation, he finally reveals that Faustus is inside with Valdes and Cornelius. The two scholars then fear that Faustus has fallen into the practice of magic. They plan to see the Rector to "see if he by his grave counsel can reclaim" Faustus.

Analysis

Essentially, this scene functions as a comic interlude. This type of scene is often called an "echo scene" because Wagner's actions parody those of Faustus in the previous scene. The scene also functions as a contrast to the earlier scene in that the same subject is being presented — the use and misuse of knowledge. Earlier we had seen Faustus alone in his study displaying his knowledge of logic in order to justify his resorting to black magic. Now we have a contrast in which Wagner tries to use logic for no other purpose than to try to tell two scholars where Faustus is at the time.

Not only is the scene a comic interlude, but it is also a comment on the actions performed by Faustus. By the end of the second scene, we realize that Faustus' choice affects more people than just himself. First, Faustus has had a direct influence upon Wagner, who tries in his silly ways to imitate his master. Further-more, in the end of the scene, we see that many more people are concerned over Faustus' choice than just Faustus alone. The two scholars indicate their desire to reclaim Faustus. The use of the word "reclaim" keeps in view the idea that Faustus' choice to use magic has already damned him. Essentially, the concern of the scholars heightens Faustus' error. Finally, this scene functions technically to allow a certain amount of time to pass.

It is characteristic of Elizabethan dramatists to have the dramatic persona speak in a language that is appropriate to their characters. The higher or nobler characters speak in an elevated and formal language. The lower characters usually speak in prose. Faustus speaks in "Marlowe's Mighty Line," while Wagner speaks in a simple prose. Shakespeare also

uses this same technique in many of his comedies. For instance, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the noble characters speak in dignified language and the rustic characters use a more common idiom and speech.

Summary and Analysis Scene 3

Summary

Faustus decides to try incantation for the first time. He mutters a long passage in Latin which is composed of passages abjuring the trinity and invoking the aid of the powers of the underworld. Mephistophilis then appears in a hideous shape, and Faustus tells him that he is too ugly. He demands that Mephistophilis disappear and return in the shape of a Franciscan friar. Faustus is elated that he has the power to call up this devil. As soon as Mephistophilis reappears, Faustus finds that it is not his conjuration which brings forth a devil; a devil will appear any time that a person abjures the name of the trinity.

Faustus asks Mephistophilis several questions about Lucifer and learns that he is a fallen angel who, because of pride and insolence, revolted against God and was cast into hell. When Faustus begins to inquire about the nature of hell, Mephistophilis answers that hell is wherever God is not present. Faustus chides Mephistophilis for being so passionate about being deprived of the joys of heaven, and then sends him back to Lucifer with the proposal that Faustus will exchange his soul for twenty-four years of unlimited power. After Mephistophilis leaves, Faustus dreams of all the glorious deeds he will perform with his new power.

Analysis

In this scene, Faustus takes the first definite and inexorable steps toward his own damnation as he abjures the trinity and appeals to the black powers of hell. The incantation, the abjuring of the trinity, and the spectacle of the sudden appearance of a horrible looking devil on the stage are very effective dramatically. The mere fact that a man abjures the trinity and invokes the powers of hell carries an awesome significance. According to the amount of stage machinery available, the appearance of Mephistophilis could be accompanied by dreadful noises, bursts of lightning, smoke, or

any combination of the above. In the following comic scenes, the appearance of a devil is accompanied by the explosion of firecrackers.

Mephistophilis' first appearance is also dramatically effective because he appears so suddenly and in a horrifying shape. The symbolic significance of his appearance is obvious: hell is a place of horror and damnation and anything emanating from there would appear extremely ugly. This physical detail alone should function as a portentous warning to Faustus, who, however, ignores the implication and simply orders Mephistophilis to reappear in a more favorable shape.

Faustus' command to Mephistophilis to reappear as a Franciscan friar satirizes the religious order which had been the subject of various literary attacks since the times of Chaucer. The satire on friars also reflects the English rejection of the Roman Catholic church which is also demonstrated in a later scene in the pope's chamber.

Faustus' first reaction to Mephistophilis' appearance is one of pride in his power to evoke a devil. He thinks that Mephistophilis is completely obedient to his will and feels that he is a "conjuror laureate." Instead, Faustus learns that a devil will appear to anyone who curses the name of God. Faustus is foolish to think that a devil is obedient to anyone except Lucifer. Thus, even at the beginning of the play, Faustus is greatly deceived about his own powers and deceived about his relationship with Mephistophilis.

Faustus acts as if he believes he has complete power and is completely free. But Mephistophilis' condition indicates that no person who deals with the devil is free. Even Mephistophilis is bound over to the devil, and as soon as Faustus enters into a contract he will no longer be free either.

At first, Faustus retains part of his old nobility as he begins to question Mephistophilis about Lucifer. Faustus is now intent upon gaining more knowledge; he wants to know something about the character of Lucifer. Mephistophilis reveals that Lucifer had once been a favorite angel until his fall. The story of Lucifer re-establishes the imagery of a fall which had first been referred to in the classical fall of Icarus.

Lucifer fell because of "aspiring pride and insolence." This image may be applied to the fall of Faustus because in his pride he is trying to discover more than is allowed to humans.

Faustus' next question involves the nature of hell and the nature of damnation. The reader should remember that at the time of this play, the Anglican church had been separated from the Roman Catholic church for only a short time. This passage emphasizes the newly established view of hell as advocated by the Anglican church. Rather than being an established or definite physical place, hell is seen as a state or condition. Any place that is deprived of the presence of God is hell.

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

Thus, the greatest punishment a person can endure is not a physical torment but, more directly, exclusion from the presence of God.

It is highly ironic that Mephistophilis, in remembering the bliss of heaven, suddenly tells Faustus to "leave these frivolous demands, which strike a terror to my fainting soul." Even with this definite warning from an authority of hell, Faustus does not modify his intent to carry out his plans. Instead, Faustus scolds Mephistophilis for not being resolute. Later these roles will be reversed and Mephistophilis will have to urge Faustus to be more resolute.

Faustus sends Mephistophilis back to Lucifer, naming the demands in exchange for his soul. The terms are rather broad in intent but later Faustus makes little use of the powers he now demands. After Mephistophilis leaves, Faustus revels in his sense of omnipotence. He becomes completely absorbed in dreams of what he will do with his newly gained power. Unfortunately for Faustus, he never achieves the things he is now dreaming of even though he has the potential. Instead, he will do no more than play insignificant and paltry tricks. Part of his tragedy is that he received this power but failed to utilize it in any significant manner.

In the Renaissance view, humans lived in an ordered universe which was governed by principles of law. Even Mephistophilis recognizes that the

universe is governed by law, but Faustus is working under the mistaken belief that he has been able to abrogate divine law by his conjuration.

Summary and Analysis Scene 4

Summary

Wagner accosts the clown and tells him that he realizes that the clown is out of work. He accuses him of being so desperate that he would sell his soul to the devil for a shoulder of raw mutton. The clown insists that if he were to make so dangerous a bargain, he would require that his mutton at least be roasted in a fine sauce. Wagner asks the clown to serve him for seven years. If the clown refuses, Wagner threatens to have lice tear him to pieces.

