CHAPTER - I.

Western influence on Bengali and Assamese drama.

The composition of drama and its stage representation got its first start in Bengal under the influence of western ideas on dramaturgy and stage-craft. The English dramatic art especially the plays of Shakespeare - inspired the educated Bengalis with the idea of composing plays in the vernacular. The enthusiastic pioneers in this field were Jogendranath Dutta, Taracharan Sikdar and Harachandra Ghosh. Jogendranath's "Kirtibilas" and Taracharan's "Bhadarjun" were published in the same year (1852). Jogendranath wanted to make "Kirtibilas" a tragedy after the English fashion, but failed completely. Taracharan, too, could not succeed in his attempt to turn "Bhadarjun" into an English comedy. In 1858 Harachandra Ghosh proved himself a failure in trying to write his "Kaurav-Biyog" in imitation of western drama. In the same period another playwright Ramnarayan Tarkaratna came to be known as "Theatrical Ramnarayan" by writing several plays, but these too were devoid of any real dramatic art.

Michael Madhusudan can be regarded as the first successful playwright in Bengal. Though he was not the first to write plays in Bengali, it was he who first wrote successful Bengali plays in imitation of western drama and blazed the path for the future dramatic literature. His successors could not make themselves free from the influence of the master, and a new stream of western thoughts and ideas penetrated into the dramatic world of Bengal. One by one Girishchandra, Dwijendralal, Khirode Prasad and other noted playwrights appeared in the dramatic firmament of Bengal.

The same thing happened to the Assamese dramatic literature when it came into contact with the western ideas. After the fall of Bengal in 1757 the English gradually took a grip on the whole of India. As it was Bengal on which the English first set their foot, the influence of western thought was first felt in that country. In Assam, too, a number of newly educated contd....
youngmen opened new horizons of culture. At the root of this was the western influence which they felt by coming into contact with Bengal. In this respect Dr. Satyendranath Sharma has written - "Sei samyat asamiyār kārane eṃmētra uccasikshār kendrastal aṣṭhi kalikatā, bāṅgālī-sakale imrājār sṃsparsat asamiyātakoe bahu āgāte aḥār kārane kalikatāt pascātya rāmāṃsacar ārhit rāmāsāka āru prekshāgraśa niṃmān kari aṃśa pascātya nātar ārhit bāṃgālā nāt rācāna kari abhinay kārīchil, unabhimsa sātabdīr sēsar phāle asamiyā dekasakale kalikatat uccasikshā lanote bāṃgālā nāt āru abhinay dekhi sei adarsat asamiyā nāt āru abhinay karībaloe prayās kare."

"At that time the only centre of higher education for Assam was Calcutta. The people of Bengal by coming into contact with the western influence built theatrical stages in Calcutta and performed plays in Bengali written in imitation of western models. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Assamese people came to Calcutta for higher education and there seeing the stage representation of Bengali plays tried to do the same in the Assamese language." 1.

The plays that were written in Bengali and Assamese under the western influence were packed with incidents and actions. Conflict was the life of these plays. The main interest of the Sanskrit dramas was 'rasa' and the prevalent 'Āngkia' plays of Assam were mainly devotional. Music and poetic beauty rather than a well-knit plot were the main features of these plays.

Before we take up the discussion on the impact of western influence on Bengali and Assamese plays an understanding of the western manner of writing plays is required. Western plays are mainly divided into two categories: tragedy and comedy. It is against the rules of the Sanskrit aesthetics to compose a purely tragic or comic plays. In a Sanskrit play, weal and woe may be blended, but the ultimate effect must be pleasurable. With the spread of English education, comedy and farce became very popular in Bengal and Assam. But as no ideal tragedy was created in any of the two languages, tragedy was not successful in winning the hearts of the people. An affinity may be observed between the Old Sanskrit plays of 'Kalidas', 'Vasa' etc. and the romantic comedies of Shakespeare. Besides this, the spectators and the readers were more attracted to the hilarious situations than the tragic ones.

