PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, generic, discipline specific elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the university has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade "A".

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Material (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar
Vice-Chancellor

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Course Code : CC-EG-02

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Netaji Subhas Open University

UG : English (HEG)

Course Title : European Classical Literature
Course Code : CC-EG-02

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Module-1
Introduction to European Classical Literature

Unit 1 ❑ Ancient Greece: History, Culture and Ideas

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1.1.0 Introduction

The Introductory Unit of this Course seeks to familiarise you with the origins and development of the ancient Greek civilization, with special focus on the socio-cultural and political life of the Greek people. It also explores some eminent personalities whose ideas revolutionised the world. After reading this Unit you will know about the different periods of ancient Greek history and the ancient Greek way of life. This background information will help you to understand and appreciate the Greek classics in translation in your syllabus.

1.1.1 Rise and Fall of Ancient Greece

a. From Indo-Europeans to Mycenaeans:

Greece, also known as Hellas, is strategically situated in South-east Europe at the intersection of Asia, Europe and Africa. Over the centuries, the boundaries of Greece have changed but in ancient times the country consisted of the following regions: Macedonia, Central Greece, the Peloponnese, Thessaly, Epirus, the Aegean Islands, Thrace, Crete and the Ionian Islands. The second millennium BC (late Bronze Age) saw the rise of ancient Greek civilization comprising of the Minoan civilization on the island of Crete and on other Mediterranean islands and the Mycenaean civilization on the mainland.

According to available historical evidence, the Mycenaeans were the first people in the Mediterranean region that spoke the Greek language. However, the origins of Greek identity and language go back earlier in history than Mycenaean times. During the great migrations of nations, a branch of the Indo-Europeans migrated into Europe and transformed the lives of the indigenous inhabitants of the region between the Ionian and the Aegean seas. The Greeks are considered to be the descendants of this group of invaders. The synthesis of the earliest Greek-speaking people with the earlier inhabitants of the Mediterranean region produced the Mycenaean civilization. Before the rise of Mycenaean civilization in mainland Greece, the Minoan civilization flourished on the island of Crete. The Minoans, who did not speak Greek, built a flourishing civilization before the Greek-speaking Mycenaeans. The Minoans differed from the Mycenaeans but because the Minoans had close contact and exerted great influence on the Mycenaeans, it is appropriate to study them as part of the early history of Greece.

➢ **Minoan civilization:**

The Minoan civilization was a Bronze Age civilization on the island of Crete and other islands of the Aegean Sea that flourished from 3000 to 1450 BC and, after a period of decline, ended around 1100 BC. Named after King Minos, the legendary ruler of the island, the Minoan was an advanced civilization which has left behind large architectural complexes—"palaces", works of art, writing systems, instruments and weapons, and evidence of a maritime trade network. The major settlements of the Minoan civilization were in Knossos, Phaistos, Malia and Kato Zakros. The early palaces were destroyed possibly by earthquakes but they were rebuilt on a grander scale marking the height of Minoan prosperity. The sprawling palaces were multi-storied with large central courtyards which may have been used for public ceremonies. Living quarters, storage rooms and administrative centres were constructed around the courtyard. The walls were decorated with colourful paintings. The rulers and their attendants lived in the palaces while the general population lived in houses around the palaces. In Greek mythology, King Minos, the son of Zeus and Europa, lived in the palace at Knossos, the centre of the Minoan civilization. He is best known for constructing the Labyrinth—a network of passages—for the Minotaur (literally, the 'bull of Minos'), a half-man, half-bull monster born to his wife, Pasiphae. The Minotaur devoured sacrificial victims thrown into the Labyrinth. It was eventually killed by the Athenian hero, Theseus.

➢ **Mycenaean civilization:**

The Mycenaean civilization was the last phase of the Bronze Age that flourished in ancient Greece approximately from 1600 to 1100 BC and ended around 1000 BC. Named after its most famous archaeological site—Mycenae—it was the first distinctive Greek civilization on the Greek mainland. Other major settlements were in Tiryns, Pylos, Thebes, Argos, Sparta and probably Athens. Though all Mycenaeans spoke the Greek language, the Mycenaean Greece was not an empire; it was a confederacy of independent city-states, each with its own king, such as, Agamemnon of Mycenae, Oedipus of Thebes and Menelaus of Sparta.

The close contact of the Mycenaeans with the earlier Minoans is evident from the ruins of Mycenaean palaces, wall-paintings, pottery, jewellery, weaponry and their writing system. Unlike the Minoan palaces, Mycenaean palaces were built on hills and fortified with massive Cyclopean walls named after Cyclopes, the one-eyed giants in Greek mythology. The later Greeks believed only giants could have built the massive

hill-top fortifications. The palaces were built around a large hall or the 'Megaron'. There were living quarters in the palaces and separate spaces for administrative work, storage and workshops. The palaces were decorated with fresco paintings on the walls and floors. The Mycenaean palaces—with the exception of Pylos—were constructed for defence against other Mycenaeans, or perhaps seaborne invaders. All of them were located close to the sea because the Mycenaeans were a seafaring people. They dominated the Mediterranean region in wars and commercial rivalry and probably put an end to the Minoans of Crete. The Mycenaean civilization reached the height of its prosperity between about 1300 and 1200 BC and collapsed around 1100 BC owing to natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanic explosions or internal strife and invasion from foreign tribes.

Both the Minoans and the Mycenaeans remained unknown to the modern world for centuries before their archaeological discovery in the 19th century. They existed in the writings of later Greeks, like the poet Homer, a native of Ionia (Asia Minor), who composed *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in 8th century BC. **You can go through the links given below for better understanding:**

Sources:

Ancient Greece: From Indo-Europeans to Mycenaeans—Brewminate

The Minoan Civilization (penfield.edu)

The Mycenaean Civilization (penfield.edu)

b. Archaic period:

The collapse of the Mycenaean civilization was caused by the Dorian invasion and led to the Greek Dark Ages (1100 to 800 BC). The Dorians were wild northern Greek tribes that migrated to settle in the southern Aegean region. Culturally, they were probably inferior to the Mycenaeans, but they ushered in the Iron Age of Greece and influenced the later development of Greek art. However, by 800 BC there was a revival of Greek civilization and new settlements appeared marking the end of the Dark Ages and the transition into the Greek Archaic Period.

The Archaic period (800 to 480 BC) saw a significant increase in the Greek population and changes in Greek language, culture, society, art, architecture and politics and international relations. New socio-political ideas and organizations emerged, the most important of which was Democracy. Draco, the first legislator of Athens, wrote laws that were to be enforced by a court. However, Draco's rather harsh laws were

abolished later by Solon, a Greek statesman. Solon wrote another code of laws that equalized political power and laid the foundation of Athenian democracy.

The process of "synoecism" or urbanisation i.e. the merger of several small settlements into one urban centre took place during this period. Initially, the *polis* (city-state) was a hill-top citadel which offered protection during war; later the *poleis* (plural of *polis*) evolved into urban centres that exerted control on surrounding regions which provided resources and paid taxes. Some of the most important city-states were Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Corinth and Delphi. All Greek city-states functioned independently and followed different forms of governance, such as monarchy, oligarchy and proto-democracy. But the Greeks were unified by traditions like the Pan-Hellenic games i.e. athletic competitions among representatives of different city-states, such as the Olympics which emerged around 776 BC. The increasing population of the city-states led to colonization and hundreds of Greek settlements were established in Ionia on the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black seas. Greek colonies led to the spread of the Greek language and Greek culture, but it also resulted in conflict with the neighbouring Persian Empire, culminating in the series of Persian Wars in the 5th century BC. The Archaic Period came to an end with the expulsion of the Persians from Greece after the battles of Plataea and Mykale in 479 BC. **You can go through the links given below for better understanding:**

Sources:

Greek Dark Age—World History Encyclopedia

Greek Archaic Period—World History Encyclopedia

c. Classical Greece:

The Classical Period of ancient Greece (480 to 323 BC) began with the Greek victory over the Persians when Athens emerged as the most powerful city-state under the leadership of Pericles, an Athenian general and statesman. The Athenian leader, Cleisthenes introduced the political system of *demokratia*, or "rule by the people" (*demos*, "the people," *kratos*, "power") in 507 BC. It is believed to be the first known instance of 'democracy' in the world. Pericles strengthened democracy by providing salaries to public officials which allowed all Athenian citizens to participate in governance irrespective of their socio-economic status. Pericles also rebuilt parts of Athens that were destroyed by the Persian invaders, such as the magnificent Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena. Under Pericles, Athens entered a golden age known

for great artists, philosophers and writers. Historians like Herodotus and Thucydides, philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, Hippocrates, the physician, Phidias, the sculptor, Democritus, the scientist and playwrights like Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Aristophanes all lived and worked in and around Athens during this period.

Athens organized a confederacy of allies called the Delian League (478 BC) to protect faraway Greek settlements from Persian attacks. However, resistance to Athens' growing power among the other Greek city-states, particularly Sparta and its allies Corinth and Thebes, led to the Peloponnesian War (431 to 404 BC). The war ended with the complete defeat and fall of Athens which was absorbed into the Spartan Empire.

Conflict soon broke out between Sparta and her allies and after a series of battles none of the southern city-states were in a position to take control over Greece. A new power started gaining influence in northern Greece—Macedonia. Hitherto a small kingdom, it came to dominate the entire Hellenic world and beyond owing to the personality and policy of Philip II and his son, Alexander. Phillip II politically unified the Greek city-states by creating the League of Corinth or the Hellenic League (337 BC). He wished to conquer the Persian Empire but was assassinated in 336 BC. His son, Alexander the Great, one of the greatest military generals in history, fulfilled his father's vision. Alexander led the Hellenic League in a long military campaign and conquered the Persian Empire, making Macedonia the most powerful empire in the world. Alexander's Macedonian Empire extended from Greece to India. Alexander died in 323 BC without an apparent heir. Consequently, the Macedonian Empire disintegrated soon after his death. However, Alexander's conquests brought people of diverse cultures residing around the Mediterranean and South-west Asia under Greek influence and led to the emergence of a distinctive Hellenistic culture. **You can go through the links given below for better understanding:**

Sources:

The Classical Age (500-336 BC) (penfield.edu)

Classical Greece—HISTORY

Macedonia—HISTORY

d. Hellenistic Greece:

Alexander ushered in the Hellenistic Period of ancient Greece (323 to 31 BC) when Greek culture spread across Europe, Asia and Africa. The word "Hellenistic" comes from the word *Hellazein*, which means "to speak Greek or identify with the Greeks."

The Hellenistic period saw the Wars of the *Diadochi* ("Successors") or the ambitious generals of Alexander who divided the Macedonian Empire into three major kingdoms. Ptolemy established his control over Egypt and parts of the Middle-East; Seleucus took over Syria and the remnants of the Persian Empire, while Antigonus brought Macedonia, Thrace and parts of Asia Minor under his authority. Most of the city-states of the classical Greece such as Athens, Corinth and Thebes continued to flourish independently.

Though marked by war and conflict, the Hellenistic period saw the spread of Greek culture and language and the flourishing of the arts, science and philosophy. This era also saw the rise of New Comedy, Alexandrian poetry and the philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Alexandria in Egypt emerged as a great centre of learning and scholarship. The Library of Alexandria, one of the important libraries in world history, with its vast collection of scrolls attracted some of the greatest Greek thinkers of the time, such as Archimedes, Aristarchus, Hero, Eratosthenes, Hipparchus and Euclid. The socio-cultural religious life of Hellenistic Greece was marked by syncretism. Although ancient Greece was at the height of its power in the Hellenistic Period, this era also marked its decline and eventual conquest by the Roman Empire.

Source:

Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age (penfield.edu)

e. Fall of ancient Greece:

Like all civilizations around the world, ancient Greece fell into decline and was conquered by the Romans. The Hellenistic era showed signs of both socio-cultural and political decline. Firstly, the Greek city-states failed to maintain democratic ideals. Democracy transformed into imperialism and gradually faded out after 400 BC. Greek society became polarised into rich and poor, privileged and exploited, citizens and non-citizens (slaves and resident aliens), leading to class-struggles. Politically, years of conflict between the Greek city-states weakened them and also destroyed the sense of community among Greeks. In a way, the conflicts between Alexander's successors can be regarded as repetition of the conflicts between the city-states on a larger scale. The Greek colonies functioned independently and were not strong allies of Greece any more. Consequently, Greeks failed to unite against common enemies. Conflicts with Persia, Macedonia and Rome, were the three stages of the decline of ancient Greece. Finally, the Roman Empire emerged as the greatest threat to the Greeks during the late Hellenistic period. There were a series of conflicts between the Roman Republic and

various Greek city-states until the Romans decisively defeated the Greek Achaean League and ransacked the city of Corinth (146 BC). The Roman control over Greece was established after the Battle of Actium (31 BC) and the conquest of Alexandria (30 BC).

However, Greece did not decline as a culture after the Roman conquest. The spirit of Greek civilization exercised a great influence upon Rome. The Romans adopted Greek culture as their own and spread it all over Europe.

Source:

The Causes of Greek Decline on JSTOR.

1.1.2 Greek Culture

a. Daily life in Greek city-states:

Although Greek city-states functioned independently, the way of life was quite similar across Greece. In Greek society, men enjoyed the legal status of a citizen, right to vote, hold public office and own property. Other social groups—women, children, slaves and foreigners—often made up the majority of the population and had defined roles within the community. Women's roles were largely confined to managing the household. The only exception was Sparta where women could own and manage property. Slaves were essential to the Athenian economy for cultivation and construction work. A sense of solidarity was fostered among the citizens through socialising in common public spaces (*agora*) and festivities.

While Greek men took an active part in the public life of the *polis*, their daily lives were centred on the home. They left home each day to work in their fields or in the town. The prosperity of the Greeks was based on agriculture and trade. The Greeks lived in simple houses made of mud bricks, built around an open courtyard with an altar at the centre. The men and the women had separate living spaces. Food was cooked over a fire in the kitchen. Both men and women dressed in tunics and used shawls and cloaks while travelling. Greeks usually went barefoot at home, but wore leather sandals outdoors. The ancient Greeks kept themselves busy in work, public duties and entertainment in their daily lives.

b. Religion and festivals:

Ancient Greek religion originated from a collection of beliefs and rituals. The ancient Greek pantheon consisted of twelve major deities of Mount Olympus led by

Zeus, the king of the Gods. The Greeks also worshipped deities of nature, the underworld, heroes and revered ancestors. Gods were worshipped at sacred sites and in massive temples in Greek city-states, like the temple of Athena in the Parthenon of Athens and the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Offerings and sacrifices were essential acts of worship. The Greeks believed in oracles which were believed to be portals through which the gods spoke directly to people. The oracles of Apollo at Delphi and Zeus at Dodona were the most famous in ancient Greece. The sibyls (female oracles) and seers were believed to have the ability to predict the future or speak for the gods. Pan-Hellenic games were held as part of worship, such as the Olympics in honour of Zeus, Pythian Games in honour of Apollo, Isthmian Games in honour of Poseidon and Nemean Games also in honour of Zeus. Besides community worship, the Greeks built shrines in their homes for household deities.

The Greeks deities were anthropomorphic or created in human forms. The god and goddesses displayed human qualities, interacted with humans, and even had children with them. They also competed and fought among themselves. In *The Iliad*, Hera, Athena, Thetis favoured the Greeks in the Trojan War; Aphrodite, Apollo, Poseidon supported the Trojans, while Zeus remained uncommitted.

c. Arts and entertainment:

Ancient Greek art emphasized the accomplishments of craftsmen. Through their temples, sculpture and pottery, the Greeks exhibited the fundamental principle of their culture – *arête* or 'excellence'. The art of pottery, particularly the decorative vase paintings dating from the 7th century BC are of special significance as they provide information about the culture of ancient Greece. Archaeologists believe that the vase paintings were inspired by the earlier wall paintings in the Minoan palaces.

The Greeks led a relaxed life when they were not fighting wars and enjoyed a variety of entertainments such as the symposium, athletics and the theatre. The symposium was a ritualised drinking occasion accompanied by music, dancing, recitals or intellectual conversation. They were hosted by wealthy men in their homes. Plato's *Symposium* and Xenophon's *Symposium* refer to these events. Athletic competitions were an important part of Greek culture. The most important athletic contests were the four Pan-Hellenic festivals – the Olympic Games in honour of Zeus at Olympia; the Pythian Games in honour of Apollo at Delphi; the Isthmian Games in honour of Poseidon at Corinth; and the Nemean Games, also in honour of Zeus at Nemea. Theatre,

an integral part of religious festivals, was a major source of entertainment in ancient Greece. The oldest *theatron* ("theatre") was that of Dionysus on the south slope of the acropolis of Athens built in the 6th century BC. Apart from these special occasions, the ancient Greeks enjoyed visits to the *agora* ("gathering place") in the city-states and the gymnasiums which were the focal points of Greek community life.

d. Heroic code and warfare:

The ancient Greeks were driven by a desire for glory and a fear of shame for Greek society valued heroic success in battles above everything else. The ultimate goal of Greek heroes was *kleos* or everlasting fame and glory that could be achieved by dying violent deaths on the battlefield. Homer sums up the Greek heroic code in three words: *aristos*, *arete* and *aristeia* i.e. the hero's single-handed success whereby he displays his fighting skills. By following this code, a Greek warrior earned his glory that ensured his place in the memory of his community.

The ancient Greeks were regularly engaged in warfare both at home and overseas for a variety of reasons—defence of autonomy, territorial expansion and honour. The Greek warrior was heavily armoured with a long spear, a sword and a circular bronze shield and sometimes a bronze helmet (with brightly coloured horsehair crest), breastplate, leg and ankle guards. Combat was bloody and lethal giving the warrior a chance to display his heroism. The ancient Greeks developed a new style of warfare: the hoplite phalanx. Hoplites were armed infantrymen and the phalanx was a rectangular formation of these soldiers with their shields locked together and spears pointed forward over the first row of shields that made them almost a single impenetrable unit.

e. Death and afterlife:

The ancient Greeks treated death as a rite of passage from this world into the next. They believed in an afterlife and had elaborate burial rituals. There were three stages of the burial: the preparation and laying out of the body for friends and relatives to mourn and pay respect, the pre-dawn funeral procession and the cremation or burial. The Athenians cremated their dead and placed their ashes in an urn. In earlier times animal and even human sacrifices were made at the graveside. Grave monuments were often erected in memory of the deceased. Slaves were given a simple burial because it was believed that slaves did not have an afterlife. Greek heroes dying in the battlefield were buried with impressive rituals, though ordinary soldiers were cremated.

The ancient Greeks believed all human beings were mortal and after death the soul (*psyche*) entered Hades, the world of the dead. In Greek mythology, the boatman Charon ferries the souls delivered to him by Hermes across the water (the river Acheron or Styx) to Hades. Cerberus, a three-headed dog guards the gates of the Underworld. In the early Mycenaean civilization all the dead went to Hades, but during the Archaic Age the Greeks conceived the underworld in terms of the Tartarus and the Elysium. Tartarus was a place of torment for the wicked, while Elysium was the place of pleasures for the virtuous. Greek heroes like Achilles, who fought in the Trojan War, were believed to live in Elysium.

Some Greek philosophers had different ideas of death and afterlife. Pythagoras and Plato preached the idea of reincarnation, while Epicurus rejected the possibility of afterlife and the concepts of reward or punishment after death. However, these ideas were accepted only by a few Greeks. **You can go through the links given below for better understanding:**

Sources:

Daily Life in Ancient Greece (Collection) - World History Encyclopedia

Common Beliefs and Practices in Ancient Greek Religion—Brewminate

ANCIENT GREEK ART, PAINTING AND CRAFTS | Facts and Details

Ancient Greek Warfare—World History Encyclopedia

1.1.3 Greek Ideas That Changed The World

a. Architecture:

The ancient Greek architectural styles were of three prominent types: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders. The Doric order originated during the Archaic Period when monumental temples were built, the most famous being the Parthenon of Athens. The Ionic order originated in in Ionia. The Temple of Hera on Samos and the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus were splendid specimens of this style. The Corinthian order derives its name from the city of Corinth and was adapted in the Indian sub-continent creating the Greco-Buddhist Gandhara School of art.

b. Philosophy:

Ancient Greek philosophy arose in the 6th century BC and continued to develop even after the Roman invasion when Greece became a part of the Roman Empire. Greek

philosophers thought about and expressed their ideas about human nature, ethics and morality. Pre-Socratic philosophers, like Pythagoras, investigated natural phenomena. The Socratic philosophers—Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – were the most well-known of all Greek philosophers. Socrates taught his pupils by asking thought-provoking questions. Xenophon and Plato wrote down Socrates' teachings which contain his views related to ethics, virtue, justice and other aspects of human behaviour. Plato had political aspirations and regarded any political system devoid of philosophy as fundamentally corrupt. His works such as the *Republic*, describes a wise society run by a philosopher. Plato established his Academy at Athens for imparting education. Aristotle was Plato's student, and under his guidance studied ethics, science and politics. However, Aristotle disagreed with Plato on many points. *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics* and *On the Soul* are some Aristotle's famous works. Aristotle established his own academy, the Lyceum in Athens. The Post-Socratic philosophers focused their attention on the individual rather than on community and established four prominent schools of philosophy: Cynicism, Skepticism, Epicureanism and Stoicism.

c. Politics:

The ancient Greek city-states were independent self-governing entities. The word 'politics' comes from Greek *politiká*, "affairs of the cities" or activities associated with power structures and relations among people residing in the Greek city-states. The very notion of democracy was derived from the Athenian political system called *demokratia*, or "rule by the people" (*demos*, "the people," *kratos*, "power"). The Athenian system was a direct democracy—all male citizens were allowed to vote and debate on state affairs. However, not all Greek philosophers believed in the democratic practices. Socrates defended the democratic system but objected to the democracy that was practised in Athens for which he was put to death. Plato distrusted democracy and proposed an aristocracy i.e. the rule of philosopher-kings. Aristotle feared that democracy could degenerate into mob rule and favoured rule by polity or political groups.

Another ancient Greek concept that influenced the modern political systems was the written constitution. Aristotle researched and recorded the constitutions of 158 ancient Greek city-states and used them to write his *Politics*. This work is a major source of knowledge of the development of Athenian democracy and the workings of the Athenian city-state.

d. Literature:

Ancient Greek literature consists of the oldest surviving written works from the Archaic Period till the 5th century AD. Homer's epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* (8th century BC) are considered to be the oldest extant works of Western literature. *The Iliad* recounts some of the significant events of the final weeks of the Trojan War and the Greek siege of the city of Troy while *The Odyssey* is the story of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, who wanders for ten years after the Trojan War. Homeric epics enshrined the heroic ideals of Greek culture and civilization. Homer's contemporary, Hesiod, is generally regarded as the first poet in the Western tradition. The Greeks invented the drama, both tragedy and comedy. Aeschylus (*The Oresteia*), Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex*) and Euripides (*Medea*) are the famous Greek tragedians whose works inspired Aristotle's *Poetics*, the famous study of Greek dramatic art. Aristophanes (*The Frogs*) was the greatest writer of ancient Greek comedy who made fun at politicians, philosophers and fellow artists through his plays. Though very little of it survives; the ancient Greek plays are regarded as some of the greatest literary achievements till this day.

e. Theatre:

Greek theatre began in the 6th century BC in Athens with the performance of tragedy plays at religious festivals. Annual theatre festivals were held to honour Dionysus, the god of theatre, to promote peace between individuals and city-states. Theatre buildings or the *theatron* were large, open-air structures with the seating built on the natural slopes of hills pointing down towards the stage. The oldest theatre of ancient Greece was that of Dionysus on the south slope of the acropolis of Athens. The popular forms of theatre were the tragedy and the comedy. Initially, only one actor was allowed on the stage at a time. Later, Aeschylus introduced the second actor and Sophocles the third one. Professional actors emerged when theatre became competitive festivals lasting several days. Thespis was the first known actor to appear on stage; hence 'actors' are sometimes referred to as 'thespians' after him. Ancient Greek actors were always men, even if they were playing female roles. Women were excluded from the theatre in ancient Greece. The actors dressed in elaborate costumes and masks were an important part of their performance. Actors were held in high regard in the ancient Greek world.

f. Medicine:

Ancient Greek philosophy led to the development of medicine as Greeks learnt to rely more on natural solutions instead of divine grace for healing. Two factors that

encouraged the Greeks to keep healthy and seek healing were warfare and sports. Hippocrates, who is regarded as "the father of medicine," established a medical school at Cos. He developed the theory of the four humours—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile—which needed to be kept in balance for good physical and psychological health. It was believed that illness would occur when the humours were not in balance. This theory remained popular in Western Europe until the 17th century. Hippocrates and his followers were the first physicians to describe and document several diseases in the *Hippocratic Corpus* which is a collection of around sixty ancient Greek medical works. However, many Greek physicians still appealed to the gods if their treatments did not work. Asclepius, the Greco-Roman god of medicine was the son of Apollo (God of healing). He learnt the art of healing from the centaur, Chiron. The temples dedicated to the worship of Asclepius were later transformed into gymnasiums, public baths and stadiums.

g. Sciences:

The Greeks made major contributions to mathematics and science that influenced Western ideas about astronomy, geography and mathematics for centuries to come. Early Greek philosophers were also scientists who observed and studied the natural world – the earth, seas and mountains, as well as the solar system, planetary motion, and astral phenomena. Pythagoras proposed the idea of a spherical Earth around 500 BC which was validated later by Aristotle. Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the Earth around 240 BC while Aristarchus presented the heliocentric model of the universe with the Sun at the centre and the Earth revolving around it once a year and rotating about its axis once a day. In the 3rd century BC, Archimedes invented the science of mechanics; hydrostatics and one of the most fundamental concepts of physics i.e. centre of gravity. The basic ideas about geometry and the concept of mathematical proofs were propounded by Greek mathematicians such as Pythagoras (500 BC) and Euclid (300 BC). Hypatia (350-415 AD), the first woman teacher of mathematics and philosophy of the Hellenistic school, had a social ranking equal to Alexandria's most important men. But she was killed by a mob of Christian men which marked the end of paganism and the triumph of Christianity. Thus, many ideas and inventions that are used in the modern world have their origins in ancient Greece.

h. Sports:

Games in ancient Greece were held as parts of religious festivals. The earliest record of Greek athletics is from Homer's *The Iliad* which describes how Achilles

organized funeral games for his dead friend, Patroklos. By the Archaic Period Greek athletics were associated with competitions for glory and status. Before participating in these events, the athletes prayed and dedicated their performances to deities. The Greek Olympics began in 776 BC as a way of paying tribute to Zeus, every four years in Olympia. Pentathlon ("five events" – running, long jump, discus throw, javelin throw, and wrestling) and chariot racing were some of the earliest events. The winners were honoured with crowns or olive leaves. The Olympics inspired similar athletic competitions elsewhere, like the Pythian Games sacred to Apollo at Delphi, the Isthmian Games sacred to Poseidon at Corinth and the Nemean Games also sacred to Zeus at Nemea. Besides these events, the city-states organised Olympic-like local games offering valuable prizes. Winning was important for a Greek athlete for victory brought glorious fame. As the prominence of athletics increased in ancient Greece, as part of religious festivities, they were eventually suppressed by Christian emperors out of concerns about pagan piety. **You can go through the links given below for better understanding:**

Sources:

Ancient Greek Philosophy | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (utm.edu)

Greek Theatre—Ancient Greece

Ancient Greek Science—World History Encyclopedia

Greek Athletic Competitions—A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity—Wiley Online Library

1.1.4 Some Famous People of Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece was one of the greatest civilizations in human history. This section is dedicated to some of the famous Greek personalities whose actions and contributions in various domains such as, philosophy, arts, war, literature, science and politics exerted an enormous impact on subsequent cultures of the world.

1. Alexander:

Alexander III of Macedon, popularly known as Alexander the Great, was one of the greatest military generals in history. He was born in Pella in central Macedonia in 356 BC. He ascended the throne in 336 BC after the assassination of his father, Philip II. Alexander led the Hellenic League in a long military campaign and established a

powerful empire that extended from Greece to India. Alexander was taught by Aristotle and established the city of Alexandria in Egypt which became a great centre of learning and scholarship. He died in 323 BC without an apparent heir and the Macedonian Empire disintegrated soon after his death. However, Alexander's conquests brought people of diverse cultures residing around the Mediterranean and South-west Asia under Greek influence and led to the emergence of a distinctive Hellenistic culture.

2. Archimedes:

Archimedes was the greatest mathematician and inventor in ancient Greece. He was born in the city of Syracuse in Sicily in 287 BC and travelled to study in Alexandria in Egypt. After his return he helped King Hiero II with his numerous inventions. Many fantastic tales are associated with Archimedes, such as his exuberant cry, "Eureka!" after discovering the way to measure the volume of gold in the king's crown. As per legend, Archimedes devised a mechanism to defend Syracuse during the Roman siege. It was a crane-like mechanism—"the Claw of Archimedes" – that could lift enemy ships and throw them back into the sea. Archimedes defended Syracuse for two years before it was captured by Roman forces. The modern world remains indebted to Archimedes for his works on mathematics, mechanics, hydrostatics and one of the most fundamental concepts of physics i.e. centre of gravity.

3. Aristotle:

Aristotle was one of the most important philosophers of ancient Greece who was tutored by Plato and later on taught Alexander the Great. He was born in 384 BC in Stagira in northern Greece. At a young age he was sent to Plato's Academy in Athens where he spent twenty years. He studied matters of ethics, science, and politics like Plato but disagreed with his teacher on many points. Later, Aristotle established his own school, the Lyceum. *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Poetics* and *On the Soul* are some his famous works. Aristotle was forced to flee Athens after the death of Alexander and his works were lost. They were rediscovered in the 1st century BC and since then Aristotle's philosophy has been the subject of academic research till this day. You will read about him in more detail in a subsequent Unit.

4. Euclid:

Euclid was an important mathematician of Greco-Roman antiquity, best known for his treatise on geometry called *Elements*. He is often referred to as the "Father of

Geometry" for collecting and reworking the mathematical concepts of his predecessors into a consistent whole. This work laid the foundation of Euclidean geometry. Almost nothing is known of Euclid's life except that he ran a school in Alexandria around 300 BC.

5. Herodotus:

Herodotus was an ancient Greek historian who was born in 485 BC in the city of Halicarnassus, in Asia Minor. He is often referred to as the "Father of History," for collecting and systematically documenting events into his work known as *The Histories*. His main source was oral tradition. Though Herodotus focused on the Greco-Persian Wars (499–479 BC), he also wrote about other events of the contemporary Mediterranean world. However, he was criticised by later historians like Thucydides, for including familiar legends and fanciful stories in his historical account for entertainment.

6. Homer:

Almost nothing definite is known of Homer, not even whether he really existed. Going by legend, Homer was born at Smyrna in the Ionian region of Asia Minor between 750 and 700 BC. He is often depicted as a blind poet wandering around the coastal region of Greece. Homer is regarded as the author of the ancient Greek epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, dating from the 8th century BC. The poems are set in Mycenaean Greece. *The Iliad* narrates the events of the final weeks of the Trojan War, while *The Odyssey* tells the story of the travels of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, after the Trojan War. Homeric epics belong to the oral tradition; his works were likely written down at a later age by others. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* offer insights into the ideals of Greek culture and civilization. Being the earliest literary works of the western world, Homer's works set the foundation of the Western literary tradition.

7. Pericles:

Pericles was an ancient Greek statesman who ushered in the Golden Age of Athens. He was born into an aristocratic family of Athens in 495 BC. He was a patron of the arts from an early age and sponsored Aeschylus and his play *The Persians*. The success of the play made Pericles a popular figure in Athens. He led several successful military campaigns which further increased his popularity. His outstanding oratory skills also helped him to gain considerable influence in Athenian politics. Pericles strengthened democracy by providing salaries to public officials which allowed all

Athenian citizens to participate in governance irrespective of their socio-economic status. Pericles also rebuilt parts of Athens that were destroyed by the Persian invaders, such as the magnificent Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena. Under Pericles, Athens entered a glorious period becoming the political and cultural centre of Greek world.

1.1.5 Legacy of Ancient Greek Civilization

Ancient Greece was a glorious civilization that left behind a rich socio-cultural and political legacy that provides the foundation of "western civilization". The Greeks made important contributions to philosophy, politics, mathematics, astronomy and medicine. The notion of Democracy was derived from the Athenian political system called *demokratia*, or "rule by the people". Though the idea of Athenian democracy is quite different from its present-day form, undoubtedly the world remains indebted to the ancient Greeks for introducing the concept. Literature and theatre were integral aspects of Greek culture which influenced modern drama. The Greeks were famous for their innovative sculpture and architecture. Greek culture influenced the Roman Empire and many other civilizations, and continues to influence modern cultures today. As the Roman poet, Horace put it, "Captive Greece took captive her fierce conqueror and instilled her arts in rustic Latium" (*Epistles II*). The Roman Empire adopted the Greek culture and spread it all over the Western world.

1.1.6 Summing Up

It is never easy to approach a culture and civilization long removed from our times, and this Course is a challenging one exactly because that is what it demands. To make your journey smooth, in this Unit we have given you a detailed view of the ancient Greek civilization, its glorious development and its fall when it was conquered by the Romans. The Classical and Hellenistic eras of Greece were undoubtedly the most splendid, however the eras that preceded and succeeded this glorious period, have left a rich a legacy. This Unit also gives an idea about the ancient Greek way of life: the socio-cultural political aspects and the contributions of some ancient Greek personalities whose ideas and activities influenced the world. We hope this Unit will help you to understand the background of the classical texts in this paper and appreciate them better.

1.1.7 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Essay Type Questions:**

1. Write an essay tracing the rise and fall of the ancient Greek civilization.
2. Briefly describe a few characteristics of ancient Greek culture.
3. Discuss three ancient Greek ideas that changed the world.

➢ **Mid-length Questions:**

1. Write a short note on the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations of ancient Greece.
2. Write a note on the Classical Age of ancient Greece.
3. Trace the origins of Democracy in ancient Greek politics.
4. Comment on the importance of ancient Greek theatre.
5. Discuss the contributions of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to ancient Greek philosophy.

➢ **Short Answer Type Questions:**

1. Write a short note on Alexander the Great.
2. Discuss the importance of Homer in the Western literary tradition.
3. What made the culture of Hellenistic Greece unique?
4. What did the ancient Greeks contribute to the development of medicine?
5. Discuss the contributions of ancient Greek scientists.
6. Comment on the heroic code and belief in afterlife in ancient Greece.
7. Give a few reasons for the fall of the ancient Greece civilization.

1.1.8 Suggested Reading

Cartledge, Paul. *Ancient Greece: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2011.

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NOTES

Unit 2 ❑ The Primary or the Oral Epic: The Development of a Genre

Structure

1.2.0 Introduction

1.2.1 Scope of the Genre

1.2.2 Defining the Genre

1.2.3 Classification of Epic

1.2.4 Primary Epic Poetry

1.2.5 Secondary Epic Poetry

1.2.6 Summing Up

1.2.7 Comprehension Exercises

1.2.8 Suggested Reading

1.2.0 Introduction

This Unit attempts to explore how the epic as a creative genre evolved over the centuries and how it developed, incorporating innovating elements that suited the new age. It tries to define the term 'epic,' and see how critics divide it into categories. It specifically discusses, with suitable examples, the two broad categories—primary epic poetry and secondary epic poetry. It is necessary to understand the basic features of both the primary epic poetry and secondary epic poetry. That is what we shall do in this unit.

1.2.1 Scope of the Genre

Many critics believe that the days of the epic are over, that the resurgence of the genre is no longer possible as we have entered the age of the fragmented life and developed the philosophy of individualism, leaving the community ethos behind. In *The English Epic and Its Background* E. M. W. Tillyard, for instance, states that the epic as a literary tradition "expired at the end of the eighteenth century" and that it has been replaced by the new genre called 'novel' (530). In *Heroic Poetry* C. M. Bowra too seems to subscribe to the same view. There are many readers and critics who share this view.

One need not necessarily agree with the view expressed by the critics mentioned above. A genre goes through transformations in content and form as it travels through time. Innovations and imitations take place during the journey. It takes new turns and the old forms of the genre transform and appear in new guises. That is why one may be tempted to announce the death of the genre prematurely. The same thing happens in the case of epic as well. Since its birth in the ancient times, the epic is conceived in terms of its length,features (such as heroism), motifs (such as travel motif), and generic conventions (such as 'in medias res' and 'Invocation to Muse').However, you must have observed how the use of the term 'epic' is no longer limited to the long, conventional poetry such as Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is now being applied to a wide range of works such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (published serially during 1865-69), Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), D. W. Griffith's pioneering *Birth of a Nation* (1915) or Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923). The last two examples are from the film genre where discourses related to the epic have also left its mark. Critics have noted down epic qualities in certain films having "extravagant demonstrations of spectacle and special effects first in the mid-twentieth century and then at the beginning of the twenty-first" (Johns-Putra 9). Literary epic and epic film, Adeline Johns-Putra argues, share elements of heroism and grandeur of scale (9) and she has included a whole chapter on film in her book *The History of the Epic* (2006). These qualities are shared in other genres such as novel. That is why Tolstoy's *War and Peace* has been mentioned above. Richard P. Martin thus argues that "[the term] 'epic,' applied to similar categories across cultures, plays a necessary role that transcends genre (thus making fruitless the attempt to pin it down as any single genre)" (9). All these suggest that it is difficult to impose a strict definitional boundary on the epic, or on any other genre for that matter, and that genres tend to have continuous dialogues with one another.

While you should remain alert to the porosity of generic borders and the flexibility of definitions, you should also be aware of the history of the birth and growth of the epic as a genre and how it developed some specific kind of epic themes, conventions, and styles. Traditional definitions are built on these. If we know how a genre is traditionally defined, we can trace the history of innovations as well. That is one reason why we should also try to define a genre at a given point of time.This can be helpful in understanding the classical European epics which you will have to read.

1.2.2 Defining the Genre

From the conventional point of view, the epic is defined as a long poem that narrates the heroic deeds of great men having a great sense of honour. This is how Professor Tom Sienkewicz defines the epic, "An epic is a long narrative poem presenting characters of high position in a series of adventures which form an organic whole through their relation to a central figure of heroic proportions and through their development of episodes important to the history of a nation or a race." Abrams defines it as: "…epic or heroic poem is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: it is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or (in the instance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) the human race" (Abrams 76). The actions of epic heroes are often directed towards the preservation of the honour of the communities, countries or 'nations' they represented. These heroes were held in great esteem by their people and even by the enemies. This sense of honour constitutes an important feature of the epic of the classical times. Speaking of the Greek concepts of 'honour' and honourable heroes, C.M. Bowra observes,

> [T]he early Greek philosophers gave a special place to those men who live for action and for the honour which comes from it. Such, they believed, are moved by an important element in the human soul, the self-assertive principle, which is to be distinguished equally from the appetites and from the reason and realises itself in brave doings. They held that the life of action is superior to the pursuit of profit or the gratification of the senses, that the man who seeks honour is himself an honourable figure; …The Greeks of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. regarded the men whom Homer had called heroes…as a generation of superior beings who sought and deserved honour. (1)

During the earliest stages of civilisation, poets and bards composed and recited/sang about such heroes and heroic spirit and the members of the audience were greatly influenced by their performances. These songs/recitations were mostly about some historical events such as war and they conveyed patriotic spirit.

You will see later how this sense of honour and the spirit of valour motivated the epic poets to tell their stories and portray their characters. Homer's epic poem the *Iliad* which is included in your syllabus is one such example. It is a story based on Trojan

war and you will see spectacular scenes of valour on display here. Greek leaders came together to preserve their honour which was slighted by Troy's abduction of Menelaus's wife Helen. The long temporal span of the Trojan war and the sustained spirit of heroism of the leaders reinforce the epic spirit in the *Iliad*.

Sienkewicz mentions the following characteristic features of the epic poetry:

(1) It deals with stories from ancient times when 'a superior race of men' lived for 'action and for the honor and renown which it brings.'

(2) consolidation of minor details to form a 'solid [narrative] background.'.

(3) 'the use of the single line, instead of the stanza, as the metrical unit.'

(4) use of speeches, often quite long, by mostly important characters.

(5) 'literary devices to vary or assist the narrative, such as similes, repeated passages, and incidental stories.'

(6) 'the reluctance of the poet to assert his own personality.'

(7) 'the dependence on a tradition which is passed from generation to generation, and from poet to poet, and [which] supplies stories, themes, and language.'

1.2.3 Classification of Epic

Epic poetry is usually classified into two types: primary/oral epic poetry and secondary/ literary epic poetry. The former comprises heroic poetry composed for the purpose of performance. During the performance, a particular poem usually receives additions and alterations. Literary epic poetry, on the other hand, is in written form and intended for the reading public. Unlike the oral epic poetry, it exclusively belongs to the literate world.

In *A Preface to Paradise Lost* C.S. Lewis divides epic poetry into two broad categories—Primary Epic and Secondary Epic. This categorisation, which has been widely accepted by the scholars in the field, closely corresponds to the oral and literary epics mentioned above. Primary epic is defined as a long poem "which stems from heroic deeds and which is composed in the first instance, in order that such deeds may not be forgotten." It is usually based on some important events which are historical in nature. Secondary epic is defined as "poetry which may deal with heroic legend or with more abstract themes than the type available to primary epic, and which is composed,

not as an historical record of the past, but as the poet's artistic interpretation or recreation of legend or theme. The combination of the poet's 'seeing eye' and his personal style together create something which is not based on reality but has a life of its own to be transmitted to the mind of the reader."

➢ **Activity for the Learner:**

1. What is the relationship between oral epic poetry or primary epic poetry on one hand and literary epic poetry or secondary epic poetry on the other?
2. Who are the critics who believe that epic poetry cannot be written now?
3. Do you feel that genre boundary is basically flexible?
4. Mention some more examples (not mentioned in this unit) of primary and secondary epic poetry?
5. Mention some films (not mentioned in this unit) which may be called 'epic'? What are the features for which they may be called 'epic' films?

1.2.4 Primary Epic Poetry

There are some well-known primary epics in different parts of the world. It is not possible to discuss all of them in this unit. Only three early epic poems will be discussed in this section to help you understand the basic features of this genre. These three poems are *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Gilgamesh, a Sumerian work, is the earliest extant primary epic. This oral epic is usually dated back to a period between 3000 BC and 2000 BC. It is a narrative of grand heroic deeds against the background of historical events. Gilgamesh is widely regarded as the forerunner to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which are also regarded as primary epic. Among other primary epics, *Beowulf* (presumed to have been written sometime between the 8th century and the late 10th century) is well-known to you.

Gilgamesh's narrative which includes 'creationist stories' has its origin in the Near East region of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and in its oral form it was very much popular among the people of the area for about two thousand years (from approximately 2200 BC to about 200 BC). It was later put down in written form in Sumerian and Akkadian languages. The protagonist Gilgamesh was a brave king. He had the temerity to reject the marriage proposal from the goddess-like Ishtar. He undertook many

perilous adventures. In the process, as the introduction of the written book states, he 'learnt of everything the sum of wisdom' (qtd. in Johns-Putra 16). His friendship with Enkidu constitutes an important part of the story. Enkidu was originally created by God to challenge and contain Gilgamesh's rash behaviour. Subsequently, both became friends and jointly participated in heroic adventures such as killing of the monster Humbaba (or Huwawa) and the Bull of Heaven. Enkidu's death during an encounter was greatly mourned by Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh's last adventure involved a quest motif, that of discovering the secret of immortality. He encountered Uta-napishti who had this knowledge. He is a Noah-like figure who survived a deluge, a close parallel to that told in the Old Testament. He, however, failed to gather the secret from Uta-napishti. The poem ends with the description of his return to his kingdom. While it is striking to note the close resemblance between Uta-napishti in Gilgamesh and the Biblical figure of Noah and their experience of the divine deluge, there are also parallels with Homeric stories. Johns-Putra states that "many scholars point to a number of thematic, structural and narrative parallels between the texts, such as the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and that between Achilleus and Patroklos, or the power dynamics that underlie Ishtar's attempted seduction of Gilgamesh and Kalypso's and Circe's relationships with Odysseus" (17).

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are also based on oral narratives which circulated for a long time. These narratives were spontaneously composed by anonymous singers and contained many formulaic expressions that helped the process of composition. Such a singer was known as *aiodos*. Johns-Putra points out that "the question of the orality of the Homeric poems is complicated by the coincidence of their composition and the invention of writing in Greece" (19). She also asserts that 'at the heart of Homeric epic' lies 'its heroic function' which is 'captured in the phrase *klea*' which means 'glorious deeds' (25). Referring to Nagy, she points out that "the word *kleos*, or 'fame' (literally, 'that which is heard'), refers not simply to the fame that is achieved by the hero who is sung" (Johns-Putra 25) but also to "the formal word which the Singer himself (*aiodos*) used to designate the songs which he sang in praise of gods and men, or, by extension, the songs which people learned to sing from him" (Nagy qtd. In Johns-Putra 25). Pointing out that "the heroic deeds are inseparable from the song that immortalises them," she observes,

> Underpinning *kleos*, then, is the notion that glory is about reputation, heroism about public honour. The Homeric poems do not simply demonstrate this heroic

> code, they rigorously interrogate it, exploring and exposing its limits. It is to this close to ironic nature of Homeric verse—its doubleness or self-awareness of its own inherent contradictions—that we shall turn our attention. (25)

Homer's *Iliad* projects its protagonist Achilles' *ménis* (wrath) which results from Agamemnon's flouting of the codes of *kleos*. By demanding Briseis, a woman awarded to Achilles as a prize in observation of the code of heroism, Agamemnon dishonours the very convention of the heroic age, and this angers Achilles who withdraws from the war. "Agamemnon's selfish actions are incompatible with, indeed incomprehensible to, Achilleus' value system: 'this thought comes as a bitter sorrow to my heart and my spirit/when a man tries to foul one who is his equal, to take back/a prize of honour, because he goes in greater authority' (XVII.52–4)" (Johns-Putra 28). This has a disastrous effect on the Achaian army. Achilles does not participate in the war till his dear friend Petroklas is killed by Hector. He has the foreknowledge that his end is near but devastates the army of Troy till he succumbs to death (See details of the story in Module 2, Unit 6).

The *Odyssey*, like the *Iliad*, contains 24 books. It opens in medias res. It is the narrative of Odysseus's return home from the Trojan war and has the epic motifs and themes such as wandering and return, participation of gods and goddesses in the actions of the poems, prophecies and omens, and encounters with supernatural creatures.The return journey takes about ten years. During his journey he encounters a series of adventures from which he comes out unscathed by means of valour, wiliness, and resourcefulness. He and his men meet lotos-eaters, and have encounters with Cyclops, Circe, Scylla. He was a captive of the goddess Calypso whose offer of marriage and immortality he rejected. Many of his comrades, however, died during these adventures. Returning home, he deals with his wife Penelope's suitors who took advantage of his long absence from his kingdom. In fact, he was assumed to have died because of his failure to return during the long intervening period of twenty years. Upon his return, Ulysses, with the help of his son Telemachus, killed Penelope's unruly suitors. Thus, as in the *Iliad*, the spirit of *kleos* is very much present in the *Odyssey*.

Based on our discussion above, we may identify some common features of the primary epic. These features have been neatly pointed out in the following extract from an essay entitled "English Language and Literary Types: A Study of Primary and Secondary Epic":

These primary epics have features in common–a central figure of heroic, even super-human caliber, who undertake perilous journeys, face various misadventures, show intellectual capacity, and have a strong element of the supernatural forces that shape the action. There are conflicts in the form of battles or other physical combat. The epics show repetition of fairly long passages of narrative or dialogue, have elaborate greetings that add to the grandeur of the heroes, their plots show digressions and the narrative takes recourse to elaborate or epic similes. There are long speeches, vivid and direct description of actions and in general there is a lofty tone, which often resembles the tone of classical tragedy, in other words a larger than life world forms the staple of the epic. Commonplace details of everyday life may appear, but they serve only as background for the story and are described in the same lofty style as the rest of the poem.

We may now proceed to discuss the secondary epic poetry in the next section.

1.2.5 Secondary Epic Poetry

Unlike primary epic poetry, secondary epic poetry is literary in nature. It is written by a poet who is identifiable, and not sung by a singer or carried down as an oral narrative. It is a self-conscious composition, and the poet is aware of the intricacies of the literary composition. It employs a lofty style in imitation of the primary epics. As part of literary innovation, the elevated style can also be employed to represent a trivial object or incident to achieve satiric effects. This is known as mock-epic poetry. Speaking in the context of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Johns-Putra argues that secondary epics follow the Homeric features: "Gods were inescapable, and funeral games, descents to Hades, catalogs of tribes and heroes, ornamented shields, night raids, *aristeai*, and duels were hardly less so" (41). Opening the poems *in medias res* ('in the midst of things') is a convention that too is followed in the secondary epics (41). There are many secondary epic poems such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme*, Aristo's *Orlando Furioso*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. We shall discuss three such poems in this section.

The first of the notable secondary epic poems to have been written is Virgil's *Aeneid* which appeared in about 29 BCE at the request of Emperor Augustus. Although there

were some epic poets such as Apollonius and Ennius who appeared in between Homer and Virgil, he was chiefly influenced by Homer. Aeneas, the protagonist, is a Trojan warrior who fled to Italy and was responsible for the foundation of the Roman empire. The son of the goddess Venus, he has a divine lineage. In the poem Aeneas is seen crossing the sea and encountering several hurdles. These were caused by the Roman goddess Juno who, we will see in our module on the *Iliad*, was ill-disposed towards the Trojans. Subsequently, however, he is able to reach Italy where the king Latinus proposes his daughter Lavinus' marriage with him. Turnus, Lavinus's betrothed, however, challenges Aeneas. In the war that follows Aeneas defeats Turnus's army. After some hesitation when he is overtaken by a spirit of kindness and piety, Aeneas kills Turnus. The path for the foundation of a new nation is made smooth in this way. Critics note two neat divisions in the epic– the Odyssean and Iliadic halves. "Aeneas' quest to find a new home to replace the ruins of Troy corresponds to the lengthy and difficult *nostos* experienced by Odysseus" (41). His challenge to Turnus, his subsequent killing of him, his "gaining the hand of Lavinia and settlement of Latium [that] echoes the Achaians' invasion of Troy" (41) constitute the Iliadic half which "allows Aeneas to display his *aristeia* and achieve *kleos*" (41). Johns-Putra also discovers two selves in Aeneas—a romantic self and an imperialist self. The former gives in to the latter. This is, for example, clearly manifested in his relationship with Dido, the Carthaginian queen, who woos him. He declines it with great difficulty: "Aeneas, mindful of Jove's words, kept his eyes / Unyielding, and with a great effort repressed his feeling for her" (qtd. in Johns-Putra 41). Such a sacrifice of the personal happiness at the altar of the greater duty "defines Aeneas as a leader of his people rather than just a brilliant warrior. His respect for the gods is a prerequisite for Roman imperial glory, since his obeisance to Jupiter's decrees, not to mention the behests of his mother, Venus, lead directly to his founding an empire in Italy" (44). *Aeneid* clearly marks a shift in the genre's journey forward: "Virgil's *Aeneid* oversees the epic's evolution from ancient Greece to imperialist Rome as a transition from a mythical narrative of a 'history of the world' to a vehicle for nationalist ideology" (44).

The next example that we shall discuss now—Milton's *Paradise Lost*—marks yet another shift—the genre shows a distinct turn towards Christian values. In this 'conventional heroic epic', originally published in 1667 in ten Books (twelve Books in the second revised edition published in 1674) Milton chose a biblical theme and adopted heroic conventions from Homer and Virgil. The theme revolves round conflicts, war,

and heroism.The poem tells the story of Adam and Eve, how they were created, why they disobeyed God's instructions and their subsequent fall. It recreates the story of Genesis, enlarging it, and giving Satan (Lucifer) a privileged focus.It talks about his rebellion against God, his expulsion, his recuperation from the effects of defeat and how he, in the form of a serpent, foils God's design by tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.Thus, *Paradise Lost* has the entire cosmos as the background and Milton embeds his story of God, archangels, and men amid this vast space. To suit the loftiness of the theme, he employs an elevated style. Milton adopts blank verse, which he describes as "English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek and of Virgil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse" (qtd. in Johns-Putra 73). Following epic conventions, he also invokes the Muse, begins the story in medias res, and uses motifs such as descent into the underworld. Indeed "Milton brings back into focus a range of epic motifs.…[He] reintroduces the epic catalogue, the war council, and the heavenly scales. Thus, his list of fallen angels in hell echoes those of the Achaian ships in the *Iliad* and of the Italian chieftains in Book VII of the *Aeneid*; the devils' war council at Pandemonium recalls those of both Agamemnon and Aeneas before the main attack, and God, like Zeus and Jupiter, indicates his judgment with a divine set of scales" (Johns-Putra 73). Milton assigns a privileged focus to the character of Satan who unmistakably shows heroic qualities. Northrop Frye rightly says, "It is to Satan and his followers that Milton assigns the conventional and classical type of heroism. Satan, like Achilles, retires sulkily in heaven when a decision appears to be favouring another Son of God, and emerges in a torrent of wrath to wreak vengeance. Like Odysseus, he steers his way with great cunning between the Scylla-like Sin and the Charybdis-like Death; like the knights errant of romance, he goes out alone on a perilous quest to an unknown world" (qtd. in Johns-Putra 75).

The last work we shall discuss briefly here is Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. The poem in two cantos first appeared in 1712, a revised edition in 1714, and the final version in 1717. Pope's venture was quite in conformity with the spirit of the eighteenth century which saw vigorous literary activities related to the epic in two new forms.The century witnessed the growth of translations of epic poetry as well as the development of mock-epic forms. John Dryden and Pope were the two main practitioners of these forms. Dryden translated *Aeneid* in 1697, six volumes of Pope's translation of the *Iliad* reached the English readers in between 1715 and 1720 (Pope also collaborated

in the translation of *Odyssey*). Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) and *Mac Flecknoe* (1682), as well as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14) and *The Dunciad* (1728-42) are mock-heroic poems.

The Rape of the Lock, as we have just mentioned, is a satiric representation of the eighteenth-century English society. It represents the satiric variety of the genre, one that takes small events and treats them as ones having epic dimensions. The poem narrates the fictional version of a true incident that involved two aristocratic families.Pope wrote the poem at John Caryll's request, Caryll was Pope's patron and the main purpose of writing the poem was to revive friendship between the families by pointing out their follies. Enmity between them developed out of an incident involving cutting of a portion of Belinda's lock of hair.This event is blown out of proportions and described in terms of a great war in which even the supernatural beings such as sylphs and gnomes who protect Belinda participate in the true epic tradition of wars. The environment of conflict and war is created through card games and the exchange of 'glares and frowns.' The "decisive battle-scene is the assault on Belinda's lock and the fight that ensues" (Johns-Putra 102). This poem, along with those of Dryden, thus created a new trend in the epic tradition.

➢ **Activity for the Learner:**

1. Consult relevant sources to find out the meanings of the following words:

(a) *aiodos*; (b) *nostos*; (c) *kleos*; (d) *aristeia*; (e) *klea*

2. Mention some works which were influenced by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.
3. During which period did the following authors write?

   Homer, Virgil, Milton, Pope, Dryden.
4. Consult relevant sources to find out whether Homer wrote any work/s other than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.*
5. Mention some other works (not spoken about in this unit) of Milton, Pope, and Dryden.

1.2.5 Summing Up

Going through the above sections, we can understand that the epic poetry has really taken new innovative turns. It was oral in the beginning, sung by local bards, and

embraced as its theme heroic deeds of great men of bygone days. To them honour of the self and of the people was of great importance. Gradually, literary epic poetry emerged as a new form which retained some of the features of the oral epic poetry but introduced new elements as well. This new form celebrated the heroic deeds of great men but inducted new motives such as imperialist desires or Christian values. The term 'epic' has now transcended the strict generic boundary of poetry and is being increasingly used in the fields of novel and film. That is why we need to trace the trajectory of the development of the epic poetry as a genre. We have exactly done this in the unit. It will help you contextualise the epic poems which are included in your syllabus.

1.2.6 Comprehension Exercises

Broad Questions:

1. Attempt a definition of epic poetry. Do you think that defining the genre is difficult? If so, why?
2. What are the characteristics of epic poetry?
3. Define primary epic poetry. What are its basic features? Mention any two examples of primary epic poetry and analyse them.
4. Define secondary epic poetry. How is it different from primary epic poetry? Explain with examples.
5. Choose any two secondary epic poems and critically analyse them.
6. Do you think that Milton's *Paradise Lost* marks a shift in the history of the genre of epic? Give suitable arguments for your answer.

Middle-length Questions:

1. Do you think that the epic poetry is dead now? Explain your position with proper arguments.
2. Explain the importance of *Gilgamesh* as an early epic poem.
3. Write short notes on the following:

   (a) *Iliad*; (b) *Odyssey*; (c) *Aeneid*; (d) *Paradise Lost*; (e) *Rape of the Lock*
4. Comment briefly on the role of 'honour' in the epic poetry.
5. Write a brief note on the impact of earlier epics on Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Short Questions:

1. Who is the author of *The English Epic and Its Background*?
2. Mention a book written by C.M. Bowra.
3. Mention any motif usually employed by an epic poet.
4. Mention at least two examples of epic conventions.
5. In which genre will you place *Birth of a Nation* (1915)?
6. Which is the earliest extant epic poetry?
7. Who is Turnus in Virgil's *Aeneid*?
8. Is Milton's *Paradise Lost* a primary or secondary epic?