Wagner gives the clown some French money and warns him that he will have a devil fetch him within an hour if he doesn't agree to become his servant; Wagner summons Baliol and Belcher — two devils — who come and frighten the poor clown. Wagner promises the clown that he will instruct him in how to summon up these devils. The clown agrees to the bargain but wants to be taught how to turn himself into a flea on a pretty wench.

Analysis

This scene re-echoes in a comic fashion various parts of the preceding scene between Faustus and Mephistophilis. In the largest view, both scenes involve a promise of servitude in exchange for certain benefits. Whereas Faustus is willing to sell his soul to the devil for complete power, Wagner accuses the clown of being willing to sell his soul to the devil for a leg of mutton. The clown modifies the condition by comically insisting upon a rich sauce to accompany the leg of mutton. In contrast to the servitude of Mephistophilis to Faustus, the clown agrees to serve Wagner. And instead of twenty-four years, the clown is only to serve for seven years.

In both scenes, supernatural devils appear; in the first scene their appearance is dramatically terrifying but in the latter scene it is purely comic. In the Wagner scene, even the names of the devils are comic; the clown mispronounces the devils' names as Banto and Belcheo. Wagner promises the clown that he can teach a person how to raise up devils and

how to change people into dogs, cats, or mice. This boast is a deflation of the grandiose powers discussed in the preceding scene.

As noted earlier, there is a notable contrast between the language used in the third and fourth scenes. Faustus delivers his sentiments in lofty and noble language. In contrast, the clown speaks in a low and vulgar manner. The scene contains obscene puns which would be highly amusing to an Elizabethan audience but are little understood by a modern audience. Marlowe also parodies several biblical passages in the lines of Wagner and the clown.

Finally, the comic scene develops in a different manner, another of the contrasting servant-master relationships.

Summary and Analysis Scene 5

Summary

Faustus, alone in his study, tries to bolster his own resolution to forget God and dedicate himself solely to Lucifer. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel admonishes Faustus to think on heavenly things, while the Evil Angel emphasizes the value of power and wealth. Faustus decides to think on wealth and summons Mephistophilis, who then tells him that Lucifer will agree to the bargain, but it must be signed with Faustus' blood. Faustus stabs his arm, but as he begins to write, the blood congeals. Mephistophilis rushes to get some fire in order to make the blood flow. As Faustus begins to write again, an inscription — "Homo, fuge!" — appears on his arm. Faustus finishes signing the bond and orders Mephistophilis to deliver it to Lucifer.

After the bargain has been completed, Faustus begins to ask again about the nature of hell, but while Mephistophilis is describing hell, Faustus becomes skeptical and refuses to believe in hell. Then, all of a sudden, Faustus changes the topic of the conversation and tells Mephistophilis that he wants a wife because he feels wanton and lascivious. Mephistophilis convinces him that he does not want a wife and offers to bring him any courtesan or paramour that he desires. Before Mephistophilis leaves, Faustus demands three books — one for incantations and spells, one for knowledge of the planets and the heavens, and one for understanding plants and animals.

Analysis

In the first part of this scene, Faustus' mind begins to waver. There is a conflict within Faustus as to whether he should carry out his plan. This inner conflict is then externalized by the appearance of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. The advice of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel serves to keep constantly before us the struggle which Faustus is facing and reminds the reader that Faustus is in severe danger of eternal damnation. The problem of salvation and damnation is now central to Faustus' conflict. He is deeply concerned over his own fate. In each appearance, Faustus is more influenced by the advice of the Evil Angel, and thus Faustus centers his thinking on the wealth and power that he is about to receive.

In the contract scene, the bond is presented in legal terms. Lucifer demands the security of having the contract written in blood. There is an old superstition that a contract signed in blood is eternally binding. As soon as Faustus signs with his own blood, he commits himself to eternal damnation. He later realizes that only the blood of Christ could release him from such a bond.

During this scene, two omens appear to indicate to Faustus that he is in dire danger of damnation. The first is the fact that his own blood congeals, the second is the inscription "Homo, fuge!" which appears on his arm. The inscription warns Faustus to flee. He ignores both of these warnings and continues blindly on his way to damnation by insisting on signing the pact. Faustus even believes that his senses are deceived by the signs, but it is not his senses but his reason which is deceived in signing the contract.

At the crucial time in this scene and all through the rest of the play, whenever Faustus begins to ask questions about essential things, the devil or Mephistophilis brings forth something to delight Faustus' mind. Mephistophilis constantly tries to discover things which would divert Faustus' attention away from his search for knowledge. Consequently, however noble Faustus' original plans were, he obviously loses part of his nobility simply by dealing with evil forces. Any association with evil forces causes a person to deteriorate as a result of the association.

Immediately after signing the contract, Faustus begins to question Mephistophilis about hell. Again the view of hell is essentially the same as expressed in Scene 3:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place; for where we are is hell
And where hell is there must we ever be.
And, to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.

Basically, Mephistophilis explains that hell is simply absence from the presence of God. As Mephistophilis tries to describe that he is now in hell because he is away from the presence of God, Faustus is in a state of complete skepticism. Consequently, we see how rapidly Faustus has degenerated. His intellect is so topsy-turvy that Faustus is unable to believe in anything. He does not even believe that death exists. This is paradoxical since the pact was originally made to escape death. Even though his aim was to conquer death, he also maintains that death does not exist. Marlowe is using this paradoxical situation to show that Faustus' logical or reasoning powers are rapidly dwindling into insignificance as a result of his pact with the devil.

Although Faustus asserts that he wants a godlike power over the world, he spends all of his time satisfying his senses. Instead of noble discussions about the nature of heaven and hell, Faustus suddenly begins to feel lascivious and wants a wife. He now wants to yield to coarse physical desires rather than search for ultimate knowledge.

Faustus does not realize that he is being cheated out of all that he was promised. He is unable to have a wife as he demands for marriage is a condition sanctified by God. Later in the scene, he is also denied knowledge that he was promised. He expected to have all of his questions about the universe answered, but when he asks who made the world, he is refused an answer.

Summary and Analysis Scene 6

Summary

Faustus begins to repent that he has made a contract with the devil. Mephistophilis tries to console Faustus by telling him that heaven is not such a glorious place and that humans are more wonderful than anything in heaven. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear, and each tries to influence Faustus' decision. Faustus is haunted by the thought that he is damned. He thinks that he would have killed himself by now if he had not been able to conjure up Homer to sing and soothe him. Now he asks Mephistophilis to argue about theoretical matters. Faustus is not satisfied with the things that Mephistophilis is able to tell him and maintains that even Wagner knows the answers to such questions. He now wants to know about the power behind the universe and who made the world. Mephistophilis tries to get him to think of hell and other things rather than about these heavier philosophical matters.

Faustus cries out for Christ to save him, and at this moment, Lucifer himself appears. Lucifer reminds him that he is breaking his promise by thinking on Christ. He tells Faustus that he has brought some entertainment to divert him.