The main object of comedy is to present the sunny side of life. On the other hand, tragedy depicts the picture of man's struggle against odds through various experiences of life and his utter failure to win over the obstacles. The nobility, strength and struggling power of the tragic hero rouse a sense of veneration in the minds of the spectators. There is no derth of tragedy in Bengali or Assamese if we take the term in its ordinary sense; but the want of a real tragedy is felt in both the languages.

The famous dramatic critic Nicoll has said in his book contd...
"Theory of Drama" that we always find a male character as the hero of a tragedy. If a female is made the main character of a tragedy, she must be strong, firm and manly. A mild natured or a weak minded woman is a minor character in a tragedy.

In the Bengali play 'Noorjahan' the playwright Dwijendralal has endowed the heroine Noorjahan with firmness, superb personality and keen intellect, but the chief trait of mobility that is essential for a tragic character is absent in her. Selfism and thirst for power have weakened the magnanimous side of her character. In the Assamese play of "Jaymati" by Gohain Barua, Jaymati cannot be regarded as a tragic heroine because in her womanly delicacy and emotionalism have the upperhand. Her devotion towards the husband rather than firmness of character has been revealed in the scene in which in spite of countless oppressions she did not divulge the whereabouts of her husband. In "Sadhani", too, Gohain Barua tried to make Sadhani a tragic character, but want of firmness and unyieldingness, are glaring in her.

In his 'The Poetics' Aristotle has said that the hero of a tragedy is not eminently good or just, though he leans to the side of goodness. He is involved in misfortune, not, however, as the result of deliberate vice, but through some great flaw of character or fatal error in conduct. In Dwijendralal's 'Noorjahan' the seed of her fall remained concealed in her greed for power. In Gohain Barua's 'Jaymati'


contd....
no palpable flaw or error in the character of the heroine is detectable for the tragic ending.

It is necessary to say something of the application of modern art and artifice in Bengali and Assamese plays. Let us first take up the case of Bengali drama. In Bengali drama from 1852 to 1859 the tradition of the Sanskrit drama or a mixture of the Sanskrit and the European drama, is found. The mixed method was done away with by Michael Madhusudan Dutta. He adopted the western style without any reserve, the magic influence of Shakespeare, who was not for an age but for all time, deeply penetrated every fiber of Bengali drama. In "Sharmistha" Madhusudan firmly set Shakespearean style in Bengali drama, and from that time forward this style occupied a permanent place in Bengali dramatic literature.

In the plots of Shakespeare's romantic plays one of the main features is the diversification of stories. In the romantic comedy along with the main plot various sub-plots are joined. The weaving of the sub-plot with the main plot is also not absent in the tragedy.

A Shakespearean play is generally divided into three main parts, viz., exposition, evolution and complexity (conflict and crisis) and denouncement of catastrophe. Exposition and the beginning of conflict are dealt with in the first act. In the second, third, fourth and sometimes in some parts of the fifth acts we find the complexity and severity of the conflict. The fifth act deals with cont'd...
In the expository first act we find the agony of Meherunnissa and the death of Sher Khan. In the second and third acts we find the beginning of real conflict—Meherunnissa becomes Moortahan—ascends from a high peak of power to a higher peak and at last occupies the tomost position in the state. The fourth act deals with the rise of the opposite force and a faint indication of her fall. In the fifth act we come across her ignominous fall and the catastrophe.

In Shakespeare's plays soliloquy and aside are important devices. This method has been adopted in the Bengali plays written in the first quarter of the 20th century. The main characters of the patriotic historical plays like 'Sirajdoula', 'Shajahan', 'Chandragupta', and 'Pratapaditya' have been revealed through the device of soliloquy.