1.2.7 Suggested Reading

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Unit 3 ❑ Introduction to Greek Drama

Structure

1.3.0 Introduction

1.3.1 Origins of Performance

1.3.2 The Performance Arena

1.3.3 Greek Tragedy

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1.3.5 Sociopolitical Significance of Greek Drama

1.3.6 Renaissance in Europe and Greek Drama

1.3.7 Influence of Greek Drama on World Theatre

1.3.8 Summing Up

1.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

1.3.10 Suggested Reading

1.3.0 Introduction

The Greeks, specifically from Athens, were the pioneering group of people who introduced one of the earliest theatres in the world. You already have an overview of how drama originated in Greece, here we shall see in detail how it developed. Eventually you will also be acquainted with some of the great Greek Tragedies and Comedies, along with the ancient theatre forms in Greece. Greek plays are the root of all kinds of drama originating in Europe, and therefore, learning about the Greek drama tradition is very important for you as students of English literature. This Unit will enable you to-

- learn about the origin of drama in ancient Greece;
- know about the important forms and examples of Greek drama;
- understand the infrastructure of ancient theatres;
- become familiar with great Greek dramatists.

1.3.1 Origins of Performance

As you've already learnt, Greek drama originated as part of religious observances in honour of Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of wine, winemaking, grape cultivation, fertility, ritual madness, theatre, and religious ecstasy, who personified both spring and the vintage. In his Roman avatar, you will see Dionysus as Bacchus. Vintage is particularly of great importance to a vine-growing country like Greece, and Dionysus was an important and popular figure in mythology. He may have been worshiped as early as 1500-11000 BCE by Mycenean Greeks. The root point to note here is that there are close connections between drama as performance and religion as part of daily life, more so the life of agrarian communities.

Greek plays were simpler than modern plays, as there were fewer characters, and usually only three speaking actors were allowed on the stage at once. Only one story would be told and there was nothing to divert the attention of the audience, and thus the drama became a special form of entertainment. As far as is known, there was a tradition of recitation of stories of Dionysus' life at the religious festivals held in his honour, and then stories of other gods and of the ancient heroes were told as well. Drama originated from these as the stories were told in the form of songs. Such songs would be chanted at first by everyone taking part in the festival, and later it would be performed by a chorus of about fifty performers, and at intervals in the song the leader would recite part of the story himself. Gradually, the recitation became of greater importance than the song, and it grew longer. In a developed stage of the tradition two people used to take part in it, and then from Sophocles' time three people would participate in it. The chorus became smaller and of less importance in the action of the drama, until at last it could consist of only fifteen performers.

The great dramatic festival of Athens was held in the spring in the theatre of Dionysus, to the south-east of the Acropolis. There would be competition between dramatists. Several plays would be staged in one day, and a prize was awarded to the best. The Athenian audience was enthusiastic and very critical. They would start at dawn and remain in the theatre until sunset, keeping the theatre arena warm with shouts and applause. Their jeers showed approval or disapproval of a play being acted. The performances would be preceded by a sacrifice.

The festival was only held once a year, and it would be public holidays during the time of the festival. Initially admission to the theatre was free, but as the crowds became

unmanageable, because as there were rows and fighting over the possession of seats, the state authority decided to charge an admission fee and tickets had to be bought beforehand. Even then there were no reserved seats, except for certain officials who sat in the front row. In the time of Pericles, complaints were made that the poorer citizens could not afford to buy tickets, and so important was the drama then considered, that it was ordered that tickets should be given free to all who applied for them.

1.3.2 The Performance Arena

The Greeks developed a special performance space for the festival of Dionysus, which was calledan amphitheatre. The term 'amphitheatre' in ancient Greek means "a place for viewing on both sides or around". It is thus an open-air venue used for entertainment, performances, and sports. The Romans developed the amphitheatres to their latest designs. Even today the ruins of these performance spaces can be visitedin Greek and Italian cities like Athens and Rome. The Greek Amphitheatre is a great semi-circle on the slope of the Acropolis, with rows of stone seats. Each amphitheatre could accommodate about eighteen thousand spectators. The front row consists of marble chairs with backs, and these used to be reserved for the priests of Dionysus and the chief magistrates. Beyond the front row, would be a circular space called the orchestra, where the Chorus used to sing. In the centre of the orchestra stood the altar of Dionysus. The

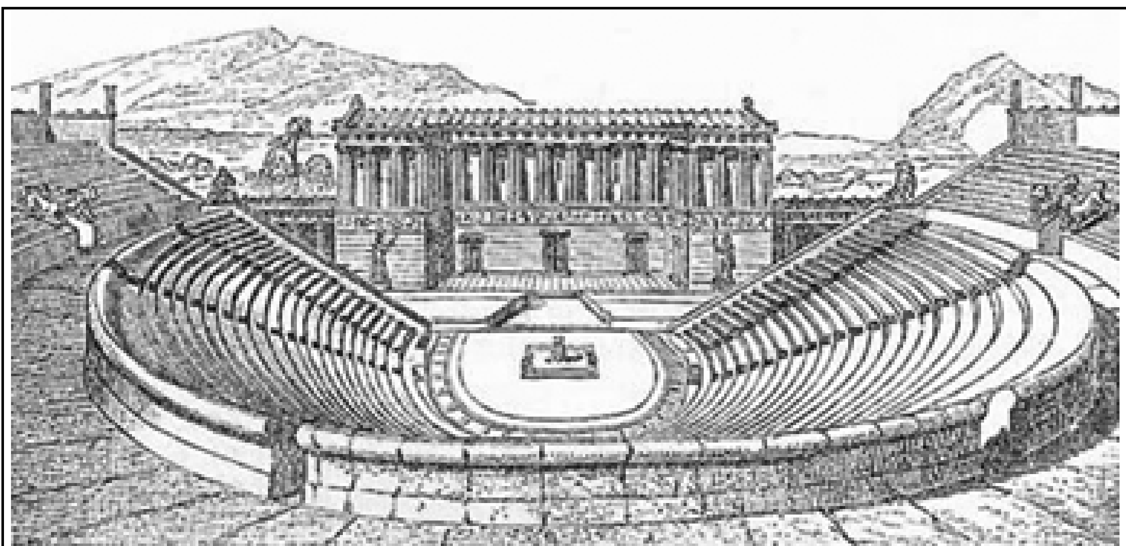

Image: The ancient structure of an Amphitheatre (Photo source: Internet)

stage on which the actors would act, would be behind the orchestra. At the back of the orchestra used to be a building painted to look like the front of a temple or a palace, to which the actors would retire when they were not needed on the stage or they would change their costumes.

As seen in the images, there would be no roof, and overhead was the deep blue European sky. The Acropolis could be seen behind with its olive-laden hills in the distance. There was no room for curtains in the plays, as the plays were not divided into different acts. When there was a pause in the action, the Chorus used to fill up the time with their songs. In a tragedy, we would not see the catastrophe on the stage, but a messenger would most often impart a bloody account of death or what had happened. We must not be beguiled by the simplicity of the outward surroundings, as we know that some of the greatest tragedies and comedies were produced here by the Greeks more than two thousand years ago.

1.3.3 Greek Tragedy

Tragedy as a dramatic genre flourished in ancient Greece in the hands of mainly three classical playwrights—Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. All three of them lived in 5th-century Athens. Aeschylus, the seniormost, was born near Athens in 525

Image: The Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the Amphitheatre existent in Acropolis of Athens today (photo source: internet)

BCE. He was a prolific writer; had written between seventy and ninety plays by the time of his death in 456 BCE, as is surmised today. Most of his plays were written for the annual Athenian drama competition mentioned in the earlier section, the City Dionysia as it was called, which Aeschylus won thirteen times. At this festival, three chosen dramatists would perform three tragedies and a satyr play. *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus is the only complete Greek tragic trilogy existing today. Only seven of Aeschylus' plays have survived till date: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides* (these three plays compose the tragic trilogy known as *The Oresteia*), *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Supplicants*, and *Prometheus Bound*. Some scholars discount *Prometheus Bound* and hold that it is wrongly attributed to Aeschylus. The first time he won at the drama festival (City Dionysia) was perhaps in 484 BCE, although the title of the trilogy is unknown. The known title of his winning trilogy for the festival in 472 BCE is *The Persians*. This trilogy deserves mention because it is about the Persian defeat at Salamis, which is unusual as at the festival the topics of the pantheon of Greek myth were usually dealt in the festival.

The second, Sophocles, is considered to be the greatest among the three, as his work took Greek tragedy to its peak. He was born near Athens perhaps in 496 BCE in the town of Colonus. It is told that in his ninety-year lifespan he witnessed the rise and fall of the Athenian Golden Age. His breakthrough in the festival of Dionysus happened dramatically. It is said that Aeschylus had left Athens in 471 BCE to attend the court of a great tyrant called Hieronat Syracuse. Hieron is known as a famous patron of the arts. When Aeschylus returned to Athens for the festival in 468 BCE, Sophocles, then twenty-eight-year-old and competing for the first time, won the first place defeating the great Aeschylus.

Sophocles never lost his popularity in Athens, and as is known, he remained in this city throughout his life although he was invited by many rulers to visit other cities in the surrounding regions. He wrote around one hundred and twenty-three plays for the Athenian theatre, and won twenty-four festivals—had he not won all of them he was at least placed second in every festival. However, only seven of his plays have survived. These are (in the order in which they are thought to have been written): *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *The Women of Trachis*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*—all tragedies. Of these, *Oedipus the King* is syllabised as a text for you in this course. All the same, as eager enthusiasts, you would do good to try and access the other plays on internet archives.

Oedipus the King is perhaps Sophocles' most famous play in which he deals with the mythological figure of Oedipus and explores several important issues of the time. You will read this play thoroughly. Its sequel, *Antigone* (c. 442 BCE) is another of his most famous works, and in this the lead character is a female though the presence of female actors is debated. She antagonises her maternal uncle King Creon of Thebes by burying her brother Polynices against his wish, and has to receive his punishment. It is a very complicated play as it deals with the moral right of a sister seeking to rescue the soul of her dead brother by giving him a proper burial, and at the same time it talks about the political right of the king having the traitor Polynices denied burial rites. The play is quite modern in that sense. From the existing wreckages of Sophocles' works or references to his lost plays, scholars have discovered that he wrote on many issues, but he was mostly revered by his contemporaries as well as by modern scholars for his treatment of the individual and for the complex issues that his tragic plays address. Sophocles was an innovator, as it is believed that he introduced several key changes in the theatre practices of the time. He ended the tradition of writing trilogies on connected topics at the City Dionysia, and introduced elaborate painted background scenery, changed the number of speaking actors from two to three, and enlarged the chorus from twelve to fifteen men.

The third great Greek tragedian is Euripides. Eighty titles of Euripides' plays are known today, of which nineteen tragedies are extant. Among these the famous ones are *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Trojan Women*, *The Bacchae*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Some scholars think that he is not as great as he is considered to be, because they find his plays filled with too many unrelated ideas that misrepresent the Greek religion. They argue that had he been as great he would not lose in so many of the drama competitions. According to information, Euripides staged his plays in the drama festival (the City Dionysia) twenty-two times, but he only won five times. He was, however, bold and irreverent as he could look beyond religious orthodoxy and criticize Greek culture and religion. It is remarkable that many of the protagonists in his plays are female, and he was able to examine well-known stories in a completely new way through his vision of the world from a female's perspective. He used to delve deep into the psychology of his characters.

1.3.4 Greek Comedy

During the 5th century BCE, at major religious festivals such as the City Dionysia mentioned in the earlier section on tragedy, comedies used to be performed in competitions that would last over three days. Initially five comedies used to be taken in for competition in the festival, and afterwards three comedies would be performed in a festival. At the end of each day a comic play would be in the line after the tragedy and satyr plays. Notice that while classical imagination had place for both tragic and comic forms, they could never think of mixing the different genres.

Aristotle's *Poetics* refers to some comedies and their creators, and it is believed that comedies had a very old tradition in Greece. The activity of men dressing as others and mimicking them goes back a long way before written records. Greek pottery has a very old history and the first signs of men's dressing as horses, satyrs, and dancers in exaggerated costumes are found in the pottery decoration of the 6th century BCE. Some even suggest that another early source of comedy is the poems of Archilochus (7th century BCE) and Hipponax (6th century BCE) that contained overt sexual humour. A third origin that Aristotle refers to is in the phallic songs sung during the Dionysiac festivals. Therefore, it is obvious that comedy was a popular and influential form in ancient Greece. The most famous playwrights of the time were Aristophanes and Menander. Their works and most other contemporary comedies are usually critiques of politicians, philosophers, and fellow artists of the time. The Greeks produced two major comedy forms-Old and New. Old Comedies refer to plays written in the 5th century BCE, and the earliest complete play that survives today is Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, first performed in 425 BCE. Not much is known about Aristophanes; He was from Athens and from the dates of his plays we may guess that he lived from 460 to 380 BCE. Eleven of his plays survive in their complete form, and these are the only extant examples of the Old Comedy genre. The plays reveal Aristophanes' sharp wit. They comment on the discrepancies and ludicrous aspects of the Greek society. They also ridicule important public figures like the politician Cleon, the philosopher Socrates, and the tragedian Euripides who appear in his comedies. Aristophanes lampooned Socrates in *The Clouds*, and in his anti-military farce *Lysistrata*. In *The Birds* he ridiculed Athenian democracy. In some cases, he named the plays after the chorus, e.g., *The Wasps*. *The*

Frogs had a more serious tone than some of Aristophanes' other comedies, and it is about dramatists, poets and competitors in the festivals.

The comedies often used satire, parody, puns, exaggeration, colourful language, and crude jokes. The plot of these comedies usually challenged reality as they would jump incredible geographic distances, break the limit of time and space and there would be rapid changes of scenes. Fantastical elements were part of these: giant creatures would walk on the stage in their improbable disguises.

Menander was quite popular at that time, and his works were frequently adapted by later Latin playwrights. His plays were popular for their imaginative situations, fast-moving dialogues and suspense. Unlike Aristophanes' middle-aged heroes, he often presented a young romantic protagonist, who would be single. There were quite many comedy playwrights of the time, among whom Epicharmus of Kos (540-450 BCE), Cratinus (520-420 BCE), Eupolis (446-411 BCE), Hegemon of Thasos (Fifth century BCE), Pherecrates (Fifth century BCE), Cantharus (422 BCE), Antiphanes (408-334 BCE) can be mentioned. Cratinus' *Cheimazomenae* (426 BCE), *Satyrs* (424 BCE), and Pytine (423BCE) and Eupolis' *Numeniae* (425 BCE), *Maricas* (421 BCE), *Flatterers* (421 BCE) and *Autolycus* (420 BCE) are remarkable and these two dramatists were multiple winners at the most prestigious festivals of the time.

Sometime in the late 4th century BCE, New Comedy arrived. Some scholars suggest that there was an intermediary stage called Middle Comedy. The division between Old and Middle Comedy is not very clearly marked. For instance, Aristophanes and some other writers of the Old Comedy were the earliest writers of the Middle Comedy. Indeed, Menander is counted as one of the Middle comedy writers. Middle Comedy was an offshoot of the Old Comedy, as it stands, only differing in some essential particulars like the Middle Comedy had no chorus; public characters were not personified on the stage in these like the Old comedies, and the objects of ridicule were more general and literary rather than being personal and political. Therefore, some scholars suggest that Old Comedy was more like lampoon while Middle Comedy was criticism and review. Aristophanes' final plays provided a transition towards this newer style.

The period of the Middle Comedy extended from the closing years of the fifth century BCE to nearly the middle of the fourth century BCE. It was a productive time for plays, as many plays were produced at that time, but the quality of plays declined. Popular themes of comedies were literary and social peculiarities of the day, which were

treated lightly instead of with serious criticism. The Middle Comedy also parodied the grand tragedies and parts of epics. Parts of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Homer, or beautiful lyrics of Pindar and Simonides would be parodied regularly. Myths were treated in the same way. Eubulus, Epicrates of Ambracia, Anaxandrides and Alexis are some of the important playwrights of the time.

Compared to Old and Middle Comedies, New Comedy focused more on the plot, and would often employ recurring stock characters such as cooks, soldiers, pimps, and the cunning slave. The chorus became less important to the plot. There would be only musical interludes between acts by the chorus. Plays of this time were of five-act structure. There was already a legislation made to curb the practice of personal attacks in plays, and there were indeed fewer of such invectives in the New Comedies. Instead, New Comedy showed concerns for people, classes, and family relations. The most important playwright of this period was the poet Philemon (c. 368/60-267/3 BCE), who wrote about 97 comedies, Diphilus who wrote around 100 plays, and Philippides. Philemon won more festival victories than Menander, but Meander is the one considered to be the greatest poet of New Comedy. He wrote around 100 plays that survived up to the 7th century CE, but after that they were lost. *The Dyskolos* (316 BCE) is the most complete surviving play of Meander and significant portions of six other plays also survive till date. Other playwrights of the time were Apollodorus of Carystus (300-260 BCE), Diphilus of Sinope (340-290 BCE), Machon of Corinth (Third century BCE), Poseidippus of Cassandreia (316-250 BCE), Laines or Laenes (185 BCE), Philemon (183 BCE), Chairion or Chaerion (154 BCE).

1.3.5 Sociopolitical Significance of Greek Drama

Greek plays were like the magic mirror of the Greek society, as they would uphold/criticise/ridicule the manifestations of society. These would often criticize political and social institutions of the time. Religion and cult, Athenian democracy and imperial ideology would often surface in these plays. Plays would represent the tensions, class difference, clash between the elites and the masses, concerns of gender and sexuality and even the representation of the Other would be treated in these plays. We know that plays were specifically commissioned for competition during religious and other types of festivals, but those were re-performed and copied into scripts for publication. Those

scripts, particularly by the three great tragedians, are now classics. The plays that took part in the festivals were kept by the state as official and unalterable state documents. The study of the 'classic' plays has become an important part of the school curriculum.

The sociopolitical impact of the plays was great. In addition to entertainment with their comic touch, the plays gave invaluable insights into Greek society. They ridiculed the government, political institutions, legal systems, religious practices, education, and so on. Today the plays reveal to us the specific interests of the Greek audience, as those show the Greeks' sense of humour of the time. They represent the relationship between the domestic and the public phases of Greek life and comment on the individual and the community lives in Greece. They teach us how to comment on a society with its nuances. Individuals, great or less important, get equal importance in these; kings, statemen, courtesans, parasites, revelers, the self-conceited cook, all become so alive in these plays that we can say here is 'God's plenty'.

1.3.6 Renaissance in Europe and Greek Drama

With new plays continuously being written and performed, Greek plays formed the foundation upon which all modern theatre is based. In the 3rd century BCE, the actors' guilds or actors' associations were formed that ensured the mobility of professional troupes. Thus, Greek plays continued to spread across the Greek world, and theatre became a common feature of the urban landscape from Magna Graecia to Asia Minor. Magna Graecia was the name given by the Romans to the coastal areas of Southern Italy that were occupied by Greek settlers.The settlers who began arriving in the 8th century BC brought with them their Hellenic civilization which left a lasting imprint on Italy such as in the culture of ancient Rome. In the Roman world, Greek plays were translated and imitated in Latin.However, the most influential time for Greek drama was the European Renaissance that started in Italy in the 15thand 16thcenturies and gradually came to England and other European countries.

The events of Italy that gave cultural and artistic recognition to Renaissance during the 16th century are collectively referred to as the **Cinquecento**. One single important trait was the development of neoclassical drama in Europe that was a consequence of the "rediscovery" of Classical literature in early Renaissance Italy. Greek drama, as it seems, never lost its currency. In Byzantium, that was an ancient Greek city and is

known as Istanbul today, Greek texts were copied and read. The three tragedians mentioned in the earlier section, together with the comedy playwright Aristophanes, were part of the Byzantine school curriculum. In Western Europe, Classical drama was known mainly through Latin authors, and through Seneca, whose plays influenced English dramatists like Thomas Kyd. The knowledge of Greek was never lost in Europe, and especially in Southern Italy, where Greek manuscripts were being copied in the thirteenth century. However, other Europeans did not know ancient Greek and thus could not have access to the original texts. Some Italian intellectuals such as Petrarch, Boccaccio and a few Italian teachers started teaching Greek. After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in the middle of the 15th century, a handful of Byzantine intellectuals took shelter in Italy and taught Greek there. They brought Greek manuscripts with them, and thus Greek drama became available to Italian humanists. The rediscovery of Classical texts played an important role for Latin drama as well. As European intellectuals learned Greek, throughout the second half of the 15th century in Italy and in the rest of Europe,Latin translations of Greek texts followed. One particular event was the publication of several plays by Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus by Aldo Manuzio (1449-1515) in Venice. You will learn in greater detail about this phase in subsequent Units.

Greek, and later Roman tragedies came as a viable model to follow for the rest of Europe, and all tragedies written in Renaissance Italy were fundamentally neoclassical, because they formally complied with Classical rules. Many tragedies of the time borrowed from Greek myths, and also used Roman myths or history. Renaissance thinkers who were thinking man as the centre of creation and questioned the supremacy of God and fate, found affinity in Greek classics that dealt with complicated issues like man’s predicament in a world dominated by uncertainties where fate needed to be treated as the ultimately powerful. In that sense, there is a line of continuity to be traced between pre-Christian classical dramaturgy and post-Renaissance humanistic strain in literature and culture. Some tragedies often focused on blood and revenge or on tragic love stories, often included supernatural elements, but would often have a moralistic undertone about human destiny. For the Renaissance playwrights, tragedy had a didactic function. An idea that by staging the fall of great nobles or tyrants, tragedy could teach rulers how to govern with justice flourished in Renaissance Italy. Kingship and power were also recurrent themes alongside man’s inability to control his destiny. Renaissance playwrights borrowed the theme of destiny from Greek tragedy and expanded it. *The*

Prince written by Machiavelli was also an influential text of the time. The unpredictability of human fortune initiated the Machiavellian idea of the necessity of exploiting it, and Renaissance tragedies used to depict Senecan tyrants as Machiavellian princes and rulers.

Neoclassical tragedy was strongly dependent on Greek models, but Greek comedy did not thrive much during the Renaissance. Neoclassical comedy took its inspiration from Roman comedy. Perhaps the crude political humor of ancient Greek comedy was not easy for the Renaissance dramatists to adapt for their audiences, while the family based humor of Roman comedy was much easier to follow. Though Aristophanes was known and appreciated, Plautus and Terence were imitated during the period.

Another form of drama called the Pastoral flourished during the Renaissance. A Pastoral is basically a love story enacted in an idealized rural setting, and showing the interaction between romanticized characters such as shepherds and shepherdesses, nymphs and satyrs, etc. The Renaissance Opera also attempted to re-create Greek tragedy. Apart from borrowing themes and styles for drama, Renaissance architecture also developed the Terrence Stage that used Perspective Painting (for comedy-regular houses; for tragedy-palaces; pastorals-woods) that had Greek influence. So, Italian Renaissance followed Greek plays to a large extent to give an artistic expression to the new thoughts of the time, and it was transferred to the rest of Europe soon and inspired many great dramatists like Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Voltaire, and many others.

1.3.7 Influence of Greek Drama on World Theatre

World drama, both for its tragic and comic forms, is largely indebted to Greek drama for having strengthened its basics. The themes and styles of Greek plays inspired many playwrights to translate, adapt and imitate them in all corners of the world. Great Greek playwrights like Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides and Aristophanes are regularly staged in almost all theatres of the world. Apart from British and American theatres, even in cultures in which theatre is not practiced very seriously, Greek plays have made their way.For example, Debra Caplan comments in her study of adaptations of Greek tragedy on Yiddish stage that Jewish teachers felt some antipathy towards Greek culture, believing it to be fundamentally opposed to their moral values and religious practices.

The Greek theatre was viewed as a manifestation of Greek culture and, therefore, was forbidden by the Rabbinic authorities. However, when early in the nineteenth century, Yiddish stage introduced European-style drama into Jewish literature, some Greek plays were translated, adapted and staged. Similarly, in many cultures of the world, Greek plays found thematic relevance and were either directly staged in English translation or adapted to their own languages in their sociopolitical milieus. In Africa, Greek plays became quite popular in the 1970s. *Oedipus the King* is a play that had paramount prominence. Apart from different direct staging attempts, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is a 1968 play and a 1971 novel by the Nigerian writer Ola Rotimi that became famous in the African setting. The story centres on Odewale, an African king, who is lured into a false sense of security, only to get caught up in a somewhat consanguineous trail of events by the gods of the land. The impact of the source text is clearly perceptible here.

In the Indian Subcontinent too, Greek plays became very popular during the colonial period, for the obvious parallels that could be drawn and lessons that could be imparted in sync with nationalist aspirations. The trend has continued unabated even after national independence in India. In Bengal there were several adaptations of *Oedipus the King* and *Agamemnon*. One popular example is *Raja Oedipus*, translated, directed and acted by Shambhu Mitra as Raja (King) Oedipus, that was produced by Bohurupee at New Empire in 1964. The play's audio recording is available, and you can listen to it on YouTube using this link https://youtu.be/ILlnfadICJ8.

Greek plays brought new tragic genre to modern plays, and also gave birth to new forms of art. For example, Old Comedy can be traced in contemporary political satires. New Comedy gave rise to a new art form called pantomime from the 1st century BCE, which drew inspiration from the Greek tragedy.

1.3.8 Summing Up

Greek plays are considered to be the root of European drama. For their thematic richness and stylistic versatility Greek plays found paramount prominence in Renaissance Europe, and through colonial connections, they reached almost all parts of the globe. These plays have given rise to theatre architecture, innovative acting space and style, the idea of theatre as a form of social criticism, and so on. Greek plays not only defined the European theatre genre, rather gave birth to modern urban theatre in many parts of the world.

1.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions

1. Illustrate the general features of Greek tragedies with reference to different tragedians.
2. Trace the development of the Greek Comedy in its different phases.

Mid-length Questions

1. Critically examine the role of the Greek comedies as social criticism.
2. Comment on the influence of Greek plays on European Renaissance.
3. How would you differentiate between Old and New Comedies?

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Comment briefly on the Middle Comedy.
2. Write a short note on the City Dionysia.
3. What and how was the amphitheatre?
4. What do you know about the costumes and masks used in Greek plays?
5. Write briefly of the impact of Greek plays on world theatre.

1.3.10 Suggested Reading

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NOTES

Module-2

Iliad (Book 1)

Unit 4 ❑ Homer the Poet

Structure

2.4.0 Introduction

2.4.1 Who was Homer?

2.4.2 Homer's Works in brief

2.4.3 The 'Homeric' Style

2.4.4 Summing Up

2.4.5 Comprehension Exercises

2.4.6 Suggested Reading

2.4.0 Introduction

In Module 1 Unit 2, you have already been introduced to the classical epic as a genre, and have contextually come across the name of Homer. In this Unit, we intend to bring about:

- some basic knowledge of Homer's life and works that will guide you through this Module
- to have an idea of the ancient Greek world
- to understand the significance of the Homeric style in epic poetry

2.4.1 Who was Homer?

Little has been known about the biographical details of Homer, also known as Homeros, the Greek poet to whom the epics of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are attributed. The *Oxford Concise Companion to Classical Literature* offers the following details:

> Many cities claimed to be Homer's birthplace, most possibly Smyrna and Chios, the home of the Homeridae. The ancient Greeks thought of Homer as a blind minstrel, suffering poverty and hardship in the course of a wandering life before his eventual death and burial on the Aegean island of Ios. (275)

Homer's representation of the blind bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey* is often taken as a representation of his own person. There is no other evidence to certify his blindness

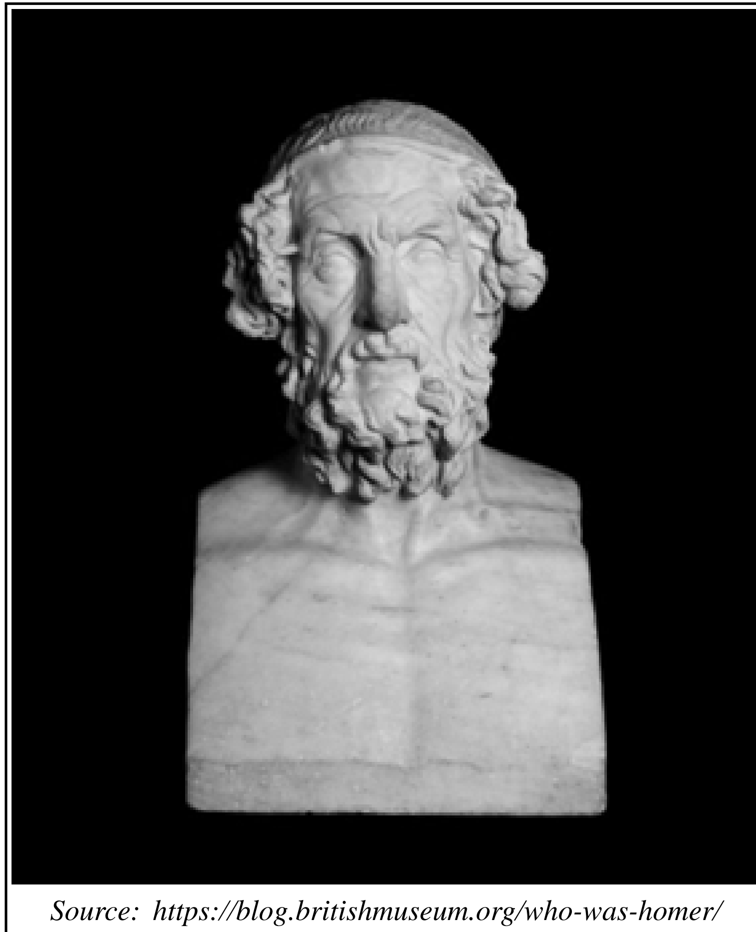
except for a marble bust, the image of which is available widely on the internet. This statue dates back to 2nd century AD and is said to be a Roman copy of the Hellenistic original sculpted in 2nd century BC.

Homer had a strong influence not only on Greek learning and literature in the classical age but also on the European culture in the later ages. Ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle referred to the lines of Homer in their treatises on different branches of knowledge. Though a miasma surrounds his biography, most of the historical records show that Homer was born in Ioniain Asia Minor (located in modern day Turkey), and probably lived during 7th century BCE or 8th century BCE. Herodotus, a historian of 5th century BCE, affirms that both Homer and Hesiod, a contemporary poet, lived not more than four hundred years before him.

Homeric poems precede the compositions of Hesiod, the author of *Theogony* or *Genealogy of the Gods* and *Works and Days.* In *Works and Days*, Hesiod describes the life of the farmers and glorifies their hard work on the land. It is written in Homeric verse, which shows the influence of Homer's style on Hesiod. However, it seems apparent that Hesiod suffered from the anxiety of Homeric influence. In *Theogony,* he says that while tending the flock on Mount Helicon, the abode of the Muses, he received orders from the Muses to become a poet and to sing of the gods. In *Works and Days,* he refers to a contest between two poets, in which he wins a tripod by defeating the rival poet. Although Hesiod does not mention the name of Homer as his rival, in another biographical narrative called *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* or *Contest of Homer and Hesiod,* this imagined contest is represented as taking place between Homer and Hesiod, in which the latter wins because his works on agriculture and peaceful life is considered thematically superior to Homer's war narratives.

The Trojan War features as the backdrop in both the epics of Homer. It is said to have taken place in the eleventh or twelfth century BCE, which is approximately three to four hundred years before Homer's lifetime. For a long time, many scholars considered the war and the city of Troy as fictional but later, in the nineteenth century, archeologists confirmed the existence of the city in Hisalrik, a place in Turkey. Since Homer is one of the forefathers of ancient Greek literature, his take on the war is important not only in understanding a long poetic tradition but also in knowing the Mycenaean world, the first civilisation of Europe. Richard Jenkyns says that the Mycenaean civilisation was "at its peak in the middle of the second millennium BC, and the *Iliad* retains some memory of that time" (1). Jenkyns also points out that the

"Mycenaeans spoke Greek and they knew the use of writing, although they may have employed it only for practical purposes, but with the decline of this culture writing disappeared, not to be introduced again until in the eighth century" (1-2). In this context, the interesting facts presented in his observation raise a question in our minds whether



Source: https://blog.britishmuseum.org/who-was-homer/

Homer's epics had evolved through writing or they belonged purely to the oral tradition. It may be possible that it was partially written either by the poet himself or by a scribe at different points of time. Many have challenged the authenticity of single authorship and have argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are perhaps works of collaboration.

➢ **Activities:**

1. Consult relevant books and authentic sources on the internet, gather information on the authors mentioned below and write short notes on them: Plato, Aristotle, Hesiod and Herodotus.

2. The names of the four authors mentioned in Activity no. 1 are not necessarily arranged chronologically. Arrange them chronologically, giving the dates of their life period, wherever possible, against brackets.
3. Consult appropriate sources to find out the locations of the places mentioned on the modern map of the world.

2.4.2 Homer and His Works

Daisy Dunn, a historian and writer, says that "the word 'Homeros' could mean hostage in Greek, so some imagined that he was a captive." Perhaps, this is the reason why he chose to sing of warfare and war heroes in his major works: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* It is important to gather elementary information about the fall of Troy before reading any of these epics. Priam was the king of Troy when the war took place. His son Paris had abducted Helen, the beautiful wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta. In order to take revenge of this dishonor and to recover her, Agamemnon, the elder brother of Menelaus, attacked Troy and destroyed it.

The *Iliad* has a simple plot. Its story is fleshed out of a particular episode in the Trojan War, wherein Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, quarreled with Achilles, the best warrior in his army, during the siege of Troy. Achilles feels humiliated when the king takes away Briseis, his concubine. Achilles leaves the battle and refuses to return even when Agamemnon calls him back through an embassy (Patroclus) and offers compensation. Achilles returns to the battlefield with wrathful vengeance only when he hears that Hector, elder son of King Priam, has killed Patroclus, his friend. He not only kills Hector but also refuses to hand over the corpse to the Trojans, which annoys the gods. King Priam comes to collect the body of his son and finally Hector receives a stately burial. The poem ends with restoration of order in the society and in the life of Achilles.

The *Iliad* represents a particular behaviour of the hero (wrath) during the Trojan War, rather than the story of his life. The *Odyssey* dwells on what it is to be a man. It looks back at the war in retrospect through the adventures of Odysseus.In twenty-four books the *Odyssey* narrates the story of the return of Odysseus from Troy to his home in Ithaca. Thereafter, it also tells us of the revenge he took on the suitors of Penelope, his wife. The *Odyssey* was written later than the *Iliad* and is often considered as a sequel

to it. Ten years had passed after the fall of Troy but Odysseus could not return home. Telemachus, his son, goes in search of his father and he is guided by Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and warfare. For seven years, Odysseus is detained in the island of Ogygia by goddess Calypso. Zeus orders Calypso to set Odysseus free. He makes a raft and sails on it. Poseidon, the sea god, raises a storm to take revenge on Odysseus as he had blinded Poseidon's son Polyphymus, a cannibal giant. The adventures of Odysseus describe his encounter with gods, goddesses, women, monsters and the spirits of the dead. The most prominent motif in this epic is that of 'journey' and it has been explored by Homer from both literal and metaphorical perspectives, thereby tracing the growth of the hero's perception of the perplexities and his perseverance in resolving them. Considering these factors, the *Odyssey* is also read as a *bildungsroman* in which identity, hospitality and test are the major themes.

The *Homeric Hymns* is another important work ascribed to Homer and the school of poets who followed his grand style. The word 'hymn' is derived from the Greek term *hymnos* meaning a song in praise of a divine figure. The Homeric hymns consist of a collection of thirty three poems written in Greek hexameter.In epic style, these hymns either invoke the gods and goddesses whose festivals were celebrated or describe events from the lives of the deities. Particularly, two out of these—"Hymn to Demeter" and "Hymn to Apollo"—are very popular. In Greek mythology, Apollo is an authority on music, prophecy, medicine, sun and archery, and Demeter holds her claim over grain and fertility. The "Hymn to Demeter," presents a mother-daughter narrative of Demeter and Persephone. It is based on the myth of Hades' seizing of Persephone and Demeter's search for her. The pursuit ends with the establishment of Eleusinian mysteries, which are associated with the annual rites of the ancient Greeks in the village of Eleusis in Athens. The "Hymn to Apollo" is divided into two parts: the first part describes the birth of the god on Delos; the second part deals with the establishment of his oracle at Delphi. The hymns narrate the attributes of the concerned deity and often recapitulate their great deeds in the past. These also describe the rituals and the rites that are performed to please the deities.

➢ **Activities:**

1. Consult appropriate sources and write a short note on the Trojan War.
2. Prepare a list of gods, goddesses and monsters you have come across in the above section (1.2) and write briefly on them after consulting relevant sources.

3. What is a *bildungsroman*? Name some works which can be placed under the category.

2.4.3 The 'Homeric' Style

Although Homer's authorship has been debated for a long time, recurrence of certain stylistic features in the epics shows that these have been produced by a single mind. An example of this in the *Iliad* is the recurrence of adjectives such as 'cloud-gathering Zeus', 'noble Achilles' and 'swift-footed Achilles'. It is also evident that both the poems "were composed in an Ionian speaking part of the Greek world" (*Oxford Concise Companion to Classical Literature* 275). Although the art of writing was re-established in Greece in 8th century BC the narrative structure of the works shows that the poems were meant for oral delivery. Either the poet sang the epic in accompaniment of a lyre, a stringed instrument, or he chanted the lines.

The *Iliad* is written in dactylic hexameter. Elaborating on its metrical structure, Jenkyns makes the following observation:

> There are six feet to the line; each of the feet may be either a dactyl (dum-di-di) or a spondee (dum-dum), except for the last, which is always a spondee. The great majority of feet are dactyls. So the verse moves lightly: the combination of ease and speed with epic elevation is the essence of Homeric style. (5)

Homeric style is synonymous with a distinct poetic tradition. It was sincerely emulated by the later poets, who chose to write of the existing heroic narratives in either religious scriptures or in classical mythology. Homeric simile (also known as epic simile), which is an extended simile, can be found in Virgil's *Aeneid* (29-19 BC) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). These poets have, for example, used Homer's simile of tree leaves in their respective works for representing multitude. Like the *Iliad,* the *Aeneid* is written in dactylic hexameter and like the *Odyssey,* it explores the journey motif through the wanderings of Aeneas from Troy to Italy. Though *Paradise Lost* was written much later it adheres to the epic conventions that were founded by Homer and were innovatively carried forward by Virgil. When Milton presents a list of the fallen angels through Satan's roll call in *Paradise Lost* Bk 1,we are reminded of the long lists of the Greek and Trojan fighters represented in Book 2 of the *Iliad.*

2.4.4 Summing Up

Homer offers a panoramic view of the ancient Greek world through an extensive representation of mythology in his works. Although the mythological tales were well-known to the audience of his time, Homer re-viewed those narratives through an experimental representation of the characters of the divine figures and the humans. At times, Homer portrays his humans as demi-gods. Their wisdom, resilience and tenacity to fight against the odds leave us awe-stricken. On the other hand, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, we come across gods and goddesses, who are cunning, revengeful and frivolous. Their character and temperament are more like the mundane human beings than the celestial figures. Plato condemned such arepresentation of divinity because he felt that it would have an ill impact on the common people. This was one reason why he advocated the banishment of the poets from his ideal republic. Needless to say, Homer would not have found an entry there. However, as readers, we cannot overlook the beauty and grandeur in Homer's treatment of the historical facts and the mythological tales. He is indeed a great poet whose poetry can transpose us to a sublime world of antiquity.

➢ **Activities:**

1. Watch the BBC documentary series *In Search of the Trojan War* (1985), written and presented by Michael Wood.
2. Look into an Atlas or a map of modern Europe and try to locate the birth place/s of Homer and the city of Troy

2.4.5 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Broad Questions:**

1. Write a brief sketch of Homer's biography.
2. Write a critical note on Homer's creative oeuvre and his influence on later writers.
3. What is your impression about Homer's style? Write a critical note.

Middle-length Questions:

1. Will you consider the *Odyssey* as a sequel to the *Iliad*? Justify.

2. Briefly narrate the theme of the *Odyssey*.
3. Write a brief essay on Hesiod.
4. What is Homeric simile? Give some examples.

➢ **Short Questions:**

1. Where is Ionia located?
2. Which character is considered as the self-representation of Homer?
3. How many books comprise the *Odyssey*?
4. Who is Telemachus?
5. Who are Apollo and Demeter?
6. What is a hymn?
7. Who was Plato? What was his attitude towards poets?
8. Where was Odysseus detained for seven years?

2.4.6 Suggested Reading

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Unit 5 ❑ An Overview of Homer's *Iliad*

Structure

2.5.0 Introduction

2.5.1 The *Iliad:* The Greek World

2.5.2 The *Iliad:* Background Information

2.5.3 Brief Summary of each Book of the *Iliad*

2.5.4 Conventions of Epic poetry in the *Iliad*

2.5.5 Summing Up

2.5.6 Comprehension Exercises

2.5.7 Suggested Reading

2.5.0 Introduction

While your syllabus specifically has Book 1 of the *Iliad*, it is important for you to have an overview of Homer's work in its entirety. So in this Unit, we briefly introduce you to all 24 books of the *Iliad*, so that you are able to have a better understanding of the classical epic mode in general and the Homeric work in particular. Apart from that, we also acquaint you with the overarching themes, and the picture of the society in which the text is set. As you go through this Unit, you are advised to keep referring back to Module 1 Unit 2 where the features of epic poetry have been explained in detail. At the end of this unit, you are expected to:

- have an idea of the ancient Greek world
- know the background of Troy and the Trojan War
- know the storyline of the *Iliad*
- have some idea about epic conventions

2.5.1 The *Iliad:* The Greek World

Many of you know that the battle of Troy was fought between the Greeks and the Trojans. In the *Iliad,* however, Homer does not refer to the rivals of the Trojans as the

Greeks. He addresses them mostly as the Achaeans, the Argives and the Danaans. Let us try to find out who these people were and why we commonly refer to them as the Greeks. During Homer's time, which was specifically the late Bronze Age, the nation of Greece did not exist as it does in the modern world map. The political demography of the eastern and the western parts of the Mediterranean during that age, and particularly, the period when the Battle of Troy had taken place, was divided among four major empires, namely: the Mesopotamian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Egyptian Empire and the Hittite Empire. With the Hittite Empire to its east, the Aegean Sea and Mycenae in the west, the city of Troy was located in north-west Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The term 'Achaeans,' in the ancient times, referred to both the region and the people in south-east Thessaly and north-east Peloponnese. It was in South Thessaly that Achilles, whose wrath is the central theme of the *Iliad,* lived. 'Achaeans' also referred to the subjects of Agamemnon, the ruler of Mycenae, who resided in the north-east Peloponnese. In an extended sense the term 'Achaeans' denoted the Greek world and the Greek people. At this point, it should be mentioned that in the ancient times, particularly during the time of Homer, the concept of nation, as we understand it today, did not exist.

The term 'Argives' is associated with 'Argos' (also called Argolis), a city in the north-east Peloponnese. In Homer's works, 'Argos' refers to the city of King Diomedes and the kingdom of Agamemnon. Homer also used it to refer to "the whole of the Peloponnese, as opposed to Hellas, i.e. Greece north of the Isthmus of Corinth" (Howatson and Chilvers 53). "Danaans sometimes signifies Argives" (Howatson and Chilvers, 159) and in this regard the term was applied widely to the Greek people living in the Peloponnesian region. The Achaeans, the Argives and the Danaans—whom Homer identified as the Greeks, lived in different parts of the Peloponnesian region. It is a widely known fact that in the classical times, the Greek world was also known as 'Hellas' or 'Hellenes.' We should, however, note that Homer does not refer to the besieging group in the Trojan War as the Hellenes. Although both, the Achaeans and the Hellenes, represented the ancient Greek world, to Homer they were distinct groups.

2.5.2 The *Iliad:* Background Information

The title of Homer's epic is derived from 'Ilion' or 'Ilium' which is another name of the ancient city of Troy. The name is also associated with Ilus, the legendary founder

of the city. In order to have a fair idea of the tale of Troy, you should have some basic knowledge of the history of this city. It was famous for horses and textiles. Troy had been attacked and occupied several times. In 1300 BC, the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Ancient historians have differed about the year of Trojan War. From their writings, we know that the War took place between 1280 BC and 1184 BC. The study of the family tree of the Trojan rulers explains the nomenclature of the city: "Dardanus [, the] son of Zeus 'established Dardania' (as Homer says), a district north-east of Troy, and married the daughter of the local king Teucer (Teukros). He had as descendants 'Tros' (from whom the Troad and the Trojans were named) and Ilus, who founded the city of Troy, sometimes called after him Ilium (Ilion)" (Howatson and Chilvers, 557). King Priam, whose name you will come across in *Iliad,* is the grandson of Ilus and the son of Laomedon. He is the father of Hector, Paris, Polydorus, Cassandra and Creusa. In the *Iliad* he is represented as an old man. He laments the death of Hector and his other sons, who died in the Trojan War. In Unit 4, you have already read about the cause of the War. You must be curious to know why Paris, Hector's brother, had abducted Helen. She, the paragon of beauty, was married to Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Abduction of the married woman, which apparently became the triggering factor for the outbreak of the War, was an indirect consequence of a negotiation between Paris and a goddess.

The background of the Trojan tale takes us to the Greek mythology. Zeus, the supreme God of the Greeks, loved Thetis, a sea-goddess. However, he did not marry her when he came to know that she will give birth to a son, who will be greater than his father. Zeus decided to get her married to a mortal. Thetis was married to Peleus, king of Phthia. In the wedding ceremony, all gods and goddesses were invited except Eris, the goddess of strife. She was angry and had come to the banquet hall unexpectedly to play a trick. She dropped there a golden apple on which was inscribed 'For the Fairest.' Soon this apple became an apple of discord between Hera, the wife of Zeus, and their two daughters, Athena and Aphrodite (Find more about the family tree of the Greek gods and goddesses by clicking on https://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/familytree.html).

All three women claimed the apple and went to Zeus to seek justice. Zeus, in turn, told them to go to Paris. Each goddess offered a bribe to Paris in order to take possession of the apple. While Hera promised to give him royal power, Athena offered him the boon of military success. Aphrodite said that he would have the most beautiful woman on earth as his wife. Paris was tempted by Aphrodite's offer and awarded the golden apple to her. Since Helen was the most beautiful woman in the Greek world,

Paris sailed to Sparta to meet her. Not only did he woo her but also convinced her to come along with him to Troy. Many years ago, at the time of Helen's marriage, the kings who courted her had vowed to protect her honour and the honour of the man she chose to marry. Thus, when Menelaus came to know about the abduction of his wife, he urged the Greek rulers to wage a war against Troy. And thus was formed a loose confederation of Greek army which would ultimately launch a war against Troy.

➢ **Activity for the Learner:**

1. Try to find out the present location of Greece in the atlas and compare its position with that of the old 'Greece.'
2. Try to locate the ancient Troy in the map of modern-day Europe.
3. Look up the word 'Hellenes' in the dictionary and consult other relevant sources and write a short note on it.
4. Who are referred to as the 'Achaeans,' the 'Argives' and the 'Danaans' in the *Iliad*?
5. Read this unit and consult relevant sources and draw a family tree of Zeus.
6. Write short notes on Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite and Eris.

2.5.3 Brief Summary of each Book of the *Iliad*

BOOK I

Book I, which is on your syllabus, dwells on the incidents of the tenth year of the siege of Troy. It deals mainly with the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Chryses requests Agamemnon to release his daughter Chryseisis in exchange of a huge ransom. Although Chryses invokes the name of Apollo, he is insulted by the king. Apollo sends pestilence to the Greek camp which wreaks havoc there. In a meeting of Greek kings called by Achilles, Calchas, a seer, reveals that Apollo's anger has caused the epidemic and that the solution lies in the release of Chryseisis. Agamemnon gets angry with Achilles and threatens to take Briseis, the latter's girl. He thereafter frees Chryseis but forcibly takes away Briseis. In retaliation Achilles withdraws from the War. His mother Thetis persuades Zeus to "grant victory to the Trojans, till the Achaeans [Greeks] give my son his due and load him with riches in requital."

BOOK II

To keep his promise, Zeus sends to Agamemnon a dream which falsely assures the latter that if he mounts attacks on Troy now, he will be victorious. Agamemnon then assembles his army and wants to test their resolution by saying that he will give up the war and return to Greece. Unfortunately for him, the troops are glad and start embarking their ships. Alarmed at this, Hera, Zeus's wife who nurtures grudge against Paris and Troy (we have already discussed the reason earlier), comes to his help and becomes instrumental in reassembling the troops and getting them mentally prepared for the War. Then they march for the war. The poet, invoking the muse, offers details of the Greek army and also of the Trojan forces.

BOOK III

Menelaus and Paris engage themselves in a duel. It is a fight between two equals and none of them can claim advantage. At one point in the fight, Menelaus is able to catch hold of Paris and drag him along. This is a point when he gains advantage over his rival but it is neutralised when Aphrodite who favours the Trojans intervenes and whisks Paris away to Priam's palace. Helen meets him there. Since Paris cannot be traced in the battleground, Agamemnon insists on Greek victory and demands Helen back.

BOOK IV

A quarrel among the gods breaks out in Olympus. Zeus feels that the Greeks have won the battle and there should be an end to the war. But Hera insists on the continuation of the war. As she favours the Greeks, she wants the complete destruction of the Trojans. Zeus gives in to her pleas. She employs a divine ploy to begin the war afresh. As the battle rages, many lives are lost but the major characters remain unharmed. The gods' intervention, however, continues to affect the course of the war.

BOOK V

Athena empowers Diomedes with the power of seeing the gods and the goddesses in the battlefield but instructs her not to disturb them except Aphrodite. Pandarus is killed by him but Aeneas is saved by Aphrodite whom, however, Diomedes is able to hurt. Aeneas later returns to the war. With divine help the Greeks are able to inflict severe losses on the Trojans.

BOOK VI

The battle continues, now without the direct participation of the gods. The Greeks gain advantage over the Trojans. Hector returns to his mother Hecuba to request her to arrange a big sacrifice for Athena so that the Trojans can rebuff the Greeks. Although the sacrifice is given, Athena refuses to listen to their prayer. Hector and Paris join the war.

BOOK VII

To avoid the continued slaughter, Hector proposes a duel with anyone from the Greek camp. Ajax is chosen to fight Hector. The two warriors engage in the duel but it remains inconclusive. The heralds call them back at the end of the day. Nestor proposes a truce so that the burial of the dead can be arranged. They will also be able to utilise this time in building a protective wall. The Trojans too send a proposal for a temporary truce for the burial of the dead. They also propose to restore Helen's property to the Greeks and give some of Paris's own. This proposal is meant as an alternative to the return of Helen to Agamemnon. The latter accepts the proposal of the truce but not the other one.

BOOK VIII

Zeus asks the gods not to interfere in the war. He goes to the Mount Ida to look at the Trojan plane below. The Trojans give a spirited fightback and the Greeks retreat behind their wall. Hera and Athena try to help the Greeks but are stopped by Zeus. Hector and other Trojans camp outside the wall to retain the advantage of the day.

BOOK IX

The Greeks are crestfallen. Even Agamemnon breaks down and speaks of returning home. The soldiers naturally feel demoralised. Diomedes, however, chides Agamemnon for his negative attitude and reminds him that the Greeks are fated to win. This instills some confidence in both Agamemnon and the common soldiers. Nestor reminds Agamemnon of the absence of Achilles and Agamemnon confesses his own foolishness. He agrees to return Briseis and offer gifts to Achilles if he agrees to join the battlefield. But Achilles refuses the offer and says that he cannot be bought or sold by money and wealth. Diomedes proposes that they should prepare for the fight next day and then all retire for rest.

BOOK X

Diomedes and Odysseus [in disguise] go out to the Trojan camp for spying. The Trojans also send Dolan to spy on the Greeks. Dolan is captured and information about the Trojan camp, their preparedness, Hector's location and other sensitive information is extracted from him. Then they kill him and some other Trojans. Apollo interferes and then they return to their camps and take a ritual bath.

BOOK XI

The Greeks under the leadership of Agamemnon gain some initial advantage in the battle but Agamemnon and several other Greek leaders are wounded. As they retire, the Trojans make advances. Achilles, confined in his isolation, goes through a mixed feeling of sorrow for the predicament of his comrades in the battle field and pleasure at the plight of the Greeks for the injustice done to him. He sends his friend Petroklos to Nestor for gathering information of the proceedings of the battle. As Nestor provides Petroklos fresh information, he requests the latter to take initiatives for persuading Achilles to participate in the war. If he fails to do so, he should wear Achilles's famous armour and join the fight.

BOOK XII

The Trojans storm the fortification under the leadership of Hector. As Hector and Polydamas attempt to attack the wall, they see an omen which is interpreted by the latter as the sign of their failure. Hector, however, ignores the interpretation and attacks the weak fortification.

BOOK XIII

As Zeus takes his attention away from the battlefield, the sea-god Poseidon secretly tries to help the Greeks. As the plundering Trojans advance and kill Poseidon's grandson, the sea-god becomes angry and helps the Greeks organise an attack against the Trojans. This results in a huge casualty on the Trojan side. Reinforced by Paris's encouraging words, Hector regains his spirit. As Hector and his team move forward, Ajax promises to offer a great fight. They engage in fights.

BOOK XIV

As Agamemnon, now injured like Odysseus and Diomedes, descends into depression and speaks of returning home, leaders like Odysseus and Diomedes criticise him and speak of the need for encouraging the soldiers. Poseidon also informs them that the Trojan attacks will indeed be repulsed. Hera and others plan to put Zeus on sleep so that

he cannot pay attention to the battle. Counselled and aided by Poseidon, the Greeks now attack the Trojans and injure Hector. Ultimately, the Trojans have to retreat.

BOOK XV

Zeus wakes up to discover the wreckage Hera and Poseidon had done to Hector. He summons Iris and Apollo and informs them that his support for the Trojans is temporary and is strategic in nature as it is intended to glorify Achilles. He further predicts that Hector will kill Petroklas which will ultimately bring Achilles to the battlefield. Iris goes to Poseidon to refrain him from helping the Greeks. The sea-god reluctantly agrees to leave the field. Apollo gets into the act of curing Hector's wounds and getting him reinvigorated.

BOOK XVI

As the Trojans burn Greek ships, Petroklas requests Achilles to lend him his armour so that he can repulse the attack. Achilles agrees but warns not to do any more than save the ships as pursuing the Trojans back to their wall will spell his doom. Seeing Petroklas join the fight in Achilles armour, the Trojans get scared. They believe that Achilles himself has joined the war. As they retreat and as Petroklas follow them, Apollo strikes him from behind and his armour comes out. He is ultimately killed by Hector.

BOOK XVII

This book deals with intense clashes that erupt around the corpse of Patroklas. The Trojan soldier who speared him is killed by Meneleus. Hector arrives and strips Patroklas of his armour which he then wears. Meneleus and Ajax, however, are able to save the body from being desecrated and to send back Hector and his army.

BOOK XVIII

Achilles is informed of Patroklas's death and he is grief-stricken. His cry attracts the attention of his mother Thetis who arrives there to know the reason of his grief. Achilles informs her that he wants to join the war and kill Hector to avenge Patroklas's death and that he wants an armour for the purpose. Thetis asks him to wait for a day so that the divine smith can make a new one for him. Achilles appears on the battlefield and lets out a cry that scares away the Trojan warriors. Patroklas's body is retrieved.

BOOK XIX

Achilles and Agamemnon are reconciled with each other. This causes jubilation in the Greek camp. Achilles wants to join the war immediately but he is persuaded to wait

as the soldiers need refreshment and rest. Though Achilles knows that he is doomed to die, he rushes to the battlefield with his team.

BOOK XX

As the Greek and the Trojan armies get locked in an intense battle, Zeus calls a meeting of gods and permit them to assist their favourites. They are instructed to see that the fate of the war which has been pre-determined should not be altered. The gods get into action accordingly. Achilles fights the war ferociously and kills many Trojans. While he is about to kill Aeneas, Poseidon intervenes and saves the latter.

BOOK XXI

Achilles continues his ferocious attacks on the Trojans and kills many of them. He throws so many of the dead bodies on the river Scamander that it gets clogged and the river-god protests and drags Achilles to the downstream. At this the gods intervene and sets the plains on fire and ultimately the river-god relents. The gods also quarrel among themselves. Achilles in the mean time pursues the Trojan soldiers back to wall of the city and is about to seize it but fails because of Poseidon's intervention.

BOOK XXII

Hector is the only Trojan hero who chooses to remain outside the city wall. He confronts Achilles and in a fierce fight ultimately dies. Achilles drags his corpse through the dirt as Priam witnesses his son's misfortune.

BOOK XXIII

Back in the Greek camp, Achilles mourns Patroklas's death. His friend visits him in his dream and requests Achilles to arrange for his funeral so that he can enter the land of the death. Achilles does so in the next morning and organises some competitions in the honour of his dead friend.

BOOK XXIV

As Achilles continues to dishonour Hector's corpse, Apollo protects it from dogs and prevents it from rotting. Zeus settles that the corpse should be given back to the Trojans in exchange for a ransom. Priam arrives to take his son's body and Achilles agrees to hand it over to Priam. Back in the Trojan camp, proper arrangements are made for the burial.

➢ **A Quick Recap Activity:**

1. How many books does the *Iliad* have?

2. Go through the book-wise summary of the *Iliad* and check whether the abduction of Helen and the storming of the Troy find place in the epic. Consult the original text and other relevant sources.
3. Write down the names of the major Greek and Trojan characters mentioned in the epic.
4. What happened over the body of Patroklas?
5. What is the significance of Achilles's armour?
6. Which event, according to you, turn the tide of the war in the favour of the Greeks?
7. Mention at least one Book where the gods engage themselves in quarrel.
8. In which Book are Achilles and Agamemnon reconciled with each other?
9. In which book is Hector killed?
10. How does the epic end?