The seven deadly sins — pride, covetousness, wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth, and lechery — appear before Faustus in the representation of their individual sin or nature. Faustus is delighted with the show and Lucifer hands him a book and promises to return at midnight. After everyone leaves, Wagner appears and says that Faustus has gone to Rome to see the pope.

Analysis

In this scene, we see for the first time a definite change in Faustus. He begins to repent of his pact with the devil. In a reversal of their roles, Mephistophilis now chides Faustus for his lack of resolution, whereas in a previous scene, Faustus had to reprimand Mephistophilis for not being resolute enough. The manner in which Mephistophilis tries to convince Faustus is an instance of logic. He says that humanity is better than heaven because earth "'twas made for man, therefore is man more excellent."

Note again that the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear to Faustus at this point — that is, when he is once again in doubt about his decision. As previously, Faustus follows the path of the Evil Angel. Faustus is torn

between two poles of belief which attract him. He desires to have the beauty of the classical world as represented by Homer and in a later scene by Helen, but at the same time he also wants to keep the best of the Christian tradition. Consequently, we have Christianity and classicism juxtaposed in these scenes; they are part of the tension in Faustus' mind. This tension also existed in the Renaissance world, which was interested both in the Hellenistic (Greek) world and the Christian world. The Renaissance tried to unify divergent interests in these two worlds.

According to the traditional Christian view, Faustus is now tempted by another sin — that of suicide. Faustus' first sin had been to deny God. Then he also fell into the sin of despair, wherein he lost hope for redemption. In this scene, he considers suicide, which is another cardinal sin.

As Faustus begins to demand deeper knowledge from Mephistophilis, he desires to know about the primary cause of the world, but Mephistophilis is unable to answer him. At every point when Faustus begins to question the universe or whenever Faustus begins to think about heavenly things, Mephistophilis tells him to "think on hell." Originally, Faustus made the pact in order to learn about the primal causes of the world; therefore, Mephistophilis is unable to fulfill his part of the bargain. Second, whenever Faustus brings up these questions, Mephistophilis tries to divert him because he possibly knows that thoughts of heaven would allow Faustus to break his contract with Lucifer.

It is a highly dramatic moment when Lucifer himself appears on the stage. Faustus maintains that Lucifer looks extremely ugly, and again the implication is that hell is ugly.

At the crucial moments when Faustus wavers, the devils always try to divert him in some sensual manner. When Faustus begins to question Mephistophilis about primeval causes, the devils try to take his mind off these noble questions and force him to think about carnal matters. Consequently, in this scene the powers of hell divert Faustus by bringing forth the seven deadly sins to entertain Faustus and to remove all these troublesome questions from his mind.

The appearance of the seven deadly sins is a holdover from the morality plays and becomes another type of interlude in the play.

Furthermore, the manner in which they describe themselves is somewhat comic. Whereas in a morality play the seven deadly sins would be paraded before the main character as a warning to abstain from evil, in *Doctor Faustus* they are presented to Faustus only to delight and distract him from heavenly thoughts.

The seven deadly sins do have a philosophical significance and do carry forward the intellectual meaning of the plot, but they also function to appeal to the general audience, who would find entertainment in the grotesque physical appearance of these awesome creatures.

Immediately after the appearance of these seven deadly sins, Faustus says "O, this feeds my soul!" Previous to this scene, Faustus had used the same metaphor of eating to express his great hunger for knowledge and power, and now this metaphor is used to show how low Faustus has fallen when the dreadful show of the sins can satisfy his soul.

At the end of the scene, Wagner enters and takes over the function of the chorus by making expository explanations, filling in background material, and letting the audience know that Faustus has now flown to Rome, where he will meet with the pope.

Summary and Analysis Scene 7

Summary

Faustus describes the trip over the Alps and the various cities on the way to Rome. After Mephistophilis tells Faustus that he has arranged to enter the pope's private chamber, he describes the city of Rome. They prepare to go into the pope's chambers and Mephistophilis makes Faustus invisible. When the pope and a group of friars enter, Faustus plays tricks on them by snatching plates and cups from them. Finally, he boxes the pope on the ear. When the friars who are accompanying the pope begin to sing a dirge to re-move the evil spirit that seems to be present, Mephistophilis and Faustus begin to beat the friars and fling some fireworks among them.

The chorus enters and reviews Faustus' career. When Faustus has seen all the royal courts, he returns home, where many of his friends seek him out and ask him difficult questions concerning astrology and the universe. Faustus' knowledge makes him famous all through the land. Finally the emperor, Carolus the Fifth, asks him to come to his court.

Analysis

The opening of this scene shows the excellent use of Marlowe's mighty blank verse. The first speech does not make any significant thematic statements, but it resounds with the beautiful poetry. The passage establishes the feeling that Faustus has seen the world and has traveled over mighty expanses of land. We feel then the scope of his travels into the mysterious lands of the known world.

By the time the reader reaches this scene, he should be aware that Marlowe is not adhering to the classical unities of time and place. The scenes now move quickly about the world and there is little indication of the exact place where each scene occurs. Even in some of the earlier scenes, the exact setting was not important. In these short scenes, Marlowe is concerned with sketching in some of the activities of the twenty-four years of Faustus' life and trying to indicate both the passage of time and the manner in which Faustus uses his power.

We must constantly keep in mind that originally Faustus had made his contract with the devil in order to learn more about the essential nature of the universe. In this scene, we must constantly observe how Faustus uses his power. Instead of discussing and learning more about the intelligence behind the universe, Faustus is now misusing his power in order to perform cheap tricks, which indicates that Faustus or any person who begins to make deals with the devil cannot keep a nobility of purpose in mind. Any bargain with the devil will automatically degrade the individual.

The setting of this scene in Rome reminds us again that Faustus is anxious to see the places of great antiquity. He becomes excited about the splendor that was Rome, which is another part of the classical tradition that intrigues him.

I do long to see monuments
And situation of bright-splendent Rome.

The scene with the pope must be viewed as "slapstick" comedy which would appeal to the lowly element in the audience in Marlowe's day. As Faustus snatches cups away and boxes the pope on the ear, the audience in Marlowe's day would be delighted by this satire against the pope and the friars. The dirge that the friars sing is also ridiculous and parodies a Roman Catholic chant.

At the end of the scene, we find out that Faustus has attained a certain amount of fame in the field of astrology. He has also experienced a measure of enjoyment. He is now more concerned with satisfying his immediate pleasure and is no longer interested in being instructed in the good life. By describing Faustus' return to Germany, the chorus also fills in the transition between scenes and prepares us for the next scene, which will take place in Germany.

Summary and Analysis Scene 8

Summary

Robin the ostler enters with a book in his hand and reveals that he has stolen a volume from Faustus' library. He intends to learn how to conjure in order to make all the maidens in the village appear before him and dance naked. Rafe (Ralph) enters and tells him that there is a gentleman waiting to have his horse taken care of. Robin ignores him, saying that he has more important things to do: he is going to conjure up a devil with his newly stolen book. He promises to procure the kitchen maid for Ralph, and then they both leave to clean their boots and continue with the conjuring.