2.5.4 Conventions of Epic Poetry in the *Iliad*

An epic is a long narrative poem celebrating the great deeds of legendary or mythical heroes. It has a grand ceremonious style. M.H. Abrams defines an epic as follows: "it is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation" (76).

There are two types of epic poetry: primary epic and secondary epic. The primary epics are those that evolve from folktales sung by the wandering bards. These are mostly oral renderings of the heroic tales popular among a particular cultural group. The *Iliad,* the *Odyssey,* the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are examples of primary epic. The secondary epic, also known as literary epic, is written in imitation of the epic form represented in the primary epics. Virgil's *Aenied* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are examples of secondary epic.

Epic poetry follows a set of conventions, which are also its characteristics:

i) Most epics begin with an Invocation to the Muse/deity. In the Invocation, the poet presents the epic question or the argument, which apparently addresses the major theme of the work. The *Iliad* begins with Homer's invocation to the

muse: “Sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles, the anger which caused so many sorrows to the Greeks” (Richards 33).

ii) The narrative begins *in medias res* (“in the middle of things”). The *Iliad* begins at the tenth year of the siege of Troy. The battle is in full swing between the Trojans and the Greeks. Specifically, it refers to the time and situation when “first, Agamemnon, king of men, and great Achilles were parted in anger” (Richards 33).

iii) The hero is a quasi-divine figure. His position is of national and cosmic importance. Iliad, for example, is the son of Thetis, a sea nymph. Although he is a mortal, his strength and valour surpasses the ordinary human standards. In Book XVIII, when Achilles re-appears in the battlefield and snarls at his adversaries, the Trojan warriors are scared. He is also a man of scruples. This becomes evident when he turns down Agamemnon’s bribe of wealth and woman and sticks to his code of self-respect.

iv) The scope of the setting is vast, often expanded across the universe. The action of *Paradise Lost* takes place in heaven, on earth, in hell, and in the space between heaven and hell. In Book XXI of the *Iliad* Achilles throws the dead bodies of the Trojans in the river Scamander. When the river is clogged, the river god is annoyed and he drags Achilles downstream.

v) Superhuman deeds, battles, catalogue of the warriors occupy an important place in both the primary and the secondary epics. In Book II, you can find two long lists of the Greek and the Trojan warriors.

vi) Gods and goddesses take part in human action. In the *Iliad,* the gods and the goddesses not only participate in the conflict between the two groups but also behave like the mortals. In Book I, Thetis persuades Zeus to give victory to the Trojans till Agamemnon realises the fact that he should not have humiliated Achilles.When Achilles is about to kill Aeneas, Poseidon, the sea god, comes and saves him. They quarrel among themselves like petty human beings when their plans are thwarted. Often they interfere in the drama of human action to either protect the honour of their followers or to render justice. In Book XXIV Apollo protects the corpse of Hector from the dogs. In the same book, Zeus states that Hector’s body should be returned to Priam in lieu of big ransom.

vii) The grand style of epic involves an elevated language which abounds in extensive allusions, epithets and epic similes. The epic simile is also known as Homeric simile. An elaborate definition of epic similes is given below:

Epic Similes are formal, sustained similes in which the secondary subject, or *vehicle,* is elaborated far beyond its specific points of close parallel to the primary subject, or *tenor,* to which it is compared. This figure was imitated from Homer by Virgil, Milton and other writers of literary epics, who employed it to enhance the ceremonial quality and wide-ranging reference of the narrative style. (Abrams 79)

Now that you have read the characteristics of epic poetry you will be able to identify these in the first book of the *Iliad.* You should note down the epic conventions in Book I and think how these contribute to the thematic aspects of this primary epic. Although heroic adventures and battle scenes are ample in the *Iliad,* these are but one of the many devices to highlight the major themes and the character traits about which you will study in the next Unit.

2.5.5 Summing Up

In this Unit you have been sensitised to the geo-political locations of the Greece and Troy and what forging an alliance meant at that time. Asia Minor figures as a focal point in the context of reading the *Iliad*. By now you also have some idea about the factors that played an important role in Paris' abduction of Helen, which led to the war between the Trojans and the Homeric Greek world. The story line of the *Iliad* and the turning points in must have been clear to you by now. You will be able to identify the epic conventions while reading Book I of the epic which is in your syllabus. Now that you have a clear idea of the points mentioned above, you will be able to appreciate the prescribed section of the epic.

2.5.6 Comprehension Questions

Broad Questions:

1. Write a critical note on the geography and history of Greek and Trojan world portrayed in Homer's *Iliad*. Comment on the formation of the Greek confederation.

2. What impression do you form about the gods and goddesses mentioned in the Iliad? Cite examples from the *Iliad*.
3. Critically analyse the narrative of the *Iliad* as an epic.
4. Identify the epic features in the *Iliad.*
5. What is an Invocation? Write a note on Homer's Invocation in *Iliad.*

Middle-length Questions:

1. Illustrate the factors that led to the Trojan War. Mention in this connection the mythical narrative that are available to us.
2. Why do we call the *Iliad* a primary epic?
3. What led to the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles?
4. Who wore Achilles armour? What happened to him?
5. Do you consider Achilles a hero? Give reasons for your answer.

Short Questions:

1. What is the origin of the word 'Iliad'?
2. Who was Helen married to?
3. Who dropped a golden apple with the inscription 'For the Fairest' on the banquet hall during the ceremony of marriage between Thetis and Peleus?
4. What request did Chryses make to Agamemnon?
5. Who was Calchas?
6. Who killed Petroklas?
7. On which river did Achilles throw the dead bodies of his enemies?
8. What do you mean by '*in medias res*'?
9. In which book of the *Iliad* did Achilles appear in the battlefield?

2.5.7 Suggested Reading

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NOTES

Unit 6 ❑ Book 1—Detailed Analysis

Structure

2.6.0 Introduction

2.6.1 Text of Book 1

2.6.2 Detailed Summary

2.6.3 Major Characters in Book 1

2.6.4 Major Themes in Book 1

2.6.5 Summing up

2.6.6 Comprehension Exercises

2.6.7 Suggested Reading

2.6.0 Introduction

The *Iliad*, we all know, is about the Trojan War. But if you have read the earlier units properly, you will realise that this epic deals with only a small part of the War. It narrates the incidents of the tenth year of the siege of Troy. The epic is mainly about Achilles and his quarrel with Agamemnon which results in miseries for the Greeks. Book I which is prescribed in your syllabus narrates the background of the quarrel and sets the action of the entire epic. This unit will deal only with Book I. It will help you get acquainted with the main incidents that happen here, the main characters that appear and the way they behave. It will also analyse some themes of Book I, and will explore the significant stylistic aspects of the Book. By the end of this unit, you will be able to—

- critically interpret the first book of the *Iliad* prescribed in your syllabus;
- understand the form, structure and the epic conventions employed in the text;
- understand the nature of political formations and alliances in the ancient Greece
- interpret the behaviour patterns of the heroic characters of the epic.

2.6.1 Text of Book 1

The Iliad: Book I

The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles—Achilles withdraws from the war, and sends his mother Thetis to ask Jove to help the Trojans—Scene between Jove and Juno on Olympus.

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so were the counsels of Jove fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel? It was the son of Jove and Leto; for he was angry with the king and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people, because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest. Now Chryses had come to the ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, and had brought with him a great ransom: moreover he bore in his hand the sceptre of Apollo wreathed with a suppliant's wreath, and he besought the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus, who were their chiefs.

"Sons of Atreus," he cried, "and all other Achaeans, may the gods who dwell in Olympus grant you to sack the city of Priam, and to reach your homes in safety; but free my daughter, and accept a ransom for her, in reverence to Apollo, son of Jove."

On this the rest of the Achaeans with one voice were for respecting the priest and taking the ransom that he offered; but not so Agamemnon, who spoke fiercely to him and sent him roughly away. "Old man," said he, "let me not find you tarrying about our ships, nor yet coming hereafter. Your sceptre of the god and your wreath shall profit you nothing. I will not free her. She shall grow old in my house at Argos far from her own home, busying herself with her loom and visiting my couch; so go, and do not provoke me or it shall be the worse for you."

The old man feared him and obeyed. Not a word he spoke, but went by the shore of the sounding sea and prayed apart to King Apollo whom lovely Leto had borne. "Hear me," he cried, "O god of the silver bow, that protectest Chryse and holy Cilla and rulest Tenedos with thy might, hear me oh thou of Sminthe. If I have ever decked your temple with garlands, or burned your thigh-bones in fat of bulls or goats, grant my prayer, and let your arrows avenge these my tears upon the Danaans."

Thus did he pray, and Apollo heard his prayer. He came down furious from the summits of Olympus, with his bow and his quiver upon his shoulder, and the arrows rattled on his back with the rage that trembled within him. He sat himself down away from the ships with a face as dark as night, and his silver bow rang death as he shot his arrow in the midst of them. Firs the smote their mules and their hounds, but presently he aimed his shafts at the people themselves, and all day long the pyres of the dead were burning.

For nine whole days he shot his arrows among the people, but upon the tenth day Achilles called them in assembly—moved thereto by Juno, who saw the Achaeans in their death-throes and had compassion upon them. Then, when they were got together, he rose and spoke among them.

"Son of Atreus," said he, "I deem that we should now turn roving home if we would escape destruction, for we are being cut down by war and pestilence at once. Let us ask some priest or prophet, or some reader of dreams (for dreams, too, are of Jove) who can tell us why Phoebus Apollo is so angry, and say whether it is for some vow that we have broken, or hecatomb that we have not offered, and whether he will accept the savour of lambs and goats without blemish, so as to take away the plague from us."

With these words he sat down, and Calchas son of Thestor, wisest of augurs, who knew things past present and to come, rose to speak. He it was who had guided the Achaeans with their fleet to Ilius, through the prophesyings with which Phoebus Apollo had inspired him. With all sincerity and goodwill he addressed them thus:—

"Achilles, loved of heaven, you bid me tell you about the anger of King Apollo, I will therefore do so; but consider first and swear that you will stand by me heartily in word and deed, for I know that I shall offend one who rules the Argives with might, to whom all the Achaeans are in subjection. A plain man cannot stand against the anger of a king, who if he swallow his displeasure now, will yet nurse revenge till he has wreaked it. Consider, therefore, whether or no you will protect me."

And Achilles answered, "Fear not, but speak as it is borne in upon you from heaven, for by Apollo, Calchas, to whom you pray, and whose oracles you reveal to us, not a Danaan at our ships shall lay his hand upon you, while I yet live to look upon the face of the earth—no, not though you name Agamemnon himself, who is by far the foremost of the Achaeans."

Thereon the seer spoke boldly. “The god,” he said, “is angry neither about vow nor hecatomb, but for his priest’s sake, whom Agamemnon has dishonoured, in that he would not free his daughter nor take a ransom for her; therefore has he sent these evils upon us, and will yet send others. He will not deliver the Danaans from this pestilence till Agamemnon has restored the girl without fee or ransom to her father, and has sent a holy hecatomb to Chryse. Thus we may perhaps appease him.”

With these words he sat down, and Agamemnon rose in anger. His heart was black with rage, and his eyes flashed fire as he scowled on Calchas and said, “Seer of evil, you never yet prophesied smooth things concerning me, but have ever loved to foretell that which was evil. You have brought me neither comfort nor performance; and now you come seeing among Danaans, and saying that Apollo has plagued us because I would not take a ransom for this girl, the daughter of Chryses. I have set my heart on keeping her in my own house, for I love her better even than my own wife Clytemnestra, whose peer she is alike in form and feature, in understanding and accomplishments. Still I will give her up if I must, for I would have the people live, not die; but you must find me a prize instead, or I alone among the Argives shall be without one. This is not well; for you behold, all of you, that my prize is to go elsewhither.”

And Achilles answered, “Most noble son of Atreus, covetous beyond all mankind, how shall the Achaeans find you another prize? We have no common store from which to take one. Those we took from the cities have been awarded; we cannot disallow the awards that have been made already. Give this girl, therefore, to the god, and if ever Jove grants us to sack the city of Troy we will requite you three and fourfold.”

Then Agamemnon said, “Achilles, valiant though you be, you shall not thus outwit me. You shall not overreach and you shall not persuade me. Are you to keep your own prize, while I sit tamely under my loss and give up the girl at your bidding? Let the Achaeans find me a prize in fair exchange to my liking, or I will come and take your own, or that of Ajax or of Ulysses; and he to whomsoever I may come shall rue my coming. But of this we will take thought hereafter; for the present, let us draw a ship into the sea, and find a crew for her expressly; let us put a hecatomb on board, and let us send Chryseis also; further, let some chief man among us be in command, either Ajax, or Idomeneus, or yourself, son of Peleus, mighty warrior that you are, that we may offer sacrifice and appease the anger of the god.”

Achilles scowled at him and answered, "You are steeped in insolence and lust of gain. With what heart can any of the Achaeans do your bidding, either on foray or in open fighting? I came not warring here for any ill the Trojans had done me. I have no quarrel with them. They have not raided my cattle nor my horses, nor cut down my harvests on the rich plains of Phthia; for between me and them there is a great space, both mountain and sounding sea. We have followed you, Sir Insolence! for your pleasure, not ours—to gain satisfaction from the Trojans for your shameless self and for Menelaus. You forget this, and threaten to rob me of the prize for which I have toiled, and which the sons of the Achaeans have given me. Never when the Achaeans sack any rich city of the Trojans do I receive so good a prize as you do, though it is my hands that do the better part of the fighting. When the sharing comes, your share is far the largest, and I, forsooth, must go back to my ships, take what I can get and be thankful, when my labour of fighting is done. Now, therefore, I shall go back to Phthia; it will be much better for me to return home with my ships, for I will not stay here dishonoured to gather gold and substance for you."

And Agamemnon answered, "Fly if you will, I shall make you no prayers to stay you. I have others here who will do me honour, and above all Jove, the lord of counsel. There is no king here so hateful to me as you are, for you are ever quarrelsome and ill-affected. What though you be brave? Was it not heaven that made you so? Go home, then, with your ships and comrades to lord it over the Myrmidons. I care neither for you nor for your anger; and thus will I do: since Phoebus Apollo is taking Chryseis from me, I shall send her with my ship and my followers, but I shall come to your tent and take your own prize Briseis, that you may learn how much stronger I am than you are, and that another may fear to set himself up as equal or comparable with me."

The son of Peleus was furious, and his heart within his shaggy breast was divided whether to draw his sword, push the others aside, and kill the son of Atreus, or to restrain himself and check his anger. While he was thus in two minds, and was drawing his mighty sword from its scabbard, Minerva came down from heaven (for Juno had sent her in the love she bore to them both), and seized the son of Peleus by his yellow hair, visible to him alone, for of the others no man could see her. Achilles turned in amaze, and by the fire that flashed from her eyes at once knew that she was Minerva. "Why are you here," said he, "daughter of aegis-bearing Jove? To see the pride of Agamemnon, son of Atreus? Let me tell you—and it shall surely be—he shall pay for this insolence with his life."

And Minerva said, "I come from heaven, if you will hear me, to bid you stay your anger. Juno has sent me, who cares for both of you alike. Cease, then, this brawling, and do not draw your sword; rail at him if you will, and your railing will not be vain, for I tell you—and it shall surely be—that you shall hereafter receive gifts three times as splendid by reason of this present insult. Hold, therefore, and obey."

"Goddess," answered Achilles, "however angry a man may be, he must do as you two command him. This will be best, for the gods ever hear the prayers of him who has obeyed them."

He stayed his hand on the silver hilt of his sword, and thrust it back into the scabbard as Minerva bade him. Then she went back to Olympus among the other gods, and to the house of aegis-bearing Jove.

But the son of Peleus again began railing at the son of Atreus, for he was still in a rage. "Wine-bibber," he cried, "with the face of a dog and the heart of a hind, you never dare to go out with the host in fight, nor yet with our chosen men in ambuscade. You shun this as you do death itself. You had rather go round and rob his prizes from any man who contradicts you. You devour your people, for you are king over a feeble folk; otherwise, son of Atreus, henceforward you would insult no man. Therefore I say, and swear it with a great oath—nay, by this my sceptre which shalt sprout neither leaf nor shoot, nor bud anew from the day on which it left its parent stem upon the mountains—for the axe stripped it of leaf and bark, and now the sons of the Achaeans bear it as judges and guardians of the decrees of heaven—so surely and solemnly do I swear that hereafter they shall look fondly for Achilles and shall not find him. In the day of your distress, when your men fall dying by the murderous hand of Hector, you shall not know how to help them, and shall rend your heart with rage for the hour when you offered insult to the bravest of the Achaeans."

With this the son of Peleus dashed his gold-bestudded sceptre on the ground and took his seat, while the son of Atreus was beginning fiercely from his place upon the other side. Then uprose smooth-tongued Nestor, the facile speaker of the Pylians, and the words fell from his lips sweeter than honey. Two generations of men born and bred in Pylos had passed away under his rule, and he was now reigning over the third. With all sincerity and goodwill, therefore, he addressed them thus:—

"Of a truth," he said, "a great sorrow has befallen the Achaean land. Surely Priam with his sons would rejoice, and the Trojans be glad at heart if they could hear this

quarrel between you two, who are so excellent in fight and counsel. I am older than either of you; therefore be guided by me. Moreover I have been the familiar friend of men even greater than you are, and they did not disregard my counsels. Never again can I behold such men as Pirithous and Dryas shepherd of his people, or as Caeneus, Exadius, godlike Polyphemus, and Theseus son of Aegeus, peer of the immortals. These were the mightiest men ever born upon this earth: mightiest were they, and when they fought the fiercest tribes of mountain savages they utterly overthrew them. I came from distant Pylos, and went about among them, for they would have me come, and I fought as it was in me to do. Not a man now living could withstand them, but they heard my words, and were persuaded by them. So be it also with yourselves, for this is the more excellent way. Therefore, Agamemnon, though you be strong, take not this girl away, for the sons of the Achaeans have already given her to Achilles; and you, Achilles, strive not further with the king, for no man who by the grace of Jove wields a sceptre has like honour with Agamemnon. You are strong, and have a goddess for your mother; but Agamemnon is stronger than you, for he has more people under him. Son of Atreus, check your anger, I implore you; end this quarrel with Achilles, who in the day of battle is a tower of strength to the Achaeans."

And Agamemnon answered, "Sir, all that you have said is true, but this fellow must needs become our lord and master: he must be lord of all, king of all, and captain of all, and this shall hardly be. Granted that the gods have made him a great warrior, have they also given him the right to speak with railing?"

Achilles interrupted him. "I should be a mean coward," he cried, "were I to give in to you in all things. Order other people about, not me, for I shall obey no longer. Furthermore I say—and lay my saying to your heart—I shall fight neither you nor any man about this girl, for those that take were those also that gave. But of all else that is at my ship you shall carry away nothing by force. Try, that others may see; if you do, my spear shall be reddened with your blood."

When they had quarrelled thus angrily, they rose, and broke up the assembly at the ships of the Achaeans. The son of Peleus went back to his tents and ships with the son of Menoetius and his company, while Agamemnon drew a vessel into the water and chose a crew of twenty oarsmen. He escorted Chryseis on board and sent moreover a hecatomb for the god. And Ulysses went as captain.

These, then, went on board and sailed their ways over the sea. But the son of Atreus bade the people purify themselves; so they purified themselves and cast their filth into the sea. Then they offered hecatombs of bulls and goats without blemish on the sea-shore, and the smoke with the savour of their sacrifice rose curling up towards heaven.

Thus did they busy themselves throughout the host. But Agamemnon did not forget the threat that he had made Achilles, and called his trusty messengers and squires Talthybius and Eurybates. "Go," said he, "to the tent of Achilles, son of Peleus; take Briseis by the hand and bring her hither; if he will not give her I shall come with others and take her—which will press him harder."

He charged them straightly further and dismissed them, whereon they went their way sorrowfully by the seaside, till they came to the tents and ships of the Myrmidons. They found Achilles sitting by his tent and his ships, and ill-pleased he was when he beheld them. They stood fearfully and reverently before him, and never a word did they speak, but he knew them and said, "Welcome, heralds, messengers of gods and men; draw near; my quarrel is not with you but with Agamemnon who has sent you for the girl Briseis. Therefore, Patroclus, bring her and give her to them, but let them be witnesses by the blessed gods, by mortal men, and by the fierceness of Agamemnon's anger, that if ever again there be need of me to save the people from ruin, they shall seek and they shall not find. Agamemnon is mad with rage and knows not how to look before and after that the Achaeans may fight by their ships in safety."

Patroclus did as his dear comrade had bidden him. He brought Briseis from the tent and gave her over to the heralds, who took her with them to the ships of the Achaeans—and the woman was loth to go. Then Achilles went all alone by the side of the hoar sea, weeping and looking out upon the boundless waste of waters. He raised his hands in prayer to his immortal mother, "Mother," he cried, "you bore me doomed to live but for a little season; surely Jove, who thunders from Olympus, might have made that little glorious. It is not so. Agamemnon, son of Atreus, has done me dishonour, and has robbed me of my prize by force."

As he spoke he wept aloud, and his mother heard him where she was sitting in the depths of the sea hard by the old man her father. Forthwith she rose as it were a grey mist out of the waves, sat down before him as he stood weeping, caressed him with her hand, and said, "My son, why are you weeping? What is it that grieves you? Keep it not from me, but tell me, that we may know it together."

Achilles drew a deep sigh and said, “You know it; why tell you what you know well already? We went to Thebe the strong city of Eetion, sacked it, and brought hither the spoil. The sons of the Achaeans shared it duly among themselves, and chose lovely Chryseis as the meed of Agamemnon; but Chryses, priest of Apollo, came to the ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, and brought with him a great ransom: moreover he bore in his hand the sceptre of Apollo, wreathed with a suppliant’s wreath, and he besought the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus who were their chiefs.

“On this the rest of the Achaeans with one voice were for respecting the priest and taking the ransom that he offered; but not so Agamemnon, who spoke fiercely to him and sent him roughly away. So he went back in anger, and Apollo, who loved him dearly, heard his prayer. Then the god sent a deadly dart upon the Argives, and the people died thick on one another, for the arrows went everywhither among the wide host of the Achaeans. At last a seer in the fulness of his knowledge declared to us the oracles of Apollo, and I was myself first to say that we should appease him. Whereon the son of Atreus rose in anger, and threatened that which he has since done. The Achaeans are now taking the girl in a ship to Chryse, and sending gifts of sacrifice to the god; but the heralds have just taken from my tent the daughter of Briseus, whom the Achaeans had awarded to myself.

“Help your brave son, therefore, if you are able. Go to Olympus, and if you have ever done him service in word or deed, implore the aid of Jove. Ofttimes in my father’s house have I heard you glory in that you alone of the immortals saved the son of Saturn from ruin, when the others, with Juno, Neptune, and Pallas Minerva would have put him in bonds. It was you, goddess, who delivered him by calling to Olympus the hundred-handed monster whom gods call Briareus, but men Aegaeon, for he is stronger even than his father; when therefore he took his seat all-glorious beside the son of Saturn, the other gods were afraid, and did not bind him. Go, then, to him, remind him of all this, clasp his knees, and bid him give succour to the Trojans. Let the Achaeans be hemmed in at the sterns of their ships, and perish on the sea-shore, that they may reap what joy they may of their king, and that Agamemnon may rue his blindness in offering insult to the foremost of the Achaeans.”

Thetis wept and answered, “My son, woe is me that I should have borne or suckled you. Would indeed that you had lived your span free from all sorrow at your ships, for it is all too brief; alas, that you should be at once short of life and long of sorrow above your peers: woe, therefore, was the hour in which I bore you; nevertheless I will go to

the snowy heights of Olympus, and tell this tale to Jove, if he will hear our prayer: meanwhile stay where you are with your ships, nurse your anger against the Achaeans, and hold aloof from fight. For Jove went yesterday to Oceanus, to a feast among the Ethiopians, and the other gods went with him. He will return to Olympus twelve days hence; I will then go to his mansion paved with bronze and will beseech him; nor do I doubt that I shall be able to persuade him."

On this she left him, still furious at the loss of her that had been taken from him. Meanwhile Ulysses reached Chryse with the hecatomb. When they had come inside the harbour they furled the sails and laid them in the ship's hold; they slackened the forestays, lowered the mast into its place, and rowed the ship to the place where they would have her lie; there they cast out their mooring-stones and made fast the hawsers. They then got out upon the sea-shore and landed the hecatomb for Apollo; Chryseis also left the ship, and Ulysses led her to the altar to deliver her into the hands of her father. "Chryses," said he, "King Agamemnon has sent me to bring you back your child, and to offer sacrifice to Apollo on behalf of the Danaans, that we may propitiate the god, who has now brought sorrow upon the Argives."

So saying he gave the girl over to her father, who received her gladly, and they ranged the holy hecatomb all orderly round the altar of the god. They washed their hands and took up the barley-meal to sprinkle over the victims, while Chryses lifted up his hands and prayed aloud on their behalf. "Hear me," he cried, "O god of the silver bow, that protectest Chryse and holy Cilla, and rulest Tenedos with thy might. Even as thou didst hear me aforetime when I prayed, and didst press hardly upon the Achaeans, so hear me yet again, and stay this fearful pestilence from the Danaans."

Thus did he pray, and Apollo heard his prayer. When they had done praying and sprinkling the barley-meal, they drew back the heads of the victims and killed and flayed them. They cut out the thigh-bones, wrapped them round in two layers of fat, set some pieces of raw meat on the top of them, and then Chryses laid them on the wood fire and poured wine over them, while the young men stood near him with five-pronged spits in their hands. When the thigh-bones were burned and they had tasted the inward meats, they cut the rest up small, put the pieces upon the spits, roasted them till they were done, and drew them off: then, when they had finished their work and the feast was ready, they ate it, and every man had his full share, so that all were satisfied. As soon as they had had enough to eat and drink, pages filled the mixing-bowl with wine and water and handed it round, after giving every man his drink-offering.

Thus all day long the young men worshipped the god with song, hymning him and chaunting the joyous paean, and the god took pleasure in their voices; but when the sun went down, and it came on dark, they laid themselves down to sleep by the stern cables of the ship, and when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared they again set sail for the host of the Achaeans. Apollo sent them a fair wind, so they raised their mast and hoisted their white sails aloft. As the sail bellied with the wind the ship flew through the deep blue water, and the foam hissed against her bows as she sped onward. When they reached the wide-stretching host of the Achaeans, they drew the vessel ashore, high and dry upon the sands, set her strong props beneath her, and went their ways to their own tents and ships.

But Achilles abode at his ships and nursed his anger. He went not to the honourable assembly, and sallied not forth to fight, but gnawed at his own heart, pining for battle and the war-cry.

Now after twelve days the immortal gods came back in a body to Olympus, and Jove led the way. Thetis was not unmindful of the charge her son had laid upon her, so she rose from under the sea and went through great heaven with early morning to Olympus, where she found the mighty son of Saturn sitting all alone upon its topmost ridges. She sat herself down before him, and with her left hand seized his knees, while with her right she caught him under the chin, and besought him, saying :—

"Father Jove, if I ever did you service in word or deed among the immortals, hear my prayer, and do honour to my son, whose life is to be cut short so early. King Agamemnon has dishonoured him by taking his prize and keeping her. Honour him then yourself, Olympian lord of counsel, and grant victory to the Trojans, till the Achaeans give my son his due and load him with riches in requital."

Jove sat for a while silent, and without a word, but Thetis still kept firm hold of his knees, and besought him a second time. "Incline your head," said she, "and promise me surely, or else deny me—for you have nothing to fear—that I may learn how greatly you disdain me."

At this Jove was much troubled and answered, "I shall have trouble if you set me quarrelling with Juno, for she will provoke me with her taunting speeches; even now she is always railing at me before the other gods and accusing me of giving aid to the Trojans. Go back now, lest she should find out. I will consider the matter, and will bring it about as you wish. See, I incline my head that you may believe me. This is the most

solemn promise that I can give to any god. I never recall my word, or deceive, or fail to do what I say, when I have nodded my head."

As he spoke the son of Saturn bowed his dark brows, and the ambrosial locks swayed on his immortal head, till vast Olympus reeled.

When the pair had thus laid their plans, they parted—Jove to his house, while the goddess quitted the splendour of Olympus, and plunged into the depths of the sea. The gods rose from their seats, before the coming of their sire. Not one of them dared to remain sitting, but all stood up as he came among them. There, then, he took his seat. But Juno, when she saw him, knew that he and the old merman's daughter, silver-footed Thetis, had been hatching mischief, so she at once began to upbraid him. "Trickster," she cried, "which of the gods have you been taking into your counsels now? You are always settling matters in secret behind my back, and have never yet told me, if you could help it, one word of your intentions."

"Juno," replied the sire of gods and men, "you must not expect to be informed of all my counsels. You are my wife, but you would find it hard to understand them. When it is proper for you to hear, there is no one, god or man, who will be told sooner, but when I mean to keep a matter to myself, you must not pry nor ask questions."

"Dread son of Saturn," answered Juno, "what are you talking about? I? Pry and ask questions? Never. I let you have your own way in everything. Still, I have a strong misgiving that the old merman's daughter Thetis has been talking you over, for she was with you and had hold of your knees this self-same morning. I believe, therefore, that you have been promising her to give glory to Achilles, and to kill much people at the ships of the Achaeans."

"Wife," said Jove, "I can do nothing but you suspect me and find it out. You will take nothing by it, for I shall only dislike you the more, and it will go harder with you. Granted that it is as you say; I mean to have it so; sit down and hold your tongue as I bid you for if I once begin to lay my hands about you, though all heaven were on your side it would profit you nothing."

On this Juno was frightened, so she curbed her stubborn will and sat down in silence. But the heavenly beings were disquieted throughout the house of Jove, till the cunning workman Vulcan began to try and pacify his mother Juno. "It will be intolerable," said he, "if you two fall to wrangling and setting heaven in an uproar about a pack of mortals. If such ill counsels are to prevail, we shall have no pleasure at our

banquet. Let me then advise my mother—and she must herself know that it will be better—to make friends with my dear father Jove, lest he again scold her and disturb our feast. If the Olympian Thunderer wants to hurl us all from our seats, he can do so, for he is far the strongest, so give him fair words, and he will then soon be in a good humour with us."

As he spoke, he took a double cup of nectar, and placed it in his mother's hand. "Cheer up, my dear mother," said he, "and make the best of it. I love you dearly, and should be very sorry to see you get a thrashing; however grieved I might be, I could not help, for there is no standing against Jove. Once before when I was trying to help you, he caught me by the foot and flung me from the heavenly threshold. All day long from morn till eve, was I falling, till at sunset I came to ground in the island of Lemnos, and there I lay, with very little life left in me, till the Sintians came and tended me."

Juno smiled at this, and as she smiled she took the cup from her son's hands. Then Vulcan drew sweet nectar from the mixing-bowl, and served it round among the gods, going from left to right; and the blessed gods laughed out a loud applause as they saw him bustling about the heavenly mansion.

Thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun they feasted, and every one had his full share, so that all were satisfied. Apollo struck his lyre, and the Muses lifted up their sweet voices, calling and answering one another. But when the sun's glorious light had faded, they went home to bed, each in his own abode, which lame Vulcan with his consummate skill had fashioned for them. So Jove, the Olympian Lord of Thunder, hied him to the bed in which he always slept; and when he had got on to it he went to sleep, with Juno of the golden throne by his side.

[The above text is taken from the Project Gutenberg EBook of The Iliad, by Homer; Translator: Samuel Butler. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2199/2199-h/2199-h.htm]

2.6.2 Detailed Summary

The *Iliad* is an epic poem divided into twenty-four books. In this section we shall offer a detailed summary of Book I which is prescribed in your syllabus for detailed study.

Chryseis is the daughter of Chryses, the priest of Apolloin Chryse located near Troy. In accordance with war custom, she was earlier taken, along with other young women,

as a ‘prize’ by the Achaeans (the Greeks in the text are called ‘Achaeans,’ ‘Danaans’ and ‘Argives’). She was ultimately allotted to the hero Agamemnon, a celebrated king well respected for his valour. In the beginning of Book I we see her father arriving at the camp of the Achaeans to request Agamemnon to free his daughter in exchange of a huge ransom. He has the sceptre of Apollo as a mark of his identity. He invokes the name of Apollo in whose reverence his daughter should be released. Agamemnon refuses to pay heed to his request. Moreover, he insults him by saying, “Your sceptre of the god and your wreath shall profit you nothing. I will not free her. She shall grow old in my house at Argos far from her own home, busying herself with her loom and visiting my couch.” Both afraid and insulted, Chryses goes to ‘the shore of the sounding sea’ and prays to Apollo for taking revenge on the ‘Danaans.’ Apollo gets angry with Agamemnon and sends pestilence to the Greek camp, first affecting ‘their mules and their hounds,’ and then the men. The death toll continues to mount, and seeing no end to it, Achilles calls a meeting of the chiefs on the tenth day to consider the ways of solving the problem. The help of ‘some priest or prophet, or some reader of dreams’ is sought for explaining the reason of Apollo’s anger. Calchas, the ‘son of Thestor, wisest of augurs,’ is summoned. But he is afraid to make the revelation as it will invite Agamemnon’s wrath. Achilles promises to protect the seer from Agamemnon’s anger. After Achilles’s assurance, Calchas reveals that Apollo is angry because Agamemnon has insulted his priest Chryses and refused to free his daughter. He also informs them that Apollo will not “deliver the Danaans from this pestilence till Agamemnon has restored the girl without fee or ransom to her father, and has sent a holy hecatomb to Chryse.” At this revelation, Agamemnon gets angry and chides Achilles for making the demand. He threatens him by saying, “Are you to keep your own prize, while I sit tamely under my loss and give up the girl at your bidding? Let the Achaeans find me a prize in fair exchange to my liking, or I will come and take your own, or that of Ajax or of Ulysses; and he to whomsoever I may come shall rue my coming.” They enter into heated arguments. Ultimately, Agamemnon agrees to free Chryseis and propitiate the god. Agamemnon then sends his men to fetch Briseis, Achilles’ girl. Despite being angry and feeling humiliated, Achilles agrees to hand over the girl to Agamemnon’s men. Achilles withdraws himself and all his men from the ongoing war against Troy. Then he prays to Thetis, his immortal mother, and implores her to seek the help of Zeus to avenge the insult and humiliation he has undergone: “Let the Achaeans be hemmed in at the sterns of their ships, and perish on the sea-shore, that they may reap what joy they may of their

king, and that Agamemnon may rue his blindness in offering insult to the foremost of the Achaeans." Thetis then moves to Zeus and informs him of Agamemnon's misdeed and her son's dishonour, and requested Him to "grant victory to the Trojans, till the Achaeans give my son his due and load him with riches in requital." Zeus agrees, rather reluctantly, to do so.

✓ **Quick Recap Activity:**

1. How many books does the *Iliad* have?
2. What is the basic theme of Book I of the *Iliad*?
3. Go through the prose translation of Book I of the epic given above and prepare a list of supernatural characters you come across.
4. There are some internet sources which catalogue the names of characters of the entire epic. Prepare your own list of these characters under three heads: Greeks, Trojans, and Divinities.
5. You have read about the *Iliad*'s structure and content in the earlier unit. Try to write a note on the importance of Book I.

2.6.3 Major Characters

➢ **Achilles:**

Achilles is the central character in Homer's epic *Iliad*. As a king he appears to rank below Agamemnon, but it is difficult to find this difference of status in his behaviour with Agamemnon. He is as severe in his denunciation of the latter as the latter is of him.

He was born out of a union of Peleus, a Greek aristocrat, and Thetis, a sea-goddess. He thus partakes of the characteristics of both a human being and a semi-god. As a valiant fighter he is respected by all. He has access to the all-powerful Jove (Zeus), mainly through his mother, and "his supremacy is powered by gods who favour, strengthen, and protect him" (Lattimore 47). A fearless fighter, he has both positive and negative character traits, and has all the ingredients of a tragic hero: he is vulnerable to emotions of grief and anger and shifting position regarding his stand on the course of action during the war.His imperfection is mostly evident in his prolonged anger which leads to his withdrawal from the Trojan War for a long period of time.In Book I we can trace the source of his anger in Agamemnon's mischievous behaviour and intention.

Achilles burns with anger for a substantial period of time and participates in the war only when his friend Patroklos is killed by Hector. This testifies to his sense of loyalty to his dear friend. Despite being gifted with such noble feelings, he is helpless in controlling his anger. "Anger," it has been said, "has clouded a high intelligence, and Achilleus acts uncertainly" (Lattimore 48). He is acutely sensitive to his sense of honour. He feels that his honour is violated by Agamemnon who publicly humiliates him and takes away from him his woman.

In Book I Achilles appears as a person of virtues, one who stands for ethical issues. He has kindness, respect and love. "He is a man of culture and intelligence; he knows how to respect heralds, how to entertain estranged friends. He presides over the games with extraordinary courtesy and tact. He is not only a great fighter but a great gentleman" (Lattimore 48). He is moved by Chryses's appeal to Agamemnon and other Greek kings for the release of his daughter. He is also affected when Briseis is taken away from him. This act in itself constitutes a violation of his honour; he remains steadfast in his love and affection for his woman who was obtained through coercive means. He seems to have no lust for riches as he effortlessly refuses Agamemnon's gifts as well as the latter's proposal to return Briseis who supposedly remains untouched (Book IX). It has thus justly been said, "Not cash, land, sex or half-hearted apology moves Akhilleus to don armour, but the death of his dearest friend and companion Patroklos (16-17)" (15).

As pointed out by Richmond Lattimore, in Book XXIV "Apollo, outraged at the treatment of his friend Hector, practically describes Achilleus as a brute and a barbarian" (48) and feels that Achilles is not really so. Lattimore argues that "if he [Achilles] lacks the chivalry of Roland, Lancelot, or Beowulf, that is because theirs is a chivalry coloured with Christian humility which has no certain place in the gallery of Homeric virtues" (Lattimore 48).In the ultimate analysis one has to largely agree with Lattimore's observation that that Achilles is a real man of flesh and blood, "mortal and fallible, but noble enough to make his own tragedy a great one" (48).

- **Agamemnon:**

In contrast to Achilles, Agamemnon appears to be arrogant, given to irrational temper and violence. He leads the loose confederate of Greek kings and leaders against Troy. Paris of Troy, it may be mentioned, had earlier abducted Helen,with her consent, taking advantage of her husband King Menelaus's hospitality. This act which amounts

to a violation of ethical norms launched 'thousand' Greek ships for the purpose of taking revenge against Troy. Agamemnon, Menelaus's brother, leads this fleet of ships and is at present camping near Troy in the tenth year of the war for mounting the final assault.

Book I of the *Iliad* is mainly about Agamemnon's quarrel with Achilles. Both the characters have mutual respect for each other's valour. Yet they get entangled in unnecessary verbal duels that will have far-reaching consequences on the Trojan war. From this perspective, it appears that both of them lack tactical understanding and foresightedness, particularly Agamemnon on whom rests the responsibility of leading the entire team.

As we have already seen, Agamemnon is arrogant and highly conscious of his own status. Blinded by self-pride and arrogance, he acts in a way that divides his team. The process begins from the very beginning of Book I when Chryses, the priest of Apollo in Chryse, appears at his door with an appeal to free his daughter Chryseis who was taken captive and allotted to Agamemnon earlier. Although many of the leaders are positively disposed towards Chryses who offers a huge ransom, Agamemnon gets angry with the priest. Despite the fact that the priest carries the sceptre of Apollo, Agamemnon insults him, and in the process dishonours Apollo as well. This hurts the priest and enrages Apollo who sends pestilence to his camp. His attitude to women in general and captive girls in particular is simply disgusting. He asserts his patriarchal authority, male ego and a general sense of superiority when he reprimands Chryses by saying, "Your sceptre of the god and your wreath shall profit you nothing. I will not free her. *She shall grow old in my house at Argos far from her own home*, *busying herself with her loom and visiting my couch*" (emphasis added). This is pure sadism; the emphasised part of his retort in particular shows him in poor light. In the above quotation he specifies two basic duties for women: doing domestic chores and satisfying male pleasure. Both his injured pride and his lust for power which is intimately associated with the desire to have control over women as objects of desire come out openly when he demands, and subsequently sends his men to fetch, Briseis, Achilles's woman. His demand that the loss of his woman should be compensated by his co-warrior's woman is irrational and shows that he has no respect for his co-warriors;this creates a rift in his own camp. This turns a friend into an enemy. This 'intimate enemy' in his own camp will be a source of constant irritation for him.

D.J. Snider makes an interesting parallelism between this incident and the abduction of Helen. He observes that "[t]he cause of Achilles is, therefore, at bottom, the cause

of Helen; he, the first of Greek men, striving to restore the first of Greek women, is injured in his honor by a wanton act of authority; the wrong done by the Trojans to the woman now finds its parallel in the wrong done by the Greeks to the man" (189). This "special form of the wrong, the taking of Briseis", is in fact a parallel to "the taking of Helen; the Greek commander is thus seen to commit the very offence for which he and his Greek armament are seeking to punish the Trojans" (189).He argues that "the Greek cause… is now at war with itself, which is just the ground of this internal strife; the Captain makes all the Greeks sharers to a degree in the wrong which they have come to avenge" (189),

So from both the practical and ethical points of view, the Greeks find themselves in a difficult situation. It is Agamemnon who is mainly responsible for causing harm to the Greek cause. His actions are responsible for the cause of pestilence in the Greek camp, for Thetis getting angry and Zeus promising to take steps, for the withdrawal of Achilles from the war for a considerable period of time, and similar other factors.

✓ **Quick Recap Activity:**

1. Write a short note on the nature of political formations of the time. Read the text first to gather information about this, and only then start writing.
2. Give your opinion about Achilles's parentage. What is so striking about it?
3. Why does Achilles withdraw from the war?
4. Do you really consider Achilles as brutish and unemotional? Come to your conclusion only after reading Book I.
5. Trace some traits in Agamemnon's character that may appear to be unethical.
6. How many women characters do you find in Book I. Analyse the role they play in Book I.

2.6.4 Major Themes

➢ **Invocation to the Muse:**

The *Iliad* opens with an invocation to the Muse, the goddess of poetic imagination. In a poetic rendition the invocation reads:

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus's son Achilleus
and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the
Achaians,

hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls
of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting
of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished
since that time when first there stood in division of conflict
Atreus' son the lord of men and brilliant Achilleus.

(Lattimore 59)

"Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed, / Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles" (1.8-9). Clearly, the help of the goddess is sought to render a story of epic dimension, that of the clash between Agamemnon and Achilles. The apparent understanding is that the poet as a human being is too insignificant to render the stories of great men and divinities, and hence the interference of the supernatural agencies is necessary to do so. In fact, this has been done at several important moments in the story of the epic. The invocation also suggests the important dramatic moments in the texts.

The invocation for all practical reasons introduces the main theme of the epic which, as has been already mentioned, is the clash between Agamemnon and Achilles. The poet seeks the divine inspiration in order to know the origin and development of the quarrel and how it affects the course of the epic.

There is another reason for seeking the intervention. The epic is lofty in both theme and style, and elaborate in design and length. In order to achieve flawlessness in themes, designs and styles, the poet must invoke the Muse.

Invocation to the Muse became the part of epic conventions down the ages. Homer in *The Odyssey* also employs this convention:

"Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven
far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel."

The invocation to the Muse in Virgil's *The Aeneid* reads like the following:

"Arms, and the man I sing, who, forced by fate,
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
Expell'd and Exil'd, left the Trojan shore."

John Milton borrows this epic device to use it in *Paradise Lost:*

"Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste

Brought death into the world, and all our woe,

With loss of Eden"

So, you can understand how important the invocation to the Muse has become in the very scheme of an epic poetry.

➢ **Role of Gods and Goddesses:**

The *Iliad* projects a world where Gods and human beings live in close proximity. Though separated by spaces as well as a hierarchy of status and power, they have frequent interactions between themselves. The gods and goddesses are loosely controlled by Zeus, and form a class of their own. "These gods have, in relation to men, absolute power. God may be overborne by god. The strongest is Zeus, who can do as he pleases, but often refrains from so doing for fear of unpleasantness" (Lattimore 54). Interestingly, there are instances of physical interactions between human beings and gods/goddesses, the birth of Achilles being one glaring example of this. He was born out of a union between Peleus, a Greek aristocrat, and Thetis, a sea-goddess.

The gods have their own spheres of influence, behave like mortals, being friendly and quarrelsome with particular beings of their own ilk. They can be as angry and jealous as their human counterparts, and even interfere in human affairs. They have their own wards and favourites, and either by favouring or opposing them, they intensify the dramatic situations in the epic. "For narrative, they are enormously useful. They can turn events, reconcile otherwise impossible motives, rescue people who have got to be rescued. But one thing the gods-as-persons of Homer do not do : they do not change human nature. They manipulate Achilleus, Aeneas, Paris, but they do not make them what they are. The choices are human; and in the end, despite all divine interferences, the *Iliad* is a story of people." (Lattimore 54). The wars between communities and races are also caused by divine desires. "For example, it is Hera's and Athena's rivalry with Aphrodite as well as their hostility toward Paris which causes and extends the bloodshed of the Trojan war" (Taylor).

It has been observed that "in some ways men understand their gods better than their gods understand them. For while men often petition their gods for favor, few mortals actually confidently expect their gods' beneficence" (Taylor)

To sum up the nature of gods and goddesses in the *Iliad*, we can quote Lattimore, "The gods of Homer are mainly immortal men and women, incomparably more

powerful than mortals, but like mortals susceptible to all human emotions and appetites, therefore capable of being teased, flattered, enraged, seduced, chastise (Lattimore 54). The qualities that we find in the works after the spread of Christianity are not much found in the *Iliad*.

➢ **Theme of Anger:**

The *Iliad* is basically based on the element of anger that fuels rivalries. It is manifested in the behaviour of human beings, but even the gods and goddesses are not immune from it. In Book I, Apollo sends pestilence in anger to Agamemnon's camp which causes immense damage to the Greek cause. Thetis too is seen angry at her son Ulysses's humiliation by Agamemnon and lodges complaint to Zeus. But more spectacular is the anger of both Agamemnon and Achilles. This emotional element brings out the worst in the character of Agamemnon. Similarly, Achilles's vulnerability to anger brings out his unstable nature. Go back to our analysis of these two major characters as well as consult the relevant sections of the text, and you will be able to cull many examples.

➢ **Style:**

We need to remember that the *Iliad* was meant for recitation and hence followed the pattern of oral transmissions. Since it was meant to narrate chronicles of a great war and sing of the deeds of great warriors, it maintained a lofty style. Its conventions included invocation to the Muse, elaborate description of genealogies, patterns of comparisons, use of similes, both simple and complex, and ekphrases (extended descriptions of objects). The elaborate description of Achilles's new shield, for example, is an example of ekphrasis. The metre employed is dactylic hexameter.One also comes across a pattern of repetitions of motives and comparisons.

✓ **Activities for Learners:**

1. Consult relevant print and internet sources and write a critical note on the identity of the Muses.
2. Read the relevant portion of the text and add some points that will help you write an analytical answer on the invocation to the Muse in the *Iliad*.
3. Besides anger, do you find the presence of any other strong emotions in Book I of the *Iliad*?
4. Read any poetic translation of the *Iliad* Book I and try to collect appropriate examples of various stylistic traits of the epic.

2.6.5 Summing up

In this unit we have introduced Book I of the *Iliad* which sets the tone for the rest of the epic. It locates the source of the rivalry between the two great heroes—Agamemnon and Achilles. It offers us a picture of nature of the political formations that the kings and princes entered into. If you can properly examine the tone and tenor of this book, you will be in a better position to evaluate the entire epic. You also have some idea about the role of divine characters who behave like mortal human characters and cause and abet rivalries and wars. Moreover, we are now in a better position to examine the structure and form of the epic and how they contain the content of the work.

2.6.6 Comprehension Exercises

Broad Questions:

1. Analyse the character of Agamemnon and bring out the heroic traits in him. How effective is he as a leader?
2. Analyse the character of Achilles. Do you think that he is a character who has been wronged?
3. Write a comparative discussion of the characters of Achilles and Agamemnon.
4. Critically analyse the stylistic devices employed in Book I of the *Iliad*.

Middle-length Questions:

1. Write a critical note on the epic convention of the Invocation to the Muse and comment on Homer's use of it.
2. Analyse the role of the supernatural agents in Book I of the *Iliad* and underscore their function in it.
3. Write a critical note on anger as a theme in Book I of the *Iliad*.
4. "Anger," it has been said, "has clouded a high intelligence, and Achilleus acts uncertainly." Do you agree? Explain.
5. Agamemnon is 'blinded by self-pride and arrogance.' Give at least two instances to prove the point.

Short Questions:

1. What does Calchas reveal in the meeting?
2. How does Agamemnon react to Calchas' revelation?
3. Why was Achilles angry?
4. What do you know about Achilles' parentage?
5. Who sends pestilence to Agamemnon's camp and why?

2.6.7 Suggested Reading

Lattimore, Richmond. Introduction. *The Iliad of Homer*. Trans. and Intro. by Richmond Lattimore. 1951. Chicago: Phoenix Books/The U of Chicago P, 1961. 11-55.

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Kearns, Emily. "The Gods in the Homeric Epics." *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. Ed. Robert Fowler. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 59-73.

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NOTES

NOTES

Module-3

Sophocles: *Oedipus, the King*

Unit 7 ❑ *Poetics:* Aristotelian Concept of Tragedy

Structure

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3.7.9 Role of Chorus
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3.7.13 Suggested Reading

3.7.0 Introduction

To talk of Greek Tragedy is to perforce talk of its understanding with the aid of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a treatise that remains our primary window of approaching classical drama. The *World History Encyclopedia* introduces Aristotle as "a Greek philosopher who pioneered systematic, scientific examination in literally every area of human knowledge and was known, in his time, as 'the man who knew everything' and later simply as 'The Philosopher', needing no further qualification as his fame was so widespread". In this Unit, our purpose will be to acquaint you with the essentials of his understanding of classical Tragedy that in turn will enable you to comprehend Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King* in its right perspective.While the expanse and purpose of *Poetics* goes much beyond the parameters of the discussion we will take up here, it will still initiate you on the lines of critical understanding that are necessary to place the Sophoclean play in perspective. By the end of this Unit, you will be equipped not just with the acumen required to get along with Sophocles, you should, with help from your

counselor, also be able to apply Aristotelian understanding to perspectivise the evolutionary trends of English drama as well, that you will come across in your entire syllabus for this programme.

3.7.1 Aristotle—A Bio-brief

Aristotle (384-322 BC), son of Nicomachus who was the court physician of Macedonia, was born in Stagira, and lived there till he moved to Plato's Academy in Athens around the age of 17. While he is variously known as a Greek philosopher, 'The First Teacher' (in the Arab world), and simply as 'The Philosopher' in the Western world, it is indeed difficult to pin down on any one of these, owing to his diverse learning. The one score years that Aristotle spent with Plato were by common consent, the most productive phase of his learning, his deference for and critical opposition with his teacher being remarkable not just to the advancement of learning, but also firmly grounding the tradition of healthy debates. Historians and experts of classical literature are of the opinion that the softening of Plato's initial position in his later writings are largely the result of these sustained encores with his most gifted student. The Roman philosopher Cicero (from whom the Ciceronian style of writing derives) is famously supposed to have said that while Plato's prose resembled silver, Aristotle's was "a flowing river of gold" (www.history.com).

Following the death of Plato in 347 BC, Aristotle is said to have left Athens and settled on the coast of Asia Minor (islands of the Greek archipelago) where he took up pioneering research in marine biology. While at the Academy, however, Aristotle had commenced his career as a teacher, having been entrusted with subjects like Rhetoric and Dialogue. Five years hence, Aristotle was to become tutor to Alexander the Great in Macedonia, and historians have traced the former's influence in the activities of the conqueror even amidst his exploits around the world.

By 335 BC however, Aristotle was back in Athens where he converted the Lyceum, formerly a wrestling school, into a place of learning that soon became the choice destination of learners from across Greece. Aristotle is said to have composed about 200 works in disciplines as diverse as biology, cosmology, philosophy, ethics, politics—in other words, on every possible branch of human knowledge that was conceivable in his time! Scholars have customarily tended to divide his existing works into four broad categories that give us an idea of the range of learning:

1. The 'Organon' being a set of writings that deals with philosophical and scientific investigations.
2. Theoretical works that deal with the broad spectrum of biology, cosmology, physics and even metaphysics.
3. The so-called practical works like *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, their aspect of practicality deriving from investigations into human nature as seen through the levels of the individual, the family and society.
4. Works like *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* that examine human productivity as evidenced in art, and its salutary impact on life at large. (Catalogue sourced from www.history.com)

By common scholarly consent, the most important of Aristotle's treatises thus include *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *De Anima* (On the Soul) and *Poetics*. If this vast range of studies incorporated in a single man surprises you, then you need to understand that Aristotle's was not a compartmentalised or fragmented approach to learning, he was rather pervaded by a natural curiosity about everything that concerned the human situation in its largest possible expanse. We must credit him for trying to make this vast horizontal learning comprehensible and meaningful by interpreting it all through the lens of a broad philosophical understanding. It is equally interesting to note that none of these were penned as written treatises for publication, rather it was all delivered as lectures at the Lyceum that were taken down by his illustrious students like Theophrastus who have been instrumental in its dissemination. As an interesting trivia, Aristotle is said to have had this habit of moving back and forth as he lectured, and this has earned the Lyceum the name 'Peripatetic School', from the Greek word *peripatetikos*, which would mean walking around.

3.7.2 Introduction to *Poetics*

As laid out at the beginning of this Unit, our concern here is with the text of *Poetics*. While we will be discussing most important concepts that Aristotle took up for discussion in *Poetics*, you must understand that this crystallization is not a substitute for reading the text in its English translation.

Primarily, we must keep in mind that Aristotle's treatise has an argumentative discourse pattern wherein he refutes his teacher Plato's ideas on the nature of poetry and

poetic truth, why poetry cannot be relegated simply to the domain of an imitative art as opposed to other more useful arts, and to that effect what is it about poetry that gives it superiority over disciplines like history or even philosophy. This makes the *Poetics* a very demanding critical text but one that is immensely rewarding in terms of being one of the earliest theoretical deliberations of dramatic theory through a philosophic perception of literature and aesthetics.You might be wondering why we talk so much on poetry while we are statedly to discuss Tragedy as an art form. It needs to be made clear in this context that in classical literary aesthetics, the term poetry is used more comprehensively than we understand it now, since verse was by and large the medium of composition. So when we use the term poetry in the context of Aristotle's deliberations, please understand that tragedy too is a form of poetic utterance.

Aristotle's *Poetics* runs into 26 chapters, and while all of those do not need to figure in our present discussion, let us nonetheless have an overview of the content of each. This will enable you to understand the logical manner in which the treatise is thought out. **The sections in bold demarcate specific portions that are important for you at this point of time:**

Chapter-wise Content Outline of Aristotle's Poetics (Sourced from www.the-philosophy.com). Based on *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. S. H. Butcher, 3rd Edn., 1902.

Chapter No.	Outline of Content	Comment/Significance
1	**Defining the purpose of poetry as imitation**	Medium, Object, Manner/Mode of imitation & inherent distinction from Plato's understanding
2	Purpose of imitation in balanced representation of humanity	Formulating thereby the basic difference between Tragedy and Comedy; placing them with regard to other arts
3	Methods of imitation—Telling and Showing	Persists with the various modes of artistic imitation; logically moving towards a definition of Tragedy
4	Poetry as literary product—based on imitation, and reflective of human propensity	Classifications into Tragedy and Comedy, the gradual evolution of forms

Chapter No.	Outline of Content	Comment/Significance
5	Epic, Tragedy and Comedy; Significance of span of time being encompassed through action	Formulates systematic differences/ parallels between Epic and Tragedy in particular, assigns specific subject matter to each type
6	**Definition of Tragedy**	Distinctly classifies the constituent elements of Tragedy; addresses the primacy of Plot over all else
7	**Developing the plot from the story; the principle of Organic Unity**	Ideas of wholeness (internal connection between parts) & magnitude (external expanse); concepts of necessity and probability; reversal of fortunes as outcome(s)
8	**Organic Unity further explained and clarified—the unit of imitation**	Unity is presupposed of the action that is shown, not of the life of the protagonist
9	Difference between Poetry and History	Binaries of universal/ particular; why Poetry offers a higher level of truth; understanding the importance of causal connection; the philosophical dimension of imitation; the episodic plot
10	**Simple and Complex Plots**	Significance of Reversal of Intention and Recognition
11	**Reversal and Recognition further explained in the light of the evocation of Tragic Pleasure**	Connecting turns of the Plot to the arousal of Pity and Fear
12	The quantitative parts of Tragedy/tragic action	Prologue, Episode, Exodos, Parodos, Stasimon

Chapter No.	Outline of Content	Comment/Significance
13	Inclusions and Exclusions in Plot; securing the specific effect of Tragedy	Singular intentions of the plot, the nature of the ideal protagonist of Tragedy, the final end being the evocation of Pity and Fear
14	The internal arrangement of situations—the knotting of the plot	How proper conditions for imitation alone can contribute to desired emotions of Pity and Fear
15	**The four criteria required of a 'character' in Tragedy—Goodness, Propriety, Verisimilitude (true to life), Consistency**	Gravitates towards defining the expected attributes of a Tragic Hero, so as to strike the twin emotions of Pity and Fear in the audience through a mimetic representation (imitation) of the trajectory of her/his life
16	Four types of Recognition—By signs, Invented at will by the (tragic) poet, By memory when the sight of some object awakens a feeling, By Reasoning	Related to the unfolding of the Plot, once again by causal connection and true to principles of imitation
17	The emphasis is on showing rather than telling	Since plot is all about action, all that which can be 'shown' in keeping with classical decorum should be presented on stage
18	**Complication and Unravelling/*Denouement.*** Accordingly, the 4 Kinds of Tragedy—Simple, Complex, Pathetic, Ethical	2 phases of the plot—node and outcome; Choral odes as part of organic whole

Chapter No.	Outline of Content	Comment/Significance
19	Diction and Thought	While Thought is to be produced by dramatic speech composed according to rules of Rhetoric, Diction belongs to the domain of delivery rather than of poetic art
20	Diction/Language	Analysis of parts of speech and grammar; Butcher considers this a probable interpolation
21	Poetic Diction	Modes of speech admissible in poetry, with special emphasis on metaphor
22	Poetic Diction continued	The appropriateness of vocabulary in Tragedy
23	On Epic poetry	Relative analysis of Epic, History and Tragedy
24	Epic Poetry continued	Relative points between Epic and Tragedy
25	**Poetic Truth vis-à-vis common reality**	Defence of poetry, rebuttal of Plato
26	Epic and Tragedy compared on truth quotient	The superiority of Tragedy

As stated above, while the highlighted sections of The Poetics form the core of your curricular understanding for this Course, it is important that you have a comprehensive view of the ideas that Aristotle deals with in all the 26 chapters.

3.7.3 The Concept of *Mimesis* (Imitation)

You must have noticed in the section above that in the context of *The Poetics*, Aristotle repeatedly talks of imitation, which is the nearest English equivalent to the Greek term mimesis. Before we get into any kind of theoretical discussion we need to understand what exactly he means by imitation, how it is different from our common usage of the term, and why it is important in the context of Tragedy. It is around this very term that the differences of opinion between Plato and Aristotle have primarily centered, and it is the key idea around which the entire purpose of Tragedy evolves. It

is important to remember that for all the different branches of knowledge that Aristotle pursued, he was broadly a philosopher and commentator on life in general; so we need to understand his conception of poetry in its relation to life at large.

In Chapter 4 of *Poetics*, Aristotle rightly points out that the instinct for imitation is ingrained in human beings since childhood; in fact he goes on to say that we learn our first lessons through the instinctive habit of imitation. In his understanding therefore, imitation is not a compartmentalised act of life applicable only to poetic pursuits, but one of the verities of life itself. In that sense, Tragedy by virtue of being basically an imitation, is not to be understood simply as an extraneous or artificial poetic pursuit; it is the representation of life itself, albeit idealized. While we will deliberate on this at length, it might be pointed out here that this holistic understanding of the concept of imitation is the corner-stone of the difference of opinions between Plato and Aristotle with regard to the nature of imitation and poetic truth thereof, though both scholars recognised it as a vital component of art and aesthetics.

➢ **The Platonic view of Imitation:**

In Plato's metaphysical understanding, the material world appears temporal and mutable, hence devoid of any autonomous value but for the extent to which permanent and immutable ideas are manifest in the material world in the form of representations of the transcendental. By inference, poetry, which exists in a tangible form in the material world, is only worthwhile in that it represents transcendental ideas but can never become truth in itself. This is best explained by his analogy of the bed, itself a metaphor from Socrates, in Book 10 of *The Republic*. We can understand this in the following stages:

Stage 1 — The idea of a bed (the original), which exists only in nature, for a Platonic idea typically exists prior to and independent of the natural. It is the **original reality**.

Stage 2 — The bed that the carpenter makes, by virtue of his art being **useful art**, is then a copy of the original bed, hence it becomes **once removed from** (the idea) **reality**.

Stage 3 — The bed described by the poet or the painter (whose art is necessarily **imitative**) is then an imitation of the carpenter's bed, hence **twice removed from reality**.

We need to understand the short and the long of why Plato says or believes so, in order to understand why and how Aristotle's understanding differs from his teacher's. There are two things to grasp in this regard:

1. As stated earlier, Plato conceives of the material world as inherently only a channel for realizing his idea of the metaphysical, and hence devoid of any autonomous value. The metaphysical in this case is the original reality/ idea, which exists above and beyond the useful and imitative arts into which Plato classifies all human activity.
2. In a more topical sense, we must remember that Plato's texts are not inherently on the subject of art and aesthetics as Aristotle's *Poetics* is. While *The Republic* chiefly concerns evolving Greek polity in terms of how the ideal republic should be constituted, *Ion* (which also has references to imitation) is a debate over whether a poet's performance is a result of skills or divine possession.

With Plato therefore, the task of unraveling truths befalls not on the poet, whose medium is chiefly rhetoric; but on the philosopher who by the superiority of his discipline, is able to thrash out the original/ metaphysical reality from mere imitations. Poetry thus becomes a copy of a copy, and poets stand to be banished from the ideal republic since they can only mislead citizens with their flowery lies!

➢ **The Aristotelian understanding of Imitation:**

In striking contrast to Plato and even his teacher Socrates, Aristotle was an empiricist. This is to say that he was not just a reductive materialist, for he thought of the body as "the matter", and also perceived the psyche as "the form of each living animal" (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). As the first of the moderns, he could not therefore have subscribed to the Platonic view of material existence as simply valueless in itself; so he recognised imitation not as mere copying but as a representation of the ideal that is crystallized in human consciousness. In his perception, human beings are essentially mimetic, hence the urge to create works of art that reflect and represent reality forms the core of his theory of imitation and thereby of the *Poetics*.

If we revive the analogy of the bed to understand Aristotle's concept of imitation, he would say that the poet, instead of copying from the carpenter, actually perfects the idea of the bed into an ideal representation. For him however, medium, object and the manner of imitation are of paramount importance. He does away with any distinction between useful and imitative arts, and states that epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic

poetry, the music of a flute or lyre—are all modes of imitation. For Aristotle, imitation is not just visual or auditory similarity, the medium rather is a mimetic representation of the emotions one feels while going through the experience. This is his way of connecting mind with matter. Significantly, while Plato found greater likeness between poetry and painting, Aristotle saw greater resemblance between poetry and music, though the objective and manner of imitation is different in each form of art. The key distinction he institutes with Plato in respect of imitation is that in Aristotle's view, imitation involves the faculty of creative imagination, so that the end result is by no means a mere copy of the original; rather a crystallization of its essence. This gives to art the dimension of universality, whether of a philosophical approach to life or in terms of its appeal to the emotions. Logically therefore, the purpose of imitative art is pleasure, though this means a mix of edification and gratification. The idea of verisimilitude or likeness is central to Aristotle's concept of imitation. In the case of Tragedy in particular, it is the similarity of the protagonist's fortunes, seen from a distance, that gives spectators the tragic feel. You would at this stage definitely wonder that when there are troubles enough in life, why should one need to witness a tragic spectacle to imbibe a feeling of suffering. It is here that we require a profound understanding, for Aristotle makes imitation or mimesis a key factor behind drawing lessons from Tragedy, which in the ultimate analysis, produces a therapeutic effect. We will come to more of this in subsequent sections. In fact, the full understanding of imitation can emerge only when we place it in the context of Aristotle's definition of Tragedy.

3.7.4 Definition and Constituents of Tragedy

Aristotle's definition of Tragedy is a long and serious one, let us understand it in detail so that we are able to place all its constituents and processes in the right perspective. Having outlined the contours of Comedy, the differences between Tragedy and Epic, and after deliberating on the aspect of imitation in earlier chapters, in Chapter 6 of *Poetics*, he writes:

> Tragedy, then, is **an imitation of an action** that is **serious**, **complete**, and **of a certain magnitude**; **in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament**, the several kinds being **found in separate parts of the play** in the **form of action, not of narrative**; through **pity and fear** effecting the **proper purgation** of these emotions. (Trans. Butcher 23)

The highlighted portions of this definition denote the key terms that we will subsequently discuss. Immediately following the definition, he further goes on to clarify :

> By 'language embellished', I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony', and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts', I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.

If we break down the definition into its key points, the following are what merit specific attention:

- ✓ **Tragedy is an imitation of an action**. This is to be understood in the light of the discussion on imitation that has preceded. Since imitation in Aristotle means artistic recreation, its use in defining Tragedy is to be understood as idealized representation. This does not mean anything unworldly, or improbable; but only such turn of events as can have a causal connection between them. By saying so, Aristotle is stressing not just on the importance of the plot and structure, but also on the philosophical intent of Tragedy/ Poetry, which is quite at variance and logically so, from Plato.
- ✓ Both the action and its imitation in Tragedy are **serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude** (justifiable length). Clearly the emphasis here is on what kind of action can constitute the crux of Tragedy, on the concept of organic unity, and on the realistic length to which the action must unfold so as to accommodate all the movements of the plot.
- ✓ The use of **language** in Tragedy is such that **it is embellished** (added/ decorated) with **aesthetically pleasing devices**. As a set of constituents, there are certain aspects that are therefore additional to the primary constituents. We will discuss them in the following sub-section.
- ✓ Such devices are spread out in **different parts of the play**. A tragic play can therefore be divided into several parts that together constitute the whole.
- ✓ **Action is of prime importance in Tragedy**, so even language is used to explain action, not just narration (as in Epic). So it is *mimetic* in the sense that the tragic action shows rather than tells, unlike the epic mode which is *diegetic* in that there is often an invisible or all-knowing narrator who probes into the minds of characters from a distance.
- ✓ The purpose of Tragedy is to bring out fears that are latent in members of the audience, and by **purging the excess of fear**, to effect a tranquil state of mind.

Obviously, this is sought to be done by projecting the fortunes of the tragic protagonist in ways that must find some resemblance with the psychic understanding of the audience. This is the principle of tragic pleasure, also called catharsis, which in the ultimate analysis gives a therapeutic purpose to Tragedy/Poetry. The audience is taught to **pity** the unjust fortunes of the protagonist, as also to **fear** for one like themselves.

➢ **The Constituent Elements of Tragedy:**

In the same chapter, Aristotle lists the six constituent elements of Tragedy and explains them in brief in the order of importance.

1. **Plot**, which holds the kernel of the action, is according to him the first principle and the soul of Tragedy.
2. **Character**, which holds second place, is entrusted the task of unfolding of the plot.
3. **Thought** is the manifestation of what the characters think and feel, and is accordingly reflected in their actions. Hence it combines both speech and action. Aristotle admirably calls it "the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances".
4. **Diction**, which is the expression of the meaning in words, has according to Aristotle, the same meaning whether in verse or in prose. It is broadly the medium of language/ expression through which characters reveal their thought or feelings. It is however incumbent that the proper diction be followed for Tragedy, which is supposed to be distinctly different from that of Comedy.
5. Of the embellishments/adornments that diction takes, one is **Song**, to which Aristotle accords the chief place in the decoration of the diction.
6. As the other form of embellishment comes **Spectacle**, which has an emotional attraction of its own, but is perceived as the least artistic and seemingly connected least with the art of poetry. Cumulatively, it includes stage décor and the theatrical effects that are presented on stage, and since Aristotle is of the opinion that the power of Tragedy can be felt even apart from representation and actors, he attributes the production of spectacular effects more to the stage machinist than the poet. We must understand that by 'representation', he does not mean to compromise with the action itself, but presumably alludes to

paraphernalia like scenes of torture, use of dress and colour, stage setting and the like.

Of the six constituents, the relationship between Plot and Character has traditionally produced the most confusion in understanding, so let us address this first before moving on to other things in greater detail.

3.7.5 Plot and Character

We know by now that Aristotle perceives Tragedy as an imitation of an action which is an image of human life, that consists of a mode of action and not merely a mental quality. He calls this mode of action, the Plot, which is supposed to mean a compendious expression for external incidents and internal mental processes and motives, all of which work in cohesion and of course in accordance with the laws of probability and necessity. Character, according to Aristotle, does determine human qualities, but it is primarily by virtue of their actions that people are either happy or sad. Hence character, with its two facets ethos (character as human entity) and dianoia (thought process) is imperatively contained within the plot, since 'action' in Aristotelian terms springs from inward power that manifests itself through external doings. Humphrey House explains this in terms of the tendency to do good or bad remaining inherently unrealised, and having the possibility of being manifest only through action. This action also includes two vital turns of the plot that are necessary for the emotional impact of tragedy to unfold—*Peripeteia* (reversal of intention) and *Anagnorisis* (recognition). We will take you through an understanding of these terms in due course.

Having laid out before you the Aristotelian perception of Plot and Character, we will now first see from the relevant passage in *Poetics* what the confusion is all about, and then place it in perspective. In Chapter 6 once again, Aristotle, in emphasizing upon the paramount importance of the structure of incidents, writes:

> Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in a subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (Trans. Butcher 27)

We must realize that in talking of the possibility of tragedy without character but not without action, Aristotle voices the belief that personages do not reveal their

characters by themselves; their moral bent impels them to act in a particular manner. Clearly, he does not subscribe to the modern critics who hold the view that character lies in apriori thought, or that action must stand in relation to certain mental states. Since Aristotle realizes character through action, he can well subordinate its individual entity to the plot, the latter being an all-pervasive whole.

So when you read that Aristotle says that the plot is the first principle—the soul of Tragedy, and that character holds the second place, you should not be confused or misled by the plethora of arguments that exist in this regard.

3.7.6 Dramatic Unity

Now that you have a fair idea of the primacy of the Plot in Aristotelian conception, we proceed to an understanding of what it is that makes the Plot so important. For understanding the structure of the Plot, we have to go back to the early part of the definition where Aristotle says that apart from being serious in nature, the action must also be a **complete whole** and have a certain **magnitude**.

Why exactly are wholeness and magnitude important, and how do they contribute to the impact of tragedy?

By **wholeness**, Aristotle means that the action must have a well defined beginning such that nothing that is necessary for the fable should exist outside of it when the play begins. Thus there should be nothing in the beginning of a play that might follow from some other causal necessity; everything in it must have a natural existence. Similarly, there should be a conclusive ending where all ends following causally are tied up neatly, and nothing at all should be left out of it. This beginning and ending must be connected by a well-defined middle. You can now use this understanding of wholeness to examine for yourselves if the plot of Sophocles' tragic play *Oedipus the King* conforms to the Aristotelian prescription.

On the question of **magnitude**, Aristotle's view is that it is not just enough for a beautiful object (and he considers Tragedy one such object) to be an aggregate of several parts, it must also have a certain magnitude (length/dimension) that determines its beauty and order. He does not however particularly lay down any specific length, but only outlines the governing principles—something that can be grasped in a single viewing, and a length that can easily be committed to memory. Far from laying down

a specific number of Acts or Scenes for a play, Aristotle in fact says that it is not the business of artistic theory to mention any limit of length. All the same, there is something far more important that he prescribes in this regard: "… the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the laws of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad." (Trans. Butcher 33)

Once again, we need to highlight that imitation for Aristotle is not mere copying, but imaginative recreation; and imagination is not something that can just run wild, it is strictly governed by the farthest philosophical expanse of causal connection. You can also see for yourselves how, in defining the plot, he actually fuses vital ingredients of the understanding of character, which as the prime agent of the plot, is responsible for it's unraveling.

Our understanding of the twin concepts of **necessity** and **probability** will further reveal why Aristotle gives precedence to plot over character. Having broached these concepts in Chapter 7, he clarifies in Chapter 8 that unity of plot does not mean unity of the hero, for there can be multifarious incidents in the life of a person that do not and cannot necessarily form the subject of a single Tragedy. It is therefore the function of the plot to select events from the life of a person who is to be the protagonist of a particular play, and the rationale behind such selection is governed by incidents that have between them a necessary and a probable connection. You can understand this by the fact that Sophocles has as many as 3 plays in the Oedipus cycle, each of them dealing with different aspects of the life of Oedipus. Imagine a situation where all these episodes were put into a single play and if that were to be your syllabus! So necessity and probability are important factors in deciding not just the length of a play but also the dramatic or organic unity between its several parts. In this context we can also understand why in Aristotle's understanding, poetry is superior to history; while the latter gives an account of what has happened, the former deals with what may happen. Once again, this 'may' includes only those parts of the action that can be strung together by the principles of necessity and probability, that we may cumulatively call causal connection. It is this basic understanding that lies beyond Aristotle's claim of poetry being the highest form of philosophy, a discipline where logical connection is the buzzword. To put it simply, while poetry deals with universal truths, the staple of history is only the particular. This connects us to the classical understanding of the poet as

maker, not just a maker of verses but of plausible plots. To that extent, even history can be the subject of poetry (as we often find in Shakespeare's History Plays), but it is the task of the poet to choose only those events of history for a single plot that can be woven together by a causal connection. It is only when tragic action can be strung together in a cause-effect relationship that it gives rise to the cathartic impact which is the desired end of Tragedy.

3.7.7 Simple & Complex Plot—*Peripeteia*, *Anagnorisis*

A brief recap first of what we have learnt so far about Plot:

- **Is the kernel of the entire tragic action—the "arrangement of the incidents" as Aristotle says**
- **Involves action, not just narration**
- **Is the most vital constituent element of Tragedy, in which are contained all other elements, including Character**
- **Events of the plot are bound by causal connection, as warranted by the logical laws of necessity and probability**
- **Has a well defined beginning, a connected middle, and a coherent ending that culminates all action**

In Chapter 10, Aristotle classifies plots into **Simple** and **Complex**, on the straight logic that actions in real life, of which the plot of Tragedy is a mimetic representation, show a similar distinction. It is therefore imperative that like Plot itself, its various kinds must also be understood not just in terms of form but as reflection of the larger panorama of life itself.

What then is the basis of this distinction?

A plot is considered to be simple when the change of fortunes of the protagonist takes place without any reversal of intention or even recognition. Conversely, a complex plot is one in which similar change of fortunes is accompanied by reversal or recognition, or in fact both. It goes without saying that either or both of these should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that whatever follows comes as necessary or probable result of the action that has preceded.

Let us now understand what exactly Aristotle means by the terms 'Reversal' and 'Recognition', which he takes up in Chapter 11.

➢ **Reversal of Intention (*Peripeteia*) and Recognition (*Anagnorisis*):**

By reversal of intention, Aristotle implies a change by which the action comes to have just the opposite impact from what was desired, but such reversal is perforce subject to tenable conditions of necessity or probability. A classic example of this is found in your syllabised text, *Oedipus the King*; where the messenger from Corinth comes supposedly to liberate Oedipus from alarms about his mother's identity but inadvertently produces quite the opposite impact by revealing his origins. In this connection you need to understand the vital difference between the possible (which exists in the realm of the knowable) and the probable (which exists outside the domain of what appears to be knowable, but can happen all the same). *Peripeteia* can therefore be understood as the tragic effects of human efforts that produce results diametrically opposed to its intentions. As an explication of the ironies of human blindness (beyond the physical) it is a vital component of the complex plot of a Tragedy.

Recognition is a stage that is inevitably connected to the reversal of intentions, and follows from it. Butcher translates it to imply "a change (of state) from ignorance (of material facts hitherto unknown) to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortunes". Thus while *peripeteia* is the working in blindness of one's imminent defeat, *anagnorisis* brings the awakening of the truth. In Tragedy, *anagnorisis* most often comes after the catastrophe has taken place, and it serves to reveal and culminate the full impact of the tragic action.

✓ **Learner Activity: With help from your counselor, try and compare Euripedes' play *The Trojan Women* with Sophocles' syllabised play, to understand the differences between simple and complex plots.**

3.7.8 Tragic Hero

As we have mentioned earlier,the tragic hero or the protagonist in a Tragedy is the character upon whom the human component of the play is enacted. It follows therefore that s/he carries the burden of the tragic flaw that brings about downfall, and is also the agent through whom the cathartic emotions of pity and fear are communicated to the audience. In a nutshell, the tragic hero must be understood in a dual perception—as the **playwright's objective creation** and also as the one who goes on to become the **subjective alter-ego of the audience**.

Since character is secondary to plot, we must first take note of the what kinds of situations Aristotle advises playwright (Chapter 13) to refrain from in conceiving their tragic protagonists:

- A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, for such a situation would be rather odious and it would inspire neither pity nor fear.
- A bad man must not be seen passing from misery to happiness, that would by no stretch of imagination lead to a tragic situation.
- An extremely bad man should not be seen falling from happiness to misery. Such a spectacle might arouse human feelings/responses, but that would definitely not be pity or fear, which is the objective of Tragedy.

What then should the tragic hero be like? Or how can we conceptualize the tragic hero on Aristotelian terms? In the same Chapter, he gives the following prescriptions:

- An **intermediate** kind of a personage
- A man **not pre-eminently virtuous and just**, or, a **paragon of virtue**
- His/her misfortune will come about **not because of any vice or depravity**, but by some **error of judgement** that leads to *hamartia* (**Tragic Flaw**). *Hamartia* is explained as an error or a miscalculation that may arise from ignorance of material facts, haste, voluntary but not deliberate action and such situations. (Notice that you can apply all of these to the case of Oedipus)
- In classical tragedy more often than not, ***hubris*** (pride) has **a role in accentuating *hamartia.*** Think for yourself how *hubris* acts to amplify the working of *hamartia* in Oedipus.

Based on the above formulations, Aristotle's 4 point prescription of **the qualities of an ideal tragic character** can be summarized in a tabular form so that it becomes easy to comprehend:

Quality	Significance
Goodness	Humphry House sees this is not to be seen merely as having moral implications, but as possessing virtues like courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, gentleness, truthfulness, friendliness and even wit. Cumulatively, one gathers that Aristotle implies worthiness as a human being, and the possessor of good intentions.

Quality	Significance
Appropriateness	A character should conform to expectations that are normally made of her/his age, class, position in society, vocation. This is because a character is simultaneously an individual and a type, hence expectations should not be belied. There is in this also the implication of the mimetic presentation of a character corresponding to source material in myth/history/ legend.
Likeness/Verisimilitude	The character must spring out of the mould of common life, he should be identifiable with the audience in the sense of being one like ourselves and yet better than the average run of humanity so that his fortunes can affect those of the community. It is necessary for the audience to be able to strike a resemblance with the protagonist's motivations and actions, so that the cathartic emotions of pity and fear may be affected.
Consistency	Unless there is some motivation to the contrary, a character is expected to show uniformity of behavioural patterns throughout the tragic spectacle. Aristotle even goes to the extent of indicating that if waywardness in the sense of inconsistency is the mark of a character, then such inconsistency should be a consistent pattern all along. In other words, a logical coherence should be discernible between thought and its manifestation in action.

3.7.9 Role of Chorus

Originally meaning 'dance' in Greek, the chorus was a group of performers at religious festivals, and in course of time they gave birth to Tragedy as performance, and they remained a relevant part for a long time. In the early phase of Greek drama, the chorus would appear just after the Prologue and remain present for most part of the play, seeing, hearing and commenting on the significance of the action that was unfolding. It

could have as many as 50 people till Aeschylus' plays reduced it to 12, and with Sophocles we again find about 15 people enacting the chorus. Of this important aspect of Greek tragedy, Aristotle does not say much in *Poetics*, but like much else, the little that he says in Chapter 18 carries importance. In Aristotle's view, the chorus should be considered as one of the actors, obviously not in terms of its numbers but as a significant presence within the action. He prescribes the choral presence as an integral part of the whole and as co-sharer in the action, preferring in this the model of Sophocles over that of Euripides. As a close observer of Greek drama festivals which in fact forms the basis of *Poetics*, Aristotle would surely have noted that the chorus in plays by Euripides seemed to exhibit less of a collective character compared to those in plays by Sophocles. This view has been held by later critics as well, H. D. F. Kitto in fact going so far as to say that the chorus in *Medea* is a total failure on account of its irrelevance. In Aristotle's understanding therefore, the role of the chorus is not confined to singing interludes, that would as well make the same set of people replicable in any play for that matter, whatever the context and content.

✓ **Activity for the learner: With help from your counselor, write an essay on the role of the chorus in *Oedipus the King*.**

3.7.10 *Catharsis*

We now come to the final topic of this Unit, which is about the purpose of Tragedy. Apart from the idea of *mimesis*, little else in the *Poetics* has given rise to as much hair-splitting debate as the concept of *catharsis* as the supposed outcome of watching a tragic play. Such debate stems in a large way from the fact that Aristotle himself made a bare mention of it, most translators apart from Ingram Bywater have not even used the word, preferring the more intelligible term 'purgation'. Purgation is definitely a medical metaphor, implying letting out of excess body fluids that cause disquiet; but when the letting out concerns the emotional-mental states of pity and fear (mentioned repeatedly by Aristotle), then it is definitely not the physical sense of draining out that he must have meant in the context of defining Tragedy in Chapter 6.

For the present, we will not go into how the definition has evolved over a very long period of time with different scholars, but try to understand it simply as an intended therapeutic effect of Tragedy. Rather than purgation, the widely accepted idea is that of

purification—the soothing out of our stresses in real life by witnessing a tragic spectacle that allows us to rise above personal constraints and feel a sense of empathy for humanity at large, embodied in the figure of the tragic protagonist.

Now, how does that work?

We can make sense of this if we perceive the sense of *catharsis* not in isolation but in the light of the discussion that has preceded.The crux of that discussion has hinged on the seminal idea of imitation of action, on the primacy of the plot that is constructed without straining credibility in any way, and on the protagonist as agent of the plot and thereby the audience's point of contact with the execution of the plot. The qualities of the tragic hero outlined in this context are also very important in perspective. The quality of verisimilitude or life-likeness means that as audiences, we look upon a tragic hero as a lot like us, her/his difference with us only being in the scale of grandeur. But in terms of human propensities, we find ample similarities being reflected, the difference being only that of degree and not of kind. Like a tragic protagonist, most of us are middling kind of personalities, neither all good nor outright bad; what distinguishes a tragic protagonist is the parameter of class—one's stature and fortunes should be such that the rise/ fall can affect a community at large, as with Oedipus. Similarly, the development of the plot of tragedy is so ordained by Aristotle as to ensure that events in the life of the protagonist are realistically strung, giving the feeling that such a fate could befall as well. Finally, the aesthetic distance that Aristotle keeps between the audience and the tragic character ensures that we are always watching her/his fate from a distance – the stage gives an illusion of safety. We call it illusion because in principle, what befalls the tragic hero could come upon us as well, for he is so like us. So we feel pity for one like us, and fear for ourselves—'there' - is this sense of barely escaped suffering - the feeling on the part of the spectator that "there might I be but for the grace of God". These twin emotions of pity for the protagonist (his fortunes being much more tragic than he merits) and fear for one like ourselves are the intended effects of Tragedy, the witnessing of which leaves us more sobered in life. It is in this intended therapeutic impact of Tragedy that we must place our understanding of *catharsis*.

As you proceed with your study of drama along the BDP course, you will notice how Aristotle's prescriptions in *Poetics*, though a solid beginning, have much evolved through the Elizabethan stage and into modern drama across the world. To Aristotle therefore, we owe our first understanding of drama, but we must remember that for all his modernity, his theory is also set against a particular milieu. As readers of drama it

is upon us to constantly update our knowledge of Aristotle in the light of subsequent revelations.

3.7.11 Summing Up

- *Poetics* as one of the earliest theorizations on classical drama
- Imitation as the soul of poetry/art; the differences between Plato and Aristotle
- The constituent elements of Tragedy
- Plot as having prime importance in drama, even character as secondary to it
- Dramatic Unity ensures coherence and philosophical approach
- Simple and Complex Plots
- Qualities of the tragic hero—the role of *hamartia* and *hubris*
- *Catharsis* as the desired end of Tragedy

3.7.12 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Long Answer Type Questions:**

1. What do you understand by mimesis? Why is it such an important component of Tragedy in Aristotle's understanding?
2. Analyse Aristotle's definition of Tragedy and point out the significance of each sub-section in it.
3. Why do you think Aristotle attaches the greatest importance to Plot in Tragedy? Is it logical to say that even Character is subservient to Plot?

➢ **Medium Length Answer Type Questions:**

1. What are the constituent elements of Tragedy? How are they connected to each other?
2. Explain with textual examples how *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* affect the course of a tragic play.
3. What is the desired end of Tragedy and why is it so important?

➢ **Short Answer Type Questions:**

1. In *Poetics*, what does Aristotle say about the chorus?

2. Why is spectacle given the least importance among the constituent elements of Tragedy?
3. State and briefly explain the qualities that according to Aristotle are necessary in a tragic hero.

3.7.13 Suggested Reading

S. H. Butcher ed. & trans. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London & New York: Macmillan, 3rd ed., 1902. (Internet edition available and has been used extensively for this Unit)

Jonathan Barnes ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Clifford Leech. *Tragedy*. Methuen & Co. Ltd, (Critical Idiom Series), 1969.

Humphry House. *Aristotle's Poetics: A Course of Eight Lectures*. Indian Ed. Kalyani Pub. 1970.

F. L. Lucas. *Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics.* Hogarth Press, 1957.

NOTES

Unit 8 ❑ The Myth of Oedipus

Structure

3.8.0 Introduction

3.8.1 The Myth of Oedipus and its Sociopolitical Relevance in Greece

3.8.2 Oedipus Myth in Classical Drama

3.8.3 World Literature and Oedipus

3.8.4 Oedipus in Contemporary Theatre

3.8.5 Adaptations of *Oedipus Rex* across Media

3.8.6 Universal Currency of the Oedipus Myth

3.8.7 Oedipus in Psychoanalytical Studies

3.8.8 Summing Up

3.8.9 Comprehension Exercises

3.8.10 Suggested Reading

3.8.0 Introduction

In this Unit we will try to know the story of Oedipus as part of Greek folklore and mythology, and try to figure out how it still resonates in our mindscape. This Unit will give you an overview of the origin and development of the story of Oedipus in Greek myth along with

- the relevance of Oedipus myth in Greek society and drama
- how the myth has influenced psychoanalytical studies
- the resonance of the myth in world drama and across media
- whether the myth still holds currency in our time.

3.8.1 The Myth of Oedipus and its Sociopolitical Relevance in Greece

"So, I will fight for him as if he were my father,
stop at nothing, search the world
to lay my hands on the man who shed his blood,

the son of Labdacus descended of Polydorus,
Cadmus of old and Agenor, founder of the line:
their power and mine are one." (Oedipus speaking in *Oedipus the King*)

These lines show the utter irony of Oedipus' search for the murderer of Laius, which will be explained to you in the respective section, but at the same time it also sets the grounds on which the myth of Oedipus is woven. It is not anything disconnected from the large mythical world of Greece, because Oedipus's fated history originated much before he took birth in King Laius's house in Thebes. Greek gods and goddesses relate to the history of Thebes and Cadmus' (or the original Greek form Kadmos, as in *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* edited by Robin Hard, but we will use the Latinised spelling of different names that the translated text of *Oedipus the King* uses) Theban line that is mentioned in *Oedipus the King*.

➢ **The Pre-history of Oedipus**

You will learn from different sources that the great city of Thebes is in southern Boeotia, and it ranked as one of the most important centres in mythical Greece. The other city that was equally important was Argos. These two cities were ruled by the second main branch of the Inachid family that descended from the Argive river-god Inachos. Inachos was the first king of Argos after whom a river was called Inachus River, which is called Panitsa today. This river is the water resource of the western margin of the Argive plain. The earliest forefather of Oedipus was Cadmus. As the story goes, an early Argive princess called Io, wandered faraway from her native Argos and settled in Egypt. Io's granddaughter Libye bore twin sons called Belos and Agenorto Poseidon, the god of the sea or water, earthquakes, and horses. These sons founded the two principal branches of the family. Danaos, a son of Belos, returned to his ancestral homeland of Argos and founded its Belid ruling line. Cadmus and Europa were the two children among Agenor's several children who came to Thebes from their birthplace Phoenicia where their father had settled. They founded the Agenorid ruling lines at Thebes and Crete respectively. Oedipus was from this family line. Europa grew up as a very pretty maid, and as in many other stories of beautiful maids, she attracted the god Zeus, who assumed the form of a bull and carried her across the sea to Crete, where he fathered Minos and other sons by her. Zeus, the supreme god, was known for his lustful nature, and he fathered many including Heracles of Hercules, the famous Greek demi god. There are some great paintings on Europa's abduction by Zeus. In the images you will see two of the most famous paintings inspired by the story of Europa's abduction,

and perhaps the name Europa also suggests that the continent Europe was named after her, as some scholars argue.

Image: The Rape of Europa, painted by the famous French painter Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre (1714-1789) (Source: Internet)

Image: Rape of Europa by the Dutch painter Rembrandt (1606-1669) (Source: Internet)

The myth of Europa is connected with Oedipus because it involves Oedipus' ancestor Cadmus to arrive at Thebes and found the ancient city. When Europa was abducted, her father Agenor ordered his sons to set off in search of her, telling them that they were not to return until they had found her. They all failed in their search and had to settle abroad. Cadmus, who set off with his mother Telephassa and brother Thasos, arrived at Thrace, where Telephassa died. Thasos too gave up the search at this point, and settled on the island. Cadmus decided to travel to Greece to consult the Delphic oracle to learn about the location of his sister. The oracle suggested that he should no more look for Europa, and take a cow as his guide which he would follow until it sank down exhausted on its right side. As he was travelling away from Delphi, he picked out a cow that was walking along on its own among the herds of Pelagon, and followed it as it ambled eastwards through Phocis and southern Boeotia until it finally sank to the ground at Thebes.This story gives us the notion that the Delphic oracle had existed long before Oedipus's birth, and was revered for its power of fortune telling. So, it is natural that Oedipus would also send Creon to consult the oracle in a state of emergency.

As the oracle asked Cadmus to found a city there, he offered the cow in sacrifice to Athena (inaugurating the Theban cult of Pallas Onka or Pallas Athena that is again referred to in the Sophoclean text). To proceed with the ritual, Cadmus needed some holy water and sent some of his companions to fetch it from a spring nearby. The spring was sacred to the war-god Ares, and it was guarded by a fearsome dragon that killed the men. As was usual with Greek dragons, this Theban dragon was pictured as a large serpent. Cadmus confronted the dragon and killed it. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, who was also the patron of Athens, advised Cadmus to collectthe dragon's teeth and sow them in the ground. As he did so, a host of armed men, known as the *Spartoi* or 'Sown Men', sprang up from the teeth and proceeded to fight among themselves until only five were left. These five named Echion, Oudaios, Chthonios, Hyperenor and Peloros (i.e. Snake-man, Ground-man, Earth-man, Overweening and Monstrous), founded the noble families that would form the military caste of the new city Thebes that Cadmus founded. He had to serve Ares fora year (or a great year, equivalent to eight ordinary years) to atone for having killed the dragon, according to the myth. Ares was reconciled with Cadmus after his servitude was completed, and Zeus was so happy that he granted Cadmus a goddess as a wife. She was Harmonia, the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Pindar, the famous Greek poet, cites this marriage as an illustrious one that was blessed by all gods and goddesses, the highest blessing that could be attained by any mortal man. However, he also refers to this to make a deeper point that runs through the story of Oedipus too: no mortal can expect to live a life that is free from their full share of misfortune, and Cadmus had to pay his due pretty soon.

The sorrows of Cadmus arose mainly from the misfortunes of his children and successors. He had a son, Polydorus (or Polydoros), and four daughters. Due to the troubles of their family, toward the end of their life, Cadmus and Harmonia had to leave Thebes to live in exile in Illyria, a wild region adjoining the Adriatic in the north-west. The kingdom was left in charge of Polydorus. Polydorus was the father of Labdacus (or Labdakos), the eponymous founder of the Theban dynasty of the Labdacids, which includes Oedipus and his warring sons Polyneices (Polyneikes) and Eteocles (Eteokles) among its members. Soon Labdacus assumed power in his own right, but he died prematurely probably because he tried to oppose Dionysus. His son Laius (or Laios) was only a year old at the time of his death, and power in Thebes passed to Lykos, the brother of Nykteus, who either ruled on Laius' behalf as regent or took advantage of the situation to seize power for himself. Lykos presided over the city for many years until he was killed (or driven out) by his great-nephews Zethos and Amphion, who established themselves as joint kings. They forced Laius to depart into exile, and he subsequently took refuge at the court of Pelops in the western Peloponnese. He finally secured his rightful throne after the death of the usurpers; and there begins the story of his son Oedipus, that you learn in the tragedy.

➢ **The Birth and Life of Oedipus**

Oedipus' father Laius was not a pure heart, and he invited a family curse through his action. While he was a guest of Pelops, he took charge of teaching the art of chariot-driving to a young illegitimate son of Pelops named Chrysippos. While teaching him, Laius conceived a passion for him and carried him off with the intention of seduction. Chrysippos repulsed him and killed himself with his sword out of shame. Some writers opine that Pelops cursed the entire family of Laius on hearing of the fate of his son which explains the subsequent misfortunes of the family. The Sphinx was said to have been sent against Thebes by the marriage-goddess Hera to punish the Thebans for not punishing Laius for his immoral action. Laius married Jocasta (or Iokaste), who belonged to a branch of the Theban royal family as a daughter of Menoeceus (or Menoikeus) and sister of Creon (or Kreon). Jocasta initially failed to produce any children, and Laius consulted the Delphic oracle, which warned him to abandon any thought of fathering a child since he would be killed by his son if he should have one. Laius kept out of his wife's bed for a time, but one night he had intercourse with her while he was drunk, and thus he caused her to conceive the fateful son.

Soon after the child was born, Laius handed him over to a shepherd to be killed, but before that he thrust a spike through his feet to ensure that he would not be recovered and reared. Thus, the baby got his name of Oedipus (or Oidipous in Greek)

that means 'Swell-foot'. The shepherd (sometimes named as Euphorbus, Euphorbos or Phorbos) was told to place him out to die on Mount Citheron (or Kithairon) on the southern borders of Boeotia. Citheron was also used as summer pasture by the Corinthian shepherds, and Euphorbus felt such pity for the child that instead of killing him he handed him over to one of the Corinthian shepherds, who took him away to his master Polybus (or Polybos), the king of Corinth. Polybus and his wife Merope (or Periboia, or Medousa) had no children of their own, and they decided to raise Oedipus as their own son. In a slightly different version, Oedipus was left on the mountain as Laius had ordered, but was discovered and rescued by some Corinthians, who took him to their king.

When Oedipus came of age, he set off for the Delphic oracle to enquire about his origins. According to the text of *Oedipus the King*, he became concerned about his birth because he was taunted at a banquet by a drunken guest who accused him of not being a true son of Polybus. Although the king and queen tried to reassure him, the rumours persisted and the matter continued to trouble him until he decided to consult the Delphic oracle without the knowledge of his putative parents. The god at Delphi offered no response to him on the point in question, but revealed instead that he was destined to kill his father, and then to marry his own mother and father children by her. Assuming that the oracle was referring to Polybus and Merope, Oedipus decided to stay away from his parents forever, and set off in the direction of Thebes. As he was approaching a point on his route where three roads met, he came across an old man who was travelling by a cart in the opposite direction accompanied by five attendants. When the herald who was proceeding at the head of the party tried to force him off the road, Oedipus struck back at him and continued his journey; but as he was passing the cart, the old man hit him on the head with his ox-goad. Oedipus did not know it was his own father, and so he reacted by hitting the old man with his staff that caused his death. He then set out to kill the other members of the group but one of them escaped undetected. Without discovering anything further about his victims, Oedipus resumed his journey and travelled on to Thebes.

Since Laius did not have children apart from the son whom he had exposed after birth, the throne passed to Creon, son of Menoeceus, Jocasta's brother. The Sphinx, a winged creature with the body of a lion and the head of a woman, appeared in Thebes at this stage. According to the myth, she would set a riddle for passers-by and would kill them if they were unable to solve it. She was fated to meet her own death if anyone should provide the correct solution. When the Sphinx proceeded to kill one Theban after another, including Creon's own son, Creon finally grew so desperate that he offered the

kingdom and the hand of the former queen to anyone who could rid the city of this monster. By now Oedipus arrived at Thebes and provided the correct answer to the riddle of the Sphinx. The riddle goes like this:

There is a being on earth that is four-footed, two-footed and three-footed, yet has a single voice; and of all beings that move on the ground or through the air or sea, it alone changes its form; and when it moves with the support of the most feet, then is the speed of its limbs at the weakest.

Image: The eponymous vessel of the Oedipus Painter, showing Oedipus and the Sphinx; reproduced by an Etruscan ceramic painter in c. 470 BC. (Source: Internet)

Oedipus inferred that the riddle refers to man, who crawls on all fours as an infant, walks upright on two legs when grown up, and employs a stick as a third foot in old

age. When he solved the riddle, the Sphinx took her own life by hurling herself from the Theban acropolis or from a cliff outside the city, or else surrendered herself to Oedipus to be killed. Oedipus then claimed Jocasta, the wife of the late king, along with the kingdom as his reward for ridding Thebes of the Sphinx. He lived with her for a long period, fathering two daughters by her, Antigone and Ismene, and two quarrelsome sons, Polyneices and Eteocles; but when the truth about his birth and his father's death finally came to be revealed, Jocasta hanged herself, and Oedipus blinded himself and then abdicated the throne to depart into exile. The tragic fate of his children continues the myth, but we will end here as of now. If you want to know more of this story, you may consult the anthologies of Greek and Roman myths.

➢ **Societal and Cultural Implications of the Myth**

It is a fact that Oedipus myth can be distinctly connected to the Greek society and culture. Indeed, there are multiple universal themes in the myth that can be related to any society. We have to remember that any great literature has its contextual importance, and since the myth has inspired and affected the writing of Sophocles and his contemporaries so much, it must have had deep-seated interest in its sociocultural milieu. Material and spiritual—both spheres in contemporary Greece had a strong connection with the myth. A few issues that are vitally important for any individual and state, can be related to the myth: (1) the idea of statesmanship that relates to governance and democracy, (2) regicide that connects to law and judiciary, (3) parricide and incest that connects to ethics and morality, (4) parent-child relationship connects to life and living in any society both in micro and macro levels. Let us elaborate on these and we will understand how this myth was utterly important in classical Greece.

Around the time Sophocles wrote *Oedipus the King*, Greece had already seen a democratic turn in the country. The first big step towards establishing democracy in Athens was taken by Solon, who was elected as its ruler in 594 BC and made several reforms. He cancelled all debts and the state celebrated at a festival called the "Casting off of Burdens". He reduced the power of the nobles, and granted political rights to all citizens. He revoked the laws set down by Draco (a previous ruler, after whom the term 'Draconian' derives) who had decreed the death penalty for almost every offence. The king, thus, was supposed to listen to his subjects and give importance to everyone. Oedipus violates this while he insults Creon and Tiresias. Now we know that Oedipus

came to Thebes when the country was captured by the Sphinx, and he rightfully became the king of the state after solving the riddle, as was declared king. As a king he was righteous and affectionate towards his subjects. When the state fell into further trouble, he took it as his responsibility to handle the situation in his own way. The oracle of Delphi and the soothsayer Tiresias have significant roles in this. The situation takes us to the classical times in Greece that was governed by a statesman who had priests representing their faith at the royal court. These representatives of divinity were sometimes more powerful than the statesman. Pre-Christian Greece believed in multiple gods and goddesses and each had his or her temple. The priests were supposed to have all the knowledge that would be available to men. So, when we come across Tiresias, we need to admit his knowledge as a seer who sees the past, present and future. Tiresias exists from or even before Heracles or Hercules who was the first human hero of Greece. It is difficult for us to understand the gravity of Oedipus' sin when he insults Tiresias, but we have to remember that the Greeks believed in Apollo's ultimate power. His ability to see and plan the future for humanity was their main point of contact with the mortal world. As the Olympian religion evolved, in major cities of Greece several temples and shrines were erected for the worship of individual gods, and Apollo was one of the most important gods. Delphi, Delos, Samos and Olympia became the most important sacred shrines in Greece, and Delphi was founded by Apollo. For the Greeks, the oracle was the word of Apollo which they would consult on every affair like whether to start a war or make peace or building cities, as we see in *Oedipus*.

It is important to know that myths are of different categories: some are **Ritual Myths** that serve survival purposes for different nations, some are **Myths of Creation** that depict the creation of the universe, some are **Explanatory Myths** through which primitive men tried to explain different phenomena, some are **Symbolic Myths** that depict stories of gods, demi-gods or heroes, and form part of the culture of different nations and tribes. Any myth basically explains the ways of life of a particular society, and the Oedipus myth is a symbolic myth that gives us the subtleties of ancient Greek society that had a city-centred kingdom, and each city had its own deity and temple. This particular deity and the priest had enormous power and so the king was to abide by the supremacy of the god or goddess, and the particular priest chosen by the deity thereby had limitless powers. Tiresias' behaviour towards Oedipus is thus explained. The Dionysiac festivals were arranged for entertainment, but these were also occasions

when through the mythical representations man would once again come to terms with his own existence. Greek myths were full of important learning for all ages. Some such topics that were influential in the Greek society are present in the Oedipus myth.

- **What does the Oedipus Myth convey**

The myth suggests that man should not be proud. Oedipus' hubris or extreme pride is one flaw in his character that was supposed to be highlighted through the play. Pride and arrogance ultimately lead to destruction, this idea comes as a moral lesson for the audience. Although Oedipus truly knew what the truth was, he couldn't get his mind to see it. He was so proud that he thought nothing could stop him. Not only did he disrespect other powerful people, but he also disrespected the gods. There is an entanglement of pride and fate in the events. Oedipus tried to escape his fate by running away and killing the man who told him about the curse. While letting his pride and power get in the way, he fulfills the prophecy. If Oedipus didn't believe that he was invincible, he could have been more careful with his decisions. The gods punished Oedipus for his disrespect and baffling pride. King Laius is one of the first characters to try to escape his fate, and committed the crime of abandoning and trying to kill his own child. Infanticide, patricide, and regicide run as significant issues in the myth. This brings in the concern for propriety and common sense. Had he not married the widow queen, tragedy of this stature would not have happened. But in all this, Sophocles also subtly includes the workings of Fate, of which you have read in other forms in Anglo Saxon literature. Remember that both Anglo Saxon and Greek literature are basically from a pre-Christian time.

Another important issue is Jocasta's helplessness. During that time life, social status, and politics relied heavily on the males in Greece. Though not overtly masochistic, Oedipus did claim and enjoy the widow queen, and she did not have a say in the whole male business. Her brother gives her to Oedipus as a reward for his heroic deed.The daughters are equally helpless and leave Thebes with their blind father, ultimately living the life of spinsters.

Infanticide, though not a strong point in the dramatization of the Oedipus myth in Sophocles' tragic play, was a major issue in ancient Greek society. Sacrificing children to the deities is a well-researched anthropological fact. In mythical reconstruction it is found in different manifestations–prehistoric tales, folk tales, legends and myths of different origin, and Greek myth was not an exception.

3.8.2 Oedipus Myth in Classical Drama

There have been numerous plays on the Oedipus myth in classical Greece, but few of those have survived. In the post-Homeric tradition, Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* is the earliest surviving source for the story of Oedipus. However, the most familiar classical drama based on the Oedipus myth is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus.* There were later accounts that differed from that of Sophocles. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, for instance, Jocasta is still alive at the time of the first The ban War, and finally kills herself after her two sons have killed themselves during that conflict. There have been dramatic renderings of Oedipus' children's stories by different classical playwrights. *Antigone* by Sophocles is perhaps the best example.

3.8.3 World Literature and Oedipus

The ancient story of Oedipus found intense dramatic appeal in many cultures. Oedipus myth appears in the folk traditions of Albania, Finland and Cyprus. Through the Roman tragedian Seneca the theme was transmitted to a long succession of playwrights, including French poet and dramatist Pierre Corneille, Voltaire, and English poet John Dryden.

With the evolution of neoclassical dramaturgy the appeal of the myth of Oedipus increased. However, it is to be noted that playwrights like Corneille and Voltaire in France and Dryden in England disagreed with Aristotle that Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* has the best plot. Rather, they found the plot of *Oedipus* inadequate, and though took the myth as their premises to attract their contemporary theatrical audience, they introduced sub-plots with some secondary characters who became vitally important for the plot. Corneille presented the myth in his *Œdipe* in 1659. It represents the political ideology and prevailing moral values of 17th-century France. Corneille introduced a subplot, the love of Dirce and Theseus, to distract his audiences from the atrocities of the legend. Corneille removed Oedipus from his position of preeminence, and Oedipus' quest for knowledge and truth became nothing more than the starting point and background for the love intrigue that dominates this version. *Œdipe* immediately became one of Corneille's greatest successes.

John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee produced *Oedipus: A Tragedy* in England in 1679 and it was a huge success in England of the Restoration. Their sources for the play are Sophocles, Seneca and Corneille, as they retained sub-plot of Adrastus, Eurydice and Creon, in which love and politics play a very crucial role. In their version all the characters die.The tragic climax is reached with the death of Eurydice, who is stabbed by Creon. After Creon has stabbed Eurydice, a massacre occurs. Creon and Adrastus kill each other; then Jocasta slays herself and her children and, finally, Oedipus throws himself from the palace walls.

3.8.4 Oedipus Myth in Contemporary Theatre

The Oedipus myth had a special attraction in the 20th century, motivating other artists.The Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky's secular oratorio *Oedipus Rex*, French writer André Gide's *Oedipe*, and French novelist Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* are some such examples. In 2008 the National Olivier Theatre of England produced *Oedipus*, which is one example of the most contemporary theatre based on the myth. Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* premièred in Paris in 1944.

In other parts of Europe too the myth produced lots of artistic inspiration. For example, Hugo Claus, who is one of the most prolific and versatile Flemish novelists, poets and playwrights of the twentieth century, produced his own versions of Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1971 in Antwerp. The following year he produced three further versions of the Oedipus myth, *Het Huis van Labdakos*. This play deals with the myth in a way very different from his own Oedipus; incorporating elements of Sophocles's two Oedipus plays as well as his Antigone and Euripides's Phoenissae. The next version of Oedipus, *Blindeman* by him was in 1985. The last version of this Oedipodie, as the three versions were popularly called, was *In Kolonos*.

In the African continent, the myth inspired many. In Egyptian theatre, the story of Oedipus inspired several playwrights in their tragedies and comedies, like Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987) whose tragedy *King Oedipus* (1949) is considered a masterpiece, and Ali Salem (1936-2015) whose play *The Comedy of Oedipus*, written in 1970, is a satirical comedy. Both adapted the myth to the Arabic milieu. In modern Yiddish

Theatre the myth also found prominence, as we have already learned. Mendl Elkins' *The Sorrow of Oedipus* in 1935 is an effort to create his thoroughly Jewish Oedipal tragedy.

Conversely, Oedipus' daughter Antigone has greatly instigated the Latin American imagination. Logically the conflict between law and order and individual rights has been one of the main issues of both its colonial past and its troubled history since independence, and the theatre artists tried to give meanings to their struggles through the oblique gaze of the myth. It is a real pity that some of these productions remained unknown because they were not translated into English or French. For example, *Antigone encréole* (1953) by Felix Morisseau-Leroy from Haiti is a significant work based on the myth.

There have been many Oedipus plays in Bangla. Sambhu Mitra's *Raja Oedipus* is a famous example in which the theatre stalwart himself played the lead role. Bahubachan theatre produced *Oedipus* in 1982 and recently in 2013 Drishtipat staged *Raja Himadri* in Bangladesh based on the myth. You can tune in to Mitra's audio play on this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILlnfadICJ8

3.8.5 Adaptations of *Oedipus Rex* across Media

A myth differs from a legend in being symbolic and carrying a philosophical depth, thus, till present, myths form a source of inspiration for writers, painters, musicians and poets.We have already learned about Shambhu Mitra's radio play in a previous section that tells us how the myth inspired the modern artists of Bengal. The myth has been turned into musicals on multiple occasions.

The visual representation of the myth has already been referred to in a previous section (3.8.1). You may look at some famous paintings by artists across the 'world'. For example, if you look up the topic in the internet sources, and you will come to know that the French neoclassical painters were the ones that presented the world with immortal work of art on the subject. Paul-*Joseph Blanc* (1846-1904), a French painter specialized in scenes from ancient history and mythology, depicted the murder scene of Laius. Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) was another leading figure in the French symbolist movement, who also produced paintings inspired by the myth, as you may see in the images given here. Others mentioned here will also show you the appeal the myth had on the painters.

Image: The Murder of Laius by Joseph Blanc (1846-1904) (source: Internet)

Image: Oedipus Separating from Jocasta by Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889, source: internet)

Image: Oedipus and the Sphinxby Gustave Moreau (1826-1898, source: internet)

Image: Oedipus at Colonusby Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust (1753-1817, source: internet)

3.8.6 Universal Currency of the Oedipus Myth

Oedipus has acquired significance far beyond antiquity. Oedipus is probably not a proper "hero", and we may differ with Aristotle, but it cannot be denied that his story has become the story of Everyman. We have already discussed issues like democracy and good governance, regicide, parricide, incest, guilt and retribution that connect to every society in the world. Therefore, it must be admitted that this myth has universal currency. The numerous theatre productions in different parts of the globe are witness to the fact that Oedipus is an Everyman and he represents the humans with their abilities and flaws.

3.8.7 Oedipus in Psychoanalytical Studies

Basing on the myth of Oedipus, the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud universalized Oedipus's story into a psychoanalytical theory: the 'Oedipus complex'. Freud introduced the concept in his *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899. **Oedipus complex**, in psychoanalytic theory, implies a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and a concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex that demands patricide; a crucial stage in the normal developmental process of a child through adolescence.

According to the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, the Oedipus Complex is a compromise formation that both shows and obscures the fundamental truth of desire, namely castration as an effect of language. Lacan separates the problem of castration from reference to the murder of the father and, in turn, the Freudian Oedipus complex.

The Oedipus complex revolves throughout all stages of human development; and psychologists in different periods have researched on this. The parental involvement in the Oedipus complex along with the consequent distribution of guilt is an inherent part of this psychic structure that has attracted the field of psychoanalysis.

3.8.8 Summing Up

Even though the classical world of Greece with its archaic faith and practices does not exist anymore, the myth and folklore produced there always help interpret human societies. The Oedipus myth has been universalised and still holds currency for us. It has given birth to numerous works of art, and continues to inspire us in many ways. Oedipus perhaps represents Everyman with libidinal and aggressive desires toward parents or taking up acquired guilt from parents that has special appeal in the field of psychoanalysis. Moreover, the themes like parricide, democracy, sense of responsibility have universal appeal.

3.8.9 Comprehension Exercises

- **Essay Type Questions:**
  1. Write a note on the Oedipus myth and its connection with contemporary society.
  2. Do you think the myth of Oedipus significantly influenced world drama? Give reasons for your answer.
- **Mid-length Questions:**
  1. Critically examine the role of the Oedipus myth in Greek society.
  2. Why do you think the Oedipus myth is important for any society?
  3. Evaluate the role of the Oedipus myth across media.
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What is the impact of the Oedipus myth on psychoanalysis?
  2. Write a short note on the city Thebes.
  3. Write what you know about the Oracle of Delphi.

3.8.10 Suggested Reading

Brill, Abraham Arden (Ed.). *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud.* New York, Modern Library, 1995.

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Unit 9 ❑ Sophocles' Treatment of the Myth

Structure

3.9.0 Introduction

3.9.1 Sophocles, the Greek Tragedian

3.9.2 Dramatisation of the Oedipus Myth

3.9.3 *Oedipus the King* as a Classical Tragedy

3.9.4 The Divine Machinery in *Oedipus the King*

3.9.5 Sin and Redemption

3.9.6 State and Kingship

3.9.7 Sophocles' Use of Different Settings

3.9.8 Summing Up

3.9.9 Comprehension Exercises

3.9.0. Introduction

This unit aims to throw light on the age-old interest related to Sophocles' most celebrated work, *Oedipus the King*. The play has been considered to be the most perfect example of Greek tragedy by Aristotle. In the previous units, you have already been enlightened on the background related to Greek tragedy and its features as stated by Aristotle. So it will be easier for you to understand the play, *Oedipus the King*, in that context. Here, we will try to highlight the background issues related to the legend of Oedipus. Further, we will try to analyse the following:

- The play as a perfection of classical tragedy.
- The use of the divine machinery and its importance in the plot.
- The question of sin and redemption related to the action of Oedipus.
- The caught-in-between situation of Oedipus in the context of state and kingship.

Certain other issues will also be explored as we continue with the discussion.

3.9.1 Sophocles, the Greek Tragedian

Sophocles is a noted name in the arena of Greek Tragedy. He was born at Colonus in the year 496 B.C. The son of a wealthy family, he was raised with all educational and social advantage. He was not a professional writer, nor were any of the Athenian dramatists of the 5th century B.C. With Aeschylus and Euripides, he formed a triad of the greatest dramatists of ancient Greece.

Sophocles entered his first dramatic competition at an early age of twenty eight. Apart from his dramatic interests, he was quite civic-minded. He held a variety of political and military offices in his lifetime. His long life of ninety years spanned the Peloponnesian War and the corresponding rise and fall of Athens as a great empire. He is credited with the writing of one hundred and twenty three plays, out of which only seven have survived. These plays are perfectly structured dramatic masterpieces.

3.9.2. Dramatisation of the Oedipus Myth

You are already acquainted with the myth of Oedipus in the previous Unit. The greatest strength of Sophocles is his mastery of the dramatic medium. Aristotle considers "imitation of action and life" to be the essence of tragedy and this is fully exploited by Sophocles in his presentation of plot, character, language and spectacle. Boldness, intelligence, resourcefulness and the excellent use of language, these are all noted characteristics of the dramatic technique of Sophocles.

The myth related to Oedipus has been kept in the background in the play *Oedipus The King*, and Sophocles has rather tried to humanise the figure of Oedipus in this play. The legendary heroic figure has been re–worked in order to appear as a lifelike towering individual who is caught in crisis. The character of Oedipus has been dramatised as a responsible king, ready to do his best for his country and his dear subjects. He understands his responsibility as a king now, and not as an accidental Messiah who had saved Thebes once upon a time from the fearful clutches of the Sphinx. He tries his best in order to solve the problem related to the plague-ridden Thebes and this is what Sophocles is successful in presenting through his excellent dramatic rendering.