Analysis

This scene is another low comic episode on conjuring. We see that Robin intends to use Faustus' books for his own pleasure. The first thing that he intends to do is to make the maidens dance before him stark naked, which is similar to the first thing that Faustus wanted. As soon as he got his new powers, Faustus also began to feel wanton and desired a woman.

In one sense, the tricks that Robin wants to perform are not much different from the tricks that Faustus has just been playing on the pope in Rome. Similar to the earlier comic scenes, this scene contrasts with the preceding scene of the main plot. The language is common and filled with obscene puns. Again a servant-master relationship is established; Robin promises Rafe powers for a condition of service in the same way that Mephistophilis promised Faustus power.

Summary and Analysis Scene 9

Summary

Robin and Ralph appear with a silver goblet that Robin has apparently taken from a vintner. Robin is very pleased with this new acquisition, but immediately the vintner appears and demands that the goblet be returned to him. Robin insists that he does not have the goblet and allows himself to be searched. The vintner cannot find the goblet. Meanwhile, Robin begins to read incantations from Faustus' book. These incantations summon Mephistophilis, who appears and puts some firecrackers at their backs and then momentarily disappears. In fright, Robin gives the vintner back his goblet. Mephistophilis reappears and complains that he has had to come all the way from Constantinople because these irresponsible servants used incantations without understanding them. He threatens to change them into an ape and a dog, and then leaves. Robin and Ralph can only think about how much fun and how much food they might have if transformed into these animals.

Analysis

This comic interlude, which actually contributes very little to the development of the play, is the second scene in a row between Ralph and Robin. The two scenes belong together in showing the result of the men's desire to practice conjuring. Some critics believe that these scenes were later inserted by another author, and there is some dispute whether Marlowe is the author of any of the comic scenes. Generally, in the present condition of the text, the safest thing to assume is that these scenes filled in the time element and provided a type of low comedy which appealed to the less intelligent members of the audience.

Summary and Analysis Scene 10

Summary

Later at the German court, Emperor Carolus tells Faustus that he has heard reports of his magical powers and he would like to see some proof of Faustus' skill. Faustus responds humbly that he is not as skilled as the rumors report him to be, but he will try to please the emperor. The emperor wonders if anyone will ever attain the stature of Alexander the Great, and he asks Faustus to bring Alexander and Alexander's paramour back to life. As the emperor makes this request, a knight in the court makes several skeptical and sarcastic remarks about Faustus' powers. At Faustus' request, Mephistophilis leaves and returns with two spirits in the shape of

Alexander and his paramour. After the emperor inspects a mole on the paramour's neck, he declares that the two spirits are real. Faustus asks that the sarcastic knight be requested to return. When the knight appears, he has a pair of horns on his head. The knight is furious about his situation and abuses Faustus. Then, at the emperor's request, Faustus releases the knight from the spell and the horns are removed. The emperor thanks Faustus for the conjuration and promises to reward him bounteously.

Analysis

This scene shows no significant development or change in the nature of Dr. Faustus. He is still pleasing himself with his new powers and is still using these powers to satisfy the most trivial demands of other people. This action does not imply that summoning two people from the past is trivial, but rather, that Faustus is trying to impress people with his feats rather than striving to use the powers for noble purposes. Before Faustus made the pact, he had anticipated benefiting humanity and Germany with his newly acquired capabilities. Instead of probing into the mystery of the universe, he simply makes horns appear on the head of a knight.

In the time that has elapsed since the first part of the play, Faustus has gained fame and reputation. Because of his reputation, the emperor himself expresses an interest in Faustus and invites him to the imperial court. But the point, as noted above, is that Faustus does not use his advantage to instruct the emperor, but only to entertain him by simple magical tricks and illusions.

It is ironic that Faustus summons up Alexander the Great — a man who conquered the entire world and performed almost impossible tasks. Faustus has at his command the means to surpass the deeds of Alexander but fails to take advantage of them. Whereas Alexander had sovereignty over the entire known world, Faustus has power to hold dominion over the unknown world. Alexander accomplished the feats he performed only by means of human power, whereas Faustus has had to pay dearly for superhuman capabilities.

The incident with the knight demonstrates how Faustus has become increasingly proud of his occult powers. The knight is presented at first as the unbeliever. Because he is sarcastic and insulting to Faustus, he becomes a type of foil for Faustus. Thus Faustus makes a pair of horns

grow on his head. For Marlowe's audience, a man whose wife was unfaithful to him was known as a cuckold and was represented as having a pair of horns growing out of his head. Therefore, besides the comic physical appearance of the knight, there was the added comedy of his being the cuckold or foolish man.

Summary and Analysis Scene 11

Summary

Faustus begins to be concerned that the end of his allotted time is drawing near. Suddenly, a horse-courser enters and wants to know if Faustus will sell his horse for forty dollars. Faustus willingly agrees to sell his horse but warns the horse-courser that he must never ride the horse into water.

When the horse-courser departs, Faustus resumes contemplating that he is condemned to die and then falls asleep. The horse-courser returns in a great fluster and accuses Faustus of cheating him. He thought the horse had some magical quality, so he proceeded to ride the animal into a pond. When the horse disappeared under him, he found himself sitting on a bundle of hay and he almost drowned.

Mephistophilis cautions the horse-courser to be quiet because Faustus has just fallen asleep for the first time in eight days. The horse-courser pulls on Faustus' legs, awakens him, and demands that Faustus pay him back his money. He is astounded when Faustus' entire leg comes off. He is so frightened that he promises to pay Faustus forty more dollars.

Wagner enters to tell Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt desires his company, and Faustus agrees to see the noble gentleman.

Analysis

For the first time in many scenes, we see Faustus pondering his ultimate fate. He becomes very aware that time is running out and that his magical powers will soon end. Faustus' consciousness of the passing of time is later dramatized at greater length in the final devastating scene of the play when Faustus watches the minutes and seconds pass.

In his second period of contemplation, Faustus returns to the idea of death itself. Earlier he had spurned the idea of death and thought of ways to escape it. Now he is fully aware of the reality of death that quickly approaches him. At this moment, Faustus also recognizes that he is still a man. In earlier scenes, he had lamented that he was only a man and not a god. In his dealings with Lucifer, he had hoped to acquire a godlike position. But at this period of inward meditation, he realizes he is nothing "but a *man* condemned to die."

This scene is constructed differently from other scenes in the play. In many other Elizabethan plays, a comic scene is alternated with a serious scene. In this scene, both comic and tragic elements occur together. Scenes of Faustus contemplating the idea of his death are interspersed with scenes of low comedy involving the horse-courser.

The comic scenes again show the tragic waste of Faustus' powers. Whereas earlier he had thought in terms of large and vast sums of wealth and power, here he is concerned with the insignificant sum of forty dollars. Faustus blackmails the horse-courser for an additional forty dollars for attempting to awake him.

Another indication that Faustus is beginning to be conscious of his approaching fate is the fact that he has not slept for eight days. To an Elizabethan, this would indicate the spiritual and mental condition of a person. For example, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* Lady Macbeth is not able to sleep when her conscience begins to bother her. Thus, the audience would automatically know that Faustus is deeply troubled by his condition.

Summary and Analysis Scene 12

Summary

At the court of the duke of Vanholt, Faustus asks the duchess, who is with child, if she has a desire for any special dainties. Although it is January, she desires to have a dish of ripe grapes. Faustus sends Mephistophilis after them, and when he returns with them, the duke wonders how this could be accomplished. Faustus explains that he sent his spirit to India for them. The duchess exclaims that the grapes are the best she has ever tasted. The duke promises Faustus that he will reward him greatly for this favor.

Analysis

Once again this scene shows what insignificant feats Faustus accomplishes with his powers. Faustus performs a magical trick of obtaining fresh grapes at the request of the nobility. The learned doctor spends some of his last fleeting moments providing "merriment" and "delight" for the duke and duchess. Faustus succeeds in temporarily diverting himself and others from important concerns of life.

Summary and Analysis Scene 13

Summary

Wagner enters with the news that Faustus is soon to die because he has given all of his goods and properties to his servants. He doesn't understand why Faustus continues to feast and to carouse if he is so near death.

Faustus enters with scholars discussing who is the most beautiful woman in the world. The scholars think it is Helen of Troy. Because of their friendship for him, Faustus promises to raise her from the dead and let the scholars see her in all her pomp and majesty. Music sounds and Helen passes across the stage. The scholars exclaim wildly about her beauty and thank Faustus for allowing them to see this "paragon of excellence."

As an old man enters, the scholars leave. The old man prevails upon Faustus to repent of "thy most vile and loathsome filthiness" so he can come under the grace and mercy of God and be saved. Faustus fears that hell has him trapped but asks the old man to leave him alone for a while and he ponders his sins.

Mephistophilis then threatens Faustus for disobedience to Lucifer, and Faustus agrees to reaffirm his contract to the devil in blood again. After he writes the second deed, he tells Mephistophilis that he desires Helen for his own paramour. When she appears, Faustus decides that Helen's beauty shall make him immortal and thus, he will not need salvation:

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 be in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helen.

After Faustus exits with Helen, the old man re-enters and expresses his disappointment in Faustus, but he also sympathizes with him because he too has been tempted but has won victory by turning to God.

Analysis

For the first time since Faustus made his compact with Lucifer, this scene returns us to the central idea of the blood bond in which Faustus bartered his soul. Wagner's opening speech indicates that the time is shortly coming when Faustus will have to face death. At the beginning of the play, Faustus had believed that death did not exist, but now he must face not only physical death but eternal death.

Wagner also comments on the manner in which Faustus faces his forthcoming death. Faustus spends his time in banquets and other physical pleasures. He acts as though he does not know that the final feast is about to come to him.

In this scene, we see that Faustus performs his last act of conjuring. Again at the request of a friend, Faustus conjures up the image of Helen of Troy.

Note the manner in which Marlowe handles the two appearances of Helen of Troy. During the first appearance, Faustus says nothing about her, and only after the three scholars have left do we hear what Faustus' impression is. The comments of the scholars indicate something of her beauty; one calls her the majesty of the world, another refers to her as a paragon of excellence, and the third calls her a "heavenly beauty." Faustus gives the most complete and memorable description of her later in the scene.

The appearance of the old man again brings back into focus the conflict between good and evil that was expressed earlier by the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. Just before the old man's appearance, Helen, who represents the beauty of the classical world, appeared upon the stage. The old man comes to remind Faustus of the faith of the Christian world. The old man, who offers himself as a type of guide who will conduct

Faustus to a celestial happiness, constantly refers to the blood of Christ, which has saved him. This blood contrasts with the blood which was used earlier to sign the contract with Lucifer and the blood which Faustus will use in a few minutes to renew the pact.

The old man appears at this point because he, along with Faustus, is approaching death. Faustus at this time still has the body of a young person, owing to the magical incantations, but has a blackened soul. The old man is ugly physically but has a beautiful soul and faith in Christ. As Mephistophilis says of the old man:

His faith is great, I cannot touch his soul;
But what I may afflict his body with
I will attempt, which is but little worth.

After a wavering in his soul, Faustus firmly resolves to keep his contract with Lucifer and offers to sign another bond in blood. We must remember that Faustus has just seen the most beautiful woman in the world and desires her. Thus, he makes the second contract to assure himself of getting Helen as his paramour. Originally, he had wanted power and knowledge, but now he is only interested in satisfying his baser appetites. Furthermore, by having Helen, he thinks that her "sweet embracings may extinguish clean / These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow." Furthermore, in his moments of despair, there has always been something to divert him so that he will never have to think about his damnation. As the old man tempts him to turn to the paths of righteousness, the memory of the beautiful and desirable Helen intrudes upon his consciousness and causes him to think only of possessing her.

Through the poetic descriptions of Helen, we are convinced that she is the epitome of beauty and the most desirable woman in the world. It is ironic that Faustus thinks that this classical beauty can make him immortal through a kiss more readily than he could achieve immortality through belief in Christ. He thinks that she will be a paradise for him, and ironically he gives up all hope of eternal paradise.

The ending of the scene is a contrast to the final scene. The old man re-enters and announces that he has undergone great temptations during life and has overcome his temptations. He notes that he feels that he has triumphed over Mephistophilis and the fiends. In the final scene, Faustus,

who has the same opportunity, fails to triumph over the satanic powers and is carried away to damnation. Thus, the appearance of the old man, who announces his triumph, reminds the audience that Faustus could have repented at almost any point and achieved salvation. The fact that Faustus never does repent suggests that Faustus intellectually wills his own damnation.

Summary and Analysis Scene 14

Summary

Faustus declares to the three scholars who accompany him that he is in a dejected state because of what is about to happen to him. He admits that he has sinned so greatly that he cannot be forgiven. The scholars urge him to call on God, but Faustus feels that he is unable to call on God, whom he has abjured and blasphemed. He says: "Ah, my God, I would weep, but the devil draws in my tears! . . . I would lift up my hands but, see, they hold them, they hold them!" Faustus tells the scholars that he has done the very things that God most forbids man to do: "for vain pleasure of twenty-four years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity."

One of the scholars volunteers to stay with Faustus until the last minute, but Faustus and the others admit that no one will be able to help him. He must face the final moments alone.

After the scholars leave, the clock strikes eleven, and Faustus realizes that he has only an hour left before eternal damnation. He suffers because he realizes that he will be deprived of eternal bliss and will have to suffer eternal damnation. As the clock strikes half past eleven, he pleads that his doom not be everlasting. He would suffer a hundred thousand years if at last he could be saved. As the clock strikes twelve, he cries out for God not to look so fierce upon him. Thunder and lightning flash across the stage and the devils arrive to take him away.