The play presents us with a problem and then the plot moves forwards finding the solution to this grave problem. The dramatic art of Sophocles is worked out wonderfully

in achieving the climax and then the denouement. It is styled on detective fiction, the 'who done it' theory working behind the whole play. Sophocles is in his best in keeping the element of suspense intact and in loosening of the knot by and by. The complications have been finely worked out and the end is quite shocking and disastrous, keeping intact the true tragic intensity.

3.9.3 *Oedipus the King* as a Classical Tragedy

By now you are aware of the basic tenets of tragedy as discussed in the earlier units. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, which is a famous study of Greek dramatic art, lays down the features of tragedy and compares it to the other important forms like comedy and epic. But it is quite interesting that the tenets propounded by Aristotle regarding tragedy come come well after the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes had been written and enacted. So Aristotle's theorisation essentially follows these performances. After closely studying the classical tragedies, Aristotle ultimately lays down the important rules to be followed by the later tragedians.

Oedipus The King is considered to be the finest and most perfect of all the classical tragedies. All the tragic elements have been successfully presented and rendered most effectively. The main point of interest in any tragedy lies in the protagonist. The tragic hero, as noted by Aristotle, must belong to the nobility, must suffer from an inherent flaw (*hamartia*) and must have the ability to endure the physical and mental stress inflicted on him. The character of Oedipus fulfills all the above stated criteria. He is a royal figure, has the flaw of excessive pride (*hubris*) and arrogance, and undergoes the vicissitudes of life successfully.

The next thing to be kept in mind is the six elements that Aristotle speaks of in relation to a tragedy, detailed at length in Module 3 Unit 7. They are plot *(mythos)*, character (*ethos*), thought (*dianoia*), diction (*lexis*), melody (*melos*) and spectacle (*opsis*). Plot is considered to be the soul of tragedy and this play keeps that in mind, which we are going to discuss in detail in the next units. The point related to the character of the tragic hero has already been hinted at in relation to Oedipus and we will discuss it again at length. The element of thought registers the ability to say what is possible and appropriate in any given circumstances and it is related to the effective speeches used by the characters in the drama. This is consequently related to the element

of diction, which means the expressive use of words. In this play, it is the diction through which the action of the play is mainly carried out.

Another important aspect related to a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is the unity of time, place and action. Though Aristotle does not specifically mention these terms the way neo-classical theorists do, the discussion on Dramatic/ Organic Unity in Module 3 Unit 7 will tell you that the Aristotelian principle of mimesis/imitation as credible representation actually harps upon these unities. The well–knit plot of *Oedipus the King* keeps the above in mind and the whole action is set in Thebes, mainly in the royal palace, the action takes place within twenty four hours and it is related to the search of the murderer of Laius, the polluter of the land. The whole play is structured in such a way that we get a comprehensive idea about the entire tragic action.

3.9.4 The Divine Machinery in *Oedipus the King*

It is a truly stated and felt fact that no other Greek story has such pain and horror as that of Oedipus. Apart from the excessive dramatic and tragic possibilities, the story specifically appealed to the writers because it raised dark questions about the treatment of men by the Gods. The Greek society and also the Greek tragedies paid much importance to the role and function of Gods in human affairs. All the tragic playwrights therefore introduced Gods and Goddesses in the scheme and at times it provided the point of conflict in the drama. They even introduced *dues ex machina*, meaning 'God from the machine' where actors who were performing the role of Gods were brought onto the stage by the use of machine. It gained extreme popularity and specifically the use of *dues ex machina* by Euripides, at the end of the play *Medea* is the most noted one.

In the play, Oedipus, who appeared to be fortune's favourite is suddenly cast down and ruined. This appalling reversal of fortune was actually attributed to direct intervention of the Gods. The Gods, specifically Apollo, play an important role in the drama and Oedipus is the victim. They have ordained a life of horror for him, which comes as a part of the curse on the House of Laius, and they make sure that he gets it. Oedipus is the instrument, the agent, by whom their plans are carried out.

Much before the play begins, the Divine Intervention has already started with the prophecy to Laius that his son is going to kill him and marry his own mother and this

was a curse to him because of his abduction and rape of Pelop's son Chrisippus. This is disastrous and Laius tries to flee from the prophecy by ordering to kill his son Oedipus, just after he is born. The Divinity is already at work with the birth of the son and will bring about the ultimate calamity.

One thing to be noted, before we proceed with the discussion is that, in every classical tragedy, it is shown that the Divine will always prevails. It is the ultimate force which brings about the downfall. This play is not an exception, but Sophocles, to some extent, has stressed the importance of human will in the divine scheme of things. This assertion of the human will aggravates the conflict in the play, but ultimately the human serves to be a petty creature in the hands of God. Laius tries to assert his free will by ordering to kill his newborn son, but the boy is saved by the grace of God, because the prophecy has to be fulfilled. When Oedipus grows up he decides to visit the temple of Apollo to know his future. He comes to know of it, but that leaves him shocked and terrified. He tries to flee from his own destiny, but to no avail. Apollo's dictum has to be proved right and Oedipus will have to commit the sins prophesied to him.

Now, our present play in discussion, opens with the situation that the city of Thebes is suffering from pollution, the plague. The plague is considered to be sent by the Gods because the land is polluted by the death of Laius and the presence of his slayer in it. We should note here, that Sophocles in hinting at the moral pollution too, over here, the Greek term for it being *miasma*. A plague as punishment for bloodshed of the king and the kindred is quite usual-Sophocles indicates that only the Gods can cure what the Gods have sent. So Creon, the brother-in-law of Oedipus, is sent to Delphi to find out the solution for this plague. The message with which Creon returns, that to punish and remove the polluter from the land, leaves Oedipus mystified. But nevertheless, we know that it is an act of the Gods, an assertion of their rights and of their inviolable laws.

The polluter and the slayer is found out and the play ultimately ends, showing us that the prophecy of Apollo was long fulfilled and the curse was worked upon. The drama focuses on the humbling of a great and prosperous man by the Gods. The humbling is not deserved, so to say, but the Gods have to display their power and since they display it, man must draw his lesson. This is kept till the end of the play when the Chorus point to the fall of Oedipus. The Chorus feel pity and horror that takes place in the life of Oedipus, but even they accept that Apollo is the real power behind all the happenings.

3.9.5 Sin and Redemption

In the previous unit, we have seen that Oedipus is the sinner and he was destined to be so. He is the son of fate ('tukhe') and he has to suffer. So in the play, Oedipus emerges before us as the sinner, the slayer, the polluter of his own land. He has committed the most heinous of the crimes and therefore, has to suffer. The story of Oedipus carried the seeds of doom for the protagonist from the very inception, but that does not lessen the quantum of the sins. Well, he had sinned unknowingly and unconsciously, but that again cannot be justified by any means. In living a life of guilt, Oedipus ultimately comes to understand that he had little to do with what happened, that fate did with him what it would and that he only acted in sheer ignorance. Thus this play provides you with a classic understanding of the Aristotelian conception of tragic flaw that has been discussed at length in Module 3 Unit 7.

Once Oedipus learns that he is the sinner, who has killed his father Laius (one of the gross sins prohibited in classical tragedy –that you were not to shed the blood of your kin) and has married his mother, he takes full responsibility of his sins. He being the king, could have avoided punishing himself, but he does not. On the other hand, he inflicts upon himself the most horrid punishment of blinding and exiling himself. At the close of the play, it becomes clear that Oedipus would struggle and repent until the last of his days for his sins. The shattered condition of Oedipus is well explored in the play *Oedipus at Colonus*. The old, weakened figure of Oedipus is a sorry sight and is quite different from the grand figure that we see in *Oedipus The King*.

3.9.6 State and Kingship

The play *Oedipus the King* deals directly with the discovery of the truth by Oedipus and with the effect of this on him. This crisis in his life is sufficient to provide a complete tragedy in which he is changed from a powerful and beloved king into a blind and abhorred outcast.

The play opens at a juncture when the city of Thebes is suffering from plague. The priest, followed by the citizens of Thebes, comes before Oedipus to speak about their problems and save them. As he states,

No man can be the equal of the Gods

We do not compare you to them. But,

As first among men, tempered by life. (lines 31 –33)

He is the king, the representative of God on earth, and thereby he should take the responsibility and save his kingdom. It is his first and foremost duty and he should perform it. This opening scene depicts Oedipus in the height of his prosperity, renowned and venerated. The priest addresses him as the 'noblest of men.'

Oedipus understands and feels the importance of the situation. He knows that he is the father-figure and addresses his subjects as 'pitiful children.' He also states that his soul groans for the whole city and he cannot sleep trying to find out the remedy. He is the head of the state and thereby is entrusted to solve the problem. But he hardly knows that he being the king, is himself responsible for the trouble of his land.

The future of the state is at stake, so is the kingship. A state suffering for unknown reasons, a pestilence-stricken country where the countrymen have become the scapegoats. The king is in power but he is helpless, he is in utter darkness, an incapacitated being and at a loss. But as a responsible being he does not stop. He continues with the search to find out the polluter, the murderer and is finally successful. The punishment which he had earlier pronounced on the guilty is finally implemented on him. The land is saved, the people are safe and the next king to be crowned is Creon.

3.9.7 Setting of the Play

In 3.9.3, we had seen that Aristotle speaks of the unities to be maintained in an ideal tragedy and this play adheres to this rule. The setting of the play is in Thebes and specifically the royal palace. The play opens at a juncture where we find that the people of Thebes have gathered on the steps of the palace and Oedipus comes out to meet them there. Most of the action takes place over there. This location is strictly maintained throughout the play.

Apart from the above, two major actions take place indoors, within the palace. One is Jocasta's suicide, which is reported by a messenger and the other is Oedipus blinding himself. These scenes are considered horrid enough and so not presented in front of the spectators. The fixed location helps in conveying the tragic intensity and focusing on the ultimate doom of Oedipus.

3.9.8 Summing Up

The previous units have helped us to form initial ideas regarding the popular tragedy. Building upon that, in this Unit you have learned to what effect Sophocles uses

the myth of Oedipus to give it a perfect dramatic structure and to accommodate within it a wide range of issues. This will be furthered in the next units. The ideas will be developed and an overall idea will be formed. In these units, the features of classical tragedy have been hinted upon and primary information related to the play has been imparted.

3.9.9 Comprehension Exercises

- **Essay type questions:**
  1. Discuss in detail the features of the classical tragedy.
  2. Comment on the role and function of Gods in the play *Oedipus the King*.
- **Mid–length questions:**
  1. Elaborate the concept of sin as seen in the play.
  2. Is the setting appropriate for the play? Justify.
  3. How successful is Oedipus as a king?
- **Short answer type questions:**
  1. Discuss the dramatic art of Sophocles.
  2. Comment on the importance of prophecy in the play.
  3. In what way does the Divine will prevail over the human will in the play?

Unit 10 ❑ Analysing the Play

Structure

3.10.0 Introduction

3.10.1 The Story of Oedipus

3.10.2 Plot and Structure

3.10.3 Relationship between Plot and Character

3.10.4 *Medias Res*

3.10.5 The Scene of Jocasta's Suicide

3.10.6 The Concluding Movement

3.10.7 The Choral Odes

3.10.8 Summing Up

3.10.9 Comprehension Exercises

3.10.0 Introduction

This unit aims to enhance your understanding of the text of the play *Oedipus the King*. Apart from the information related to the background of the story of Oedipus, there will be discussions related to the important features of the play like plot, character, important scenes, the importance of choral ode, and the structure involving the technique of 'medias res', which is very important a concept for your understanding of classical conventions,. The concluding movement of the play is also very interesting where the conflict is ultimately resolved. The learning outcomes of this Unit will be fulfilled only when you supplement it with your reading of the text. Once you have done that, this Unit will provide the vital linkages between the other Units of this Module.

3.10.1 The Story of Oedipus

By now you have already formed an idea about the story of Oedipus, his origins, and the course of his life from your reading of the previous Units. Just to briefly recount that for the purpose of this Unit, Oedipus was the great grandson of Cadmus, and he was one of the best known among the Greek heroes. He is looked upon as the archetypal

tragic hero, whose life history embodied the universal human predicament of ignorance. Oedipus was born into the royal family of Thebes and his parents were Laius and Jocasta. Laius had come to know from an oracle that he would meet his death at the hands of his son and this son would also marry his own mother. In order to get rid of the terrible outcome, Laius ordered a shepherd to throw Oedipus into the jungle presumably to be eaten away by animals. The ankles of Oedipus were pierced and nailed so that he would not be able to crawl away. He was therefore a foundling, and it is held that this forced upon injury to the child was the origin of his name, which means 'swollen' or 'twisted' foot. The kind shepherd would not abandon the child and so handed him to another shepherd. This shepherd, in turn, brought the child to Polybus, the king of Corinth, who being childless was glad to raise the boy as his own. When Oedipus grew up he decided to travel the world, but before that to consult the oracle at Delphi. You have learnt about the importance of Delphi in the previous Unit. The oracle told him about the shocking future, that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Utterly horrified, he left Delphi and decided never to return to Corinth.

Oedipus started travelling here and there. Unknown to Oedipus, his real father Laius was also travelling in the neighbourhood of Delphi. At a place where the three roads met, Oedipus confronted the chariot of Laius. The escorts of Laius ordered Oedipus to move out of the way. A quarrel arose among them and Oedipus being haughty by nature killed Laius, hardly knowing that he was killing his own father. He then continued on his way. You have to relate this irritable nature of Oedipus to his *hubris*, of which we have discussed in the Unit on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

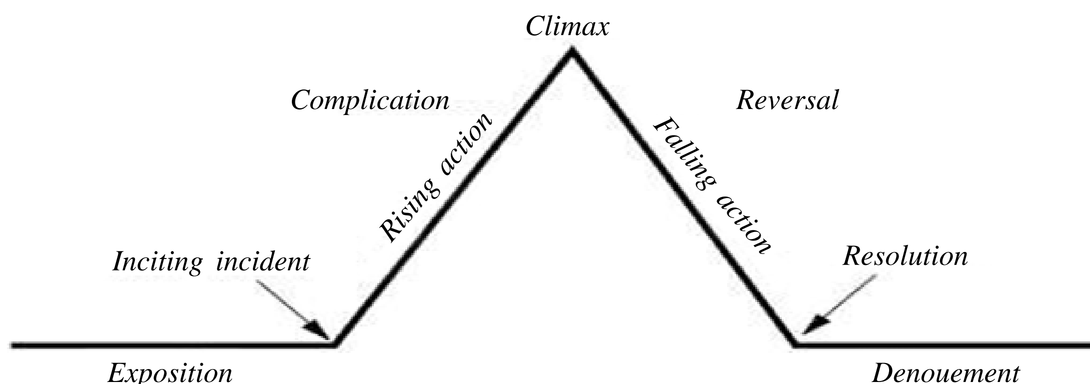
Afterwards he arrived at Thebes, which was at that time being terrorised by the Sphinx, a monster, who asked puzzling questions. Those who tried and failed to solve the riddle were turned to stones. To Oedipus, the riddle posed no problem. He was quick enough to reply, and on hearing it, the Sphinx left Thebes forever. As an interesting exercise you can do a comparative study between Oedipus and Beowulf insofar as the trajectories of their lives and their mission of liberating people from superhuman monsters are concerned. You will in course of that realize how much more complicated classical literature actually is, though at base much of the heroic codes may appear similar. It is this sense of the tragic components of life that makes Greek Tragedy so much more superior and abiding in nature.

To return to the story, the citizens of Thebes were overjoyed with the success of Oedipus and looked upon him as the saviour. They made him their kind and as was the custom he had to marry the existing queen, Jocasta. So, unknowingly both the sins were committed by Oedipus as foretold by the oracle. For many years Oedipus lived in perfect happiness and harmony. He proved to be a wise and benevolent ruler and Jocasta bore him two sons, Etiocles and Polyneices and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. This is the background story related to the great figure of Oedipus. It is important to realize these past incidents in order to analyse the play properly.

3.10.2 Plot and Structure

In this unit we are going to discuss in detail the plot and structural divisions used in the play. In order to understand this part, we are going to take help of Freytag's analysis. Gustav Freytag in his *Technique of the Drama* (1863) talked of what he considered to be the most successful structure for a play. In brief, he believed that the action of the play could be organized in the shape of a triangle (famously referred to as Freytag's pyramid), stressing on the fact that there should be five distinct parts. The figure below, taken from open sources on the internet where it is readily available, will succinctly explain the parts of what constitute a dramatic structure. You can well explain the play in the light of this diagrammatic structure, once you have read it for yourselves :

Before going into the structural analysis, let us very briefly form an idea about the plot of the present play. In the last unit we found how Oedipus becomes the king of Thebes by unknowingly killing his father Laius and then eventually marries his mother,



queen Jocasta. This play opens with a crisis. After a long reign of peace and happiness, Oedipus confronts a great problem. A plague has come over Thebes, due to which crops are dying, animals are barren, children are falling sick and unborn babies are withering in the wombs of their mothers. This is actually due to the violation of the moral code or the principle of *miasma* that we have discussed in the earlier Unit. The moral pollution has spread all over the city, as the king who is on the throne is himself polluted, albeit without his knowing it as yet. So this is how larger fate and individual destiny combines in classical tragedy; and in the case of Oedipus, the fact that he is the ruler of the land only compounds problems for his subjects. The citizens appeal to him for help and Creon is sent to Delphi to find out a solution. Creon returns with the message that the pollution will be lifted only when the killer of Laius will be brought to justice. Oedipus takes on the responsibility and as a first step thinks of consulting the blind prophet Teiresias. The prophet is brought to the court but he is reluctant to reveal the identity of the killer. Oedipus gets angry and accuses Teiresias of being associated with the murder. Eventually he says that Oedipus himself is the sinner and the polluter. Enraged at this, Oedipus banishes Teiresias. He leaves, stating that Oedipus is blinded by his pride and therefore fails to see the truth. After this Oedipus suspects that Creon had been plotting to take over the throne by killing Laius. Jocasta tries to pacify Oedipus and says that it is an impossibility as Laius was killed as a place where the three roads meet suddenly. Oedipus remembers his chance encounter with the old man and suspects that Laius might have been his victim. As he waits for confirmation to come from one of the members of the escorts of Laius who returned to Thebes, a messenger arrives from Corinth with the reassuring news that Polybus has died a natural death. Oedipus, not yet suspecting the full extent of his crime, is thankful that he seems to have evaded at least a part of the oracle.

The well-meaning messenger, anxious to put the mind of Oedipus to rest, assures him that Polybus and Merope were not his real parents. The messenger had received Oedipus when a baby, from one of Laius' shepherds on Mount Cithaeron and had given him to Polybus. Even now Oedipus fails to make the proper connection, and while the terrified Jocasta tries in vain to persuade him to stop his investigation, he persists in his efforts to get to the bottom of the mystery and demands that Laius' shepherd be brought before him. Thankfully, according to the will of the destiny, the shepherd is still alive, and when he finally arrives the full horror of the situation is at least brought home to Oedipus. Once again, dear learner, you are to go back to your study of Aristotle and understand for yourselves, how the element of 'reversal' works out in the plot of this play.

Jocasta could not wait for the *denouement* to unfold, she had already gone into the palace and had taken away her life. After the horrible discovery and enlightenment, when Oedipus comes to Jocasta, he finds that she has hanged herself to death. Tearing the golden brooches from her dress, he plunges them again and again into his eyes until he is completely blinded. This is where our present play under discussion and the first part of the Sophoclean trilogy ends.

The play is not divided into acts and scenes as a conventional tragedy does. Sophocles has intended to keep the play as a whole with the tragic scheme of things at proper work. Now let us try to re-look at the play from Freytag's analysis. The five-part division of a play consists of:

i. Introduction or Exposition: Where the place and time of action is stated.

ii. The Rising Action: It is believed to begin when the events of the play are ultimately set in motion.

iii. Climax: It is considered to be the highest point of actions of the play.

iv. The Falling Action: It charters the result of the climax.

v. The Resolution or Denouement: It is also termed as closing action where all the loose ends of the play are tied.

Let us now mark these points in relation to the play *Oedipus, the King*. The play opens in Athens and states that the country is suffering from a devastating plague. So the problem is exposed before us. Then comes the rising action, where the plot is set in motion and Creon is sent to oracle at Delphi. Oedipus consults Teiresias, the messenger from Corinth brings the news of the death of Polybus and finally the shepherd reveals the past to Oedipus. The climax reaches fast after this revelation as Oedipus comes to understand that he is the murderer and the polluter of the land, his native land. The falling action deals with the suicide of Jocasta and self-blinding of Oedipus. The resolution comes with the realisation of Oedipus and his desire to go for exile and with the hope that normal life will return to Athens.

Finally we can say that the play, in a way, is structured as a prologue and, along with that, five episodes, which of course we talked of above. Each of these episodes is introduced by a choral ode. Every incident in the play is part of a tightly constructed cause and effect chain. These incidents are assembled together as an investigation of the past, and the play is thus truly considered to be a marvel of plot structure.

3.10.3 Relationship between Plot and Character

Aristotle cites the play *Oedipus, the King* as the most brilliant example of theatrical plot. For Aristotle the soul of drama is plot—the action that demands and succeeds in engaging our attention so that we are no longer just detached spectators, but are directly involved in the progress of the stage—events. In turn this engagement of the audience proceeds from an identification with the figures on stage, and this is not possible if we are made to feel that the action of the characters is not free, not effective. It is possible only when we feel that there is a meaningful relation between the hero's action and his suffering, and that his action is free and thereby he is solely responsible for the consequences.

The plot of the play is a perfect example of the exclusion of the irrational, and the skilful handling of the traditional elements of the myth on which the play is based. Sophocles, of course, is cautious enough not to dramatize any of the admittedly irrational parts of the myth. He rather constructs the play in a brilliant move, as an investigation of the past.

The tremendous sense of the inevitability and fate that we find in this play actually stems from the fact that all the irrational things have been already done and they are unalterable. Once Oedipus starts to investigate, the whole truth ultimately emerges before him and also us.

The plot of the play is uniquely designed in that the drama moves forward in action but backwards in revelation. The technique can be called the technique of retrospect. Sophocles has also made effective use of dramatic irony as a part of his dramatic plot. The process of the backward movement in terms of knowledge, contributes to the discovery by Oedipus and at the same time shocks the audience.

The whole movement in the play is directed to revelation on the part of Oedipus. The *peripeteia* or element of reversal in the play comes with the messenger's revelation, which brings out a material fact that creates an impact absolutely contrary in nature to what it was intended to be by the character. In seeking to help Oedipus, by providing him with the valuable information that Polybus and Merope were not his real parents, he instead creates the opposite effect, providing the crucial piece of information that will reveal to Oedipus that he has actually killed his father and married his mother. As Aristotle recommends, this is directly connected to the *anagnorisis*; for the messenger

and the shepherd piece together the whole story of Oedipus enabling him to recognize his true identity, to gain the essential knowledge that he has so long lacked. The *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* directly cause the catastrophe, 'the reversal of fortune' for Oedipus and lead to the emotional scenes of 'suffering.' In a sense, each of the actions of Oedipus can be considered to be a reversal of intention, and each gives him a little more knowledge of the dreadful truth which leads him to his terrible downfall.

3.10.4 *Medias Res*

In the previous Units we have come to know of the story of Oedipus, both the background legend and what actually happens in the play. Now coming back to the plot of the play, what we find is that the actual action has already taken place, the disasters and the sins have already been committed and Oedipus is now to suffer the consequences. So we can aptly say that the play begins in the middle of things or in *medias res*. This is a Latin term which means "in the middle of things". So when the play opens, there is a lot of action that has preceded, and we gradually come to know about in through the cinematic technique of flash back and forward alternately. As you read the play, you will discover for yourselves what this technique gives to the handling of the plot. You will also see the employment of *medias res* when you study *Paradise Lost* in Core Course 3. In the epic, it serves a similar purpose. Largely we might say that the use of *medias res* brings the audience/ reader at once into the thick of the action.

The plot of the play actually starts from the moment that is not the same as the chronological beginning, but in the middle of the story. The play, as Sophocles presents, begins long after the actions have already taken place as we said earlier. But these events are revealed to Oedipus by and by and that constitutes the interest and irony of the play. The audience knows much more than Oedipus does before the play begins, and is therefore better placed to judge the nature of his actions. That constitutes the irony of the play, and this technical device to begin in the middle gains ground.

3.10.5 The Scene of Jocasta's Suicide

In the play *Oedipus, the King*, Jocasta has a late entry. She enters at a critical point when Oedipus, unable to find out the cause of the plague and the polluter of the land starts suspecting and attacking Creon. Jocasta comes in at this point in order to pacify

Oedipus and make him understand that Creon cannot be guilty of committing such an offence. Jocasta emerges as a practical-minded, clear-headed woman and also a responsible queen. But following the technique of *medias res*, we need to understand that she is a much more enduring figure in the tale than what we can surmise from her stage presence.

That she is extremely practical is proved by the point that she does not have any trust on the oracles and their prophecy. She wants Oedipus too to understand this and not to be baffled by the prophecies. By way of evidence, she cites the prophecy that her own child would kill his father and marry her. She tries and had tried hard to change the fate in defiance of prophecy, but ultimately fulfils it, even though unwittingly. When she comes to understand that Oedipus is heading towards ruinous discovery, she beseeches him to cease from the quest, but to no avail. She finally comes to understand that the horrible sin of incest has been committed by her. The prophecy has been fulfilled and she has wedded her own son and given birth to sinful children. It is a shame too much for her to bear. So she ultimately takes recourse to suicide to end her life with honour rather than live in disgrace for the rest of her life.

If we closely analyse the character of Jocasta, we find her to be as tragic as Oedipus, and in a way her actions (committed unknowingly of course) lead to her downfall. Along with that she is a victim of fate too. Like Oedipus, she is guilty of hubris, as she attempts to defy the gods. She even insults the gods by dismissing their prophets as unreliable. When Oedipus comes to meet the Corinthian, she mocks the oracles. She urges Oedipus not to entertain fears of any kind, and that is the philosophy of life for her.

The end which Jocasta meets is appropriate from a tragic perspective, and this end contributes to the effect of catharsis which the play produces in full measure. The suicide scene is kept offstage as Sophocles did not want to present the horrid incidents before the spectators. But Sophocles is successful in portraying the essential femininity in her and raising her to the level of tragic dignity.

3.10.6 The Concluding Movement

In the earlier section we have seen how Jocasta, unable to bear the burden of the truth, commits suicide. Soon Oedipus is also enlightened with the truth of his very

existence. He then runs offstage, finds that Jocasta has hanged herself, and taking the brooches from her robe, gouges out his eyes. With the knowledge gained, with the truth revealed he inflicts self-punishment of blinding himself.

The Greek word 'oida' means 'to know' and literally it means 'to have seen.' To see is to know. Teiresias, who was physically blind, could actually see and understand, but Oedipus who had sight and knowledge actually did not know. When he finally comes to know, he could not bear to see through it all, and blinded himself. Aristotle remarks that Oedipus falls from a great height because it was fated and in that sense his fall was fore-doomed; but because of his refusal to know himself, he falls further into blindness and exile.

This act of self-blinding is related to the theme of the play, the theme of sight and blindness. The literal act of blinding ultimately makes the metaphorical blindness explicit that Oedipus has displayed throughout the play and indeed throughout his whole life. He has always to remain blinded by his pride and ignorance. His blinding symbolically represents his previous decision to overlook the vital message delivered by Teiresias and to ignore the truth. So before leaving Teiresias prophesies to Oedipus:

> 'A beggar, not a rich man, blind who now has eyes,
>
> Hesitatingly tapping his staff through a foreign land,
>
> He will be exposed as brother and father
>
> To his own children, son and husband
>
> To the woman who bore him, sharer of the marriage bed
>
> With the father he murdered.' (Lines 455-460)

Thus due to his hubris, Oedipus was blind to all of the warning signs. The punishment thus he gives to himself is quite justified and to see Oedipus in such an appalling state. With blood pouring down his face brings about pity and fear in the Activity for the Learner:

With help from your counselor, make a comparison between this play and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* on the theme of sight and blindness.

The play ultimately ends with reference to the daughters of Oedipus. Before he sets out for exile, he wants to meet his daughters, who are unfortunately his sisters too, for the last time, and he requests Creon that he should look after them. Oedipus laments for the doomed future of Antigone and Ismene as he knows that society is going to look upon them as outcasts and no one will marry them. They will have to suffer because of the sins committed by their parents. Oedipus appears to be very emotional in this scene and his fatherly love and concern know no bounds. Oedipus ruefully says:

'Such an evil heritage: your father his father's killer,

Who ploughed where he was sown—the mother of his children.

And you two come from the same place.

Taunted with this, who would marry you?

No one, dear children—it is clear

You must die virgin and barren.' (1497-1502)

It is really a moving scene and Sophocles is successful in drawing the attention and emotion of the spectators to the fullest. We will further discuss about the children of Oedipus in the next unit as Sophocles has dedicated a whole play to the daughter Antigone, in his trilogy related to Oedipus.

3.10.7 The Choral Odes

While referring to the chorus in his *Poetics,* Aristotle clearly states that the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors in the play and it should be an integral part of the whole and should also take a share in the action. But if we consider the chorus in *Oedipus, the King*, we find that it never takes an active share in the action of the play. Rather it makes important remarks as the right moment. In Aeschylus, very often the choral ode strays out into obscure and unrelated meditations, which are not directly connected with the central action of the play. But the odes of Sophocles always relate to the subject of the drama. In general, these consist of reflections and meditations related to the recent events. Thus the chorus in this play concentrates generally on the variety of human fortune and discusses the sanctity of the oracle.

Thus, in the first choric ode, the chorus creates a symbolic pattern in the context of the destiny of the city. But, then it suddenly shifts away from the immediate crisis and begins to involve Athena and Apollo and accumulate the tension of the play by means of a specific prayer. It also tries to transcend the moment of crisis and approximate a general principle of morality to be realized in human existence. It also comments on the idea of Hubris which lies at the root of the tyrant's fall.

The chorus in this play comprises of the Theban elders and they appear five times in the play. Each ode, they sing, makes a reflection upon each climatic situation in the

play. The first song takes place immediately after Oedipus has declared his resolution to trace the murderer of Laius. It also intensifies the sorrowful condition prevailing in the city. The second song is introduced in the play, just after Oedipus himself is accused as the polluter by Teiresias. The chorus, of course, is not prepared to believe the allegation against Oedipus and instead urges the murderer to be found out. The third song is a meditation upon the nature of Oedipus. The chorus indirectly speaks of the possible fall through pride. The fourth ode comes up at a point when Oedipus is baffled with his identity. The final choric song is a comment on the fall of Oedipus and is a reflection upon short-lived happiness of human beings. We will discuss the importance of the chorus and how their odes make a remarkable commentary in detail in the next unit.

3.10.8 Summing Up

In this unit we have had a detailed understanding of the text. The idea related to plot and structure has been enhanced. Certain important and significant scenes and moments in the play have been highlighted for better understanding of the text. The interpretation of the text opens up various issues for elaborate and never-ending discussions.

3.10.9 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Essay Type Questions:**

1. Discuss in detail the plot of the play.
2. How far is the process of self-blinding in the play related to the theme of sight and blindness?
3. How in your analysis of the play does character contribute to the unfolding of the plot?

➢ **Mid-Length Questions:**

1. Comment on the scene of Jocasta's suicide.
2. In what way is the play structured to chart out the process of self-discovery of Oedipus?
3. Comment on the significance of the choral odes.

➢ **Short-answer Type Questions:**

1. What is *medias res*?
2. Comment briefly on the sins committed by Oedipus and their significance in the plot.
3. Comment on the tirade between Oedipus and Teiresias.
4. Discuss Freytag's pyramid in relation to the play.

NOTES

Unit 11 ❑ Themes and Characteristics

Structure

3.11.0 Introduction

3.11.1 Sophocles' Art of Characterisation

3.11.2 Oedipus as a Tragic Hero

3.11.3 The Importance of Children

3.11.4 The Chorus

3.11.5 Major Thematic Issues

3.11.6 The Idea of Fate

3.11.7 Dramatic Irony

3.11.8 The Play in Critical Reception

3.11.9 Summing Up

3.11.10 Comprehension Exercises

3.11.11 Suggested Reading (Units 9 to 11)

3.11.0 Introduction

By now you have become familiar with many aspects of the play, *Oedipus the King*. This final unit of the play hopes to highlight some more points related to the text. The play has continued to be of extreme interest for both the readers and the researchers and so the discourse is still on. The unit aims at the following:

- To get a clear and brief idea related to the way Sophocles wants to present his characters.
- To develop a better understanding of the character of Oedipus.
- To judge the significance and role of the children of Oedipus in the whole scheme.
- To discuss the importance of Chorus in the plot, apart from the structural discussion that we had in the previous unit.
- To try to understand the concept of fate in Greek tragedy in general and in particular in this play.
- Finally, to have an overall idea about the major themes that emerge from the play and to have a look at the critical reception of the play.

You will notice that in this Unit we will be going back and forth with much that you have already known by now, the purpose being to place your understanding of the text in the light of theoretical perspectives, keeping Aristotle in mind.

3.11.1 Sophocles' Art of Characterisation

When we carefully and closely study the plays of Sophocles, we find that every detail in his plays seem to arise out of and contribute to one single concept. Nothing is present in the plays simply because he got interested in a character or situation, but because he was interested in a different aspect of life. Sophocles contemplates the human situation at large, as one which is essentially fixed and governed by laws that do not and cannot possibly change. In a large way, this frames his tragic perspective as well. In his conception of Diké (the world order), there is no place for anything progressive, rather it is something inherent in the nature of the universe and of Man, something eternal. This world order he shows as revealing itself in the complex characters and actions of a group of persons, who are related to each other, thereby his chief personages will not simply come into conflict with each other, but will engage with each other in close and prolonged clashes, to bring into the play their whole personality.

Greek tragedies actually did not want to focus on the 'heroes', though we have eminent protagonists like Agamemnon, Orestes, and Oedipus; but rather on the universal scheme of things. The human beings and the human free will were kept in a subordinate position to Gods and the Divine will. Sophocles happens to be perhaps the only Greek dramatist who is engaged in the depiction of the hero in the mythical sense, denoting a person, who, after a lifetime of exceptional achievement and suffering, passes into an immortal existence and remains a source of both blessing and dread to the people at large. Not quite a God but rather God –like in power and immortality, he is successful in exacting worship. In such a person, rage and intemperate passion would not call for ethical judgment or psychological analysis for it would form the very mode, the only possible mode, of his mythic existence and action.

Sophocles always draws his characters as they ought to be, for which his characters do not fall flat. They are dynamic and change through learning from the context. In *Oedipus the King*, all the characters are meticulously drawn. In his portrayal of the

central figure Oedipus, Sophocles wants to show that the character, though, honourable and heroic, is also flawed but courageous and honest enough to find out and admit his faults. He truly regrets the sins committed, at the end of the play.

The secondary characters in the play are also drawn minutely.The characters function as dictated by the legend. Sophocles portrays Jocasta, as a practical-minded woman and a queen and also as a loving and caring wife in the conventional sense. She is shown to possess courage and ability to handle repulsive situations. But ultimately she cannot stand up to the vagaries of fate and commits suicide. Creon, the brother in law of Oedipus is also drawn as a respectable person, who appears to be a sensible and reasonable man. At the end of the play he becomes the king of Thebes; he could be cruel towards Oedipus, but instead, he shows compassion towards Oedipus and also promises to shoulder the responsibility of the daughters of Oedipus. The other important and significant character, in the context of the play, is Teiresias. He is the one to point out to Oedipus that the latter has committed some crime that is yet unknown to him.Though the presence of Teiresias is brief on stage, as a representative of Apollo, he remains the most powerful character in the play. The Chorus also plays a very important and significant role in placing their observations at various critical points in the play. They pray, sing and frequently talk to the protagonist. The Messengers also have a crucial role to play in the plot movement. They largely form the instruments of revelation for Oedipus.

In all his plays, Sophocles tried to portray his characters as pious, heroic, and even if they have flaws, they are impeccable. The characters are integrated to the plot of the play and together help to bring about the final outcome.

3.11.2 Oedipus as a Tragic Hero

The character of Oedipus is based on the legend of his exploits and is so developed as to explain why he falls as he does. Sophocles shows us that the fall of the hero is not an “accident” but is inevitable, the consequence of a certain blindness on the part of the hero. Aristotle in his *Poetics* suggested that the hero must be of noble birth and have the capacity to suffer, so that his story could be set as an example. The hero must commit a major error (*hamartia*) and this error usually arises from some circumstances or attributes of the person that his ignorance or weakness causes, and which would ultimately result in a reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) and finally lead to his downfall.

The hero would thus recognize (*anagnorisis*) or discover his flaws through events and situation.

Oedipus is definitely a man of action and courage and these are markedly Athenian characteristics. The courage of an Athenian would rise to its greatest heights when the situation seemed to be most desperate and this is what we find Oedipus to do, as the play opens. In the play, Oedipus performs multiple roles, like he himself is the investigator, prosecuter and judge of a murder. In all these aspects he represents the social and intellectual progress that had resulted in the establishment of Athenian democracy and its courts of law. The heroic achievement of Oedipus is the discovery of the truth, and that discovery is the most thorough –going and dreadful catastrophe the stage has ever presented. The hero who in his vigour and courage and intelligence stands as a representative of all that is creative in man ultimately discovers a truth that is so dreadful.

Venerated as the equal of a God, uncontested master of justice, holding in his hands the health of the whole city–such, placed above other men, is the character of Oedipus, the wise. So he asserts boldly as the play begins:

I, Oedipus, whose fame is known to all. (Line 8)

The priest implores Oedipus to save their pestilence stricken country as he had saved the country previously by solving the riddle of the Sphinx. He is hailed as the first of man, who with his intelligence and wisdom can save all. To quote the priests:

Come, noblest of men, rescue our city.

Come-act-because the whole country calls you its hero since you first saved us. (Lines 45 to 47)

Oedipus takes up the course of action from here and the rest of the play deals with the process of discovery. The noble king, doing his best to save his people. At the end of the play, this image of Oedipus is reversed. From a pious one, he becomes abominable, concentrating in himself all the impurity of the world. The divine king becomes a contaminated one whom it is necessary to expel like a scapegoat (*pharmakos*), so that the city may be saved.

Divine king and scapegoat, such are the two faces of Oedipus, which constitute him as a riddle, by uniting two figures in him, the one the inverse of the other. Sophocles attributes a general significance to this inversion in the nature of Oedipus. The hero

proves to be the model of the human condition. But Sophocles did not have to invent the polarity between the king and the scapegoat. It was inscribed in the religious practice and in the social thought of the Greeks. If the king is the master of fecundity, and it dries up, it is because his power as sovereign is in some way reversed, his justice has become crime, his virtue contaminated, and the best has become the worst.

The process of discovery, intensely exciting and painful as it is, arouses horror and even dismay. Oedipus is not legally or morally guilty of murder or of incest since he acted in ignorance. But he is something no less horrible; he is a polluted being, a man to be shunned. Had Oedipus for instance, been more conscious and more aware of the forces at work upon him, he must surely have said that he was not really to be blamed for having co-habited with his mother, since neither he, nor anyone else knew she was his mother, or to have killed his father, in ignorance.

At last, Oedipus chooses to blind himself because he could not bear to see the faces of his children and his fellow citizens. But his action has, in the context of this play, an impressive element of dramatic irony or natural justice, whichever way one sees it. who, proud of his far-seeing intelligence, taunted Teiresias with his blindness now realizes that all his life long, he has himself been blind to the dreadful realities of his identity and action.

Oedipus's downfall is caused by his ignorance about his identity; he is not evil, or proud, or weak.If he really wanted to avoid the oracle, leaving Corinth was a mistake on his part, and killing an unknown old man was a graver mistake and marrying an older queen was a disaster. Trying to reveal the truth, cursing the murderer of Laius, sending for the Corinthian shepherd–each of the actions that he pursued so vigorously and for such good reasons, ultimately lead to his doom. Oedipus is not morally guilty but he is radically ignorant and Sophocles does not present him as a unique case but rather as a paradigm of the human condition.

3.11.3 The Importance of Children in *Oedipus The King*

We have stated in the earlier unit that the reference to the children of Oedipus comes at the end of the play, but nevertheless they have importance in the life of Oedipus. In the end Oedipus not only realizes he is a sinner, but also understands and laments at the fact that he has destroyed the life of his children, specially his daughters.

Helpless and blind he requests Creon to take care of the girls. He is really worried about them and his fatherly love is bestowed on them. He says all I can do is weep for you both and can't bear to contemplate, the bitterness of the rest of your lives and all your will suffer as the lands of men. (Line 1486-1488)

The play ends with the concern of Oedipus for his daughters and there is no mention of his two sons. Sophocles doesn't ponder over the father-daughter or father-son relationship in this particular play as that is not his subject. Rather here and moreover he would highlight the aspects in the next two plays of the trilogy, mainly Antigone and Oedipus at the colonies.

In the above-mentioned plays Oedipus reveals his inner self, and expresses detestation for his sons and care for his daughters. Antigone is seen to serve all his eyes, as well as his guide and nurse. Both the daughters, Antigone and Ismene, sacrificed their life's expectations to help their father in exile. That their culture expected of them, daughters must be dutiful and obedient. But thesedaughters went far beyond these expectations and according to Sophocles, acted as if in their protection of their father they replaced the two sons of Oedipus Polynices and Etocles, failed to carry out. Oedipus showed the intensity of love for his daughters against anger and hatred for his sons. Sophocles shows that Oedipus thus acted favorably towards his daughters, how loved and cared for him, and cursed his sons, who rejected him.

3.11.4 The Chorus in *Oedipus The King*

The Chorus was an integral part of every Greek tragedy. The Greek Chorus served as a foil, a type of common humanity beside the heroic figures of the play. They often commented on the actions of the characters, and at times acted as the voice of the dramatist. The Chorus would often present its dialogue in the form of songs, while dancing often to the accompaniment of a drum and flute –like instrument. Choral songs had several functions to perform: to provide interludes between episodes, to break up long dialogue sections and to create scene transitions.

The Chorus, as it is found in the plays of Sophocles, stands aloof from the storm and stress of the action, and assumes the role of an impartial mediator, holding the balance between the various contending forces. The Sophoclean Chorus, when sharing in the dialogue, represents the ordinary mass of human beings. There is nothing ideal in its

character; it exhibits both foibles and the Excellencies of an average crowd of respectable citizens. As a rule, however it is pious and God-fearing and expresses reverence for the Gods to be the chief source of happiness.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* states that the Chorus must form a part of the whole and should join in the action. In Sophocles, the Chorus hardly takes any practical share in the action and it never plays a part comparable to its part in the plays of Aeschylus. But what Aristotle meant by joining in the action might be that the Chorus should refer to the subject of the plot and should not be mere digressions. From this point, the Sophoclean Chorus is perfectly accurate. The odes of Sophocles relate to the subject of the drama and they are reflections and meditations on the recent events in the play. Sometimes they are prayers for help or descriptions of preceding circumstances.

In *Oedipus the King*, the Chorus consisting of Theban Elders acts almost like a voice of conscience. It tends to sympathize with Oedipus till the end of the play. It retains its nature of prayer and serves as a group of supplicants. The supplication to the Gods sets the event of the play in a divine perspective, which is essential for tragedy. The Chorus holds the balance between Oedipus and his antagonists marks the progress of their struggle and restates the main theme after each dialogue or agon. The ancient ritual was probably performed by a Chorus alone, without individual developments and variations; the Chorus in *Oedipus the King* is still the element that throws most light on the ritual form of the play as a whole. The Chorus represents the city Thebes as it shows its point of view and faith, and of the Athenian audience. Their errand before the palace of Oedipus is like the audience of Sophocles in the theatre. The Chorus in this play directly intervenes in the action, for example, the Chorus leader appears in the middle of the scene with Teiresias, and expressing its emotions and visions in song and dance, suffers the result. The Chorus finally offers a new vision of Oedipus, who is now a sinner, and the Chorus also suggests ways for the welfare of the city.

Choral odes in this paly are closely knit with the action and mood of the Chorus changes with the march of events. Being apprehensive, the Chorus shows little patience for calm reflection or reasoned judgment and even their final words seem only to deepen the hopeless gloom:

> Fellow Thebans, look at Oedipus—he who solved the famous riddles. The man of power whom every citizen envied. See what a wave of terrible misfortune has submerged him. Before that final day when one can say his life has reached its end with no distress or grief, no man should be called happy. (Lines 1524-1530)

Thus it can be stated that one of the most important functions of the Chorus is to disclose the truth, in its wildest and most mysterious extent, the theatre of human life, which the play, and indeed the whole festival of Dionysus assumed.

3.11.5 Major Thematic Issues

The theme of a play is generally considered to be its dominant central idea, message or moral that the author wishes to convey to the readers or the playwright to the audience. A theme may reveal universal truth, and is usually centered around society, human nature or the human condition. In ancient Greece the plays were not simply written for entertainment but written and performed in order to teach the audience a moral lesson.

In *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles deals with multiple themes in order to justify the human predicament in the world order determined by Gods. The human and the divine are constantly brought into conflict in the context of the plot movement. Let us examine the themes under the following heads:

➢ **Pollution (and by implication the need for purification):**

The concept of moral pollution (*miasma*) which was mentioned in the earlier units, and blood guilt existent in the religions in ancient Greece influenced the Theban plays. In Greek myths the sacred and the profane intertwined, and for society to function properly all kinds of pollution had to be avoided to maintain the harmony between the gods and mankind. Thus, blood guilt, pollution and exploitation became the major themes in classical tragedy. For Sophocles these were secondary themes; yet it was fundamental for the myth of Oedipus. Indeed, most of his plays deal with pollution. In *Oedipus the King* it is the pollution caused by the murderer of Laius; in *Antigone* the pollution is caused by leaving a dead body kept unburied; and in *Oedipus at Colonus*, it is the revolution of a lifetime of pollution for Oedipus. Killing an individual triggered a series of moral pollution that was to be removed through banishment of the polluter, which only could re-establish the harmony with the gods.

➢ **Self-discovery:**

Another major theme of the play is search for the knowledge and identity every tragedy seeks; but Oedipus was blind of his flaws and did not know the implications of the speech. This moral blindness, consoled with his pride leads to the damnation of

Oedipus. The events that occurred before the play begins failed. Oedipus still had free will and he could have expressed it, in the right way, but then he sails from a great height as Aristotle says. That is self-understanding and self-realization. Oedipus is the man of knowledge, the wise person. During the play we come to know that he answered the riddle of sphinx. In a scene the answer to that was not only a "man" but Oedipus himself. The riddle of the sphinx resonates with the famous maxim, "know yourself know you are man". This idea that is inherent in the riddle of the sphinx is the idea of a man's self-knowledge. Sophocles has actually tried to portray in this tragedy the theme of self-knowledge and therefore the plot of the play is directed in that manner

➢ **Sight versus blindness:**

This is another theme that runs through the play; that of sight versus blindness or rather sight and knowledge. The Greek word for "to know" is *oida*; literally this word means "to have seen". To see is actually to know. Teiresias, the prophet, who was blind could not see but understand. Oedipus the man of knowledge could see but didn't know and understand. When he finally knew he could not see so he blinded himself. Teiresias repeatedly tried to drive home the point to Oedipus. Besides the above mentioned major thematic issues there are others like pride or hubris. Oedipus suffers from great pride due to his knowledge and thereby he's not ready to actually see. The concept of fate also looms large in the play, which ultimately cures the free will of Oedipus which he has experienced right from the beginning. Apart from that these are prophecies, at the very root of the play which both Oedipus and Jokasta have tried in a way to avoid, but ultimately and unknowingly succumbing to them. But all these elements are inter-related in such a way that they ultimately work forward the final disaster.

3.11.6 The Idea of Fate

The play *Oedipus the King* has been universally regarded as a classic example of the tragedy of fate. Its tragic effect is considered to be based on the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the failed attempts of mankind to escape from the evil that threatens them. Destiny and the will of gods do indeed loom ominously behind the human action, but that does not and should not necessarily belittle the human action.The legend of Oedipus is related to predetermined doom, but as far as the dramatic framework of the play is concerned, the interpretation of the tragic fall in terms of destiny is kept to minimum. Thus, the dramatic emphasis is more on the problem of the

self-will, security inspection and investigation,than on the unquestioning submission to the cruel hand of fate.

Sophocles chooses as the subject of his tragedy a story about a man who tried to avoid the fulfillment of a prophecy by Apollo and then believed that he had succeeded and cast corn on all the oracles and then ultimately found that he had actually fulfilled the prophecy long ago. Oedipus in the play is a free agent and he is responsible for the catastrophe. The plot of the play, as we have already seen, is mainly related to his discovery that he has fulfilled the prediction of the god and this discovery is entirely due to his action and is naturally self-defeating. The oracle delivered to Oedipus has been often considered to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that the prophecy itself sets in motion the events that conclude with its own fulfillment. This however is not to say that Oedipus is just a victim of fate and has no free will to exercise. The oracle inspires a series of specific choices, freely made by Oedipus, which lead him to kill his father and eventually marry his mother. Oedipus chooses not to return to Corinth after hearing the oracle, just as he chooses to head towards Thebes, to kill Laius and marry Jocasta unknowingly. In response to the plague at Thebes he chooses to send Creon to the oracle to seek advice and then to follow that advice, initiating the investigation of the murder of Laius, the former king. So it is to be noted that none of these choices were predetermined.

In Greek religion the concept of fate naturally and essentially governed and bound both men and gods. There was no escape from it and the concept of human will was ineffective. Even Zeus the ruler of Olympus could not change his fate. As goes the story in Homer's *Iliad*, that Zeus' son Sarpedon was fated to die at Troy and even Zeus could not change the predicament of his son. All he could do is to delay the death of Sarpedon. The story of the life of Oedipus is also related to fate. Laius the father of Oedipus was fated either to have no son or if he did, to have been killed by that son. Laius tried his best to avoid his destiny, but failed to do so finally.

However, coming to the play *Oedipus the King*, it can be said that it is not entirely a play of fate, as it is generally considered to be so. At least Sophocles did not want it to be treated as a play dealing only with the concept of fate. Here the human will have a significant role to play. Oedipus has been offered enough choices to do or not to do. All that was fated as already stated to happen before the play begins. Nothing that happens in that play is fated. The singular action of the play which is related to the process of investigation is solely due to the will of Oedipus. Even when Jocasta prevents

Oedipus from pursuing the search, he does not listen to her. All through the play he expresses his own free will and ultimately confronts his disasters. At that point of discovery, the self-inflicted punishment is also his own will. Sophocles could have decided to make the play a story of fate, as Aeschylus perhaps did; but he chose not to do so. Thus the play doesn't present the triumph of the idea of predestination. Sophocles' dramatic framework upholds the principle of individual responsibility. Thus, the tragic vision of Sophocles appears to be more human than that of Aeschylus.

3.11.7 Dramatic Irony in *Oedipus the King*

Learner Activity: Before you come to a reading of this sub-section, look up any standard dictionary of literary terms for the meaning of the word 'irony'. Understand for yourselves why and how irony is used as a rhetorical device, and what are the ways in which the use of irony influences readers/audiences when appreciating a play either in reading or in watching a performance.

The use of tragic irony has been a favourite device in almost all democratic literature. It is mostly employed when some catastrophe is about to take place, which is already known and foreseen by the spectators, but concealed from the actors in the drama. In such cases the dialogue may be couched in terms which though perfectly harmless upon the surface, carry an ominous significance to the initiated and point suggestively to what is about to happen, and the contrast between the outer and the inner meaning of the language produces a deep effect upon the stage.

Tragic irony may be specifically divided into two kinds, the conscious and the unconscious. Conscious irony occurs in those instances where the speaker is not himself the victim of any illusion, but foresees the calamity that is about to fall on others and exults in the prospect. The other kind of irony, the unconscious, is certainly considered to be the more impressive. Here the sufferer is himself the spokesman, utterly blind to the loom which looms large over him, he uses the words which to the mind of the audience, have an ominous suggestiveness and hardly knowing about it, probes his own wounds to the bottom. Such a kind of irony is not solely confined to the dialogues, but runs through the whole situation and the contrast between the cheerful heedlessness of the victim and the dark shadows which surround him, produces an impression more terrible than that which any form of the speech could convey. Scenes and situations of this particular kind have a peculiar fascination for the ancients. The fear of sudden

reversal of fortune and some fatal nemesis which waits upon pride and boastfulness was of all ideals the one most deeply impressed upon the mind of antiquity. Hence the popularity upon the stage of those thrilling spectators, in which confidence and presumption were seen advancing blindfold to destruction and the bitterness of the loom was intensified by the unconscious utterances of the victim.

When we come to Sophocles, we find that it is not merely in occasional scenes and episodes that he introduces instances of self-deception and unconscious irony. He makes it the ruling motive of the dramas, as in *Oedipus the King.* The irony of destiny is here exhibited with vehement force. In the opening scene, Oedipus is depicted in the height of prosperity, renowned and venerated and the priest addresses him as the 'wisest' of men, as we have already referred to in the previous discussions. Oedipus is considered to be an expert in dealing with the chances in life and with the visitations of heaven. To the audience who know that within a few short hours the wrath of heaven will crush and shatter him, the pathetic meaning of these words is indescribable. From this first seen until the final catastrophe the speeches of Oedipus are all full of the same tragic allusiveness. He can scarcely open his lips unconsciously on his own approaching fate. In the play there is always a fear of sudden reversal of fortune. When Oedipus shows a casual innocence and distinctive pride to find out his own identity, Jocasta tries to distract him from his own destruction. But Oedipus creates an ironical situation which chiefly arises out of his intellectual inadequacy. He therefore proudly makes his decision to carry out the search without being conscious of the sense of irony latent in the whole situation. Perhaps the most tragic passage of all is in which, while cursing the murderer of Laius, he pronounces his own doom: "I pray that whoever did this, even if he has, alone or with murderous accomplices, escaped, may his life always be wretched. And I pray that he should be one of my household- and I know it, and then let me suffer every punishment I call down on others" (L. 246-251). In *Oedipus the King,* irony is not only a means and mode of communicating the thematic messages; it is rather the theme of the play itself. The central thematic irony of the play is related to Oedipus's quest for knowledge and truth. Oedipus in his conversation with Teiresias calls him blind old man. But Oedipus proves himself to be the most blind in his belief and actions. The dramatic irony implicit in the statement that Oedipus hurls at Teiresias, finally culminates in Oedipus himself becoming blind at the end of the play.

Although Oedipus, along with the other characters of the play does not know what is actually going to happen in the course of the play, the audience does. It is due to the

ability of Sophocles to use dramatic irony throughout the play, that the audience knows everything that is going to happen, before it actually takes place. It is thus the emergence of the idea of reasons which helps us to enjoy the play on an aesthetic level. When everything is played out on the stage, we come to realize that whatever happens on stage is not life itself, but life well imitated. As a result the final tragic impression of *Oedipus the King* is one of aesthetic enjoyment.

3.11.8 The Play in Critical Reception

Critical interpretation of *Oedipus the King* began only, when Aristotle used the play as the paradigms of Greek Tragedy. He considered Oedipus to be the ideal tragic hero and the play to be the best of all tragedies ever written. Various interpretations have continued to the present day. Each age has tried to understand the play according to its own culture and ethics. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his *Birth of Tragedy,* looked upon this play as a complex one, in which Oedipus is a kind of superman; one who expelled others in terms of knowledge. But he also believed that those who expelled their fellow men always paid a price. For Oedipus, the price was incest, patricide, blindness, exile and destruction. Sigmund Freund was profoundly influenced by Greek thought. He developed the idea of the Oedipus complex; whereby an infant would feel lust for his mother and would want to displace his father. He explained that the fascination over the years with *Oedipus the King* came about because the play resonated with an innate desire of men to kill their fathers and sleep with their mothers. The inquiry of Oedipus in the past, to correct the present mirrors Freund's theory of psychoanalysis. The patients visit the physician because of a present malady. Through analysis, which is going back in time to understand the cause of the problem, the patient is ultimately cured. Oedipus also became the paradigm for Freund's theory of repression. The patient represses knowledge and resists finding out the painful origin of his present condition. Thus, each time Oedipus learns a new piece of information he represses it in a way. Nevertheless he persists until he can no longer suppress the knowledge. Then, through sliding himself, he perpetrates the ultimate repression, never again beholding this situation or any other. Bernard Knox, one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century on Sophocles, argued that Sophocles depicts a heroic individual confronting his destiny all alone, free to act, but taking the consequences of his actions, he is not only a victim but an active agent too. The tragic hero of Sophocles exhibits strength of will, stubbornness, harshness and he is easily angered and offended. Isolated, the hero refuses to compromise,

setting his own conditions for existence. Jean-Pierre Vernant sees the play in terms of the historical role of tyrants in Greece with their excessive behaviour. Plato attributed incest to tyrants as part of their lawless conduct, a change that fits Oedipus in a way. Vernant also sees Oedipus in the role of pharmakos, or scapegoat, who was driven out of the city of Thebes, after all ills and evils of the city had been placed on him. At the end of the play, Oedipus is willing to be the sacrificial victim, by whose punishment and exile the city can be saved from its pollution of blood guilt. Charles Seagull views Oedipus as a hero of inner visions and personal suffering, whose force of personality and integrity enabled him to confront his suffering and fate with utmost courage, after a struggle for self-knowledge. According to Seagull, this was how Sophocles created the form of "the tragic hero" which became a paradigm in western literature.