Analysis

The basic situation in this final scene evokes many literary parallels. For example, we are immediately reminded of Job, who had his friends with him to comfort him during his suffering, but the friends were no help to him. Likewise, in the play *Everyman,* Everyman wants to take all his friends with him to the grave. In *Doctor Faustus,* the doctor has his friends with him and

one of the scholars wants to stay with him, but Faustus realizes that he must face death alone.

It is in this scene that Faustus completely realizes what he has done. Because he wanted to live for vain joys, he has lost eternal life. There is a constant interplay throughout the scene between living and dying. Faustus makes a statement to one of the scholars that "had I lived with them then had I lived still, but now I die eternally." In spite of all the admonitions, Faustus even at the end makes no real effort to turn to God. As he realizes the magnitude of his sin, he is almost afraid to turn to the God whom he has abjured. He knows that he has committed those very things which God most strictly forbids. Faustus' only excuse for not turning to God is that "the devil threatened to tear me in pieces if I named God, to fetch both body and soul if I once gave ear to divinity." This excuse is not rational. In the previous scene, Marlowe demonstrated the example of the old man who abjured the devil and turned to God.

Consequently, Faustus' explanation is false and empty. All he can finally do is to ask the scholars to pray for him.

Man's limitation is that he lives in time, and in his final speech, we see Faustus fighting against this very limitation. As the clock strikes eleven, he realizes that he has only one hour left to live. He suddenly understands that one power he does not possess is the ability to make time stop; he desires to have more time to live and thus repent of his sins.

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
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!

The drama of the scene is heightened by this constant awareness of the passing of time. Faustus is almost frantic as his end approaches. But even in this final scene, Faustus cannot remain resolute and call on God or Christ. He tries at one point to invoke the aid of Christ but ends up by asking Lucifer to spare him. He pleads then that his body suffer punishment but that his soul be spared.

As the clock strikes half past, Faustus then asks that he be punished for a hundred thousand years, but finally he requests that his soul be spared from eternal punishment. Furthermore, he begins to question the existing order of things. He wonders why a person must have an eternal soul. It would be better to accept some other theological system where a person's soul could return to the earth in the form of an animal or simply cease to exist. But Faustus is a man with an immortal soul, and this soul is damned.

As the clock strikes the final hour, we have one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Elizabethan drama. During thunder and lightning, horrible-looking devils appear to take Faustus off to his eternal damnation. His last pleading words are an effective statement of the horror of trafficking in the black arts. His final speech is incoherent and incomplete, as though he were suddenly dragged off in the middle of his plea.

The chorus makes the final and closing comment on the fall of Faustus. They comment that he had tried to go beyond the limitations of humanity and had thus fallen into eternal damnation. The chorus admonishes the audience to take note of Faustus' example and not go beyond the boundary of lawful things. The chorus expresses the medieval view that Faustus' fall resulted from his pride and ambition.

Christopher Marlowe Biography

Christopher Marlowe was the son of a wealthy Canterbury shoemaker who was an influential citizen in his community. Marlowe was born on February 6, 1564, and was baptized at Saint George's church in Canterbury on February 26. After attending King's School in Canterbury, Marlowe went to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge in December 1580. He attended on a scholarship founded by Archbishop Parker which was granted for six years to those who were studying for a career in the church. From this fact, it appears that it was Marlowe's intention to go into the church, even though in the college records he first appears as a student of dialectics.

Marlowe received his B.A. in 1584, and three years later he received his M.A. degree. His academic career was fairly conventional except for some long periods of absences during his second year. The only trouble which Marlowe had was just before he was granted his M.A. degree. Because of the prevalence of certain rumors, the college was going to hold up his degree. The Privy Council of the queen wrote a letter to the university assuring the college about Marlowe's character and asserting that he had been of service to her majesty. The purpose of this letter was to allay rumors that Marlowe planned to join the English Catholics at Reims in France.

Marlowe appears to have performed services for the government during these years, such as carrying dispatches overseas or else acting as a spy in the service of Sir Francis Walsingham, who was the head of Queen Elizabeth's secret service. No direct evidence, however, remains as to what his specific tasks or assignments were in the service of the queen.

After receiving his M.A. from the university, he moved to London, where he was a part of a brilliant circle of young men which included Rawley, Nashe, and Kyd. Before the end of the year 1587, both parts of his first play, *Tamburlaine the Great,* had been performed on the stage. At this time, Marlowe was a young man of only twenty-three and already established as a known dramatist as a result of the success of this first play.

In the remaining six years of his life after he had left the university, he lived chiefly in the theatrical district of Shoreditch in London. Although he

traveled a great deal for the government during this time, he always retained this London address. For a time, he had as his roommate Thomas Kyd, who is also the author of a very popular Elizabethan play, *The Spanish Tragedy.* Kyd later made the statement that Marlowe had a violent temper and a cruel heart.

In September of 1589*,* Marlowe was imprisoned in Newgate for his part in a street fight in which William Bradley, the son of a Holborn innkeeper, was killed. One of Marlowe's friends named Watson had actually killed the man with his sword, so Marlowe was not charged with murder himself. He was released on October 1, on a bail of forty pounds, and was discharged with a warning to keep the peace.

Three years later, in 1592, Marlowe became involved in a court action as he was summoned to court for assaulting two constables in the Shoreditch district. The officers said that they had been in fear of their lives because of Marlowe's threats. He was fined and released.

In the spring of 1593, Marlowe again found himself in difficulty with the Privy Council on the charge of atheism and blasphemy. Thomas Kyd had been arrested for having in his possession certain heretical papers denying the deity of Christ. Kyd denied that they belonged to him and maintained that they were Marlowe's. Marlowe was then summoned to the Privy Council, which decreed that he must appear daily before them until he was licensed to the contrary.

Then, twelve days later, Marlowe was killed in a tavern in Deptford, a dockyard adjacent to Greenwich. On that day, Marlowe had accepted an invitation from Ingram Frizer to feast at the tavern with several other young men of dubious reputation who had been mixed up in confidence games, swindles, and spy work. After supper, Marlowe got into an argument with Frizer over the tavern bill. When Marlowe struck Frizer on the head with a dagger, Frizer twisted around somehow and thrust the dagger back at Marlowe, striking him on the forehead and killing him.

During his short career as a dramatist, Marlowe gained a significant reputation on the basis of four dramas. Other than his first play, *Tamburlaine,* he was also the author of *Faustus* in 1589 or 1592, *The Jew of Malta* in 1589, and *Edward II* in 1592. In addition to his dramatic pieces, he translated Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Ovid's *Amores.* He also wrote poems,

among which his most famous are "The Massacre of Paris" and "Hero and Leander."

Critical Essays Faustus — Medieval or Renaissance Hero

Certain aspects of the drama can be used to support an interpretation of Faustus as a Renaissance hero and other aspects suggest he is a medieval hero. According to the medieval view of the universe, Man was placed in his position by God and should remain content with his station in life. Any attempt or ambition to go beyond his assigned place was considered a great sin of pride. For the medieval person, pride was one of the greatest sins that one could commit. This concept was based upon the fact that Lucifer's fall was the result of his pride when he tried to revolt against God. Thus, for the medieval person, aspiring pride became one of the cardinal sins.

According to the medieval view, Faustus has a desire for forbidden knowledge. In order to gain more knowledge than he is entitled to, Faustus makes a contract with Lucifer, which brings about his damnation. Faustus then learns at the end of the play that supernatural powers are reserved for the gods and that the person who attempts to handle or deal in magical powers must face eternal damnation. When we examine the drama from this standpoint, Faustus deserves his punishment; then the play is not so much a tragedy as it is a morality play. The ending is an act of justice, when the man who has transgressed against the natural laws of the universe is justifiably punished. The chorus at the end of the drama re-emphasizes this position when it admonishes the audience to learn from Faustus' damnation and not attempt to go beyond the restrictions placed on humanity.

The character of Faustus can also be interpreted from the Renaissance point of view. At the time of this play, there was a conflict in many people's minds, including Marlowe's, as to whether or not to accept the medieval or the Renaissance view. The Renaissance had been disappointed in the effectiveness of medieval knowledge because many scholastic disputations were merely verbal nonsense. For example, arguments such as how many angels could stand on the head of a pin dominated many medieval theses. The Renaissance scholars, however, revived an interest in the classical knowledge of Greece and the humanism

of the past. They became absorbed in the great potential and possibility of humanity.

According to the Renaissance view, Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restriction put upon humankind decreeing that he must accept his place in the universe without challenging it. Because of his universal desire for enlightenment, Faustus makes a contract for knowledge and power. His desire, according to the Renaissance, is to transcend the limitations of humanity and rise to greater achievements and heights. In the purest sense, Faustus wants to prove that he can become greater than he presently is. Because of his desire to go beyond human limitations, Faustus is willing to chance damnation in order to achieve his goals. The tragedy results when a person is condemned to damnation for noble attempts to go beyond the petty limitations of humanity.

Critical Essays Faustus as Dramatic Character

When we first meet Faustus, he is a man who is dissatisfied with his studies in dialectics, law, medicine, and divinity. Even though he is the most brilliant scholar in the world, his studies have not brought him satisfaction, and he is depressed about the limitations of human knowledge. In order to satisfy his thirst for greater knowledge, he decides to experiment in necromancy. He wants to transcend the bonds of normal human life and discover the heights beyond. One might say that he wants to have godlike qualities.

Faustus is willing to sell his soul to the devil under the terms of a contract by which he will receive twenty-four years of service from Mephistophilis and, at the end of this time, will relinquish his soul to Lucifer. At first he is potentially a great man who desires to perform beneficial acts for humanity, but as a result of his willingness to exchange his soul for a few years of pleasure, he begins to sink toward destruction. He allows his powers to be reduced to performing nonsensical tricks and to satisfying his physical appetites.

At various times throughout the drama, Faustus does stop and consider his dilemma and comes to the verge of repentance. He often thinks about repentance, but he consciously remains aligned with

Mephistophilis and Lucifer, and never takes the first steps to obtain forgiveness.

By the end of the drama, when he is waiting for his damnation, he rationalizes his refusal to turn to God. Throughout the drama, internal and external forces suggest that Faustus could have turned to God and could have been forgiven. In the final scene, the scholars want Faustus to make an attempt to seek the forgiveness of God, but Faustus rationalizes that he has lived against the dictates of God, and he makes no effort to invoke God's forgiveness until the appearance of the devils. By then, he can only scream out in agony and horror at his final fate.

Critical Essays The Character of Mephistophilis and the Concept of Hell

Mephistophilis is the second most important dramatic personage in the drama. He appears in most of the scenes with Faustus. When he is first seen by Faustus, he is horrendously ugly. Faustus immediately sends him away and has him reappear in the form of a Franciscan friar. The mere physical appearance of Mephistophilis suggests the ugliness of hell itself. Throughout the play, Faustus seems to have forgotten how ugly the devils are in their natural shape. Only at the very end of the drama, when devils come to carry Faustus off to his eternal damnation, does he once again understand the terrible significance of their ugly physical appearance. As Faustus exclaims when he sees the devils at the end of the drama, "Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile! / Ugly hell, gape not."

In his first appearance, we discover that Mephistophilis is bound to Lucifer in a manner similar to Faustus' later servitude. Mephistophilis is not free to serve Faustus unless he has Lucifer's permission. Then after the pact, he will be Faustus' servant for twenty-four years. Consequently, the concepts of freedom and bondage are important ideas connected with Mephistophilis and Faustus. In other words, no person in the entire order of the universe is entirely free, and what Faustus is hoping for in his contract is a complete and total physical, not moral, freedom. It is paradoxical that the brilliant Dr. Faustus does not see this contradiction in his views about freedom and bondage.

In most of the scenes, Mephistophilis functions as the representative of hell and Lucifer. Only in a few fleeting moments do we see that

Mephistophilis is also experiencing both suffering and damnation because of his status as a fallen angel. In the third scene, he admits that he is also tormented by ten thousand hells because he had once tasted the bliss of heaven and now is in hell with Lucifer and the other fallen angels.

Upon Faustus' insistence to know about the nature of hell, Mephistophilis reveals that it is not a place, but a condition or state of being. Any place where God is not, is hell. Being deprived of everlasting bliss is also hell. In other words, heaven is being admitted into the presence of God, and hell, therefore, is deprivation of the presence of God. This definition of hell corresponded to the newly founded doctrine of the Anglican church, which had just recently broken with the Roman Catholic church. But Marlowe also uses a medieval concept of hell for dramatic purposes. As the devils appear in the final scene and as Faustus contemplates his eternal damnation, there are strong suggestions and images of a hell consisting of severe punishment and torment, where ugly devils swarm about and punish the unrepentant sinner.

Critical Essays Servant-Master Relationship in *Doctor Faustus*

One of the basic character relationships and one of the dominant ideas throughout *Doctor Faustus* is that of the relationship between the servant and the master. Faustus' basic desire is that he will never be a slave to anything but that he will be master over the entire world. For this desire he sells his soul. Mephistophilis then becomes Faustus' servant for twenty-four years and has to carry out every wish and command that Faustus makes. The paradox of the situation is that in order to achieve this mastery for these few years, Faustus must sell his soul and thus is, in fact, no longer a free man but, instead, is actually the slave to his desires. Furthermore, when Mephistophilis first appears, he lets Faustus know that there is no such thing as complete freedom. He acknowledges that he now serves Lucifer and that everything in the universe is subjected to something else.

Faustus also is involved in another servant-master relationship with his pupil Wagner. Wagner, the inferior student of the masterful doctor, represents the servant who does not understand either his master or what is happening to him. Wagner tries to emulate Faustus in many things and to take upon himself all the power that his master displays. In his failure, he becomes one of the comic devices in the drama. He tries to use the

magical powers to get the clown to serve him, thus establishing another servant-master relationship. On the comic level then, there is even a greater misuse of power. The comic actions of Wagner show that Faustus' essential relationship with Mephistophilis carries a more universal significance. Faustus' actions affects other people, for Wagner tries to imitate his master and only bungles whatever he does.