3.11.9 Summing Up

Thus we have seen that the play unfolds before us the various tragic aspects not only in the life of Oedipus, but in general to all of humanity at large. It also states that the tragic incidents are not merely caused due to the divine will at work, in the form of fate, but also because of the human will and responsibility. What happens to Oedipus is surely a cause to mourn, but he is a victim of fate right from the beginning and though he tries to exercise his own independent will, unknowingly falls prey in the hands of fate. There is something sinister at work, which cannot be denied at any cost. But that does not make the play be wholly pessimistic. Sophocles has always celebrated the courage and tenacity of human beings and thus Oedipus is not an exception to this. In this unit we have tried to look at the major issues related to the play and also the character of Oedipus. It is aimed at making the play an informative and interesting read.

3.11.10 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Essay type questions:**

1. *Oedipus the King* is the story of a nobleman who seeks knowledge that ultimately destroys him. Discuss.
2. Discuss in detail the role of fate in bringing about the downfall of Oedipus in the play.
3. How does Jocasta wield power over Oedipus and Creon?

➢ **Mid.-length questions:**

1. How does the motif of sight and blindness contribute to the dramatic action of the play?
2. Comment on the use of irony in the play.
3. How does Sophocles raise the levels of tension and suspense in the play?

➢ **Short answer type questions:**

1. Point out some of the critical approaches to the play.
2. What role do the children play in the life of Oedipus?
3. Write in brief the art of characterization of Sophocles.

3.11.11 Suggested Reading (Units 9 To 11)

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Haigh, A.E. *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks*. Clarendon Press, 1896.

Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Duckworth, 1986.

Jones, John. *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*. Oxford University Press, 1968.

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Leech, Clifford. *Tragedy*. Critical Idiom Series. Routledge, 1969.

Module-4

Ovid: Selections from *Metamorphoses*, 'Diana and Actaeon' (Book 3)

Unit 12 ❑ Roman History, Literature and Culture

Structure

4.12.0 Introduction

4.12.1 Roman History

4.12.2 Roman Literature and Culture

4.12.3 Summing Up

4.12.4 Comprehension Exercises

4.12.0 Introduction

Following the Modules on Greek literature and culture, this section introduces to you a brief political and social history of Rome from the beginnings to the modern age. This is followed by a discussion on the culture and literature of the nation which is famous for its characteristics of a great civilization. The objectives envisaged in this Unit broadly are:

- To get a fair idea of the development of Rome from an ancient city of legends under Monarchy to a modern Republic
- To know and appreciate the culture and literature of this civilization
- To identify a pattern in the development of its literature and culture
- To comprehend the impact of political conditions on the production of the Literature of a particular period

4.12.1 Roman History

Legends say that Aeneas, son of Venus, fled Troy when it was burned by the Greek army in 1200 BC, wandered for a while, and settled in Italy along the Tiber River.

However, history leads us to the fact that, a number of Indo- European speaking tribes presumably after crossing the Alps had settled in Italy during the so called Late Bronze Age (1300-1100 BCE). These tribes intermingled with the existing tribes around the Tiber, through peaceful or violent means, leading to modifications in their language

as well as their culture. Romans were the descendents of one such Indo- European tribe to have settled in Italy towards the close of the second millennium BCE. One of the Indo- European tribes were the Latins (Romans) who inhabited the fertile and well watered Latium region.The most prominent Non- Indo- European tribe of the Italian Peninsula was that of the Etruscans who dominated the northwestern and central parts of Italy.

The Etruscans were among the early (Late Bronze Age) inhabitants of the Italian Peninsula and had a profound influence on the Romans since they were settled in the most fertile tracts of land and witnessed a period of rapid economic growth. Between 800 and 700 BCE the Etruscans occupied most of central Italy and brought the Latium region (including Rome) under their direct influence.

Rome was founded in 753 BC, based on Latin Etruscan and Greek legends and by the descendents of Aeneas, Romulus and Remus. Initially the Roman government was monarchy wherein the king combined the functions of political and civil Government but was above all the commander-in-chief. As per the tradition, Rome, since its foundation until 510 BCE was ruled by seven kings of Latin, Sabine and Etruscan origins. Romulus became the first king of Rome when he killed his brother Remus. There were five more subsequent kings before 510 BC, when the sixth king, Tarquinius Superbus, also known as Tarquin the Proud, was so hated by the people of Rome that a revolt, led by Lucius Junius Brutus, overthrew him, and formed a government with representatives elected by the people. Rome vowed to never be ruled by a king again.

The decline of Monarchy in Rome was followed by a Republican form of government that lasted more than five centuries (510 BC to 27 BC), and this period of time is called the Republican Age.In a republic, the supreme political power rests with the body of citizens and is exercised by the appointed officers who are in some way responsible to the citizens. The body politic of the Roman republic was closely linked with the Roman social structure. In a restricted sense it can be said that the hierarchical Roman family, led by the *paterfamilias* (patriarchal head of the family) also shaped the early Roman state by fostering obedience to authority. There was therefore, no conceptual distinction between 'society' and 'politics'. Historian Livy argues that the Roman state from its very beginning was rigidly divided into two classes or 'order'-the Patrician (rich aristocracy) and the Plebian (poor common masses). An oligarchical form of Government was set up under which the major policy decisions were taken by a select few.

In 387 BC, Rome was sacked by the Gauls and the entire city was destroyed, including all historical records, making history much less reliable before that year than after it. The part of the Republican Age from 350 BC to about 100 BC was the period of Rome's greatest expansion, when it grew through conquest from its city walls, to the entire Italian peninsula, to Northern Africa and Spain, to Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt. From then until the fall of the Roman Empire the Mediterranean Sea was called the Internal Sea since all the land surrounding it was part of Rome. During the last 100 years of the Republic, individual leaders gained more power and lost respect for the Republic until a critical mass of power, popularity and loyalty of the military was achieved by Julius Caesar, who named himself "Dictator for Life" and was shortly thereafter assassinated by senators who correctly feared this would destroy the republic. But they didn't think through what would happen after his assassination, and the power vacuum led to Civil War which was eventually won by Julius Caesar's successor, Augustus.

Augustus' reign started in 27 BC and ushered in the age of the emperors, or the Imperial Age, from then until 476 AD. The emperors before about 180 AD were in general, good, and Rome saw its greatest territorial extent during the reign of Trajan, 98-117 AD. The city was a collection of monuments and government buildings of marble. Slave labour was abundant. Times were good for 60 more years. The decline after 180 AD was gradual, as Rome had more and more trouble defending it's too-large borders and less and less trouble accepting selfish leadership. Repairs were attempted, including splitting the empire in 395 AD into an eastern half with Constantinople as it's capital and a western half led in Rome. Due to the wealth of the east and the lack of borders with the northern barbarians, the east survived. But the west was unable to defend itself, and Rome itself was sacked by the Visigoths in 410 AD and by the Vandals in 455 AD. The last western emperor, Romulus Augustus, was forced out of power in 476 AD, marking the most popular date cited as the end of the Western Roman Empire. The Goths put the final nail in the city's coffin when they destroyed the aqueducts and cut off the water supply to Rome in 537 AD, ushering its final shrinkage from a peak population of about a million people to 30,000 in 550 AD. The Eastern Roman Empire (also called the Byzantine Empire) lasted until 1453 AD.

Western Europe was plunged into the Dark Ages for 1000 years by the fall of Rome to the barbarians. When it finally emerged around 1500 AD, Rome was the center of the Catholic Church.

Rome was made the capital of the reunified Italy under King Victor Emmanuel II during the late 1800s, and modernized under Mussolini during the 1930s. It survived World War II to become the successful city it is today.

4.12.2 Roman Literature and Culture

The Roman Empire and its predecessor the Roman Republic produced an abundance of celebrated literature; poetry, comedies, dramas, histories, and philosophical tracts; the Romans avoided tragedies. Much of it survives to this day. Let us briefly look at the way this newer culture and literature shaped itself.

- **Greek influence:**

The indebtedness of Roman Literature to Greece was even recognized by the writers themselves. Horace, one of the poets of the Golden Age of Roman literature wrote that Greece introduced the arts "into a backward Latium." Historian Nigel Rodgers wrote that Rome could not and did not deny that Greece was more refined and superior in both intellectual and cultural pursuits from technology and philosophy to poetry and sculpture. In reality, Rome could hardly deny a closeness to Greece since Greek cities had existed on both the lower peninsula and Sicily for decades.

- **Comic playwrights:**

Roman literature began near the end of the 3rd century BCE with the emergence of such comic playwrights as Plautus, Terence, and Ennius. Quite often their plays would be performed during one of the city's many festivals where the audience was mostly male.

The first of the three was Plautus (254-184 BCE). Of his more than 130 plays, only 20 complete works survived. Two of his more notable works are *Aulularia* (*The Pot of Gold*) and *Captivi* (*The Prisoners*).

Publius Terentius Afer, better known as Terence (195-159 BCE), and Ennius (239-169 BCE) were Plautus' contemporaries. Terence arrived in Rome as a slave from North Africa, eventually gaining both his freedom and an education. Many of his plays, such as the comedy *Eunuchus* (*The Eunuch*), did not appeal to many of the unsophisticated Romans; he was criticized by his contemporaries for "cannibalizing" Greek plays.

Ennius, however, was more highly spoken about than either Plautus or Terence and is considered to be the "father of Latin poetry." Even though he claimed to be the

reincarnation of Homer, only fragments of his works have survived. Rodgers notes that he demonstrated how Latin poetry had achieved greatness while still emulating Greek forms. His *Annals* was a history of Rome from the mythical Trojan hero Aeneas through his own day. Unfortunately, he died in poverty.

➤ **Golden Age of Roman Poetry:**

As foretold by Ennius, Latin literature would soon truly come into its own. The Golden Age of Roman poetry (c. 70 BCE-14 CE) produced such memorable writers as Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid. According to Rodgers, Virgil, Horace, and the exiled Ovid created a classical style of writing, comparable to many of the great Greek authors.

One of these distinguished poets was Publius Vergilius Maro or Virgil (70-19 BCE). Unlike many of the poets who followed him, Virgil provided his audience with a more romanticized picture of Rome. Hailing from Cisalpine Gaul and a family of modest farmers, many of Virgil's themes demonstrate his love of the rural life. His *Eclogues,* written around 37 BCE, spoke of the loves and lives of shepherds, while his *Georgics,* written around 29 BCE, praised Roman country life: plowing, growing trees, tending cattle, and even keeping bees. However, his most memorable work is the *Aeneid*, an epic telling of the journeys of Aeneas after the fall of Troy through the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus to the age of Augustus.

Quintus Horatius Flaccus, more commonly known as Horace (65 BCE-8 BCE), was the son of a freedman. In keeping with his Epicurean philosophy, Horace's poems demonstrated a joy for life and a love of nature. Among his many works are Satires, which was a criticism of the vice that was rampant in Rome, *Epodes,* inspired by the Greek author Archilochus, and *Odes,* a celebration of life in Rome during the age of Augustus.

This new age under the reign of Augustus also produced many young poets who reacted differently to the changes in Roman politics and society. The leader of these emerging poets, Gaius Valerius Catullus (84 BCE-54 BCE) is considered one of the greatest of all Roman lyric poets. Avoiding any personal involvement in politics, he looked to his neighbors to the east, such Greek authors as Sappho and Callimachus, for inspiration. According to historian Rodgers, his poetry mingled both passion and urbanity with an awareness of life's impermanence and he "raised colloquial Latin to new heights" (386).

Probably the most famous or infamous poet of the era is Publius Ovidius Naro or Ovid (42 BCE-18 CE). After Ovid, Roman poetry would take a brief hiatus. Rodgers wrote that with Ovid Latin poetry had finally attained an "elegance and lyricism" to rival that of any Greek. To Ovid love was the only "game worth playing." However, you will know more about him later.

➢ **Silver Age of Roman Poetry:**

Two famous Roman poets linked to what has been called the Silver Age of Roman poetry are Marcus Annaeus Lucanus, better known as Lucan (39-65 CE), and Publius Papinius Statius (45-96 CE).

➢ **Roman Prose:**

While there was an abundance of poets in Rome, there were also many outstanding writers of prose. The city was alive with orators who took to the stage in the Roman Forum to voice their views to the masses. It was a platform as well for lawyers who wished to plead for their clients. One of the more memorable was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE), not only a brilliant statesman and author but also an orator who, besides his 911 letters, wrote on subjects ranging from art to education. He wrote political essays such as *De re publica* (*On the State*) and *De legibus* (*On the Laws*) as well as five books in Latin on ancient philosophy—*De finibus bonorum et malorum*. His *Epistulaead familiares* (*Letters to family and friends*) act as vivid historical and cultural documents of the period and give an insight into the inner workings of late Republic. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE) was a student of Stoic philosophy and tutor to Emperor Nero. Not only an essayist, he wrote nine plays based on such Greek legends as Oedipus, Heracles, and Medea. He also authored 124 essays on subjects ranging from vegetarianism to the humane treatment of slaves. After being implicated in the Piso conspiracy, he was forced to commit suicide by Nero.

Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) or Gaius Plinius Secundus was a Roman administrator who wrote on the Germanic wars and whose *Natural History* (*Naturalis Historia*) contained information on the known universe as well as tracts on animals, trees, and plants, all in 37 volumes. Volume-III, for example, describes the geography of Italy and the topography of Rome:

There were also a number of Roman novelists: Petronius, Apuleius, Martial, and Juvenal. However, Decius Junius Juvenalis or Juvenal (c. 60-c. 130 CE) is considered the greatest of the Roman satirists.

➢ **Later Roman Literature:**

The spread of Christianity gave rise to a new type of literature from the 4th century CE, with clerics writing on Christian morality in sharp contrast to the amoral and often sexually explicit works of the previous centuries.

➢ **Historians:**

Besides the writers of poetry and prose, there were the historians: Sallust, Tacitus, Livy, and Suetonius. Unfortunately, much of early Roman history is based on myth, and some historians sadly accepted it as fact. However, real or not, it gave the Romans a sense of identity.

Livy (59 BCE-17 CE) wrote a detailed history of Rome in 142 books, however, unfortunately only 35 survive. Although he accepted many myths as fact, his history demonstrated his belief in Rome's destiny.

Cornelius Tacitus' (58-120 CE) works include *De vita Iulii Agricolae*, which spoke of his father-in-law's time as governor of Britain; Germania, dealing with the wars against the tribes of Germany; and the fragmented *Annals* and *Histories*.

Lastly, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. 69-c. 130 CE) must be mentioned. His *De virisillustribus* included short biographies of Roman men of letters; poets, grammarians, orators, and philosophers. His *De vita Caesarum* (*The Twelve Caesars*) spoke of the Roman 'caesars' from Julius Caesar to Domitian. Using earlier histories as sources, his works are considered interesting but not totally reliable. They are concerned more with an emperor's personal habits than with his political accomplishments.

Unfortunately, Rome did not produce many philosophers like Greece; however, there are two who should, at least, be mentioned. Marcus Aurelius was not only an excellent emperor but also a Stoic philosopher; his *Meditations* was written Greek. Finally, T. Lucretius Carus (99-55 BCE) wrote *On the Nature of the Universe*, an Epicurean doctrine that said the world was mechanistic, operating without divine intervention and true happiness existed from complete withdrawal from public life.

4.12.3 Summing Up

As we see, although Roman Literature borrowed heavily from the Greeks, they were able to shake the shackles and create a vibrant literature of their own; poetry, prose, and

history. The Roman authors influenced countless others in the decades and centuries that followed—Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and many more. One cannot enter either a library or bookstore without seeing Roman poetry and prose on the bookshelves; Cicero, Tacitus, Suetonius, as well as Virgil and Horace. Western literature owes a debt of gratitude to the Romans for what they have given the world.

4.12.4 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Broad Questions:**

1. Trace the development of Rome from a seat of Monarchy to a Republic.
2. Write a note on the development of Roman Poetry.
3. Write a short essay on the Roman Literature produced before the advent of Christianity.
4. Why do you think the comic playwrights were so popular in Rome? Write a note on the major contributors and themes.
5. Discuss how during the last age of the Roman Republic, the individuals gained more power in the Roman body polity.

➢ **Short Questions:**

1. What is the legend associated with the foundation of ancient Rome?
2. What does history say about the foundation of ancient Rome?
3. Who were the Etruscans and why were they able to influence the Romans?
4. How was the Roman government closely related to the Roman social structure?
5. Who were the early Roman and Greek historians? What were their major works and how did they contribute to the understanding of Rome?
4. What was the reason of the overthrow of Monarchy in Rome?

Unit 13 ❑ Roman Poetry and Ovid

Structure

4.13.0 Introduction

4.13.1 A Brief Note on Roman Poetry

4.13.2 Publius Ovidius Naso: Life and Works

4.13.3 Ovid's contribution to Roman Poetry

4.13.4 Summing Up

4.13.5 Comprehension Exercises

4.13.0 Introduction

This unit gives a brief introduction to the major types and forms of Roman poetry. This section is followed by a brief sketch of the life and works of the poet concerned: Publius Ovidius Naso. Our objectives in this Unit are:

- Comprehending the major forms and types of Roman poetry
- Understanding the reasons why certain kind of poetry was written during a particular age
- Acquainting ourselves with the period during which Ovid wrote, and the circumstances of his life
- Knowing the major works of the poet

4.13.1 A Brief Note on Roman Poetry

➢ **The Epic and Epyllion:**

You know by now that the Epic was initially a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures, or the past history of a nation.

However, an **epyllion** is a relatively short narrative poem resembling an epic in theme, tone or style.

People may have forgotten the "strong epic" for which Virgil's friend Varius is renowned, but Virgil's *Aeneid* was certainly something new. Virgil did not work on recent history. Rather he worked on Naevius' version of Aeneas pilgrimage from Troy to found Rome. The poem is representative of the moderation of Roman culture by Italian touch during the Augustan age. There was a revival of interest in ancient customs and religious observances, which Virgil could appropriately indulge. The verse throughout is superbly varied, musical, and filled with rhetoric.

With his *Hecale*, Callimachus had inaugurated the short, carefully composed hexameter narrative (called epyllion by modern scholars) to replace grand epic. The *Hecale* had started a convention of interpolating an independent story.Catullus inserted the story of Ariadne on Naxos into that of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. This poem is marked for its lyrical beauty. However, the story of Aristaeus at the end of Virgil's *Georgics*, with that of Orpheus and Eurydice inset, shows the best of the style of epyllion.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a collection of **some 50 epyllia** with shorter episodes, one of which is taken on your syllabus. He created a convincing imaginative world with a magical logic of its own. His continuous poem, beginning with the description of the creation of the world to the deification of Julius Caesar, is baroque in its conception. Executed in swift, clear hexameters, its frequent irony and humour are striking. Thereafter, many epics were written. Statius' *Thebaid* and incoherent *Achilleid* and Valerius' *Argonautica* are seldom read now. Lucan's unfinished *Pharsalia* has a more interesting subject, namely the struggle between Caesar and Pompey, whom he favours. He left out the gods. His brilliant rhetoric comes close to making the poem a success, but it is too strained and monotonous.

➢ **Didactic poetry:**

Didactic poetry is one which embraces a number of poetic works (usually in hexameters). They aim to instruct the reader in a particular subject matter, be it science, philosophy, hunting, farming, love or some other art or craft. Strictly speaking, this form of poetry was not considered as a separate genre.

Ennius essayed on the nature of didactic poetry in his *Epicharmus*, a work on the nature of the physical universe. Lucretius' *De rerum natura* is an account of Epicurus' atomic theory of matter, its aim being to free men from superstition and the fear of death. It combines an appeal to the morality of the readers, has an intellectual

force, and an exact observation of the physical world, which makes it one of the best examples of classical literature.

This poem profoundly affected Virgil, but his poetic response came only after about seventeen years. The *Georgics*, though deeply influenced by Lucretius, were not truly didactic. Although Virgil was country-bred, he wrote for literary readers like himself, selecting whatever would contribute picturesque detail to his impressionistic picture of rural life. The *Georgics* portrayed the recently united land of Italy and taught that the idle Golden age of the fourth *Eclogue* was an illusion. Yet it does create, "the glory of the divine countryside." The compensation is the infinite variety of civilized life. *Georgics* had a political intention. It encouraged revival of an agriculture devastated in wars, of the old Italian virtues, and of the idea of Rome's extending its works over Italy and civilizing the world.

Ovid's *Ars amatoria* was comedy or satire in the burlesque guise of didactic, an amusing commentary on the psychology of love. The *Fasti* was didactic in popularizing the new calendar; but its object was clearly to entertain.

➢ **Satire:**

In literature, Satire is an artistic form in which human follies, vices or other shortcomings are held up to censure with the help of ridicule, burlesque, irony, parody caricature or other means. They are sometimes intended to bring about social reforms.

In ancient Rome, Satura meant a medley. The word was applied to variety performances introduced, according to Livy, by the Etruscans (the earliest line of monarchy in Rome). Literary satire begins with Ennius, but it was Lucilius who established the genre. After experimenting, he decided on hexameters, thus making them its recognized vehicle. A tendency to break into dialogue may be an expression of the remaining dramatic element in nonliterary *satura*. Lucilius used this medium for self-expression, fearlessly criticizing public as well as private conduct. "Menippean" satire, which descended from the Greek model of Menippus of Gadara and mingled prose and verse, was introduced to Rome by Varro.

In the hands of Horace, satire improved as an art. Lucilius had been an uncouth versifier. Satires I, 1-3 are essays in the Lucilian manner. But Horace's nature was to laugh, and not to attack aggressively, and his incidental mockeries were either insignificant or dead. He came to appreciate that the real point about Lucilius was not his aggressiveness but his self-revelation. This encouraged him to talk about himself.

In *Satires* II he developed in parts the satire of moral diatribe which looks forward to Juvenal. His successor Persius blended Lucilius, Horace, diatribe, and mimed them into pungent sermons in verse. The great iconoclast was Juvenal, who fixed the idea of satire for generations to come. Gone was the personal approach of Lucilius and Horace. His anger may at times seem artificial, but his epigrammatic power and brilliant eye for detail make him a great poet.

The younger Seneca's *Apocolosyntosis* was a blend of prose and verse, but its ruthless skit on the deification of the emperor Claudius was Lucilian satire. The *Satryicon* of Petronius is modeled after the Menippean. It contains varied digressions (shorter anecdotes outside the main structure) and occasional verse; essentially, however, it comes under fiction.

The fables of Phaedrus who was freed from slavery in the reign of emperor Augustus, may be classified as Lucilian satires. These beast fables include contemporary allusions. Phaedrus is the Roman Aesop.

➢ **Iambic, lyric and epigram:**

Lyrics are usually short, personal poems. Iambs are units of rhythm and epigrams are rhetorical devices.

The short poems of Cattulus were called by himself *nugae* ("trifles"). They have different moods and intentions. He uses the iambic metre normally associated with invective not only for his abuse of Caesar and Pompey but also for displaying his tender emotions while homecoming to Sirmio. Catullus alone used the hendecasyllable (a line of eleven syllables), the metre of skits and lampoons, as a medium for love poetry.

In his *Epodes*, Horace used iambic verse to express devotion to Maecenas and for brutal invective in the manner of the Greek poet Archilochus. However, it was Horace who attempted to create literature, rather than using the vehicle to vent their feelings. In the Odes, he adapted other Greek metres and claimed immortality for introducing early Greek lyric to Latin. These *Odes* rarely show the passion now associated with lyric. They are rather marked by elegance, dignity, and studied perfection.

Martial, another poet followed Catullus for his metres and his often for his wit. He is the one who modeled the epigram for posterity by making it characteristically pointed.

➢ **Elegy:**

An elegy is a short poem of mourning or lamentation. It is a form of Lyric.

The elegiac couplet of hexameter and pentameter (verse line of five feet) was taken over by Catullus, who broke with tradition by filling elegy with personal emotion. One

of his most intense poems in this metre, about Lesbia, extends to 26 lines. His long poem about the love of Laodameia for Protesilaus is often used as a model for others. These two poems make him the inventor of the "subjective" love elegy dealing with the poet's own passion. Gallus, whose work is lost, established the genre; Tibullus and Propertius were known for their mastery of technique.

Propertius' follows Catullus in his first book. It is inspired by his passion for Cynthia. Much less is known about the involvement of Tibullus. Later, Propertius grew more interested in manipulating literary conventions. These two poets established the convention of the "soft poet,". They were courageous only in the campaigns of love, which were immortalized through them and the Muses. Propertius was at first resistant to Augustan ideals. He glorified his slavery by associating it with love and naughtiness (*nequitia*). He later, became acclimatised to Maecenas' circle.

Tibullus, a lover of peace, country life, and old religious customs, had grace and quiet humour was far more charming than Tibullus. He often wrote ironically, blending language and associative sequence with passion and sublime imagination.

Ovid's aim was not to preach and rectify but to entertain. In the *Amores* he is outrageous and amusing, his Corinna being probably a fiction. Elegy became his characteristic medium. He used the couplet of his predecessors with dexterity. It was characterized by parallelism, regular flow and ebb, and clear wit

4.13.2 Publius Ovidius Naso: Life and Works

On March 20, 43 BC, **Publius Ovidius Naso**, better known to modern readers as Ovid, was born at Sulmo, 90 miles from Rome. Ovid's father, who was a respected member of the equestrian order, expected Ovid to become a lawyer and official and had him schooled extensively for that purpose. After working in various judicial posts, Ovid made the decision to dedicate himself to a life of poetry instead. Ovid's elegance, both in verse and comportment, made him a favorite among the moneyed class of Rome, and it was not long before Ovid was widely hailed as the most brilliant poet of his generation. His elegant verses on love appealed to a society being forced into a period of moral reformation by the emperor, Augustus.

The reason for Ovid's exile by Augustus is unknown. It is said that, he was working on Fasti, a poem on Roman Calender, when, in AD 8 Ovid was sent to the bleak fishing-

village of Tomi on the Black Sea. Ovid describes the cause as, "a poem and a mistake". There was probably a political aspect to the affair. Ovid attempted on numerous occasions to find his way back into the good graces of Augustus, writing poems to the emperor and other influential friends. The poems, which were far less polished and elegant than his previous works, had little effect on Augustus, and Ovid remained in exile until his death in AD 17.

4.13.3 Ovid's Contribution to Roman Poetry

Ovid's poetic influence continued long after his death. His most famous work, *The Metamorphoses* (AD 8), had a great influence upon writers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and the 12th century was named the Ovidian age for the numerous poets writing in Ovidian hexameter.

His published works include, *Amores*, a collection of short love poems; *Heroides*, verse letters written by mythological heroines to their lovers; *Ars Amatoria*, a satirical handbook on love; *Remedia Amoris*, a sequel to the Ars; and *Metamorphoses*, his epic work on change. Although he never returned to Rome, he continued to write notably, *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* and revised *Fasti.*

4.13.4 Summing Up

Classical Roman poetry, as we see, thus exhibited the major types and forms. Not only were many of the genres established, they were perfected too. Leaving apart the exceptions, Latin poetry served as a model for the later world. We also observe that though Ovid was born in a relatively peaceful and calm nation freed of the wars, his life underwent a lot of turmoil. Yet the poet was ambitious and did not lose his objective of entertaining the masses. His poetry however displayed the same and characteristic finesse of his predecessors in terms of manner and technique.

4.13.5 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Broad Questions:**

1. Write an essay on the various forms and types of Latin poetry with reference to the major contributors of each type

2. Briefly, comment on the contribution of Ovid to the oeuvre of Latin literature. Mention, the ways in which he was a pioneer in many respects
3. Discuss the development of satire as an independent genre in Latin poetry.
4. Distinguish between the epic and epyllion. Show, how they both contributed as a type in contributing to the culture of Rome.
5. Comment briefly on each of the following types in Roman poetry: Epic, satire, elegy, didactic poetry, lyric

➢ **Short Questions:**

1. Which parts of history do the Roman epics deal with?
2. Why would you consider *Georgics* by Virgil as a political poem?
3. How did Lucilius use the medium of satire? In what way did the later poets deviate from it?
4. In what way did Catullus and Propertius establish the mood of elegy?
5. Why and how did Ovid become the favourite among the aristocracy of Rome?

NOTES

Unit 14 ❑ Text and Analysis

Structure

4.14.0 Introduction

4.14.1 Contextualising *Metamorphoses*

4.14.2 *Metamorphoses*: Significance of the Text

4.14.3 Text of 'Diana and Actaeon' (Book 3)

4.14.4 Glossary and Notes

4.14.5 Analysis and Detailed discussion of 'Diana and Actaeon'

4.14.6 Key Issues

4.14.7 Summing Up

4.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

4.14.9 Suggested Reading (Units 12 to 14)

4.14.0 Introduction

The unit describes the personal and political conditions under which Ovid wrote the mock-epic, *Metamorphoses.* You have been prescribed only a section of this work in your syllabus. This is to be found in Book III of *Metamorphoses* ("Diana and Actaeon"). Further, the unit also explains the importance of this long poem in the entire Roman Literature. The issues embedded in the section prescribed for you are also discussed. At the end of this Unit, this is where you should be able to find yourself:

- Know when, why and how was *Metamorphoses* written
- Comprehend the significance of the work in the entire Roman culture and literature
- Become familiar with the text of "Diana and Acteaon"(Book III) prescribed in your syllabus
- Understand and appreciate the literary merit of the poem
- Comprehend the major issues foregrounded by the poet in the section recommended for you.

4.14.1 Contextualizing *Metamorphoses*

When Ovid was in his mid forties, somewhere around 2 BC, he started composing two very different kinds of poems simultaneously-one was the *Fasti* ('Calender') and the other was *Metamorphoses* ('Transformations'). *Fasti* was to be in elegiac metre, conventionally a metre used for comparatively short works. But *Fasti* was planned to be in twelve books, one for each month of the Roman year. The *Metamorphoses* was to be even longer, fifteen books-three longer than twelve of Virgil's *Aeneid* and in dactylic hexameter of Homeric epic, used by Virgil too. The scope too was to be a mighty one- the whole of human experience from the beginning of the world down to Ovid's times.

Unlike his earlier poems Ovid shows a keen interest in the social rituals and the power structures operating in the new political order which he had been observing as an adult. Unlike the poets of the generation before him, Ovid had not been personally affected by the chaos associated with the disintegration of the Senatorial government of the Republic. He had grown up in a political environment of relative stability and calm. However his boyhood was lived against a background of civil wars and a growing threat of another such war between Mark Antony and Caesar Octavian, the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Ovid was only twelve years old when Octavian won his victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium on 2 September 31 BC. After ascending the throne in 27 BC, Octavian took up the name of Augustus and the informal title of 'Princeps' or 'First Citizen', thereafter, he never stopped experimenting while he consolidated his control over the Roman world. The people knew that any overstepping could begin fresh chaos and disorder. After, Augustus's death at the age of thirty nine there continued an anxiety over the succession of the Principate from its earliest days.

The readers do find therefore, in Ovid's works and particularly in the *Metamorphoses* a symbolic reflection of a prolonged observation of the *Principate* as a gradually evolving institution, together with all the evolution for Roman politics, religion and society in general. What appears as flippancy in Ovid is perhaps because of his being unchallenged with major political upheavals in the sense of Virgil or Horace. It is therefore wrong to say that Ovid's creations are entirely divorced from reality. Ovid's interest in the contemporary power structures become evident very clearly in the last books of the *Metamorphoses* where the readers are exposed to a journey through the

Roman history with deification of Julius Caesar and his adopted son Augustus. Ovid's preferences are clear in Book fifteen where there is a contrasting depiction of the personal power and self aggrandising religious policies of Augustus with the religious solidarity displayed by the Senate and the people of the Republic when they import the god Aesculapius from Greece to save the whole state from plague.

Although he committed no real crime, Ovid got somehow involved in a scandal that touched the royal family, when he was almost about to finish the *Metamorphoses*. An outraged Augustus banished him into an informal exile apparently by citing the flippant attitude of the poet in *Ars Amatoria* that disrespected Augustus's efforts to elevate the morals of an increasingly degenerate Roman public.

4.14.2 *Metamorphoses:* Significance of the Text

Metamorphoses by Ovid, is a work shockingly different from everything that ever had been written in the Roman world. Funny, devastating and sometimes intimidating too, there are as many moods in the poem as the hundreds of stories that make the work. The title of the poem, Metamorphoses, is a Greek word for 'transformations', and the myths that provide the source material for Ovid in stories after stories are all linked by this theme of transformation. Most of the changes occur as a result of characters having incurred the displeasure of Gods or have surprisingly proved to have amorously attracted the Gods. In the process some of the humans as well as the Gods invite the wrath of other gods/goddesses leading to their transformation.

> Many episodes, for example, deal with illicit or unlawful loves, such as Tereus' for his sister-in-law, Philomela (book 6), Byblis' for her twin brother, Caunus (book 9), and Myrrha's for her father, Cinyras (book 10). Other episodes depict the folly of mortals who set themselves up as rivals to the gods; their punishments of these offenders reveal the gods' own capacity for jealousy and cruelty—in short, their human side. The line between mortal and divine blurs continually and, in some instances, disappears completely—as when a mortal is deemed worthy of godhood, undergoing the most glorious of all metamorphoses. (Loy 232)

This, otherwise chaotic package of utterly dissimilar tales are tied together with this unifying thread. In spite of not following the beaten track of serious epical grandeur like Virgil's *Aenead*, Metamorphoses is liked by readers who are smitten by the sheer

iconoclasm of the content, the wit and the irony of the poem. Just like the poet had written in the last lines of the poem, Metamorphoses actually leaves the reader engaged and mersmerised:

The people shall read and recite my words.

Throughout all ages,

If poets have vision to prophesy truth, I shall live in my fame.

The significance of the poem lies in the fact that, no European poet, author or playwright could ignore the myths treated in the poem. Ovid leaves his fingerprints everywhere, from 'Pyramus and Thisbe' or 'Diana and Actaeon' in Shakespeare or the Adonis of Spenser's *Fairie Queene* to *Tales from Ovid* of Ted Hughes. It is pertinent to quote Alan H.F. Griffin here, who says,

"The quantity of Ovid's poetry, of course, cannot made an excuse for lack of quality, but no indulgence need begged and no allowances made for his masterpiece, the Metamor- phoses." (2)

Written in 15 books and finished around 8th AD, in the genre of a mock-epic or anti epic, *Metamorphoses* contains 250 myths spanning from creation to the deification of Julius Caesar. As written earlier, the books are written in Dactylic Hexameter like *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Just like Metamorphoses itself influences virtually all of European authors, it is in turn influenced by various other works and traditions. In this regard, Karl Galinsky comments,

Ovid's relation to the Hellenistic poets was similar to the attitude of the Hellenistic poets themselves to their predecessors: he demonstrated that he had read their versions ... but that he could still treat the myths in his own way. (2)

It is said that Ovid's decision to make myths the subject of his poetry was got from the Alexandrian Poetry. However, the moral implications of the former tradition, was manipulated to depict a playful mode.The model for a collection of metamorphosis myths derived from a pre-existing genre of metamorphosis poetry in the Hellenistic tradition, of which the earliest known example is Boio(s)' *Ornithogonia*—a now-fragmentary poem collecting myths about the metamorphoses of humans into birds. This apart the, *Heteroioumena* by Nicander of Colophon is clearly an influence on the poem—21 of the stories from this work were treated in the *Metamorphoses*.

In spite of its apparently unbroken chronology, scholar Brooks Otis has identified four divisions in the narrative:

- Book I–Book II (end, line 875): The Divine Comedy
- Book III–Book VI, 400: The Avenging Gods
- Book VI, 401–Book XI (end, line 795): The Pathos of Love
- Book XII–Book XV (end, line 879): Rome and the Deified Ruler (83)

The structure of the 15 books can be summarized in the following manner:

Book 1 The Creation; The Ages of Mankind; The Flood [Lycaon]; Deucalion and Pyrrha; Apollo and Daphne; lo [Syrinx]; Phaethon

Book 2 Phaethon (eont); Cailisto; The Raven and the Crow [Apollo and Coronis]; Ocyrhoe; Mercury and Battus; The Envy of Aglauros; Jupiter and Europa

Book 3 Cadmus; Diana and Actaeon; Semele and the Birth of Bacchus; Tiresias; Narcissus and Echo; Pentheus and Bacchus [Acoetes]

Book 4 The Daughters of Minyas; Pyramus and Thisbe; The Sun in love; Salmacis and Herroaphroditus; The Daughters of Minyas Transformed; Athamas and Ino; The Transformation of Cadmus; Perseus and Andromeda

Book 5 Perseus' Fight in the Palace of Cepheus; Minerva Meets the Muses on Helicon fContest with PieridesJ; The Rape of Proserpine [Cyane]; Arethusa; Triptolernus

Book 6 Arachne; Niobe; The lycian Peasants; Marsysas; Pelops; Tereus, Procne, and Philomela; Boreas and Orithyia

Book 7 Medea and Jason; Medea and Aeson; Medea and Pelias: Her Flight; Theseus; Minos, Aeacus/the Plague at Aegina, and the Myrmidons; Cephalus and Procris

Book 8 Scylla and Minos, The Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus; Perdix; Meleager and the Calydonian Boar [Atalantal; Althaea and Meteager; Achelous and the Nymphs; Philemon and Baucis; Erysichthon and his Daughter

Book 9 Achelous and Hercules; Hercules, Nessus, and Deiantra; The Death and Apotheosis of Hercules; The Birth of Hercules; Dryope; lolaus and the Sons of Calfirhoe; Byblis; tphis and lanthe

Book 10 Orpheus and Eurydice; Cyparissus; Ganymede; Hyacinth; Pygmalion; Myrrha; Venus and Adonis; Atalanta

Book 11 The Death of Orpheus; Midas; First Foundation and Destruction of Troy; Peleus and Thetis; Daedalion; The Cattle of Peleus; Ceyx and Alcyone; Aesacus

Book 12 The Expedition against Troy; Achilles and Cycnus; Caen is; The Battie of the Lapiths and: Centaurs; Nestor and Hercules; The Death of Achilles

Book 13 Ajax and Ulysses and the Arms of Achilles; The Fall of Troy; Hecuba, Polyxena, and Polydorus; Memnon; The Pilgrimage of Aeneas; Acis and Galatea; Scylla and Glaucus

Book 14 Scylla and Glaucus *(cont);* The Pilgrimage of Aeneas *(cont);* The Island of Circe; Picus and Canens; The Triumph and Apotheosis of Aeneas; Pomona and Vertumnus; Leg-ends of Early Rome; The Apotheosis of Romulus

Book 15 Numa and the Foundation of Crotona; The Doctrines of Pythagoras; The Death of Numa; Hippolytus; Cipus; Aesculapius; The Apotheosis of Julius Caesar; Epilogue

Ovid subsequently describes how the universe, which first existed in a state of chaos, was itself shaped by a god into its more ordered form. The "great Creator" established separate domains for the heavens, air, earth, and waters, shaped the world into a sphere, and populated it with plants, animals, and, finally, men (Metamorphoses, 1.76).

Ovid next tells of the Four Ages of Mankind: 1) the Golden Age, when all men were innocent, faithful, and good, needed neither laws.

The work, on the whole, inverts the accepted order, elevating humans and human passions. Gods and their desires are objects of low humour.

4.14.3 Text of 'Diana and Actaeon' (Book 3)

	Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation Translated into English from Latin by David Raeburn (Penguin Books: 2004)

Actaeon

Thebes had her walls, and Cadmus' exile might have been thought
to have brought him nothing but luck. He had married Harmonia, daughter
of Mars and Venus, a most prestigious match which had yielded
a brood of numerous sons and daughters and much-loved grandsons,
grown into fine young men. But never forget the ancient 135
saying: 'Wait for the final day. Call no man happy
until he is dead and his body is laid to rest in the grave.'

Prosperous in so much, great Cadmus was struck by disaster.
First, Actaeon, his grandson, had antlers sprout from his brow
and his dogs were allowed to slake their thirst in their master's blood. 140
If you look at the facts, however, you'll find that chance was the culprit.
No crime was committed. Why punish a man for a pure mistake?
Picture a mountain stained with the carnage of hounded beasts.
It was now midday, the hour when the shadows draw to their shortest;
the sun god's chariot was halfway over from east to west. 145
A band of huntsmen was strolling along through the pathless glades,
when their leader, the young Actaeon, calmly made an announcement:
'Comrades, our nets are soaked, our spears are drenched in our quarry's
blood. Our luck is enough for today. When the goddess Aurora.
appears tomorrow and shows the gleam of her rosy wheels, 150
let us all return to the chase. Now Phoebus is halfway over
from east to west and cutting the fields with his burning rays.
Leave off what you're doing and stow your knotted nets for the moment.'
The men did just as he told them and took a break from their hunting.
Now picture a valley, dense with pine and tapering cypress, 155
called Gargaphie, sacred haunt of the huntress Diana;
there, in a secret corner, a cave surrounded by woodland,
owing nothing to human artifice. Nature had used
her talent to imitate art: she had moulded the living rock
of porous tufa to form the shape of a rugged arch. 160
To the right, a babbling spring with a thin translucent rivulet
widening into a pool ringed round by a grassy clearing.
Here the goddess who guards the woods, when weary with hunting,
would come to bathe her virginal limbs in the clear, clean water.
On this occasion she made her entrance and handed her javelin, 165
quiver and slackened bow to the chosen nymph who carried

her weapons. Another put out her arms to receive her dress
as she stripped it off. Two more were removing her boots, while Crocale,
more of an expert, gathered the locks that were billowing over
her mistress' neck in a knot, though her own stayed floating and free.
Niphele, Hyale, Rhamis, Psecas and Phiale charged
their capacious urns with water and stood all ready to pour it.
And while the virgin goddess was taking her bath in her usual
pool, as fate would have it, Actaeon, Cadmus' grandson,
wandered into the glade. His hunting could wait, he thought, 175
as he sauntered aimlessly through the unfamiliar woodland.
Imagine the scene as he entered: the grotto, the splashing fountains,
the group of nymphs in the nude. At once, at the sight of a man,
they struck their bosoms in horror, their sudden screams re-echoing
through the encircling woods. They clustered around Diana 180
to form a screen with their bodies, but sadly the goddess was taller;
her neck and shoulders were visible over the heads of her maidens.
Think of the crimson glow on the clouds when struck by the rays
of the setting sun; or think of the rosy-fingered dawn;
such was the blush on the face of Diana observed quite naked. 185
Although her companion nymphs had formed a barrier round her,
she stood with her front turned sideways and looked at the rash intruder
over her shoulder. She wished that her arrows were ready to hand,
but used what she could, caught up some water and threw it into
the face of the man. As she splashed his hair with revengeful drops, 190
she spoke the spine-chilling words which warned of impending disaster:
'Now you may tell the story of seeing Diana naked –
If story-telling is in your power!' No more was needed.
The head she had sprinkled sprouted the horns of a lusty stag;
the neck expanded, the ears were narrowed to pointed tips; 195

she changed his hands into hooves and his arms into long and slender
forelegs; she covered his frame in a pelt of dappled buckskin;
last, she injected panic. The son of Autonoe bolted,
surprising himself with his speed as he bounded away from the clearing.
But when he came to a pool and set eyes on his head and antlers, 200
'Oh, dear god!' he was going to say; but no words followed.
All the sound he produced was a moan, as the tears streamed over
his strange new face. It was only his feelings that stayed unchanged.
What could he do? Make tracks for his home in the royal palace?
Or hide in the woodlands? Each was precluded by shame or fear. 205
He wavered in fearful doubt. And then his dogs caught sight of him.
First to sound on the trail were Blackfoot and sharp-nosed Tracker
Tracker of Cretan breed and Blackfoot a Spartan pointer.
Others came bounding behind them, fast as the gusts of the storm wind:
Ravenous, Mountain-Ranger, Gazelle, his Arcadian deerhounds; 210
Powerful Fawnkiller, Hunter the fierce, and violent Hurricane;
Wingdog, fleetest of foot, and Chaser, the keenest-scented;
savage Sylvan, lately gashed by the tusks of a wild boar;
Glen who was dropped from a wolf at birth, and the bitch who gathers
the flocks in, Shepherdess; Harpy, flanked by her two young puppies; 215
River, the dog from Sicyon, sides all taut and contracted;
Racer and Gnasher; Spot, with Tigress and muscular Valour;
Sheen with a snow-white coat and murky Soot with a pitch-black;
Spartan, wiry and tough; then Whirlwind, powerful pursuer;
Swift, and Wolfcub racing along with her Cypriot brother; 220
Grabber, who sported an ivory patch midway on his ebony forehead;
Sable, and Shag with a coat like a tangled thicket;
two mongrel hounds from a Cretan sire and Laconian dam,
Rumpus and Whitefang; Yelper, whose howls could damage the eardrums-

and others too many to mention. Spoiling all for their quarry,
over crag, over cliff, over rocks which appeared to allow no approach,
where access was hard and where there was none, the whole pack followed.
Actaeon fled where so many times he had been the pursuer.
He fled from the dogs who had served him so faithfully, longing to shout to them,
'Stop! It is I, Actaeon, your master. Do you not know me?' 230
But the words would not come. The air was filled with relentless baying.
Blacklock first inserted his teeth to tear at his back;
Beast-killer next; then Mountain-Boy latched on to his shoulder.
These had started out later but stolen a march by taking
a short cut over the ridge. As they pinned their master down, 235
the rest of the pack rushed round and buried their fangs in his body,
until it was covered with crimson wounds. Actaeon groaned
in a sound that was scarcely human but one no stag could ever
have made, as he filled the familiar hills with his cries of anguish.
Then bending his legs like a cringing beggar, he gazed all round
with his silently pleading eyes, as if they were outstretched arms.
What of his friends? In ignorant zeal they encouraged the wild pack
on with the usual halloos. They scanned the woods for their leader,
shouting, 'Actaeon! Actaeon!', as if he were far away,
though he moved his head in response to his name.
'Why aren't you here, 245
you indolent man, to enjoy the sight of this heaven-sent prize?'
If only he'd not been there! But he was. He would dearly have loved
to watch, instead of enduring, his own dogs' vicious performance.
Crowding around him, they buried their noses inside his flesh
and mangled to pieces the counterfeit stag who embodied their master. 250
Only after his life was destroyed in a welter of wounds is Diana,
the goddess of hunting, said to have cooled her anger.

4.14.4 Glossary and Notes

➢ **Notes:**

1. Book 3 of *Metamorphoses* contains six main stories with a seventh inserted within the sixth. All these stories are connected to each other with the common context of Thebes and the House of Cadmus. The first two stories and the last two are lengthy with epical grandeur and dimensions, but the second and the third are shorter and lighthearted. The theme of Metamorphosis continues to occupy the centre of these poems, sometimes centrally and sometimes peripherally. Each story has a distinct content and a tone but, (in the words of the translator, David Raeburn),

   […] in all six we can detect an underlying theme in the idea of 'intrusion' or 'seeing the forbidden holy', followed by unhappy, even violent, consequences. In the four major tales (there is) also the ecphrases, formal descriptions of natural surroundings which are more than purely decorative: they suggest that elemental forces in nature are at work. (91)

2. In this edition, the tale of Diana and Acteaon begins at line number 131 and ends at line number 252. The title of the story is "Acteaon" instead of "Diana and Actaeon"

➢ **Glossary:**

L 131- Cadmus- Husband of Harmonia, Son of Agenor, Father of Agave and Autonoe. He famously slays the dragon and founds Thebes. He had wandered in exile with Harmonia.

L 133- Mars: (also known as Gradivus) god of War, son of Jupiter and Juno and had affair with Venus.

L-133- Venus: Goddess of Love, wife of Vulcan, mother of Cupid.- Personification of Sexual Love. She had an affair with Mars.

L 142- "No crime…a pure mistake":The expression and the tone is identical to the poet's (Ovid's) own condition and circumstances of exile to Tomis. In Tristia 2.ll103, the poet actually compares himself to Actaeon. Many scholars suggest that these lines (141-2) are a later addition where Ovid speaks about himself.

L 146- Glades: an open space in a wood or forest

L 148- Quarry: an animal pursued by a hunter

L155- Tapering: becoming thinner or narrower towards one end

L 156- Diana-[also known as Phoebe] virgin goddess of hunting, daughter of Jupiter and Latona, sister of Apollo.

L 160- Rugged: rough

L 172- capacious: Large

L 177- Grotto: cave

L 194- stag: a male deer

L197- pelt: repetitive use

L 197- dappled: marked with spots or rounded patches

L 197-buckskin: the skin of a male deer

L198-Autonoe: One of the daughters of Cadmus and mother of Actaeon.

L 207-Blackfoot…Tracker: In the original Latin, Ovid uses common Greek names for Acteaon's dogs which many of his contemporary readers would have associated with and enjoyed. The translator here uses English equivalents

L 213- Sylvan: consisting of or associated with woods

L 215- flanked: accompanied

L 216- taut: stretched or pulled tight

L218- murky: dark and gloomy

L225- spoiling: aggressively eager for

L 239- cringing: bent in fear or apprehension

L 246-lazy

L 250- counterfeit: imitate fraudulently

L 251- welter: lie soaked in blood

4.14.5 Analysis and Detailed Discussion of 'Diana and Actaeon'

Translator Ian Johnston summarises, Book 3 of the *Metamorphoses* in the following manner, Cadmus searches for Europa; he consults Apollo, who tells him to follow a heifer; Cadmus fights and kills the dragon, sows the dragon's teeth; warriors spring up

and fight; Cadmus founds Thebes; Actaeon sees Diana naked, is changed into a stag, and ripped apart by his dogs; Juno tricks and kills Semele; birth of Bacchus; Juno and Jupiter argue about sex, agree to consult Teiresias; how Teiresias became a woman and then a man again; Juno blinds Teiresias, Jupiter gives him the gift of prophecy; Narcissus and Echo; Juno punishes Echo; Narcissus rejects Echo; suffering of Echo; Narcissus falls in love with his own image, pines away, dies, and is changed into a flower; Pentheus and Bacchus; the story of Acoetes; Bac-chus changes sailors into dolphins; Pentheus is killed. (Intro)

As students, you will find the above summary useful in order to situate and understand the Actaeon Diana myth.

The Actaeon myth is narrated in four parts. In the first part, lines 131- 154, Actaeon returns from hunting. In the second part (lines 154 to 198) readers encounter the secret Gargaphie valley where Diana and the nymphs are taking a bath and Actaeon, accidentally enters the spot and sees the nude bodies of the bathing women. He is transformed into a stag by the curse of Diana. Line 198 to line 231 show Actaeon being pursued by his own hounds (Third part). Line 232 to line 251 (the fourth part) describe Actaeon killed by his own dogs.

A first time reader could perhaps be repelled by the sheer irrationality of the progress of events happening as well as the horror of the macabre act of letting loose a pack of hounds on an innocent man. One might interrogate the logic of considering the poet to be an extraordinary one. But the entire *Metamorphoses* is a veritable cauldron of shocking and fantastic tales. That has not however deterred critics to detect in it the characteristics imprinted by a genius. For Alan.H.F. Griffin: Metamorphoses is a ‘universal poem of human experience’ (14). By human experience, Griffin meant the gamut of emotions dealt with in the poem. In this sense, Ovid was much more connected to reality inspite of writing fantastic tales because he sought to expose the freeplay of a range of human emotions (ironically, exhibited more by Gods) which were significantly spearheaded by personal motives rather than any political or social maneuvers.

Going back to the tale of Actaeon,

✓ **First part: Lines 131-154**

-It begins with a brief introduction to the family of Actaeon who is one of the many grandsons of Cadmus and Hermione. Cadmus was the founder of Thebes and while the

narrator describes the long lasting happiness of the Actaeon's grandparents, he warns that no man can be called happy 'until he is dead and his body is laid rest in the grave' (l137). He inserts into the narrative, the cause of Cadmus's grief by summarizing in two lines the fact of Actaeon's transformation into a stag and his being brutally killed by his own hounds. The narrative then goes into a flashback and readers are invited to find out the reasons and retrospect whether a man should be punished 'for a pure mistake'. Ovid does not miss this opportunity to mock and emperor Augustus and his whimsicalities as well as draw a parallel of himself with Actaeon to attract the sympathies of the reader. It was midday with the sun overhead and Actaeon and his men and animals were tired after a successful hunting expedition. As the huntsmen were wandering in the woods, Actaeon ordered them to put away their nets which were soaked with the blood of animals till the next down. He suggested that they take a 'break from their hunting' and resume their 'chase' the next morning.

✓ **Second part: Lines 154-198**

- As the men and dogs take a break the scene shifts to 'a secret corner, a cave surrounded by a woodland' called Gargaphie. This is the place which was often visited by the virgin goddess Diana (very similar to the Greek Artemis in temperament) where the Goddess came for a bathe now and then with her chosen nymphs. Each of the nymphs had a particular duty. On the very fateful day, when Diana came to take a bath in the magical pool, one removed the quiver and the bow (Diana was also a huntress) while others helped her to undress. Two other nymphs removed her boots and Crocale (Like Betty who was the special assistant of Belinda in the *Rape of the Lock*) did the chosen job of '(gathering) the locks that were billowing over/her mistress' neck in a knot'. The narrator faithfully enlists their names-Nephele, Hyale, Rhamis, Psecas and Phiale who stood waiting to bathe their mistress.

At this moment, Acteon who was aimlessly wandering through the woods, accidentally entered the clearing and saw the nude bodies of Diana and her nymphs. In a flash of a moment the nymphs surrounded their mistress to conceal her nakedness, but 'sadly the goddess was taller; her neck and shoulders were visible over the heads of her maidens.' Diana blushed in a crimson glow and was for a moment, but quickly becomes, in the words of John Heath, " the uncompromising agent, that the compromised victim." (55) We must remember that in the earlier Books-1 and 2, women (nymphs) like Daphne, Io, Syrinx had all become victims of lust, greed and jealousy, although the perpetrators of

the crime had been Gods rather than men. Diana had missed the signs of Callisto, one of her favourites (in Book 2) being raped. So with a human around her, she feels threatened and in an act of subversion and teaches the (supposedly) voyeur a lesson of his life, by turning him into a stag.

✓ **Third Part: Lines 198 to 231**

John heath emphasizes on Actaeon's 'oblivion' or in other words bewilderment, when he can feel himself transforming into a stag, '… last she injected panic. The son of Autonoe bolted/surprising himself with his speed as he bounded away/from the clearing.' Ovid, as a poet in the third part of the tale definitely wanted to emphasize the injustice meted out to an individual who was in oblivion and the overwhelming amazement that came over him as he sees himself reflected in a pool. Ovid insists on Actaeon's 'fearful doubt' and indecisiveness. His profound sadness at being rendered identity less. Actaeon in an instant becomes outcaste not knowing whether to go to the palace or to hide in the woods. His victimisation is complete, notwithstanding the fact that Actaeon could himself be blamed for his predicament. He had provoked divine wrath by desiring to marry Semele, whom Zeus wants for himself. In Euripides, he boasts of being a better hunter than Artemis[Diana] (*Bacchus*.337-341). But as readers, we do feel a lot of sympathy for him. In this part of the tale Actaeon is chased by his own dogs, each of a different breed and having a different expertise. Stylistically, this section is unique for the names and the adjectives used to describe each one of them, 'powerful Fawnkiller, Hunter the fierce, and violent Hurricane;/ Wingdog, the fleetest of the foot, and Chaser, the keenest-scented.

Thematically, this part is a subversion of the eternal trope of the hunter and the hunted: Actaeon (human) and dogs = Hunter/stag = Hunted: Dogs = Hunter/Actaeon (Stag) = Hunted. It is this shift, or in other words the liminality of identities (in this case the Hunter and the Hunted) through transformation that becomes the haunting theme of *Metamorphoses*.

✓ **Fourth Part: Lines 232-252**

The last part of the passage is a macabre conclusion of the horrifying tale. Actaeon is brutally attacked by his own dogs that pin him down and dig their fangs into his flesh. As he prayed for mercy, understanding and recognition, the picture becomes too bizarre and incredible a scene. Again Ovid and the translator take their time in mentioning the flamboyant names of the canines and to take away the horror of the scene,

'Blacklock first inserted his teeth to tear at his back;

Beast-killer next; then Mountain- Boy latched on to his shoulder.' (ll 232-233)

The utter desperation of the protagonist is hinted by the narrator when he uses the simile, 'like a cringing beggar,'.

Actaeon's trusted friends only add to the woe by encouraging the wild pack by their hallooing. They ironically rue the absence of Actaeon and call him 'indolent' at a moment when the dogs overpower the gods end game. Actaeon wished he were indeed absent, but he was there; he wished he was watching, not feeling, the savage deeds of his own hounds. Actaeon's inability to even signal that he recognises his own name here contrasts markedly with the articulate authority he had displayed earlier, giving commands to his companions (Hawes 85). Such binaries (hunter/ hunted, authority/servility, beauty/ ugliness) are iterative themes in the Metamorphoses. Actaeon's friends fail to recognize their own friend and leader metamorphosed into a deer. The dogs ultimately tear his flesh, till he is covered with crimson wounds and soaked in blood. It is said that only when Actaeon died in this manner was Diana's anger cooled.

4.14.6 Key Issues

1. Metamorphosis in *Metamorphoses* (Book 3, 'Diana and Actaeon')

Like all the other books and tales the myth of Diana and Actaeon also foregrounds the transformation of Actaeon into a stag by the curse of Diana. While the initial response of the readers (like in the other tales) is of incredulity, this initial response slowly turns into horror and loathsomeness as the young and handsome man is hunted down and killed in a gruesome manner by his own hounds. Ovid employs in each case, plenty of space for such transformation:

"The head she had sprinkled sprouted the horns of a lusty stag;

the neck expanded, the ears were narrowed to pointed tips;

she changed his hands into hooves and his arms into long and slender

forelegs; she covered his frame in a pelt of dappled buckskin;

last, she injected panic. The son of Autonoe bolted,

surprising himself with his speed as he bounded away from the clearing." (ll 194-199)

There is a certain relish on the part of the poet as he imagines the readers' intial shock as Io transforms into a heifer, Daphne into an oak tree, or Syrinx into a reed. It is mostly women who bear the brunt of Gods and Actaeon's change is important because he is one of the men who too face god's wrath. Few others being Cycnus in Book 2 who is changed to a swan, Adonis in Book 10, changed into a flower or Atlas in book 4 who is changed into a rock by Medusa's head.

There is perhaps a similar disbelief when modern readers encounter Gregor Samsa transforming into a fly in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In both Ovid and Kafka who use transformation as a trope in relatively lighthearted and serious contexts, there are specific purposes behind their literary acts. This becomes clear when the readers understand that the change should be a seen as a symbolic one rather than literal. The issue of transformation becomes a ploy to explore identities and their crises. The opportunity which arises allows readers to contextualize the relevance and role of not only the victim but also the perpetrators in changed circumstances. In Felder's understanding, throughout the poem Indeed throughout the poem (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), mortals will be punished precisely for failing to recognize that their capacity for metamorphosis allows the Olympian gods of legend to appear as unremarkably realistic figures. (166)

Read in these terms, Diana for the readers becomes a figure capable of displaying base human emotions like anger, revengefulness, rashness and incapable of showing any mercy. It is the gods whom Ovid chooses to satirize rather than humans who are incapable of escaping punishments for their frailties. The case of Actaeon who is the victim here, also allows us to understand that identities one is proud of might be taken away from him/her. Actaeon who was once the skilled hunter, the commander and the active agent is now transformed into the hunted, the commanded and the passive recipient of aggression. Again, as readers we may interrogate, what constitutes the identity? The mind within the body? The body only? Or the mind only? Ovid seems to suggest that it is the body which helps others determine our identity, whereas we ourselves determine our own identity in terms of our mind and thought processes. The body, however is an appropriate vehicle to lodge our self (identity). Therefore when Actaeon' s body is transformed from a human to an animal one, he cannot express his human thoughts.

"He fled from the dogs who had served him so faithfully, longing to shout to them,

'Stop! It is I, Actaeon, your master. Do you not know me?'

But the words would not come. The air was filled with relentless baying." (ll 229-231)

Ovid's Metamorphoses is abound such dichotomies between mind and body.

In a way Actaeon is also punished for his ambitions, for having desired to marry Semele, for having boasted of being the best hunter in the world. But these are human frailties. Ovid precisely challenges the well know idiom, "to err is human, to forgive divine." Therefore Diana is incapable of forgiving the braggadocio of the young man and in order to erase any chances of having a competitor in hunting Diana gets him killed. This could be a more plausible reason for transforming Actaeon into a stag rather than teaching a lesson for being a voyeur.

One of the other problems which should bother us is the lack of proportion between the crime committed and punishment meted out. In case of Actaeon, Ovid himself writes,

"If you look at the facts, however, you'll find that chance was the culprit.

No crime was committed. Why punish a man for a pure mistake?" (ll 141-142)

Such disproportionate penalties should egg readers to find out the real motive behind the execution of it. Precisely Diana's jealously and earlier premeditated vengeful thoughts, rather than the immediate mistake of Actaeon when he accidentally sees Diana bathing nude.

Transformation thus becomes an alibi to challenge and subvert existing dynamics between the ruler and the ruled. In this case the Gods and the humans, respectively.

2. Gender and Sexuality

Although, in the ancient world, there was not much attention paid to 'gender' as a social construct, there have been instances in the *Metamorphoses* of myths where girls were brought up as boys. The story of Iphis, Book 9, is a clear example of how Iphis, biologically a girl, is brought up as a boy, since her father had ordered that should the child be a girl, she should be murdered at birth. To prevent the above fate, the girl grew up secretly as a boy and wanted to marry a girl when of marriageable age. Since there was no gay pride, or LGBT rights, during the times, this was a dangerous situation. So, goddess Isis came to her rescue and transformed her to a man (biologically). Many such aberrations in sexuality were to be found in characters like Narcissus who fell in love with himself, Myrrha who was sexually attracted to her own father.

In 'Diana and Actaeon' we find another extreme sexual aberration in the figure of Diana who like her mortal counterparts, Daphne and Callisto vouched celibacy and resisted sexual advances of men and Gods. In Book 1, Daphne pleaded to her father in the following words,

"…Darling Father, I want to remain a virgin

for ever. Please let me. Diana's father allowed her that." (ll 486-487)

Added to this, for Diana, men were adversaries or at best competitors. Therefore, Diana was already jealous of Actaeon since he was a comparable hunter. She roamed freely in the woodlands, carried bow and arrows, wore a short skirt (which irked many) and boots, so that she could hunt well. This should definitely remind us of the upbringing of Iphis, mentioned earlier.

For many critics, Ovid had a soft corner for women. In a society which was tough on women and victimized them for no reasons, saw them as sexual objects and procreating machines, stories in *Metamorphoses* seek to expose the brutality and discrimination meted out to women. In the process expose the irrationality of Gods (read 'authority') Alison Sharrock explains the process in the following words,

While many modern feminists would be unhappy about this chivalric designation, there is no doubt that the Ovidian corpus provides a particularly rich site for gendered study. More than any other non-dramatic ancient poetry, male-authored as it overwhelmingly is, Ovid's work gives space to a female voice, in however problematic a manner, and to both male and female voices which reflect explicitly on their own gendered identity. It is also driven by a troubled relationship with the purveyors of Roman masculinity – the army, politics, Augustus, epic, and so on. (95)

In this sense, Diana's treatment of Actaeon, however harsh, is a depiction of her gendered identity. She is viciously protective of her virginity and therefore cannot judge the intruder's entry into the secret spot as an error, rather than an act of deliberate voyeur. Obviously, she is a goddess and therefore has to act fast in order to prevent the fate of her mortal counterparts like Callisto, Daphne and Io. So, in Diana and Actaeon we see an inversion of the normal rationale behind scheme of transformation where the God is the predator and the mortal is the prey. While in other stories the reason for transformation is the desire for the opposite sex, in this story the propelling reason is repulsion for the other one.

Ovid, as a narrator seems to justify the wrongs done to women by inserting counter stories once a while. Besides, Actaeon was an ambitious youth who aspired to compete with the gods. Sexually, he was attracted to Semele, already desired by Zeus, so like Icarus, his fall was inevitable.

3. Revenge and Jealousy

So far, you have understood, how, *Metamorphoses*, inspite of being a collection of fantastic tales is, to borrow the words of Griffin, a 'universal poem of human experience' with a deep rooted connection to contemporary reality. The myth of 'Diana and Actaeon' has a very strong echo of the injustice meted out to Ovid himself by emperor Augustus. As you know, Ovid was exiled to Tomis because emperor Augustus wanted to avenge the poet's involvement in the royal scandal. But in reality, Ovid had done no such significant crime.

One of the motives of the poet in this anti-epic, was to show how extraordinary people, whom we often look up to are also capable of frailties and that no being is above human emotions which can at times occlude their good sense. Thus, protectors become avengers.

In this case, Diana the god, falls prey to such common emotions which veil her sense of judgement, her good sense which should have perceived Actaeon's accidental entry while she was taking a bath. But rather than trying to understand, forgive and forget, Diana displays a mercurial temper, takes revenge and turns the poor man into a stag. Goddesses being unsympathetic angry, vengeful and jealous is an iterative theme in the *Metamorphoses*. Goddess Juno, Jupiter's (Zeus') wife in particular shows an abnormal jealousy by punishing and transforming all those women who are lusted after by her husband. She leaves no stone unturned to harass and torture characters like Io, Semele, Callisto and others. It is therefore nothing strange that Diana should display the same tendency to show her authority and control. One such counterpart of Diana is Artemis to be found in Greek myths who had stopped in her anger, the winds which would have sailed the ships of the Greek army to Troy.

The other and hidden emotion displayed by Diana is jealousy which grew in her due to Actaeon's reputation and claim as a great hunter. The goddess wanted no competitor and therefore took this opportune moment as an alibi to get her adversary killed.

While Diana displays anger, vengeance and jealousy, Actaeon displays initial shock and dismay at the transformation, followed by fear,doubt, desperation and pain which are all common and predictable feelings in the particular context,

"[...] Actaeon groaned
in a sound that was scarcely human but one no stag could ever
have made, as he filled the familiar hills with his cries of anguish.
Then bending his legs like a cringing beggar, he gazed all round
with his silently pleading eyes, as if they were outstretched arms." (ll 237-241)

4. Narrative Technique in *Metamorphoses*

The *Metamorphoses* is as much a web of narratives, acts of story-telling, as it is of stories. The act of story-telling is basic to the whole plot. When Longinus says that the *Odyssey* is 'mostly narrative' (*to pleon diegematikon*) he is opposing dramatic intensity and action (as seen in the *Iliad*) to a narrative mode defined by rambling curiosity and story-telling. With Ovid we can go further and say that the poem is 'mostly *about* narrative', if we consider the strategic importance of telling stories for the plot. The poet narrates, the characters, when they have an occasion to speak, tend to become narrators. Ovid develops the Odyssean tradition. A genre consisting in telling stories about actions becomes increasingly interested in the action of storytelling. The text not only consists of a mixture of narrative and mimesis, but also suggests the mimesis of a narrative. The attention claimed by internal narrators within the plot sensitizes readers to the point where we take very seriously the presence of a super-narrator within the text. Communication becomes a central theme of the myths of metamorphosis, and this is mostly a consequence of Ovidian innovations in inherited tales. At the same time as collecting such diverse and separate subject matter, Ovid intended to write an epic poem. He states his intentions clearly in the first four lines of the poem, which is brief but packed with meaning:

"Changes of shape, new forms,are the theme which my spirit impels me
Now to recite. Inspire me, O gods (it is you who have even
Transformed my are), and spin me a thread from the world's beginning
Down to my own lifetime, in one continuous poem."
(Prologue ll1-4 translator David Raeburn)

The chronology of the poem confirms the greatness of Ovid's undertaking, for it is boundless, going from the beginning of the world down until Ovid's own day. This allowed Ovid to be active in fields both distant in time and myth as well as deal with

the issues of his own time, which he achieves by making the new Augustan regime the crowning culmination of world history. Although highly intertextual with the *Aeneid*, especially since he re-tells part of the story himself, Ovid nonetheless manages to create a very different type of work, stylistically and tonally.

Possibly Ovid's greatest achievement in writing this poem was the manner in which he seamlessly tied the myths together, imposing a chronological structure which seems entirely natural, so that when Ovid claims in Book 1, for example, Apollo killed the Python and crowned himself with oak leaves, since the laurel has not yet come into existence, and then moves on to tell that particular myth, it is easy to suspend disbelief.

A master of storytelling, each myth moves seamlessly into the next, merging together through theme, subject matter, and verbal interplay, so that the poem truly appears to be a *carmen perpetuum* (unbroken song.) The stories can be linked by chronology, geographical continuity (as with the Theban tales from the third book onwards), thematic parallels (eg loves of the gods, their jealousies and revenges)[we can place the tale of Diana and Actaeon in this scheme], contrast (stories concerning piety and impiety placed in proximity), genealogical relations between the characters and even by similarity of metamorphosis.

At the same time, Ovid does not strive for unity in content and form so much as a calculated variety. It is the continuity of narrative, not subject matter, which creates the impression of fluidity. A proof of this lies in the technique of division between the books of the poem: unlike in Virgil's *Aeneid* where each book has its own relative completeness and independence, the breaks between the books of the *Metamorphoses* frequently fall at the liveliest points, in the middle of an episode (Pan and Syrinx myth is inserted inside the story of Io by pausing it at a critical juncture). This sharpens the reader's curiosity and keeps it aroused in the pauses within the text, allowing no lessening of the narrative tension. Throughout the narrative the narrator or Ovid remains as an omnipresent being oscillating between 'telling' and 'showing' which is also true of the Actaeon story. Ovid is detailed and descriptive allowing the readers to feast their eyes and senses:

"Now picture a valley, dense with pine and tapering cypress,

Called Gargaphie, sacred haunt of the huntress Diana;

there, in a secret corner, a cave surrounded by woodland,

owing nothing to human artifice. Nature had used

her talent to imitate art: she had moulded the living rock

of porous tufa to form the shape of a rugged arch.

To the right, a babbling spring with a thin translucent rivulet

widening into a pool ringed round by a grassy clearing." (ll 154-162)

The employment of nature imagery, similes and metaphors (often the credit of the translator) renders the poem a smooth reading.

But in spite of such smooth reading, at times, Ovid's objective becomes difficult. In the words of Andrew Feldherr again,

> Should we read metamorphosis through epic eyes, with an even greater awareness of its essential unbelievability and trivializing effect? Can the epic form even save the work from itself by transfiguring its fabulous subject matter into a grand history of the Augustan world, just as Virgil allows metamorphosis a new role in his poem? Or is the work fundamentally an anti-epic, lending the gravity of the Homeric and Virgilian form to an antithetical vision of man's place in the cosmos? Or, a final alternative, should we simply avoid the question by allowing the poem to decompose itself into a Hellenistic assemblage of separate tales? Since Ovid often positions metamorphoses at the end of episodes, the transformations within the narrative tend to occur precisely where the structure of the work as a whole is most up for grabs. In deciding whether each metamorphosis marks an ending, or merely a transition, readers are continually confronted with the question of what kind of work they are reading. To get a sense of what is at stake ideologically in the differing responses (169)

5. Treatment of Myths

Fritz Graf, in his essay "Myth in Ovid" points out to the contradiction inherent in Ovid's treatment of myths in the *Metamorphoses* in the following words:

> [...]the deep seriousness of our own concept of what myths are—'a traditional tale . . . held to be not a passing enjoyment, but something important, serious, even sacred', 'traditional tales with immediate cultural relevance'—seems to clash violently with Ovid's irreverent playfulness, as he most often is perceived. (108)

In late Republican and early Augustan Rome, myth (*fabulae*) were universally understood as modes of poetic discourse. There were two ways of narrating events- 'historia', 'historical narratives' and 'fabula', 'mythical narratives'. There was a third type, 'argumentum' which basically referred to the plot (especially in 'comedy').

'Historia' as understood referred to real and factual events, whereas, 'fabula' referred to imaginary or mythical ones. According to Graf, *fabula* 'is a text which contains neither true nor plausible things' (109).

However, Ovid used the 'fabula' but with an objective whish was most suited to the ends of a 'historia'.

Ovid's myths cover an extraordinary range of experience and he displays a penetrating psychological knowledge of the variety of human motivations and delusions. It is in the face of this variety and range, readers have regularly tried to isolate what the unifying theme of metamorphosis might be. But it is hard to do so. It can be banal or it can be sublime, or anything between the two, humans are capable of. At times it can be a 'a savage reduction' (in the words of Leonard Barkan), as in the case of Diana and Actaeon, where the Goddess shows an uncanny aggression and vengeance. On the part of Actaeon, it is the fittest example of 'abject and desperate helplessness', the nadir of a human condition. But whatever it may be Ovid does it with a purpose as the bard would write for Hamlet, "there's a method in his madness." The main connecting thread in these myths is an interest in identity: what is it that makes a human, or does transformation into animate and inanimate things take away the essence of being a human being. The myths are basically collected together and used to answer these questions, and if not answer, at least make us, the readers ponder over them. For Ovid, therefore, myths become 'poetic texts' for probing into the existential questions.

Also, if myths are traditional tales with immediate cultural relevance, then mythical narration explains and, when necessary, legitimates cultural, societal and natural facts in a given society—cults and rituals, social structures, but also natural phenomena; the mythical history of a group defines its identity and place in the contemporary world. In this sense myths also reflect contemporary socio-political practices of the relevant group. Ovid, in a way used the myths in this sense too—As a mirror to the social practices of his times.

4.14.7 Summing Up

Even after two thousand years of its composition, *Metamorphoses* is a pervasive influence in European Literature and Arts, particularly visual arts. It is a veritable storehouse of every conceivable myth which one needs to know in order to understand

and appreciate allusions used by numerous later writers in their texts. It has been translated and dramatized by many and adapted by some of the modern world's most distinguished poets, most notably Ted Hughes (1997). As a work, *Metamorphoses* has been different and iconoclastic, compared to what his contemporaries were writing, particularly in being sensitive towards women and their plight in the contemporary society. The poem is more real than many other realistic works in its approach to society, politics and the perspective towards authority.

4.14.8 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Broad Questions:**

1. Justify the inclusion of the tale of Actaeon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*
2. Comment on Ovid's handling of the myth of 'Diana and Acteaon' in the *Metamorphoses*.
3. Discuss Ovid's treatment of gender and sexuality in *Metamorphoses* with the story of 'Diana and Actaeon' in particular.
4. Comment on the narrative treatment and style in Ovid's Metamorphoses with particular reference to the myth of 'Diana and Actaeon'.
5. Examine how Ovid reverses the role women generally play in his poem, by portraying Diana differently in the 'Diana and Actaeon' myth.
6. Comment on the theme of metamorphosis with reference to the myth of 'Diana and Actaeon'.
7. Discuss the theme of identity, its change and its loss, in the myth of 'Diana and Actaeon' in Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

➢ **Short Questions:**

1. When Actaeon turns into a stag and is pursued by hounds, what human characteristics does he miss most? Why?
2. How does this story handle the theme of female violence? Does such violence seem justified here? How does its significance go beyond the immediate tale? Why do you suppose the narrator comments at the end on others' views of Diana's conduct?
3. How does 'nature' and 'art' blend in the valley of Gargaphie?

4. Describe the situation which made Diana initially a helpless victim.
5. With the transformation of Actaeon into a hound we also see a loss of his identity. Discuss briefly, how far is the above statement true.
6. Explain the way in which Actaeon's story is a continuation of the tale of the house of Cadmus.
7. Comment on the circumstances that made Actaeon lose his way into the Gargaphie.
8. Comment on the horror and pathos created in the dying moments of Actaeon.

4.14.9 Comprehensive Reading List for Module 4

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NOTES

Module-5

Plautus: *Pot of Gold*

Unit 15 ❑ Society and the Beginnings of Comedy in Rome

Structure

5.15.0 Introduction

5.15.1 Roman Society

5.15.2 The Beginnings of Roman Comedy

5.15.3 Old Latin Comedy: Features

5.15.4 Summing Up

5.15.5 Comprehension Exercises

5.15.0 Introduction

In this introductory Unit to Plautus' text, *Pot of Gold* that is on your syllabus, we will begin with some basic ideas about Roman society in order to understand how the soil was germane to the flowering of Comedy. In that context, we will further discuss the beginnings of comedy, and then the style and features of old Latin comedy. With this understanding of the socio-cultural background, you will be able to proceed on a study of the text in a more comprehensive manner. While going through this Unit, you should be careful to mark how certain features of classical comedy have survived in later practice, and how some of it has been adapted to suit later contexts.

5.15.1 Roman Society

You know by now that ancient Rome, which was situated on the banks of the river Tiber is now in modern-day Italy. It was inhabited by the Latin tribes (Latini or Latians), almost a thousand years before the birth of Christ. The city of Rome, however, was, according to historians, founded, in circa 753 BCE. Legends often tend to associate the foundation of Rome to the story of the Trojan Prince Aeneas, hailed in Virgil's epic; but a more popular story regarding the foundation of Rome owes its origins to the mythical character of Romulus.

Roman society was patrilineal since its foundation, with a Father-god, like Jupiter, at the head of its polytheistic pantheon. However, as in many other primitive communities, women had to play a vital role in consolidating the society, stopping war and bloodshed,

and by peacemaking through marriage. The story of Romulus' wife Hersilia can be cited as a mythical representation of this role played by women in ancient Roman society.

The development of Rome continued through such major phases as the Republican (590-27 BCE) and the Imperial (27 BCE-476 CE in the west, 330-1453 CE in the east). The political structure of the society involved a powerful patriarchal leader at the top—called the 'Consul' during the Republic, and 'Emperor' afterwards. The administration consisted of the senate, judges, and assemblies, which operated under the Consul or the Emperor.

There was a major social division between two classes—the aristocratic Patricians, mainly the landowning gentry; and the working-class Plebeians—involving not only the poor labourers but farmers, artisans, small traders, *craftsmen and even teachers*—basically *those* who were non-aristocratic. The Roman laws were heavily in favour of the upper class Patricians – until a power-struggle, called the 'Conflict of Orders', *ensued* in the period c. 500-287 BCE. The Plebeians made up a large portion of the army needed by the Patricians to fight against the neighbouring tribes. **Notice how the concept of different social classes, and conflicts between them have characterised every phase of social existence at all points of time!**

In 494 BCE, the working-class Plebeians refused to continue fighting until their *demands* were addressed properly. New laws were framed to give the Plebeians some voice *by* allowing them to send to the Senate a 'Tribune' as their representative. By the time the Conflict of the Orders was resolved, Roman society was hierarchically divided into five social classes: (1) Patricians, (2) Equites, (3) Plebeians, (4) Freedmen and (5) Slaves. Gradually, however, some of the Plebeians gained importance in society and marital relationships between Patricians—the traditional landed gentry and some Plebeians who later gained some wealth and position—became possible.

The *Equites* (the equestrian class, associated with horses or the cavalry) came from the class of knights who later became associated with trade and commerce. They also belonged to the upper class but were inferior to the Patricians who made up the Senate.

The freedmen, former slaves who had been able to buy their freedom or set free by their masters and were recognized as citizens but did not have any representation in politics. Former slaves could choose any common profession according to their capacity or serve their former masters as clients.

Slaves belonged the lowest position in society; they had no rights and were considered to be the property of their owners. Yet, Roman civilization depended heavily

on the manual labour of the slaves. Their lives were spent in tremendous hardship and *there was* a major protest, by Spartacus and his followers, in 71 BCE. The story of Spartacus has hence been severally adapted and performed across different media all over the world, each time exemplifying the spirit of resistance and rising up for rights. From these distinct divisions into classes, you can have a clear idea of Roman social organisation, and how strategic that was.

The family was at the base of Roman society where women were, in general, under the jurisdiction of men—a legally appointed father-figure, a husband, or some male guardian. However, experienced elderly ladies and mothers were influential in maintaining the stability of the family. Aristocratic ladies hardly had a public life outside the household whereas, slave-women, along with their male counterparts, had to work hard mostly in their owners' houses. Despite a few worthy examples of learned women, women, in general, were denied education. Roman citizenship was granted to a male who belonged to one of the Latian tribes and was above the age of fifteen— according to his ancestry, landed position, and profession. For a detailed idea about the Roman society, students may refer to such books as *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (1998) by Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, and *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation* (2014) by Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth.

5.15.2. The Beginnings of Roman Comedy

An exposure to Greek culture, mostly through the influx of Greek people brought to Rome as slaves during the 3rd century BCE, *initiated* the beginnings of Roman drama. The history of Roman comedy *has become* available to today's world mostly through the writings of Livius Andronicus, a Greek, who came to Rome as a slave but later *earned* his freedom and was made to tutor the children of some noble Roman households. In 240 BCE, he presented a play before a large Roman audience, an adaptation from the Greek, and this event played a great role in triggering a Roman interest in the Greek classics. His translation of Homer's *Odyssey* in Latin was considered a pioneering work. The other texts he adapted into Latin include, Sophocles's *Ajax*, *Andromeda*, *Gladiolus* and *Ludius*.

For Roman society, the adaptation of a Greek cultural ethos, was not an easy task. Though we often utter Greco-Roman in one breath, one needs to understand that the free

individualism of the Greeks would have been problematic in imperial Rome. As the Classical scholar W.A. Oldfather observes in his essay on 'Roman Comedy',

> Perfect solidarity in public action and in private conduct, and hence in thought and belief, could alone save the imperilled nationality. Out of this spirit grew that sturdy sense of public duty which governed the whole moral life, a recognition of the superior claims of social justice, and of the need of uniformity in regulating the intercourse of men. These qualities, together with the indomitable will of generations of fighting men, produced the incomparable Roman achievements in character, administration and jurisprudence. (218)

However, as the politico-social situation of old Rome left little scope for literature and cultural modes of self-expression, the Romans thus turned to Greek literature and its liberal spirit for these activities. Thus the adaptation of Greek works in Latin gave an impetus to the shaping of what we call 'Roman literature' of the early period. Soon the Romans became exposed to the Greek comic theatre, and turned to adapting Greek comedy into Latin. Of course, there had been a tendency to introduce 'Roman' elements of society, events, and characters, into typical 'Greek' plots and settings—elements which would help the Roman audiences to relate with the plays. For instance, *when* the setting of a play was Athens, a Roman playwright would use a 'Prologue' which would set the tone of the play, adding local colour and situations, thereby, acclimatizing Roman audiences with the different milieu.

Gnaeus Naevius (c. 235-204 BCE) adapted many of Euripedes' tragedies and Menander's *Kolax*. He also composed historical plays and about thirty comedies are ascribed to him— the most famous of them was *Tarentilla*. He was a predecessor to Plautus, who gave Roman drama a distinguished position. Naevius introduced songs and a variety of metres. His plays were rich in critical commentaries on Roman *social and political life*, which led to his imprisonment in 207 BCE. In many ways, his use of stock characters, well-knit plots and colourful, colloquial language, his vivid portrayal of the common people's l*ives* with intrigues, amusement and romantic engagements would later be found more vividly in Plautus, who was respectful of the elder poet. His application of the device of mingling or fusing plots (known as 'contaminatio') had been a major influence on two of his most famous successors, Plautus (254-184 BC) and Terence (185-159BC).

In the hands of Plautus, the plays of Menander and the other Greek playwrights were adapted into musical Latin comedies. His stock characters involved—the braggart soldier, the parasite, the old miser, the identical twins and the resourceful slave - *the last providing* a major force behind the comic action. Plautus confined himself to a single literary species, and brought the Greek masters onto the Roman stage, with a renewed vigour. Some *Critics have, however often* charged him *later for not trying to produce* a genuine 'national' comedy for Rome *as* all his works had been adaptations of Greek comedy wrapped with some local flavour.

In this discussion, we should also include, however briefly, the contribution of Caecilius Statius (c. 220 BC-c. 166/168 CE) who marks an 'intermediate' phase in the development of old Latin Comedy. According to W.A. Oldfather, "Neither so original as Plautus nor so refined as Terence, he left much to be desired in point of good taste and of good Latinity. But he followed his originals, principally works of Menander, more closely in the construction of plots." (220) His plays were marked by a tendency towards debate and argument.

With Terence the development of Roman Comedy was believed to be complete. His plays mark a distinctive aesthetic achievement in language involving an uniformity of elegant style giving to the plays of Terence, in the opinion of many scholars, a greater sense of 'refinement' than those of Plautus. Terence's use of the verse-form was more polished, more stylistic in conception and structure, coupled with a subtlety of humour, avoiding the farcical and the 'lowly comical'. But this element of sophistication perhaps rendered his plays less popular to the Plebeian audiences than those of Plautus. Plautus's plays, on the other hand, was more vivacious and full of energy. Oldfather, thus points out that he was essentially nearer to the Greeks than was Terence and, consequently, he developed the style and structure of what we call 'closet' drama.

5.15.3 Old Latin Comedy: Features

The Atellan farce, a native form of the Old Latin comic-dramatic endeavour did exist before the Romans' association with Greek drama. This kind of farce, originally from the Oscan town of Atella in Sothern Italy, used to be performed with masks, and was popular for almost half a millennium in Italy. Historians would date its origin around 300 BCE. This form had similarities with the *improvised Greek farces* known

as *komos* (revels). The use of masked stock characters and slapstick gags were a common feature in this farce; plots generally involved domestic affairs, mostly as in Greek New Comedy—'boy meets girl, falls in love, but parents object to their union, finally a loyal and clever slave intervenes and makes the marriage possible'. Thus Atellan farce could be easily mixed up with the spirit of Greek New Comedy in adaptations that were called *fabulae pallaitae* ('plays in a Greek cloak'). The scripts were rich in lively action, robust puns and jokes. The reliance on boisterous scenes of physical comedy was significant as it undermined Roman etiquette in a licensed manner.

Performed as a popular form of entertainment in ancient Republican and early Imperial Rome, Attelan farces originally came *from* an oral tradition, mostly in the Oscan dialect. Later they became a literary genre and came to be performed in Latin by the 1st century BC, but only a few fragments have survived. Lucius Pomponius of Bononia and Novius were among the writers who used the form of Attelan farce in Old Latin comedies, but their written legacy is almost extinct. The stock characters in these farces included Maccus, the clown; Bucco ("Fat Cheeks"), the simpleton; Pappus, or the old fool; Dossennus, perhaps meaning the "Hunchback"; and Manducus, who can be understood as "the Glutton." There is no evidence of farces in existence beyond the 1st century AD, but as a matter of 'legacy', we may trace some of the stock characters used in the 16th-century Italian 'commedia dell'arte' from this tradition. These old Roman farces, with a typical use of mimicry and a reliance on stock characters, got incorporated into the new strain of Latin comedy which flourished under the Greek influence.

Having a meagre pre-existent tradition to adhere to, Plautus retained some features of the Atellan farce, and freely adapted Greek comedies, especially Menander's New Comedies. Except for the period called the 'Middle Ages', Plautus's comedies hardly failed to attract audiences when performed; his plays, therefore remained popular through European history and its cultures of theatre. His works were even quoted and appreciated by strict and conservative church fathers like Saint Jerome and so on.

The plays had the richness, energy and complexity of Greek plots but were free of unwanted Hellenisms *as* they were strongly embedded in the contemporary Roman context. In temperament, Plautus was nearer to Aristophanes. Avoiding Menander's subtle character portrayals, Plautus's exaggerated depiction of character verged on caricature. Plautus had an infallible instinct and a perfect sense of comic timing to turn his art into achieving stage success, for it was dedicated to amuse with compulsive, extravagant laughter and musicality.

5.15.4 Summing up

- The Romans lived in a society that was patrilineal, strictly following a social hierarchy.
- Their society was basically an administrative and law-abiding body but their exposure to Greek culture, through the translations of Livius Andronicus, made them eager to express their talents by adapting Greek plays to Latin.
- Naevius, Plautus and Terence were some of the major exponents of *the developing* Latin Comedy.
- Considering the native form of old Roman farces, one may assume that the use of stock characters and a tendency towards comic mimicry went well with the spirit of Greek New Comedy and so these features were more or less retained in Plautine comedies.

5.15.5 Comprehension exercises

➢**Long Answer Type Questions:**

1. Discuss the structure of Roman society, with special *reference to* its social hierarchy.
2. Briefly comment on the 'Conflict of Orders'.
3. Give a brief sketch of the position of women in Roman society.

➢ **Medium Length Answer Type Questions:**

1. Give and account of the early native form of farces in Rome.
2. What were the points of similarity between these farces and Greek 'New Comedy'?
3. Give some examples of the stock characters.

➢ **Short Answer Type Questions:**

1. How did the Romans *become* exposed to the Greek culture?
2. Discuss how differently Plautus and Terence adapted Greek comedies into Latin.
3. Briefly discuss the role of Naevius and Statius in the development of comedy.

Unit 16 ❑ From Menander to Terence: The Tradition of Roman Comedy

Structure

5.16.0 Introduction

5.16.1 Menander's New Comedies in Greek

5.16.2 Menander's Influence on Writers of Roman Comedy

5.16.3 Terence and the Achievements of Roman Comedy

5.16.4 Summing up

5.16.5 Comprehension Exercises

5.16.0 Introduction

This Unit proposes to trace the tradition and the development of Greco-Roman Comedy from Menander to Terence, so that learners are able to historicise the Plautine plays in general and the *Pot of Gold* in particular. It is therefore incumbent that you look upon this Unit as a continuation from where we left off in the previous one.

5.16.1 Menander's New Comedies in Greek

We have already discussed that the fascination of the Romans with the Greek culture started with Livius Andronicus's translation of *Odessey* and some Greek plays. In the genre of comedy, Menander with his Greek New Comedies has been the major influence.

The Athenian Menander was considered the greatest among the comic playwrights of the third and the final stage of Greek comedy—known as New Comedy. By the time he started writing, Greek comedy was no longer interested in satirizing public affairs as in the time of Aristophanes. Menander concentrated more on domestic affairs and young people's love-intrigues. He also used stock-characters, suitable for a romantic-familial plot. Characters in his plays could often be identified as stern fathers, boastful soldiers, young lovers, cunning slaves, and so on.

Despite his use of stock characters, Menander excelled in characterization sometimes with a touch of subtlety, for example, the portrayal of the old misanthrope Knemon—a typical 'stern father' in *Dyscolus* (*the only complete text* we have among his surviving plays) *who* is not without a touch of sympathy, especially when he relinquishes everything and retires towards the end *leaving* the stage for the lovers' union. Menander dispensed with the chorus and instead of mythical or social plots, *introduced* domestic problems *of daily life* and, finally, their happy resolutions. Menander's works were adapted by the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence and, through them, the influence continued to work upon the development of European comedy during the Renaissance. It is from their work and some writings by other Latin authors that *the twentieth century has* come to know about the lost corpus of Menander's plays, before.

The discovery of several fragments of Menander's texts in Egypt in 1898 and 1900—*more than the halves of two plays*, *Witnessess* or *By-Standers,* and *The Girl Whose Hair Was Cut Short*—had revived *interest in* some of his lost work. Subsequent discoveries were made and scholarship on Menander flourished in the 20th century. More than a hundred plays were attributed to Menander, of which mostly fragments have been discovered till now. While compiling the fragments in an accessible form, for students of Roman comedy, W C Wadell relied largely upon Koch's *Comicorum Atticorum Fragments*, Volume III, Edward Capps' *Four Plays of Menander*(1910), Van Leeuwen's *Menandri Fabularum Reliquiae* (1919), and Francis G. Allinson's *Menander* (Loeb Classical Library, 1921). Wadell's compilation, *Selections from Menander* (Oxford University Press, 1927) remains, till date, a significant text for the study of Greek influences on Roman Comedy.

It is to be noted, however, that Menander's significant influence has caused general readers (except a dedicated group of Classical scholars) forget the other exponents of New Comedy—including Alexis—Menander's uncle, Philemon and Diphilos—*who were* 'rivals' of Menander and more oriented towards the farcical, and also Hegesippus and Euphron. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the notion that Philemon and Diphilos were more of an influence on Plautus whereas, Terence was closer to Menander. In her 2015 paper on 'New Comedy and Roman Comedy : With and Without Menander' Sophia Pappaioannaou shows that Plautus "was better inclined towards models that favored less refined speech, cruder jokes, farcical violence, and more impressive dramatic effects, and were closer to the prankish and paradramatic character of Middle Comedy. Diphilos and Philemon comply much better with this

profile, and it is not fortuitous that they have been classified as writers of the Mése by later critics in antiquity". (69). The term 'Mése' literally stands for 'Middle Street'—the main road running through Constantinopole was known as the Mése. So the phrase 'writers of the Middle Street' suggests that Diphilos and Philemon were more associated with the mass-audiences, than the aristocrats. Pappaioannaou also points out that Philemon's *Thensaurus* and *Emporos* provided the models for Plautus' *Trinummus* and *Mercator* (70). William S. Anderson (1993) mentions that Diphilos was the main source for Plautus' *Rudens* and *Casina* and his *Vidularia* and *Captivi* also includes elements from the fragments of Diphilos. (45-69) However, Terence's *Adelphoe*, once thought to be inspired fully by Menander, was at least partially indebted to Diphilos' *Companions in Death*. (Petrakis 55)

However, it is historically recognized that Menander's leading position as the most *notable* playwright of New Comedy, remains unchallenged both for his Roman successors and students of classical literature. Ovid expresses his appreciation for his writing, Plutarch compares Menander's skill to that of a skilled craftsman, musician or painter and Quintillian's praise of him is reiterated by a 20th century Classical scholar like Sidney G. Ashmore (Introduction, *The Comedies of Terence,* New York : Oxford University Press, p. 7) Summarising Menander's achievement C.R. Post, therefore writes:

> Preeminently a Greek, he excels in those very qualities which always lend charm to the most insignificant literary products of Hallas, which were always less possible to the heavier Roman mind and the more cumbrous Latin tongue, and especially, despite the more advanced stylistic art of Terence, to that mind and that tongue in their as yet inchoate condition of the second century before Christ. (Quoted in Petrakis, 64)

Considering Menander *as* the chief exponent of New Comedy, we may take a brief note of its *major* features. In 'The Argument of Comedy' Northorp Frye argues,

> New Comedy unfolds from what may be described as a comic Oedipus situation. Its main theme is the successful effort of a young man to outwit an opponent and possess the girl of his choice. The opponent is usually the father. (450)

Therefore, it is basically concerned with a domestic-romantic plot which seeks its final resolution in marriage and in the 'triumph' of the younger over the 'traditional' and sometimes 'dogmatic' elderly generation which also tends to harp on a social

reconciliation. As Frye adds: “The essential comic resolution, therefore, is an individual release which is also a social reconciliation. The normal individual is freed from the bonds of a humorous society, and a normal society is freed from the bonds imposed on it by humorous individuals” (452).

5.16.2 Menander’s Influence on Writers of Roman Comedy

It would be best to begin with a question here: How closely did Roman Comedy follow the Greek originals? The legacy remained alive *not merely in translation but, in this* period, much more in the spirit of adaptation. Considering the differences in cultural setting, much of the *subtle* nuances, literary and historical allusions and, sometimes, the delineation of characters, originally done by Menander with a finer touch of the Attic language, had to be modified.

For a long time, Classical scholarship maintained that Plautus had rather ‘freely’ reworked the original texts of Menander or his contemporaries like Diphilos and Philemon, adapting them to indigenous settings and by adding local colour thereby making them suitable for his contemporary Roman society, whereas Terence offered a comparatively ‘Romanised’ version of New Comedy. For both Plautus and Terence, more action was infused to fill up the corpus of the play to satisfy the expectations of the local audiences; *and, according to early sources*, they sometimes achieved this, by a combination of plots and elements of two or three plays.

According to Oldfather, “Such combinations were, with the stock figures and when made on a small scale, comparatively easy, and Terence was especially successful therein. Names of personages were changed freely, sometimes, as in the *Eunuchus*, without any very obvious purpose, but with Plautus, in the main, no doubt, for comic effect”. (220)

Another way of reworking was accomplished by substitution of characters—one for another [for instance, the character of the misanthrope Knemon in *Dyscolos* is substituted by the miserly Euclio in the Pot of Gold, where some similarities between the two characters can be found, but the plot and contexts, on the whole are very different] and, sometimes, by suggesting a change of situation. Plautus’ plays did not ‘defamiliarise’ the originals by Menander, but they excelled in structurally and thematically modifying the Greek plays, in mixing up plots and characters and, sometimes, deconstructing the

original with a vibrant, populistic approach. Another major difference *was in the use of* language, and meter, especially in the inclusion of rhythm and music.

5.16.3 Terence and the Achievement of Roman Comedy

Publius Terentius Afer, better known as Terence in English, was born in the Roman colony of Carthage in Africa. He was brought to Rome as a slave by a senator called Terentius Lucanus, who gave him his own name, and impressed by his intelligence, helped him to get a fair education, and finally, set him free. Since the revival of classical learning in Europe during the Renaissance, Terence was held, after Plautus, as the greatest comic playwright of Rome. For the classical and Neo-classical scholars, his dramatic verses were celebrated as the model of simple and conversational yet, refined Latin. However, in his lifetime, he was not as popular as his famous predecessor, Plautus. Moreover, he faced slanders from his senior contemporaries and, his association with the Scipian circle—a group of cultured Roman nobles named after one called Scipio Africanus the Younger, who was an admirer of Greek literature—also led to the accusation that his plays might have been written by some noble patron.

Terence's plays differed in presentation and structure from those of Plautus, and also in their use of language. Terence's humour depended more on a literary sensibility, whereas, Plautus excelled in its dramatic and visual presentation which might have been crude and physical at times but able to please his audiences. Plautus used to add a prologue at the beginning, so that the audiences could *be given* an idea of the plot. Terence, on the contrary, did not *suggest* the plot in his prologues. Using shorter prologues he would rather defend himself against the attacks from "malicious old poets" like Lucius Lanuvinus, who accused him of meddling with the originals—combining materials from two Greek plays by the same author or by different authors. *It was true*, Terence *did* sometimes incorporate some extraneous sources into the main plot, but that could not be labelled a 'discredit'. For Instance, in the *Andria (The Andrian Woman),* he combines the Greek play by Menander, sharing the same title, with materials from another play, also by Menander-*Perinthia* (*The Perinthian Girl*). Terence's *Eunuchus was an adaptation of* Menander's *Eunouchos* , in which the Roman playwright added two characters, a soldier and his parasitic flatterer from another play called *Kolax (The*

Flatterer)—also by Menander. As already mentioned in the previous unit, in the *Adelpho*e, Terence added extraneous material into the main plot *in the form of* an interesting scene from a play by Diphilos, a contemporary of Menander.

Both Plautus and Terence added much to the development of Roman comedy, but their aims and approaches were different. During Plautus' writing career, a steady form of Latin comedy was yet to be conceptualised. The Greek models were available but a simple translation of them would not be accepted by the local audience. Plautus had to improvise considerably and make the plays more interesting than intellectual. Plautus's challenge was in providing genuine laughter, often mixed up with crude farce, for the common audiences—otherwise they would leave and seek other kinds of entertainments such as a gladiator fighting with lions, or a wrestling match. This was exactly the case with the two productions of Terence's play, Hycera: people left in the middle of the play, and the productions failed. Thus we can see that by the time Terence started to write comedies, the situation of the general public was approximately the same though, Roman theatrical culture had by then, been able to claim a stronger appeal—at least among a chosen few. Terence wrote mostly for the educated 'Scipionic' coterie, whose taste demanded more refinement than that of the general Roman mob.

Modern scholarship on Terence has often faced a problem, regarding the question of his 'originality' as a playwright. However, as Roman literature and culture owed considerably to the Greeks, the question of 'originality' could not be viewed unequivocally. The term should not be used in a modern-day sense, to criticize or appreciate plays of classical antiquity. Here, the question of 'originality' is important, however, because it has enabled modern scholarship to trace the tradition, through Plautus and Terence, back to Menander whose plays could not be preserved in their entirety. Terence indeed found his model mostly in Menander and, in some cases, also adapted from the works of other Greek poets. Four of his plays were based on Menander and the other two mentioned Apollodorus of Carystus—a follower of Menander—as the original author. Classical scholars have shown that Terence did not fully 'translate' the Attic Koine of Menander but he maintained a studied adherence to his style which gave to his use of Latin a sense of 'standard' artistry. Besides his skill as a translator or adapter, he dressed his plays with a sophisticated, sensitive approach to individual characters and their problems. His combination of two plots, known as 'contaminatio', was not uncommon: Plautus also used it even with more creative freedom and vivacity. Terence aimed at a conversational

realism, and reduced the long, expository prologues or such conventional devices as the character's address to the audience.

He died young, and was not so successful in gaining the favour of the audiences in his lifetime. History, however, gave him his due, for with Terence, Roman comedy reached its final stage of development and, after him, it is difficult to find any comic playwright worthy of mention. The age of Roman comedy survived only a short time after Terence. His life was short and his works were not many in number but his language and art of presentation set a standard for "pure Latin" for a long time. Finally, for classical and neo-classical studies, Terence is now even a part of the curriculum.

5.16.4 Summing up

- The plays of Menander, the Greek playwright had been the model mostly sought by the writers of Roman Comedy. Before the 20th century discovery of some of his fragments, we could know about his work chiefly from the adaptations of his plays by his Roman successors.
- Plautus and Terence, with different approaches and style, contributed to the development of Roman comedy. Plautus was more dramatic and physical in his use of humour, whereas Terence was more refined.
- Both writers combined plots from more than one Greek original but Plautus did it more freely whereas Terence, even while combining elements from two plots, remained a faithful adapter.
- Terence's language and style have been considered the model for "standard Latin".

5.16.5 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type:**
  1. Discuss the influence of Menander on his Roman successors.
  2. Discuss the achievement of Plautus and Terence, with reference to their different approaches to comedy.
- **Medium Length Answer Type:**
  1. Comment briefly on Menander's New Comedies.

2. What do you know about Terence's style of combining plots? Explain with examples.

➢ **Short Answer Type:**

1. Briefly discuss any two features of Greek New Comedy.
2. Write a short note on the dramatic style of Terence.

NOTES

Unit 17 ❑ Plautus and his Plays

Structure

5.17.0 Introduction

5.17.1 Plautus: A Bio-Brief

5.17.2 Plays of Plautus: An Overview

5.17.3 Plautus' plays: Major Features and Style

5.17.4 Summing Up

5.17.5 Comprehension Exercises

5.17.0 Introduction

This Unit will be helpful for students for understanding Plautus and his plays as a whole. They will be able to gain an understanding of the features of his plays, his use of stock characters, and gain an insight into the style and technique used in his plays before engaging in a deeper reading of the prescribed text. The Unit will also help the learner to place Plautus within the larger frame of Classical Literature.

5.17.1 Plautus: A Bio-Brief

Though the plays of Plautus are more or less accessible to the present generation of readers, it is difficult to know the man behind them. According to recent research, though there is no definite proof, yet Plautus is believed to have lived approximately between 254 and 184 BCE. As it is clear to us that the time when Plautus lived is historically so remote and the literary and cultural remnants of this age are so few and fragmentary that it is difficult to make any claims. However, Plautus's comic plays are one of the literary relics of that time gone by and remain as important documents that testify to the abiding values of humanity. The common desires and concerns that existed in that civilization now lost seem to find an echo even today. Therefore the plays seem to unify human civilizations across time and space.

According to knowledge now available to us, Plautus was originally called Titus Maccius Plautus. This tripartite name was a convention in the names used by Roman

aristocrats. A closer look will, however, prove that this name was itself a deception. The very name is a comic artifice on part of the classical dramatist. Thus, a close analysis will show that the first name (praenomen), that is, Titus; the second (nomen)—Maccius and the third (cognomen)—Plautus, taken together, as the full name suggests "Titus belonging to the Flatfoot clan of the Maccus family". It can be noted in this context that Maccius refers to the son of "Maccus", where Maccus was the clown figure of Atellan farce. Moreover, in Latin Titus was slang for "penis"; thereby revealing that Titus Maccius Plautus was just a contrived name. It is, therefore quite apparent that the name of the comic dramatist was itself a joke—a joke in the typical Plautine style—remarkable for its exaggerated coarseness.

Plautus was not born into the upper class of the Roman society. His close references to ordinary life, in many of his plays give us ample proof of that. In fact, the name he uses may have only been a stage name for the playwright might have been trained as a performer in the genre of Atellan farce. Many fabricated stories have been doing the rounds since Plautus's death. There is one which states that he was born about 254 BCE in Umbria. His early associations with theatre probably began as an actor and he came to Rome when travelling with a theatre-group. He is said to have fallen out of luck several times as he had worked in a theatre, saved a little money and lost it subsequently in a trading venture. After this he returned to Rome in a state of insolvency and had to work in grain mills. While working in the mill he wrote three of his plays in a row, and encouraged by their success, went on to write more comedies. These are some of the available information on Plautus's life but these are not based on any factual evidence. These biographical details are conjured from his own comedies. Similar kinds of fabricated stories have been created about the great Greek dramatist Euripedes.

Twenty one comedies by Plautus are still extant. For his source materials, Plautus depended on the New Comedy of Menander and other Greek dramatists. He adapted them freely, often retaining the Greek setting but using references to Roman lifestyle and local scenario. Sometimes he used to give topical references—such as the imprisonment of the comic poet Naevius (207 BCE), or incorporated scenes of a Roman city or marketplace and sometimes even referring to Roman politics or laws. However, in general he avoided political satire and relied more on the ridiculous follies of human nature. Most of the stories of his plays came from the life of the lower or middle-class Roman citizens. As a result of his skilful adaptation of Greek comedies into the new Roman context, Plautus's lines serve not only as important examples of Roman theatre

of what later came to be known as the Classical age, but also as indications of the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of late third-century and early second-century Rome. The comedies employ archaic Latin vocabulary full of what might be considered unusual by later civilizations but, nevertheless developed around Roman culture. Extensive study and experimentation have been conducted by academics and translators, regarding the language of the Plautine plays. Despite such scholarly efforts, it is impossible to properly transfer these into modern languages—as they are a storehouse of realistic and brilliant colloquial idioms. The plays dramatise the humour that won the appreciation of Roman audiences. Recurrent rhetorical devices like the pun, quipping, alliteration, assonance that run through Plautus's texts are the hallmarks of his comic technique.

5.17.2 Plays of Plautus: An Overview

A number of plays are attributed to Plautus, but only twenty one of those plays are authentically recognised, and revived mostly in entirety. The dates of his plays are rather disputed yet, we can include *Cistellaria* (202 BCE), *Miles Gloriosus* (200 BCE), *Stichus* (200 BCE) among his **early plays**. On the other hand, *Pseudolus* (191 BCE) *Bacchides, Persa, Trinummus* and *Truculents* are assumed to be written in his **later life**. The dates of many other plays like *Amphitrion, Asinaria, Auluraria* (The Pot of Gold), *Captivi* and the famous *Menaechmi,* are difficult to determine.

The original versions of the Plautine texts are mostly lost, what *have* survived are basically 'performing editions'. These had been prepared for production purposes, with necessary *interpolations*, expansions, modifications and reductions. *The* plays continued to hold popularity on *the* stage until the time of Cicero and Horace. *In* the Middle Ages, Plautine plays lost their popularity, but literary interest in *them* revived during the Italian Renaissance. In 1429, Nicholas of Kues revived twelve of his plays. It was through Ariosto that Plautine adaptations, in the Italian vernacular, came to light. *Amphitruo* was the first Plautine play to be translated into English during the Renaissance. Edwardes' *Damon and Pythia*, Heywood's *Silver* were some others based on Plautine models. The most famous example of *a* Plautine influence on Shakespeare is *The Comedy of Errors*, which is modeled on Plautus' *Menaechmi.* However, *Menaechmi* presents only one set of twin brothers, whereas *Amphitruo* offers a double set of twins—both masters and slaves. It can also be assumed that Shakespeare, for his *Comedy of Errors*, combined

the ideas from two plays by Plautus. The degree of esteem in which Plautus was held in the Elizabethan age, can be justified by the speech by Polonius, introducing the group of actors and their talents, refers to Seneca and Plautus, as models for tragedy and comedy—"Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light" (*Hamlet*, 2.2). Molière's play *L'Avare* (1668), *The Miser* (1672) by Sheridan and also by Fielding (1732) were notably inspired by *Aulularia.* It is worth noting that the influence of Plautus was not exhausted even in the age of Hollywood movies. *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,* the 1963 musical motion picture can be regarded as a 20th century adaptation of Plautus. Those of you who are interested to know more on this can well google the 20th century musical.

5.17.3. Plautus' Plays: Major Features and Style

A major aspect of Plautus' plays is his innovative use of stock characters. In terms of stock characters, Plautus served as an important source of inspiration for the English and French playwrights of the 16th and 17th centuries, and beyond. The braggart soldier-figure in *Miles Gloriosus* has its successor in the 'type' character of the 'Capitano', as found in the Italian *commedia dell' arte*. This Italian phrase basically means comedy of the profession' and was widely prevalent in Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries. For more on the *commedia dell' arte* you can check this webpage: https://www.britannica.com/art/commedia-dellarte

We can also find a similar character in Nicholas Udall's comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*—the first 'comedy' in English. Ben Jonson's *The Case is Altered* (1609) is an adaptation of Plautus' *Aulularia* (*Pot of Gold).* The Plautine influence can be recognized in iconic comic characters—ranging from Shakespeare's Falstaff to George Bernard Shaw's Sergius in *Arms and the Man* (1894).

Plautus showed a careful organization of his plots and, as a popular playwright, he was familiar with the methods of how to make the plot interesting with such devices as farce, *boisterous* jokes, intrigues, the theme of mistaken identity and so on. The Plautine plots often relied heavily on comic exaggeration, burlesque, robust humour and often turning traditional values upside down with the purpose of achieving comic effect. All these were done in the genial spirit of comedy and, in some of his plays, he also upheld moral virtues. His plays displayed a wide thematic range from plays based on

history, sentimental comedy (as in *Captivi* and *Cistellaria*) to plays which involved a mockery of mythological stories (*Amphitruo*) and plays using coarse humour verging on the farcical (*Asinaria*).

The use of rhythmical lines gave a musical quality to Plautus' plays. He employed the long, six-or seven-foot line in iambic and trochaic meters, as found in the Greek originals of his plays. However, Plautus *also introduced* variations by employing colloquial dialogue to suit the mood and temperament of the characters and also included songs. His use of alliteration and the pun made his dialogues racy and vigorous; he picked up the colloquial idioms used by the common people to achieve the effect of a fleshly realism.

Therefore, there is a common consensus that Plautine stock characters had an active life on stage centuries after his death. Let us discuss some notable character types, with examples:

Pargopolynices, the "braggart soldier" in *Miles Gloriosus* amuses the audience with his vain-glorious posturing and tendency towards self-aggarndisement, while Artotogrus, his parasite or flatterer, keeps on filling him up with newer and ridiculous claims of glory.

The 'cunning slave' or 'intriguing slave' was a character type familiar in Menander's New Comedies, but the way Plautus used this figure, is more interesting in its variety. While in Menander the slave was an intelligent comic character and helpful to his young master, Plautus made him more active in devising ingenious schemes of action and, sometimes, even controlling the action of the play. The slaves in Plautus often turn the comic world topsy-turvy by controlling their masters, boasting like military heroes and becoming the driving force of the plot. The ingenious deal-making Pseudolous in the eponymous play, is a major example. Sometimes the characters are very sure of their specific roles: both Strobilus in *Auluraria* (*Pot of Gold*) and Chrysalus in *Bacchides* have pointed out what a 'good' (i.e., clever) slave should be. C. Stace, however, in his essay on "The Slaves of Plautus", has categorized Plautine slaves into 'cunning', 'deceived', 'ordinary', and 'slaves of special interest'. [64-77]

In Greek comedies, the character of the old man is sometimes typified as an ill-tempered miser, a misanthrope, or a stern father opposing the marriage of his son with his beloved. The lustful old man or *sensex amator* is a character improvised by Plautus upon the mere *sensex* or 'stern old father' which was a staple in Greek New Comedies.

Thus, the old lech develops a passion for the beautiful heroine and seeks opportunities to satisfy his desire but ultimately he is outwitted and removed from the path of the young lovers. Demaenetus in *Asinaria*, Demipho in *Cistellaria*, Lysidamus in *Casina*, Demipho in *Mercator*, and Antipho in *Stichus*— aged men driven by a sort of 'vulgar' amorous passion, are recognized as belonging to this type. All these characters share a similar purpose of winning the young woman but their situations and the procedures they adopt vary. Despite his repeated use of stock characters, Plautus saves his plots from monotony by providing different settings and courses of action. Ben Jonson's Volpone, the title character in the eponymous play, the 'miser' is also a Platuine type, possessing the traits of the 'lusty old man'. As you proceed with your course, you will repeatedly find the influence of Plautus in English comedies from the Elizabethan to the Modern periods.

The women characters in Plautus are not lacking in variety either, as they are modelled on the common types also used by other playwrights of Roman comedy. 'Mulier' is usually the wife of the sensex, sometimes supportive of her husband, sometimes dominating and shrewd. *Meretrix* is the courtesan, often the love-interest of more than one young men; *Ancila* is the slave-woman always loyal to her mistress—a female counterpart of the male *servus* or 'slave', but not as clever or resourceful as the male. *Virgo* is the young woman, rarely presented on stage but traditionally viewed as an epitome of beauty and innocence. If you go back to your study of the development of English drama towards the end of the Middle Ages, you will find that this trend of using abstractions to name characters was also prevalent in the Morality Plays.

As for themes, Plautus showed his skill in such essentially comic themes such as those of mistaken identity and impersonation, that of the twin brothers, the problem of the generation gap leading to a father-son conflict but, ultimately, giving way to a happy resolution — themes which remained to entertain the audiences of the European stage and screen till the middle of the 20th century.

5.17.4 Summing up

- Plautus was the most popular comic dramatist of ancient Rome. He adapted freely from Greek New Comedies, and gave a Roman *setting and sensibility* to his plays.
- He used the colloquial idiom of the common people and excelled in the application of robust humour, pranks and musical meters.

- Plautine themes of 'mistaken identity', 'twin brothers', 'impersonation', the 'old-man- desiring-young -women' continued to provide materials for Elizabethan and Jacobean comedies.
- Plautus's use of stock characters continued to influence several character-types on the European stage in later times.

5.17.5 Comprehension Exercises

➢ **Long Answer Type Questions:**

1. Write an essay on the available body of Plautus' works and the controversy regarding their dates.
2. Discuss the themes of the Plautine plays and assess their influence on subsequent English dramaturgy.
3. What aspects of Plautus' characterisation bring out a comprehensive picture of contemporary Roman culture?

➢ **Medium Length Answer Type Questions:**

1. Discuss the figure of the cunning slave as a stock character in plays by Plautus.
2. Write a brief essay on Plautus' use of language and style.
3. Show how Plautus' use of poetic style, rhythm and music impact his plays.

➢ **Short Answer Length Questions:**

1. Briefly discuss Plautus' influence on Shakespeare.
2. What understanding of women in contemporary society do you get from Plautus' plays?
3. Classify the plays of Plautus into early and late ones based on available information.