This master-servant relationship is carried to further comic extremes in the relationship between Robin and Ralph in the comic interludes. Robin gets one of Faustus' conjuring books and tries to force Ralph to become his servant.

Thus, the comic episodes are loosely related to the serious aspects of the drama by this servant-master relationship in which the actions of the master influence the behavior and destiny of the servant.

Critical Essays The Renaissance Theater

The medieval drama had been an amateur endeavor presented either by the clergy or members of the various trade guilds. The performers were not professional actors, but ordinary citizens who acted only in their spare time. With the centralization of the population in the cities during the later part of the Middle Ages, the interest in secular drama began to increase.

At the end of the medieval period, when there were still some guild productions, a rivalry developed between the amateur actor and the new professional actor which stimulated interest in the art of acting. In the sixteenth century, the Elizabethan stage became almost wholly professional and public. Professional groups were formed which charged admission fees to allow audiences to witness their performances. The new theater groups devoted their entire time to the art and craft of play producing. The art of acting be-came a profession during the Elizabethan period which would furnish a good livelihood for the actor. Likewise, the production of plays at this time was a good financial venture.

Because of the Act of 1545, which classed any person not a member of a guild as a vagabond and subject to arrest, the groups of actors were exposed to a new danger since many of them were no longer members of a guild and were devoting themselves to traveling about the country and acting. In order to save themselves from being arrested, many of the actors put themselves under the patronage of an important person. Then they

could be called a servant of this person and would be free of the charge of being a vagabond. Although many times the relationship between actors and patrons was only nominal, there were a few of these patrons who did give some financial assistance to the actors.

Late in the century, Queen Elizabeth gave permission for a group of actors to perform in London in spite of local rules against actors. Elizabeth stipulated that they could act in London as long as their performances met the approval of the Master of the Revels. By the end of the century, there were always a number of groups of companies playing in London and also others touring the outlying districts.

The actors, usually young males, organized themselves into companies in which each of them would own a certain number of shares. These companies were cooperative and self-governing and divided the profit from the performances. The company would either lease or build its own theater in which to perform, hire men to play the minor parts, and get young apprentice boys to play the female parts in the plays. The important members of the company usually played definite types of characters. For example, Richard Burbage would always play the leading tragic roles, whereas such actors as William Kempe and Robert Armin would play the comic roles.

Plays were often written for a particular troupe or company, and often at their direction. For example, a playwright might read the first act to the members of the company and then accept their criticism and suggestions for changes. Consequently, many plays might be considered as the combined effort of dramatists and actors.

The method of acting was peculiar to the Elizabethan period. The actors expressed themselves in a highly operatic manner with flamboyant expressions. The gestures were stylized according to certain rhetorical traditions. Rhetoric books of the time told exactly how to use one's hands to express fear or anger or other emotional states.

The Elizabethan stage was a "presentational theater" in that there was no attempt to persuade the audience that they were not in a theater and no attempt was made to create any dramatic illusions because there was very little scenery. Also, the actors could speak directly to the audience; the soliloquy, a speech spoken directly to the audience, was a

typical characteristic of Elizabethan drama. Since the stage was relatively unadorned, the actors depended upon the visual color and pageantry of their elaborate costumes to give color to the play. Sometimes there was an attempt to wear historical costumes, but most often the actors wore decorative and elaborate Elizabethan dress.

The Elizabethan stage also was a repertory stage; that is, an actor would have memorized certain roles for a limited number of plays. Therefore, each company would present only a given number of plays at prescribed intervals. An incomparable record of the repertory system is Henslowe's diaries. Henslowe kept valuable records of the plays which were performed by the Admiral's company, with which he was associated from 1592 to 1597.

From Henslowe's records we have derived the following information about the repertory season. The plays were performed almost daily throughout the year except when the companies observed a Lenten suspension. Then oftentimes there was a summer break from mid-July to the beginning of October. In any two-week period, there would be eleven performances and only one would repeat a play. A play would never be presented on two consecutive days. Six out of the ten plays would be new works for that season, two would be carry-overs from the previous year, and two others would be older plays which had been revised. The alteration of plays was generally irregular. But with a new play, there seems to have been a general pattern of presentation. The play would be repeated several times after it had been first staged, then it would be acted two times a month for the first months and gradually would be repeated less frequently until in a year and a half it would generally fade from the repertory.

The Elizabethan theater building evolved from constructions that had previously been used for public entertainments — the bear-baiting ring, the innyard. The first plays were given in inns, where tables would be put together to function as a platform or stage. Then the guests would watch from the balcony of their rooms or from the innyard.

The first regular theater was constructed in 1576 by James Burbage and was called "The Theater." In the next thirty years, eight new theaters were built around London, mostly in the district of Shoreditch or Bankside. They were located in these districts because they were just outside the city limits and thus were not under the jurisdiction of the city council, which

opposed the opening of theaters because of fire, sedition, and plague. The most important theaters which were built in this period were the "Curtain" in 1577, the "Rose" in 1587, the "Swan" in 1595, the "Globe" (Shakespeare's theater) in 1599, the "Fortune" in 1600, and the "Red Bull" in 1605.

A few records have survived showing the architecture of the Elizabethan theater. There is one drawing by DeWitt showing the construction of the "Swan" theater. From this sketch, we know that the "Swan" was a three-tiered circular building with a large protruding platform extending out into the center of the enclosure. It was an open structure so that natural light entered through the top. The spectators sat in either the gallery around the sides or down in the "pit."

Considerable information has also been preserved concerning the design of the Globe theater. The "Globe" was octagonal in shape with a platform extending to the center of the theater. The stage had an inner stage which was used for special scenes. There was also a trapdoor in the platform (and sometimes another one in the concealed stage) which was used for the sudden appearance of ghosts and specters. Most of the action of a play would take place on this platform, which contained virtually no scenery.

The Elizabethan theater was an intimate theater since the actor was seldom farther away than forty feet from the audience. This close physical proximity provided for the maximum communication. The spectators were not only sitting in front of the stage but on three sides as well.

Review Questions:

1. Is Faustus' damnation tragic or an act of justice? Discuss in detail.

2. Compare the master-servant relationship in the drama.

3. What is the function of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel in the drama?

4. How are the Good Angel and the Evil Angel related to earlier morality plays? What else in the drama is a holdover from the morality plays?

5. How are the comic interludes related to the main plot?

6. What is the role of the old man who appears toward the end of the play?

7. How does Faustus' use of his magical powers correlate with his earlier desires and plans?

8. Write a description of hell as it is variously described and presented in this drama.

9. Comment on the weaknesses found in the structure of the drama.

10. How does Greek classical imagery function in the drama?

11. After the original contract with Lucifer, is there a possibility for Dr. Faustus to repent?

12. How is the image of the "fall" used throughout the drama?

13. Explain the satire against the Roman Catholic church and describe its purpose.

14. How does Marlowe use the classical concept of the chorus during the play?

15. How does Faustus' relationship with Helen of Troy epitomize the activities of the twenty-four years?