Unit 18 ❑ Understanding the Text

Structure

5.18.0 Introduction

5.18.1 Plot Summary (Scene-wise)

5.18.2 Plot Analysis

5.18.3 Characterisation

5.18.4 The Use of Humour

5.18.5 Key Issues

5.18.6 Representation of Society

5.18.7 Significance of the Title

5.18.8 Summing Up

5.18.9 Comprehension Exercises

5.18.10 Suggested Reading (Units 15 to 18)

5.18.0 Introduction

Having learnt about Roman theatre in general and Plautus in particular in the earlier Units, here we come to a detailed analysis of the text, *The Pot of Gold*. This will provide the students with a detailed summary of the scenes, a close understanding of the characters and thematic issues, along with the representation of Roman society that is attempted in this play. While going through this Unit, students are expected to take note of the close bearings that comedy has on real life, and from that perspective their understanding of the genre should have a universalist approach about it.

5.18.1 Plot Summary (Scene-wise)

Plautus's artistry regarding plot-construction is etched in perfection. The well-knit structure of this play, which might have partially been adapted from Menander's *Dyskolos* or some other 'lost' play, is the basis for its timeless commercial success. Let us have a look at a detailed plot-summary:

- **Prologue**

Lar Familliaris, Euclio's household God introduces the context of the play. The pot of Gold entrusted by Euclio's grandfather to him was kept secret from Euclio's father for his neglect of the God. Euclio's daughter Phaedria regularly worships the God, much to his pleasure. Therefore the God has revealed the treasure to Euclio for her dowry. He also proclaims to generate a process of the wedding of Phaedria, who is made pregnant by Lyconides, whose uncle Megadorous seeks to marry her. Thus the Deity's prologue introduces all the thematic concerns in the play, and also establishes the symbolic and metaphorical significance of the titular 'pot of gold'.

- **Act 1, Scene 1**

In the first scene of first act of the play readers visualize the protagonist Euclio, chasing and beating his old slave Staphyla angrily, because he suspects her of spying and prying. Staphyla wonders why her master is behaving so strangely. From her utterance the readers get to know that Euclio does this with her repeatedly in course of a day. Staphyla describes how Euclio behaves all day: he does not sleep at night, he sits at the house all through the day. She is also concerned for the young mistress, and wishes to protect her from any kind of 'disgrace'. This natural impulse to protect the lady from the trouble gives a motherly streak to the character of Staphyla who has been growing old slaving at this household and looking after it.

- **Scene 2**

Euclio is unwilling to go out of his house leaving the house unwatched. He asks Staphyla to watch over the house. Staphyla is surprised that there is nothing valuable in the empty house other than cobwebs. Euclio's gripping insecurity runs through his instructions to Staphyla: he asks her to bolt the door and let no outsider in. Euclio's greatest fear are the neighbours who might knock and enter to fetch day to day household items like fire, knife, axe, mortar, pestle and so on.

Once outside, Euclio informs the audiences that director of their ward has called them for doling out a present of two shillings per head. The amount is very little, but if Euclio skips the visit he will attract undue attention. It will make people think that he has got a pot of gold at home. To assuage that suspicion he has to leave the house against his wish. Euclio also reveals his suspicious mind which believes that everyone has found out the truth about the gold he has got and has a changed response now.

Act 2, Scene 1

In this scene a conversation takes place between Eunomia and her brother Megadorus. Eunomia urges Megadorus to marry and give birth to a son, to continue the family-line. A suitable mature lady who is fit to be his wife can be found. Megadorus objects to Eunomia's proposition as a middle aged lady will not be able to give birth as unproblematically expected. Megadorus rather wishes to marry the young daughter of his neighbour Euclio. Eunomia accepts the proposition. Megadorus prepares for an interview with Euclio to this purpose.

Scene 2

Euclio returns home. His visit has been of no use. Neither the director nor anyone from his ward was present to keep the promise. As a result Euclio did not receive the promised shillings. He is terribly anxious of having lost his gold which he has left home unattended. At this point of time Megadorus comes his way. Megadorus's polite behaviour raises Euclio's suspicion. When Megadorus finally reveals that he desires to marry Euclio's daughter, Euclio is shocked and refuses such an offer as Megadorus is tremendously rich and Euclio is awfully, dreadfully poor. For a poor man to try and get into an association with the rich would be like an ass yoked with a bull. An ass cannot be in an equal set with the bull, says Euclio. Nevertheless, he finally agrees to let Megadorous marry his daughter, without any dowry. Megadorus agrees and leaves with his servant Pythodicus for preparation of the marriage. The marriage is to take place on that very day itself without delay. Euclio thanks his lot because he thinks it is the secret knowledge of inheriting the hidden gold that makes Megadorus act so.

Scene 3

Euclio calls Staphyla and tells her that her daughter would be married today. He asks her to keep the door locked and prepare for the wedding by the time he returns from the forum. Staphyla's reaction is one of shock. She exclaims that the decision is too sudden. Once Euclio exits Staphyla says that this situation ruins it totally. The secret about the lady's disgrace can no longer be kept. Meanwhile she has to prepare for the occasion.

Scene 4

After an hour Pythodicus returns with Cooks—Anthrax and Congrio, and Music Girls—Phrygia and Eleusium. He is accompanied by a few more attendants, with provisions from the market. Pythodicus instructs that they have to divide into two parts.

One part would attend to the house of Megadorus the other to that of Euclio. Humorous chitchats take place in the process from the very onset of the scene. They observe in all elaboration the miserly nature of Euclio who is unable to pay for catering of his daughter's marriage. They observe that he bawls about his bankruptcy. They joke about the miserly nature of Euclio. At the end, their discussion unravels that it is normal for cooks like Anthrax and Congrio to thieve things from the household they work in.

Scene 5

Pythodicus allocates the cooks, the lambs, and the music girls to each household according to his wisdom. Anthrax is assigned to the household of Megadorus. Congrio complains and is assuaged. Since the fattest lamb has gone to the household of Megadorus, the fattest of the music girls, Phrygia is sent to the house of Euclio. Congrio is sent to the house of Euclio.

Scene 6

Pythodicus calls Staphyla and leaves the cook, music girl and supplies in Euclio's house. When she says that there is no firewood for cooking Congrio suggests cooking with the rafters or timbers. Staphyla is enraged at the suggestion of burning the house down for cooking. The poverty of the house is reveled through this dialogue and the unsuitability that comes with such poverty. Staphyla also remarks about the absence of drink in the supply. Congrio suggests that Euclio might bring it from the forum.

Scenes 7-8

Pythodicus leaves for Megadorus's house, to supervise things there. In the meantime, Euclio returns from the Forum with a small package and a few forlorn flowers. He found everything too costly. Fish, lamb, tunny, pork, veal everything has become unaffordably expensive. It is all the more expensive because Euclio is terribly poor. The miser's psychology is beautifully developed as he gives logic against unreasonable expenditure in wedding. The principle of economizing is put forward with an adage equivalent to "Holiday feasting makes everyday fasting". Euclio decides to cut down his daughter's wedding expenses just as much as possible. He finally comes home with a little frankincense and some wreaths of flowers to honour their Household God, so that he may bless the daughter's marriage. At this moment he notices that unknown people have entered his house. The cook talks about a pot for cooking. Euclio mistakes it for his pot of gold. He thinks that the pot is found and robbed. He cries for God Apollo's help and protection before he is ruined completely.

Scene 9

This scene opens with Anthrax, the cook employed for wedding preparations at the Megadorus's house. He gives instruction to his subordinates with boning and scaling of fish so that in the meanwhile he can visit Euclio's house to fetch a bread pan. At Euclio's house there is an uproar. Anthrax mistakes this sound of scuffle for cooking preparation at its height. This makes him return to his own responsibilities instead of going out. He fears that leaving his work station will create further trouble in his domain.

Act 3, Scene 1

In continuation of the shouting that is heard from afar in the previous scene, Congrio and his followers are awfully clubbed and beaten and they wish to run out of Euclio's house for their lives. As they tumble out of Euclio's house they shout out loud to all the Romans writhing in pain and give a brief idea about their predicament. Euclio runs after them with a cudgel in his hand. Congrio resents that he has never been in such a madhouse like this, never been so severely beaten.

Scene 2

Euclio shouts for stopping Congrio and his disciples as he intends to report them to the police. Congrio has been holding and threatening Euclio with a knife, says the latter. Euclio complains that they entered his house without his permission. Congrio explains that he came to cook for the wedding. Euclio objects that it is none of Congrio's business whether he consumes his food cooked or raw. A miser's miserliness grows to absurd and impractical proportions. Congrio grudges that his two shilling job here would cause him to pay more as doctor's bill. Euclio forbids them to enter his house, and leaves again, to hide the pot of gold.

Scenes 3-4

Euclio now hides his pot of gold under his cloak so that it does not get stolen. He happily asks the cooks and music girls to cook, work and scurry about the house now. They can work to their heart's content as there is no need to watch out for anything anymore. Congrio says that it is useless to have the promise of a good time now. The harm has already been done when Euclio clubbed his head till it is all cracks. He also threatens to present the doctor's expenses before Euclio, who complains how the evils of associating himself with a wealthy man like Megadorus are leading him into insecurity and compromises. He observes that a cock came and started digging the place

where the gold was hidden. He has no doubt that these are all a ploy of Megadorus to steal his property.

Scene 5

Megadorus is returning from forum to his home and elaborately talks about the wisdom of his choice. He says that his friends call it a fine idea and a sensible thing to do. He says that marrying a poor girl like Phaedria is not only a wise choice but also effective. Marrying into poor families will also lessen the divide between rich and poor and the society will be more unified, in Megadorus's opinion. It is easier to have control over poor girls whereas the wealthy women pester their husbands' lives out. Euclio greatly appreciates this economizing impulse in the speech of Megadorus.

Scene 6

Euclio appreciates Megadorus' speech and again harps on the idea that he is extremely poor. Megadorous merely suggests, in an assuring tone, that what he has got is enough. That causes the miserly Euclio to suspect that Megadorus has got to know about the pot of gold. Euclio complains that Megadorus has peopled his house with thieves and that itself is a cause of great worry. At the end of the scene, Euclio is convinced that Megadorus is upto stealing his pot of gold and makes up his mind to hide it outside, possible in the shrine of Faith.

Act 4, Scene 1

Strobilus, while waiting for his master, gives a soliloquy. He says that a good servant should know his master's inclinations like a book, so that he can read his wishes in his face and act accordingly. His master Lyconides has learnt that his uncle Megadorus is about to marry the lady he is in love with. He settles down behind a sacred altar to keep an eye on things and report everything to Lyconides.

Scenes 2-3

Euclio is unaware of Strobilus's presence around and enters to secretly keep his pot of gold. He entrusts to the deity in the shrine of Faith the safety of his pot of Gold. He plans to go for a bath so that he can sacrifice and not hinder his prospective son-in-law from marrying his girl the moment he claims her. Strobilus is overjoyed to hear of the treasure. The moment Euclio leaves he wonders about the prospect of procuring the treasure. Euclio re-enters the shrine following an ominous sign. As soon as he left, he heard a raven cawing on his left croaking away. He hurriedly goes back to the shrine.

Scene 4

A few moment lapses and a scuffle between Euclio and Strobilus is heard on the street. Euclio beats Strobilus hard and asks him to return whatever of Euclio's property he has stolen. Strobilus pretends ignorance. Suddenly Euclio hears Strobilus's accomplice carrying out his work inside the shrine and rushes towards the temple.

Scene 5

Strobilus stands up and resolves to give a lesson to Euclio. He is convinced that Euclio will not keep his gold in this shrine after this event. He hides by Megadorus's house and watches over Euclio and his activities. He sees Euclio come out of the shrine with the pot of gold.

Scene 6

Euclio exclaims that he had a great regard for Faith of all deities but this proved to be impractical. He feels thankful towards the raven which croaked and warned him against the danger. He wonders where he can safely hide his wealth and chooses the grove of Silvanus. He pronounces that he trusts Silvanus more than Faith now. Strobilus observes him closely. Strobilus plans to climb a tree and locate the place where Euclio hides the gold. He fears that his master will punish him for leaving the spot. Notwithstanding the prospect of being thrashed he undertakes the venture. He is hopeful that it will be faced with cash in hand.

Scene 7

Lyconides enters with his mother Eunomia. He has told her the whole story and Eunomia finds it a perfectly reasonable request to make Megadorus stop from marrying a woman who is bearing his nephew's child. In the middle of the conversation the labour pangs of Phaedria from her house are heard and that further attests the truth of Lyconides's words. While Eunomia proceeds to talk to Megadorus, Lyconides looks for Strobilus.

Scene 8

Strobilus enters with the pot of gold and gives a speech of joyful victory. He jubilates on the fact that he is now richer than the most powerful king that ever was. He narrates how he climbed a tree before Euclio came to the spot and watched where he hid the pot of gold, and took it after Euckio's departure. Towards the end of the scene Strobilus sees that Euclio is coming and hides.

Scene 9

Euclio runs wildly back and forth, having lost his pot of gold. The happy faces of the passers by make him suspect the thief to be in them. He prays to God for justice and asks and wants to know who the thief is. He observes how thieves dress up well and pretend to be honest men. He guarded the gold carefully denying comfort and pleasures to himself. Now others are making merry and he is sunk in the despair of loss. At the end of the scene Lyconides hears Euclio's howling in front of their house. He thinks that Euclio has got to know about his daughter's pregnancy.

Scene 10

Euclio has in mind the lost pot of gold. Lyconides has in mind the wrong he has done to Euclio's daughter. Euclio's complaint and Lyconides's desire for atonement lead to a conversation with humorous interest for the readers/ audiences. At the end of this dialogue comes the understanding that they are talking at cross purposes. Lyconides confesses that he knows nothing about the pot of gold stolen from the grove of Silvanus. He on the other hand shocks Euclio by saying that Megadorus has broken the engagement. Euclio is furious to hear this. He is certain that stealing the pot of gold was Megadorus' actual intention. Now that the gold has been successfully appropriated, Megadorus cancels the ceremony. Lyconides tries to cool him down and admits the wrong that has been done by him to his daughter. Euclio is traumatised to hear that he is a grandfather on his daughter's wedding day as it is the tenth month since the festival of Ceres, when being drunk and unable to control his passions Lyconides ravaged the woman he loved, i.e., Euclio's daughter. At the end of the scene Lyconides wonders where his servant Strobilus is and leaves Euclio to himself so that he can find out the truth enquiring with Staphyla- the old nurse who has been maid to Euclio's daughter.

Act 5, Scene 1

Strobilus triumphantly tells Lyconides what he has found and begs to be set free. Lyconides asks him to hand over the gold so that it can be restored to Euclio. Strobilus rejects the proposition. After this point the play is lost, except a few fragments. Apparently Lyconides, convinces his slave to return it to Euclio, so that he may be given permission to marry Euclio's daughter. The end possibly shows that Euclio, with a change of heart, influenced by his Household God, gives the pot of gold to the young couple as a wedding present.

5.18.2 Plot Analysis

The plot of Pot of Gold has a simple yet very well-knit structure. The Prologue, spoken by the household Deity of Euclio, brings together the themes, which are going to discussed later. The first act, through the character of the miser, Plautus attracts critical attention to his obsession with the wealth, and his alienation from social life. Because his hoard is secret, Euclio is caught in a dilemma: if he stays home to guard his pot of gold, he thinks that his refusal to go to the forum may arouse the curiousity and suspicion of his neighbours. His sense of insecurity is revealed through his abusive behaviour towards his loyal slavewoman Staphyla, and this action also brings out the gendered context of the play: a slavewoman, in the strictly hierarchy-based society of ancient Rome, was doubly bound: because of her gender, and also by virtue of her bondage to her master.

Act 2 brings out the romantic theme, however verging on the farcical. Megadorus, a mature and quite elderly rich man gains Euclio's consent, after much persuation, to have his daughter's hand in marriage. He also sends a troupe of cooks and musicians to prepare for the festivities, fearing that Euclio is too miserly to provide for the waiting ceremony. The scene involving the jesting and howling of the cook and his associates provides a "carnivalesque"(the term should not be used in a pre-Christian context, but one may take a comic license in appreciating a comedy) flavour, and a means of social reintegration—although on a farcical level. Euclio, however, returns home from the market, and finding these people, drives them out. The theme involving a constant conflict between the self-obsessed miser and the vibrant society is once again at play.

Suspicious of Megadorus and his slaves who frequent his house, Euclio decides to hide the pot of gold in the temple of Fides. While Euclio is busy in hiding the pot, we see the clever slave of Lyconides passing by the temple. This man, Strobilus, informs the audience that his master is in love with Phaedria (603). As David Konstan aptly points out, "Plautus does not explain Lyconides' sudden feeling for the girl he raped nine months before. Presumably, he is anxious lest, thus violated, she should become his uncle's wife, and Megadorus' interest in her may also have awakened a slumberine passion of his own." However, Strobilus overhear Euclio's injunction to the god of the temple to protect his gold. He is not successful in his first attempt to appropriate the gold; Euclio, seeing him, drives him away, and decides to hide the pot in a grove.

Strobilus does not give up; as if, to teach the miser a 'lesson', he finally steals it from the sacred grove—which is a symbolic admonition to the miser. His lack of trust in everybody around him (which is a sort of dishonour to social life), even his shifting faith in gods, is thus punished.

5.18.3 Characterisation

As already discussed, Plautus' art of characterisation maintains the tradition of stock characters as found in Greek New comedy, but projects it with a touch of 'individual talent'. Stock characters are indeed important, since they provide the audience with the popular level of comic exuberance, but Plautus' improvisation also attracts critical interest. The stern 'sensex' of Greek comedies has become a character with many shades: Euclio in Plautus' play is one who can be laughed at, but also pitied. Megadorous follow the type of 'lusty old man', but his generosity and sense of dignity cannot be missed. Lyconides can hardly be called the 'hero', considering his act of violating the modesty of a girl he loves, and remaining silent for a long time, but at the end he repents and comes with a proper proposal of marriage. Such improvisations deserve critical attention. Let us look at the characters in some detail :

- **Euclio**

Euclio, the miserly old man is a stock character since the time of Menander, but he is presented with a Plautine flavour of novelty. He has found a pot of gold which has been unveiled to him by the household God of his house so that his pious daughter can have a good marriage and a good dowry for that. He is extremely possessive about the pot and suspects everyone to be a thief. The portrayal of the psychology of a miser with all his doubts and insecurities is one of the finest presentations of human mind from the classical age. He is approached by his rich neighbour Megadorus for the hand of his daughter. He thinks this to be a ploy to usurp his gold and repeatedly proclaims his impecunious situation. He nevertheless agrees to the marriage as Megadorus promises to accept Phaedria without a penny. The preparations begin. The cooks sent to his house make fun of his peculiar miserly habits. He even beats Congrio, the cook, fearing theft of his treasure—which reminds one of Menander's Knemon, also beating a cook, in *Dyscolos*. Finally Euclio goes out to the Shrine of Faith to hide his gold, wherefrom Strobilus steals it. Euclio is ruined and devastated. At this point he has a revelation

about Lyconides violating his daughter and the child born of the act. The miser's breakdown is complete, but he shows a sign of changing his heart, finding that nothing good has come of his self-obsessed, miserly and insensible nature. The situation is saved as Megadorus cancels the engagement, Lyconides acquires and replaces his lost treasure from Strobilus, his own servant and finally Euclio agrees to marry off Phaedria to Lyconides. This section is however lost and exists only in fragments.

➢ **Megadorus**

Megadorus is a rich man who lives next door to Euclio. In the play his sister Eunomia urges him to marry as he has grown old and needs to have a child. Megadorus refuses to marry a middle aged woman as it is difficult to have a child from a mature woman and the baby may be born posthumous. He also disapproves of the rich lady's baggage, her pretentious self- importance. Megadorus specifically desires to marry his next door neighbour Euclio's daughter. However, his **specific interest** in Phaedria is unmistakable: he wishes to marry her to satisfy his desire, not out of 'love'. His age, in any case, has given him a sense of dignity: so he makes a formal proposal to the girl's father, and agrees to marry her without a dowry. So far he is a stock character, a typical 'lustful old man', but Plautus brings a touch of originality, showing the positive and generous side of his nature at the end. When he comes to know about his nephew's interest in the same girl, he calls off his own marriage. Megadorus bears all the expense of the marriage preparations and divides what he buys in the forum into the two households-bride's part of the celebration and bridegroom's part of celebration. He speaks of the efficacy of marrying a poor lady as it is hassle free and unifies the divided rich and poor population of the society. On the other hand, his words against rich women and their extravagance, appears to be misogynistic from a modern feminist point of view.

➢ **Lyconides**

Lyconides (the name suggests, 'wolfling') has violated Phaedria in the festival of Ceres. He blames his drunken condition for the wrong, but is unable to mend the situation during the following ten months, till Phaedria is in labour. On the verge of the end of this pregnancy Megadorus plans to marry Phaedria on a day's notice. Now, with a renewed 'love' for Phaedria, Lyconides asks for help from his mother Eunomia. He explains the whole situation to Euclio and asks for his forgiveness and wishes to marry his daughter. Lyconides is a flawed character but at the end he shows the honesty to

admit his deed, and behaves like a mature lover. The lost fragments at the end possibly contained a happy closure, showing Lyconides restoring the gold to Euclio and finally marrying Phaedria.

➢ **Strobilus**

Lyconides' slave Strobilus can be categorised as a "clever slave", one of the significant stock characters in Greco-Roman comedy. While waiting for Lyconides, he gives a speech on what a good slave should be: clever, conscious of his master's intent, quick in action and so on. His soliloquy gives his self-impression, enumerating the ways in which he has been so resourceful to his master. Strobilus also plays a significant role in the discovery and theft of the pot of gold, giving a new turn to the development of the plot. He watches over Euclio, when he comes to hide the pot in a grove, and appropriates it once he is gone, leading to Euclio's complete breakdown and change of mind which comes afterwards. By the intervention of the slave, this incident becomes instrumental in Lyconides winning Euclio's favour, when he restores Euclio's gold, and gains his permission to marry Phaedria.

✓ **Women characters:**

Plautus' treatment of women characters is rather conventional, as far as the Pot of Gold is concerned. In the patriarchal society of ancient Rome, women were subject to the rule of their fathers, guardians, or husbands. The condition of slavewomen was worse. However, only mature and matronly ladies, by virtue of their social and domestic position, had some motherly authorities. This is exactly the picture we get through the portrayal of Eumonia, Staphyla and Phaedria.

➢ **Eunomia**

Eunomia shifts her role from being a sister to Megadorus to the mother of Lyconides. In the beginning of the play he urges Megadorus to marry and towards the end she urges him to cancel the marriage and succeeds. At first, she proclaims her loyalty and adherence to her brother's cause. She advises him to marry a mature woman suitable to his age, but in the end of the conversations agrees with his brother's decision to marry a younger lady, Phaedria in specific. Upto this point, she appears to be a mere homespun woman, bound to agree with whatever a male authority proposes. However, she shows her matronly qualities when Lyconides tells her everything about Phaedria. Considering the young woman's situation and her own son's happiness, now she takes

a motherly, strategic role to convince Megadorous to cancel his engagement with Phaedria. Her timely intervention earns a happy resolution for the crisis.

- **Staphyla**

Staphyla is a slave and housemaid for Euclio. She looks after and protects and nourishes young Phaedria and keeps the secret of her sexual violation. She bears the torture of Euclio when out of insecurity he beats her. As a female slave, she is extremely loyal to the master's family. She cordially cooperates with the gang of cooks who came in to make preparations for the marriage. At the climax of the play Euclio goes to Staphyla to know the truth of Phaedria's pregnancy which has been unknown to him for all these ten months.

- **Phaedria**

Phaedria is Euclio's daughter. She is mentioned at the very beginning of the play by their household God. Phaedria regularly worships the God with incense, garland and wine. So the God is extremely pleased with her. He causes the discovery of the pot of gold to her father for her to have a good marriage. God divulges that she has been violated at the festival of Ceres by Lyconides, and to initiate the process of marriage between the two the God will make Megadorus, Lyconides's uncle come and propose to marry her on that very day.

Phaedria does not appear in the action of the play, but her offstage voice is once heard calling for the nurse during the pains of childbirth. Phaedria is a passive character. She does not have a say in her marriage. She also did not have the power to protect herself when Lyconides raped her. However, the readers and audience of Plautus like to believe that Phaedria is also in love with Lyconides, so ultimately she wins her love, by the grace of their household Deity.

5.18.4 Use of Humour

In 'The Argument of Comedy', Northrop Frye describes Greek New Comedy as a 'comic Oedipus situation', where the father and son desire the same girl. The mother becomes an ally of the son, and finally the young couple's path is cleared. This is exactly the situation in Plautus' *The Pot of Gold*—possibly adapted from Menander. The play is but partially similar to *Dyscolos*, whereas the main content is different—which might have been adapted from some lost play of Menander's. However, the situation

really puts Megadorous the uncle (father-figure) as an opponent to the nephew, Lyconides (the son-figure)—who gets help from his mother, Eumonia. Besides this essentially comic 'Oedipus situation', the play also generates humour in a typically Plautine process, distinct from Menander. Euclio's miserly attitude turns him into an extreme character type, a laughable 'stock'. The common Roman audiences were fond of mimicry and caricature. Relying on the Roman audiences' appreciation of jesting, repartee and quipping, Plautus successfully creates intelligent and comic conversations in his play. The comic humour results from Plautus' keen observation of class-attitudes, reflected in the speeches and gestures of his characters. The vibrant jokes played in the conversation among the cooks and servants—Anthrax, Congrio and Pythodicus, and their symbolic names—are sources of hearty laughter. 'Anthrax' stands for 'coal', and 'Congrio' for the 'eel'—suitable names for people who are associated with the kitchen. The ironic speech of Megadorus, commenting on the vanities and expensive nature of the rich women—provide much amusement. The irony becomes all the more sharp because Megadorous himself is a rich man and has irrational desires, but as a man he can take the upper hand and satirize women belonging to his own class.

The play can also be viewed in terms of a satire on the Roman upper-classes, though his characters share Greek names. The lusty old man, Megadorous, becomes a target of satire—showing his foolish desire for a girl who could be his daughter as well. However, at the end he realises the absurdity of his desire and breaks off his engagement with Euclio's daughter. The character of Euclio the miser is a favourite laughing stalk. He is so obsessed with the treasure that he is always in fear, he beats up his maid-servant unnecessarily, assaults the cook, and the height of irony comes when he cannot understand what Lyconides has to say about his daughter, he is thinking of the loss of his pot of gold instead. The misguiding conversation, with obviously serious connotations underlying, apparently leads to enough of verbal humour.

The cook and his party, joking about Euclio's miserly character, provide another sort of racy humour. Megadorous has begun preparations for his wedding, and with an attitude of favouring his would-be 'father-in-law', sends cooks and flute-playing girls, who come and create havoc in Euclio's house. Euclio comes back and finds his house full of unknown, rowdy people. He panics that these people must have come to steal his gold, and beats them up. This is a situational irony, because Euclio is panicking over a matter which is already exposed in a different way, of which he knows nothing. Thus the play is rich in both verbal and situational humour, which often verges on the

ironical, and dramatic actions like Euclio running wildly in search of the lost gold, or beating up the cooks, or the slave Strobilus entering triumphantly with the 'prize'—also provide a sense of physical humour, with vigour and immediacy.

5.18.5 Key Issues

The Pot of Gold revolves around two themes—one of **avarice or obsession with wealth**, and the other concerning **love, marriage and sexual morality**. So it is of prime interest to explore how Plautus weaves together these two themes within the frame of the comic. It will therefore be interesting to understand if the comic as a genre is also used to bring in serious considerations of life and livelihood with an apparent tone of the jocular. Along with these come the concerns of 'gender', society' and 'religious faith'. In the ancient Roman society, 'marriage' and 'commerce' had long been associated, and the custom of dowry from the bride's family can be viewed as symbolic of the monetary concern for marriage. Plautus carefully merges these two themes within the comical structure of his play. The role of Lar Familiaris, functioning as a guiding spirit behind the action, also reflects the importance of religious belief in Roman life. Euclio, for all his faults, has some kind of respect for the God, and his daughter is earnestly devoted to the God, so the God has taken responsibility to save the girl from her disgrace, and allow her a happy marriage with a handsome dowry. Thus the prologue itself defines the thematic associations—the position of a young woman is determined by her prospects of marriage; and for that marriage, a large dowry is required, and that dowry is granted by a benevolent Deity, who has revealed the treasure to the girl's father for the purpose of her marriage.

On the other hand, we find Eumonia urging her brother Megadorous to get married, for the continuation of the patrilineal structure of the family. She has been married to another family, and has nothing to say about a man's choice—even if that man is her brother. However, she is concerned of the continuation of her father's line, which will be secured if her brother gets married. In the character of Eumonia as a matronly, mature lady, we have an example of patriarchal family structure getting internalised. Later, when she comes to know about her son's interest in the same girl chosen by her brother, she has to intervene, learning that Phaedria is carrying the child of her son. Such concerns are not explicitly said, but a sensible reader can feel that now Eumonia has to think of Phaedria and her child as involved with the honour of her husband's family, and

the reputation of her son, Lyconides. Earlier, she did not object to her brother's choice of a young girl who could be his daughter. But now, considering the situation, she no longer wishes to let her brother marry a girl who is carrying the child of her son. Thus the question of sexual morality is portrayed through a typical viewpoint of patriarchy, which, for the modern readers, leaves ample scope of argument.

Personal motivations often clashing with each other adds to the dramatic dynamism of the play. The threefold concealment of the pot of gold, initially beneath the fireplace in Euclio's own house, then in the temple of Fides and finally in the grove of Silvanus, in fact undermines the miser's motivation to guard the treasure. Euclio cannot trust his family Deity, under whose protection the treasure has really been safe. Next he moves to the temple of Fides, the god who stands for good faith, which, in Roman society, was looked upon as a bond of social importance, the very spirit of all pledges and contracts in the community. Again, he is unable to keep faith on Fides, and goes beyond the boundary of the city—to the wilderness, and nor can the god of the forests (Silvanus) protect his gold, because he has estranged himself from the society. The role of the divine authority thus functions in correspondence to the basic theme of the play—the miser'srealisation of his fault and the futility of his self-absorption. When Lyconides faces him, Euclio is still obsessed with his loss, and cannot understand that the young man is actually talking of the wrong he has done to his daughter, and now he is willing to marry her. Finally, when he comes to know about Lyconides' motivation, and accepts his offer, he is assured of being a grandfather—which reflects his humbling and attempt to reintegrate himself with the society and a new generation.

It is further to be noted that the Plautine plays, especially the *Pot of Gold* has been a major influence on the development of what we call 'Comedy of Humours' in the 17th century. You have read of the post-Shakespearean playwright Ben Jonson. Jonson's play *Every Man in his Humour* famously appropriates the Plautine type of the 'braggart soldier', and his *Volpone* bears certain thematic resemblances with the *Pot of Gold*. As a character, Volpone is a combination of Euclio and Megadorous, his worship of the gold and his desire for a young girl reminds one of the Plautine themes. However, Euclio retains the audiences' sympathy to a certain extent, while Volpone is shrewder and a cunning old villain, he resembles Megadorous to a degree, in his role as a lusty old man, but he lacks the generosity and good sense which Megadorous shows at the end. In the French playwright Molière's (1622-1673) play *The Miser*, the titular

character of the miser is largely modelled on Euclio, though there is an interesting twist: Harpagon, the miser in Molière is in love with the beloved of his own son. Plautus' vibrant portrayal of comic characters, with their shortcomings and follies, and sometimes, also a touch of redeeming sympathy never failed to inspire his European successors on the English and French stage.

5.18.6 Representation of Society

Despite its essentially comic nature, the *Pot of Gold* offers a social commentary without being didactic. Though the setting is Athens, it reflects the social disparity between the rich and the poor. When Megadorous seeks to marry Euclio's daughter, the latter refuses him on the ground of the huge social and financial disparity between them. Euclio may be a miser, and a target of joke for his obsession with the gold, but in this case, he shows a clear-sighted and pragmatic understanding of his social position: if he gets his daughter married to Megadorous, his own class will disown him, nor will he be accepted by the upper class. On the other hand, the scenes involving cooks, servants and music-girls draw attention to a vivid reality of the 'lowly' but vibrant life of the commonfolk in a Roman city. However, Euclio's maniacal harsh treatment on them also betrays the way such 'lowly' people were treated, even by middle-class Plebeians.

Euclio's self-centred avarice and miserly nature cause his estrangement from society. In the very first scene of the first act, Euclio instructs Staphyla to bolt the doors, so that nobody may enter into his house, to deny "fire and water" to anybody. As David Konstan points out, in ancient Rome, denying fire and water was a symbolic act of isolating someone from the society. To this social issue of disintegration, is added the question of 'disgrace' which puts an unmarried but pregnant girl under a social stigma. Thematically, thus the plot of an otherwise 'comic' play brings into consideration the position of women in Augustan Rome.

Women in the Roman society were subjugated to men, and the play bears ample proof of this reality. Eumonia is a mature, motherly lady, yet she has internalised patriarchy so well that she openly admits that women are merely "chatter-boxes", and their talks are without any value. Yet, out of her sisterly regard for Euclio, she urges Euclio to get married. She is a complex character—on the one hand, she knows her 'shortcomings' as a woman, and accepts them in a typical allegiance to patriarchy. She

even agrees to Megadorous' wish to get married to a young girl. However, when her son reveals his love for Euclio's daughter, she understands the situation and takes the responsibility to persuade Megadorous to change his mind. Phaedria is not presented on stage—she remains the innocent girl, who is ravished by her own lover, and waits painfully for anything that may be imposed upon her, without having a voice at all The position. When Euclio ultimately agrees to Megadorous' proposal, he never feels like asking the daughter about it—she is a 'property' to her father, just like the pot of gold. The parallel between the woman as a 'treasure' and the pot (which may be taken as a symbol of the womb) containing gold is reinforced, when Euclio loses the gold, panics for it, and come to know about the violation of his daughter's virginity, from a repentant Lyconides. The condition of slave-women in Rome was even worse: Staphyla bears all kinds of torments at the hand of her master, yet has to remain faithful and concerned for the household, as well as for the fate of her young mistress, showing a helpless yet genuine female solidarity.

Both structurally and thematically, the theft of the miser's gold, and the violation of the chastity of his daughter present a parallel situation. The theft exposes the miserly social outcaste's lack of self-sufficiency. Now made wiser by his loss, towards the end, Euclio finally agrees to make a 'deal' with the thief—at least to recover the wealth partially. He no longer wishes to keep it hidden, but wishes it back, to use it as dowry for his daughter's marriage, which points towards his conformity with the social norms of his time. On the other hand, Lyconides, who has ravished Phaedria, becomes conscious of his wrong-doing only when he fears a loss of his 'woman'—finding that his own uncle is willing to marry the girl he has ravished. His change of mind and confessing gesture as a repentant lover, who is willing to marry the girl he has raped, also acts as a redeeming factor towards a positive end and social reintegration.

5.18.7 Significance of the Title

Aulularia, the "little pot" or more popularly known as the *Pot of Gold* bears its titular significance at more than one level, and this leads us to consider the title of the play in some length. It symbolises, at first, the materialistic concern of Euclio. However, the family Deity speaks of it as a treasure preserved for the purpose of the dowry of Phaedria, a pious and loyal devotee of the god. Thus, the worth of a woman is measured

in terms of gold—a concern that brings out the commodification of women in ancient Roman culture, and in many other cultures—a tradition which survived afterwards as well. A virgin woman is to be 'guarded' by her parents before her marriage, and the pot of gold is also to be preserved with care. However, the contrast between the woman and the gold is also evident in a metaphorical level: a woman, however subjugated to male guardians or husbands, is 'productive', since she continues the family-line through procreation. Gold is an abstract embodiment of wealth and power, which, unless used, remains unproductive. The miserly Euclio jealously guards the pot of gold against all living creatures around—which leads to his social estrangement and lack of faith in everybody. Such is his obsession with the pot that he suspects the cook, who wants a larger 'pot' for cooking, and decides to hide it elsewhere. Finally, when it is stolen from the grove of Sylvanus, Euclio behaves like a madman, and when Lyconides comes to confess to him that he has violated the modesty of his daughter, he considers it to be a confession of the theft. The double-meaning conversation, notwithstanding its obvious comic overtones, once again captures the notion of a symbolic analogy between a woman's womb and the pot of gold. At the end of the play, which is lost but as far as the indications (given in the prologue) can tell us, the pot of gold is restored to Euclio and he, humbled by his miseries, uses it as dowry for his daughter's wedding. Thus the pot of gold transforms into a means of enabling social integration and a remedy of the violation of a woman's honour, offering a comic yet socially significant resolution to all the key issues in the play.

5.18.8 Summing up

- Thematically and structurally, *The Pot of Gold* brings together two major concerns in the Roman society: marriage and wealth.
- The play shows Plautus' skill in his treatment of the stock characters, with a touch of originality.
- The essential comic situation rendered in the play is not without glimpses of social reality.
- Plautus' use of humour ranges from the farcical to the ironic, but it is without an overtly didactic tone.

5.18.9 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Give an account of the different thematic issues interfused in the *Pot of Gold*.
  2. Show how Plautus' art of characterisation contributes to the unfolding of themes in *Pot of Gold*.
  3. What aspects of classical comedy can you identify in the play *Pot of Gold*?
- **Medium Length Answer Type Questions:**
  1. What function does the Prologue have in the play *Pot of Gold*?
  2. Bring out the significance of the pot of gold in the play. How does it become the nerve centre of this Plautine comedy?
  3. Write a brief essay on the aspects of social reality that Plautus deals with in *Pot of Gold*.
  4. How does humour form a vital aspect of Plautus' plays? Discuss with specific references to *Pot of Gold*.
- **Short Answer Type Questions:**
  1. Write a brief note on the character of Euclio.
  2. Show how Plautus designs the role of the clever slave in the figure of Strobilus in *Pot of Gold*.
  3. Comment briefly on the significance of the character of Megadorous.

5.18.10 Suggested Reading (For Units 15 to 18)

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NOTES

Timeline of Greek Society and Culture in Evolution

	Date	**Major historical events**	**Date**	**Major literary and cultural events**
3400-2350 BC Early Minoan	3000	Copper mined in Cyprus		
	3400-1200	Bronze age in Crete		
	2870	First known settle-ment in Troy		
2350-1600 BC Middle Minoan	2000	Greek speakint peop-le migrate to Greece		
	2100-1950	First series of Cretan palaces. Proto-palatial period of Minoan civilisation on Crete, palaces built on a number of sites, principally Cnassos, Mallia and Phaestos.		
	1900	Destruction of the palaces		
	1700-1450 (1600-1500)	Neo-Palatial period on Crete when Minoan civilisation reaches its height, and it ends with another destruction of palaces.		
1600-1200 BC Late	1600-1200	Bronze age in Thessaly	**1600**	A new dynasty at Mycenae on mainland Greece. Shaft graves are

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
Minoan				dated 1600 BCE and the beehive tombs at 1450. These people built towns not only at Mycenae and Tiryns but at Sparta, Amyclae, Aegina, Eleusis, Chaeronea, Orchomenos and Delphi. Probably they came from Thessaly. Their architectural designs and religious practices prove instances of cultural exchange with the Minoans.
	1582	Foundation of Athens by Cecrops		
	1450	Destruction of second series of Cretan Palaces. The palace at Cnossos on Crete is re-inhabited by Greek-speaking people		
	1433	The Flood		
	1400-1200	The Mycenaen civilisation is at its height; trade with Sicily and Italy		
	1313	Foundation of Thebes by Cadmus		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	1300-1100	Age of Achaean domination in Greece. It is supposed that the Achaeans were a Greek tribe, expanded from Thessaly and mingled with the Pelasgo-Mycenaeans and towards the 1250 became the ruling class.		
	1250 (1194?)	The Mycenaean Greeks attack Troy and destroy it. With the defeat of the Trojans, Aegean civilisation dies and Greek civilisation begins.	1250-1183	Age of Homeric heroes
	1213	War of the Seven against Thebes		
	1200 BC	Accession of Agamemnon		
	1176 BC	Accession of Orestes		
	1104 BC	Dorian invasion of Greece. Greece emerges from this period with Dorians in control of the eastern Peloponnesus,		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		Crete and the south-west portion of Asia Minor, including Rhodes; the Ionians in control of Attica, the island of Euboea and the western central coastline of Asia Minor including the offshore island; and the Aeolians in control of Lesbos and a portion of the northern Asia Minor coastline.		
1100-850 Age of Migration (Dark Age)			1000	Temple of Hera at Olympia
			950-700	Vases are decorated with geometric patterns and abstract representation in sculpture. This is known as Geometric period.
	900	Sparta is founded when four villages of Dorian Greeks in the Eurotas valley unite to form a single settlement.		

	Date	**Major historical events**	**Date**	**Major literary and cultural events**
	814	The Phoenician city of Tyre founds Carthage in modern Tunisia		
800-600 Age of Colonization: founding of settlements abroad by individual city-states; development of political institution			**776**	Olympian Games Olympic games are founded and we have a record of the victors from this date till 217 CE
	750—550	Greeks expanded throughout the Mediterranean in this period, founding colonies in Sicily, southern Italy, southern France, eastern Spain, Libya, the north Aegean, and the Black Sea region.	**750** **730** **725**	*Iliad* (English translation 1611) Hesiod's old epic poetry *Odyssey* (English translation 1614) Eighth century is probably the time of Homer. No fixed date can be ascertained.
	725-05	First Messenian war	700-500	Cycle of legends of Troy by the Cyclic poets. Their poems are lost but they supplied the artists with themes. Also composition of hymns.
			730	Poems of Hesiod.
	680	Pheidon director at Argos; earliest state coinage in Greece	690	Approximately, it is the time of elegiac poetry. Earliest poets were

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
				Callinus of Ephesus (690), Tyrtaeus of Lacedaemon (685), Archilocus of Paros (680), Simonides of Amorgos (660)
	660-640	The Messenians attempt to throw off their Spartan over-lords with help of neighbouring Achaea, Elis and Argos. Sparta represses the revolt only with diffi-cultyand thereafter develops into a militaristic state in order to maintain her domination of her helots.		
			670	Tempauder of Lesbos, poet and musician; Archilochus of Paros, poet; Homeric hymns to Apollo and Demeter
	658	Byzantium created by the Greeks, after the native king Byzas. This was a strategic port and an example of many cities created by Greece in this period.		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	640-31	Second Messianic war	**640**	Thales at Miletus, philosopher and proficiency in Geometry and Astronomy, predecessor to Euclid
	624	Laws of Draco at Athens; first written law codes		
600-400 Golden Age: maturity of economic, social and political institu-tions, flourish of finest thinkers			**600**	Sappho and Alcaeus, poets of Lesbos. Alcaeus took active part in civic dissensions and popularised a metre called 'Alcaic' which was full of invectives. Sappho was one of the greatest lyric poets of her age.
	590	Age of Seven Wise Men		
546-527 Dictator-ship of Peisistra-tus Estab-lishment of Demo-cracy			**580**	Aesop of Samos, the fabulist
			570	Stesichorus of Himera in Sicily, poet. He was famous for his odes on heroic subjects. Anaximander of Miletus (611-549), philosopher and student of Strabo

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	560	Pisistratus makes his first attempt to make himself a tyrant at Athens		
	558	Carthage conquers Sicily and Corsica		
			551	Confucius is born
	546	Pisistratus finally succeeds in making himself a tyrant at Athens and after his death in 527 his son Hippias takes over as a tyrant		
			540	Hipponax of Ephesus
			534	Pisistratus establishes the great festival of Dionysia in Athens. Thespis from a village called Icaria wins the first prize in the tragedy contest.
			529	Pythagoras, philosopher at Crotona
			520	Olympieum begun at Athens
			517	Simonides of Ceos, poet. Perhaps, born around 556. Famous for his elegies and lyrical odes. Lived in Athens in the court of

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
				Hipparchus together with Anacreon and under democracy during Persian wars. In 477 he got the winning prize for the dithyrambic chorus.
			511	Phrynicus of Athens, dramatist
			510	A new temple of Apollo is completed at Delphi with the generous donation made by the noble Athenian family of the Alcmaeonidae, who gained considerable power in contemporary politics. Anacreon of Teos (540-478) poet of love songs and drinking songs. Was in the court of Hipparchus.
	509-507	Under the leadership of Cleisthenes, who belonged to the family of Alcmaeonidae establishes democracy at Athensbased on the principle of equality before the law	**508**	A contest in dithyrambic song and dance is established at the city of Dionysia in Athens as distinct from tragedy which had now developed into a dramatic presentation
	500-499	A revolt against Persian ruler breaks	**500**	Hecateus of Miletus, geographer

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		out in Ionia (the northern part of the Greek settlements, presently in Turkey), led by Aristagoras of Miletus and Athens and Eretria send help to the rebels.		
			499	Aeschylus' first play
	494	The Ionian rebel fleet is crushed by the Persian navy at he Battle of Lade. Revolt fails.		
	490	The Athenians defeat a Persian expedition-ary force at the Battle of Marathon. Legends say that a herald was sent running from Marathon to Athens running to announce the victory. This is how Marathon was conceived in modern sports.		
			485	Epicharmus (540-450) establishes comedy at Syracuse

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	480	Xerxes of Persia was defeated by the Greek navy at Salamis. His army was again defeated in the following year in the Battle of Plataea and Battle of Mycale by the Greeks (Sparta, Athens and Corinth).		
			478	Pindar of Thebes, poet (b. 522?). Well known for his odes.
	477	Delian Confederacy founded under the leadership of Athens to counter any future Persian expansionism.		
			472	Aeschylus' *The Persians*. Earliest extant tragedy.
			469	Birth of Socrates
	468	Persians defeated at Eurymedon	**468**	First contest between Aeschylus and Socphocles
			467	Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*
	464-54	Helot Revolt: the Spartan slaves revolted against the authority.		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
			460	Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*
	459-54	Athenian expedition to Egypt fails	**458** **456**	Aeschylus' *Oresteia* Temple of Zeus at Olympia
	450	Callimachus develops the Corinthian order	**450**	Zeno of Elea, philosopher; Hippocrates of Chios, mathematician; Philolatus of Thebes, astronomer
	449	Hostilities with Persia cease (Peace of Callais in 448), but Athens forces the Delian league allies to continue paying their annual tribute to the League treasury which Athens now uses to finance the Periclean building programme.		
	445	Athens concludes a thirty years peace with Sparta which recognises Spartan hegemony in the Peloponnesos and Athens and Sparta pledge not to interfere with each other's sphere of influence.	**447-32**	Work begins on the temple of Athena Parthenos (The Parthenon) on the acropolis of Athens. It is concluded in 432.

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	443-429	After the ostracism—exile for ten years—of his last serious political opponent, Thucydides, Pericles holds unchallenged power, being elected year after year to the committee of ten generals. His imperialist policy gradually disturbs the balance of power between Athens and Sparta.	**437** **443**	Construction of the monumental entrance to the Athenian Acropolis, the Propylaea begins and completed after five years. Herodotus of Halicarnassus, a Dorian colony, historian (b. 484). Around this time, he settled in Thurii, a colony founded by Athenians in Italy.
			442	Sophocles, *Antigone*
			438	Euripedes, *Alcestis*
	431	Peloponnesian war breaks out between Athens and Spartan alliance.	**431-24**	Euripedes, *Medea*; *Andromache*; *Hecuba*; Sophocles, *Electra*
	430	Plague at Athens and a third of the population dies in four years, including Pericles.	**430**	Antiphon (480-411), orator, who opened a school of rhetoric; one of his students was Thucydies. He was put to death in 411 for establishing the oligarchy of Four Hundred.
	429	Rise of Cleon, one of the most important	**429**	*Sophocles*, *Oedipus the King*.

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		generals for the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War		Plato born in Athens.
			428	Euripedes, *Hippolytus*
			425	Aristophanes, *Acharnians*; earliest extant comedy.
			424	Aristophanes, *Knights*
			423	Aristophanes, *Clouds*
	422	Death of Cleon	**422**	Aristophanes, *Wasps*
	421	Peace of Nicias or the Fifty Year Peace was concluded between Athens and Sparta, restoring the status quo ante.	**421**	Aristophanes, *Peace*
			420-06	The Erectheum, temple at Acropolis
	418	Spartan victory at Mantinea	**418**	Euripides, *Ion*
	416	Massacre at Melos. During the Peloponnesian war the Athenians sieged the island of Melos in the Aegean Sea. the Melians had ance-stralties with Spartans but in the War they were neutral.	**416**	Euripides, *Electra*

	Date	**Major historical events**	**Date**	**Major literary and cultural events**
	415-13	Athenian expedition to Syracuse	**415**	Euripides, *Trojan Women*
	414	Siege of Syracuse	**414**	Aristophanes, *Birds*
	413	Athenian defeat at Syracuse	**413**	Euripides, *Iphigenia in Taurus*
	413-404	In the last phase of the Peloponnesian War, Persia supplies Sparta with subsidies to build a fleet to challenge the Athenian navy.		
			412	Euripides, *Helen and Andromeda*
	411-410	Athens introduces an oligarchic government to replace its demo-cracy but the Atheni-an navy refuses to accept the new const-itution and democracy is restored in the following year.		
			408	Euripides, *Orestes*
	406	Athenians the last victory of War over the Spartan fleet at Arginusae islands. But the commanders	**406**	Deaths of Euripides and Sophocles; Euripides, *Bacchae* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		were sentenced to death as they failed to rescue the shipwrecked crew.		
	405	Spartan fleet led by Lysander captures the Athenian fleet at Argospotami; this was the decisive win.	**405**	Aristophanes, *Frogs*
	404	End of Peloponnesian War; Sparta takes over the Athenian empire except for the Greek cities over the coastline of Asia Minor which are returned to Persia. It establishes a pro-Spartan oligarchic government in her cities, though Thrasybulus restores democracy in Athens in the following year with the permission of the Spartan king.	**403**	Thucydides of Athens, historian (b. 471). After spending 20 years in banishment, principally in Peloponnesus, he returned to Athens around this time. He is well known for his historical account of the Peloponnesian war.
			401	Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*
			399	Trial and death of Socrates

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	395-387	A coalition of Athens, Corinth, Thebes and Argos, encouraged by Persia, fights Sparta. In 394 a Spartan fleet is defeated by a Persian fleet led by an Athenian general. Faced with signs of Athenian revival, Sparta and Persia settle their differences (which begun in 399 when Sparta tried to free the Ionian cities of Asia Minor). In 387, Athens and Sparta sign a peace treaty, under the aegis of the Persian king. This 'King's Peace' ensures that Persia keeps the Greek cities in Asia Minor but frees rest of the Greek cities.		
			393	Plato: *Apology*; Xenophon (b. 430?), historian, *Anabis* : personal account of his participation in war against Athens; *Hellenica:*

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
				continuation of Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war; *Memorabilia:* defence of his master Socrates against the charges that occasioned his death.
			391	Isocrates, (b. 436), professor of rhetoric opens his school. His style has great influence on Cicero.
			386	Plato founds the Academy
			384	Aristotle born at Stageira, a seaport town.
	382	Spartans occupy Cadmeia, the Theban acropolis,in a surprise attack.		
	379	A group of young Theban under Pelopidas and Melon, liberate Thebes. A war between Thebes and Sparta follows, Thebes aims at uniting all Boeotia, part of central Greece.		
378-54 Athenian and	377	Athens signs a naval alliance with sixty autonomous members		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
Theban supremacy and the struggle for power	371	to stop Spartan imperialism. Sparta and Athens sign a peace treaty in which Thebes does not join. Sparta orders the king of Boeotia to attack Thebes but the Theban army under Pelopidas and Epaminondas defeat the Spartan army. From 371 to 362 Thebes remain the chief military power in Greece.		
	362	Thebes defeats a Spartan-Athenian alliance at the Battle of Mantinea, but the Theban statesman and military genius Epaminondas is killed in the battle.	**367**	Aristotle comes to Plato's academy
Beginning of Macedonian supremacy	359	Philip II becomes king of Macedon on his brother's death.		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	356	Birth of Alexander the Great	**356**	Isocrates, *On the Peace*
			355	Isocrates, *Arepagiticus*
			348-39	In 347, after Plato's death, Speusippus, son of Plato's sister becomes the head of the Academy.
			346	Demosthenes, *On the Peace.* Demosthenes (b. 382-81?) was the greatest orator of his time. He was an active opponent of Philip and considered him to be enemy of the liberties of Athens and Greece. Isocrates, *Letter to Philip*
	338	At Chaeronea in Greece, Philip of Macedon defeats the combined armies of Athens and Thebes. Thebes is punished severely. In the following year the League of Corinth is formed under the patronage of Philip of Macedon. The league promises war on Persia to avenge	**342-38** **338**	Aristotle tutor of Alexander. Death of Isocrates

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		the Persian invasion of Greece in 480.		
			339-14	Xenocrates head of the Academy
	336	Assassination of Philip and accession of Alexander the Great.		
	335	Thebes revolts from Macedon on hearing the death of Philip only to be vanquish-ed by Alexander who burn the city down, sparing only the house of Pindar. Alexander begins his Persian campaign.		
	334	Alexander defeats the Persian satraps of Asia Minor and recaptures the Greek cities along the coast and places his own officials instead. In the following year he defeats the Persian King Darius III at the Battle of Issus and proceeds to conquest Syria.	**334**	Aristotle opens the Lyceum, where he spent next eighteen years of his life.

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	331	Alexander defeats Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela. The Satrap of Babylon, Mazaeus, surrenders and joins Alexander who seizes the treasure in Babylon and Susa. He also founds the city of Alexandria in Egypt.		
	330	Alexander captures and burns the Persian ceremonial capital of Persepolis and fulfils the promise of avenging the panhellenic campaign of Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480.	**330**	Demosthenes, *On the Crown*
	329-8	Alexander invades central Asia		
	327-5	'Pages Cospiracy; is supressed by Alexander and his court historian, and nephew of Aristotle, Callisthenes, is put to death. He also		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		invades India. Suddenly left when a mutiny in the Hyphasis broke out.		
	324	Currency is standardi-zed throughout Alexander's empire. This was the basis of the great expansion of economy in the Hellenistic world. Alexander also encou-raged race mixing of the Macedonian and Persian elites.	**324**	Exile of Demosthenes
	323	Death of Alexander. His kingdom was divided by his generals: Antipater takes Macedonia and Greece; Antigonus, Phrygia and Lycia; Ptolemy, Egypt; Lysimachus, Thrace. Greece tried to free itself from Macedo-nian domination but Antipater crushes the insurrection. This is known as the Lamian War.		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		However, in the years to follow the generals of Alexander tried to prove their own imperialist desires and the political situation in the zone remains unstable.		
			322	Death of Aristotle, Demosthenes and Diogenes
			322-288	Theophrastus head of Lyceum
			321	Menander's first play
			319	Philemon and the New Comedy
	317-307	The Aristotelian philosopher, Demetrius of Phalerum, who was appointed the deputy ruler of Athens (known as the philosopher-king), ruled for ten years. He was later driven out by Demetrius Poliorcetes, the Macedonian king of the Antigonid dynasty. Demetrius flees to Egypt where he advises Ptolemy to	**314-270** **307**	Polemo head of the Academy Law against the philosophers

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		establish the great Alexandrian library to promote Hellenistic culture.		
			306	Epicurus opens his school at Athens
	301	After various battles four Hellenistic kingdoms emerge: Macedon under Cassander, Egypt and Palestine under Ptolemy, Thrace and Asia Minor under Lysimachus, Persian heartland and northern Syria under Seleucus. However, this balance was short lived, because with Cassander's death in 297, fights ensue between the kings.	**301**	Zeno opens his school at the Stoa
			300	Euclid of Alexandria, mathematician
			290	Rhodian school of sculpture
	286	In 286, Lysimachus adds Macedon to his empire.	**288-70**	Strato head of Lyceum

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	282	War breaks out between Rome and the Greek city Tarentum.		
	281	Seleucus defeats Lysimachus but is assassinated by Ptolemy the Thunder-bolt, son of Ptolemy I. Macedon comes under his rule.		
	279	A horde of Celts, known as Gauls invade Macedon and Ptolemy the Thunder-bolt is killed. Macedon is without a king. The Gauls push down to Greece but their advance is stopped by the Aetolian League in North-West Greece.		
			278	The Colossus of Rhodes
	274	Antigonas Gonatas, son of Demetrius Poliorcetes, defeats the Celts and occupies the vacant throne of Macedon, where the Antigonid dynasty rules until		

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
		the last king, Perseus, is defeated by Romans in 167.		
	272	Tarentum surrenders to Rome and the Greek cities of southern Italy becomes allies of Rome.	**270-69**	Crates of Athens, head of the Academy
			269-41	Arcesilaus, head of the Middle academy
			257-180	Aristophanes of Byzantium, philologist
			247	Archimedes of Syracuse, scientist
	229-	Aratus, the Strategos of the Achaean league leads a battle against Macedonia		
			240	Apollonius of Rhodes, poet
	229	Aratus frees Athens		
	229-21	Antigonus III king of Macedonia		
221-179 Philip V king of Macedonia	215	Alliance of Philip V with Hannibal, the Cathaginian general.		
	214-05	First Macedonian war with Rome		
			212	Death of Archimedes

	Date	Major historical events	Date	Major literary and cultural events
	210	Sicily becomes a Roman province		
	200-197	Second Macedonian war		
	197	Battle of Cynocephalae		
	196	Flaminius proclaims freedom of Greece	**196**	Foundation of Pergamene Library
			195-80	Aristophanes of Byzantium librarian at Alexandria
179-68 Perseus King of Macedo-nia	171-68	Third Macedonian war. Aemellius Paullus defeats Perseus at Pydna		
	167	Deportation of the Achaeans		
	161	Judas Maccabee makes treaty with Rome. The following year he is defeated.		
	146	Greece and Macedonia become a province of Rome		

❖ All dates are in BCE unless otherwise mentioned.

❖ The dates of the cultural and literary figures are based on approximate calculation, keeping in mind the years they were active, or, some historical account. However, in some cases, their birth years are mentioned in parenthesis.

NOTES