The greatness of Shakespeare lies in the spirit or the soul of his plays. It was through the contact with his plays that the tragic conception of life burst into bloom in Bengali literature. The western ideas and conception of life turned our attention towards reality. Consequent upon this an artistic form of tragedy was evolved in our literature. The 19th century freedom-seeking Bengalis devoted themselves to power worship, so the stern struggle and intense inner conflict of powerful men caught their imagination. Michael, Dinabandhu, Girish Chandra, contd..
Dwijendralal, Khirods Prasad, Rabindranath and others were deeply attracted to the tragic side of life. When a man's heart is lacerated in the conflict between two opposing passions, a heart rending tragedy is born. Such a tragedy is not a rare thing in Bengali literature. The characters of Bhim Singh, Shajahan and Alangir have risen to the tragic height through struggle against unfavourable circumstances and inner conflict between opposing passions.

The most important influence of Shakespeare on the Bengali literature is to be found in the tragic conception of life. It must be admitted in this connection that a perfect Shakespearean tragedy has not been composed in our literature. The reason for this is to be sought in our difference of outlook of life in social, family, moral and religious fields, and we have applied these in conformity with our thoughts and ideas.

In Bengali literature we first notice a glimpse of patriotic light in the plays of Jyotirindranath Tagore, but afterwards this light of patriotism flooded the historical dramas of Girishchandra, Dwijendralal and Khirodsprasad. Girishchandra did not hesitate to sacrifice history in order to rouse pity and terror in the spectators' mind through the character of Siraj. Girish Chandra has depicted nicely Siraj's love of country and hatred for the English, but the tragedy of Siraj does not take place in his soul - it is a tragedy that has been brought about by outer forces. The influence of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" is felt to some extent in Chandragupta, the first successful historical play of cont'd...
Another playwright of the period Khirodeprasad has shown his skill in composing chronicle plays. But there is an admixture of romance and history in his plays. Though there is an absence of heroic sentiments in his plays, national sentiments have played important parts in many places. This love of country is also one of the many faces of western influence. The use of soliloquy has expressed the ideas contained in the drama. In trying to express Pratap's patriotism in his play "Pratapaditya" Khirodeprasad has given him soliloquies which have gone a long way to widen the field of expression. In the beginning of the 20th century the practice of writing chronicle plays came into vogue, but the age is not memorable only for that. The most important thing is that through these plays modern drama came to life in Bengal. Modernity revealed itself through glorification of man, curiosity, conflict in character, introduction of tragic sentiments and an intimate connection with the stage. The zeitgeist through found more or less in other playwrights, Dwijendralal was undoubtedly the proponent of the spirit of the age. The first decade of the 20th century may be termed the golden age of chronicle plays. The main plays of Girishchandra, Khirodeprasad and Dwijendralal were composed in that period.

The main reason for success and popularity of Dwijendralal's plays is their exquisite language. Though there can be found a trace of western influence in the...
language and idioms he has used, their artistic application has made them inimitable. In Shajahan’s soliloquies in the one hand has been revealed the helpless condition of the emperor, on the other hand they have become brilliant specimens of poetic dialogue. An example may be given here.

'Sajahan - surya utheche, yeman sei pratham din uthechilo, ei rakan ujjwal raktabarna. akāś temni nil; oe jumna temni krilamaye kalaswara, yamunā parpāre brikshraji temni śyampatra, puspojjwal; yeman āmi āsāesab dekhe esechi. sabai sei, kebal āmi badlechi - (galhasware) āmi āj amār putrer haste handinari mata asahāy, sisur mata durbal. majhe majhe krodhe garjam kare uthi, kintu se sarster megher garjam - ekta nispal hahakar metra, amār nirhis asphalane āmi nijei kshy haye yāi, uh! bharat sarat sajahan-ej saki abasta'.

(Shajahan - The Sun has risen. It is as bright and crimson as it was on the first day. The sky is blue as it is ever. That Yamuna is playful and bubbling as before. The trees on the otherside of the Yamuna are green and flowery as I have seen them since my childhood. Every thing is as it was, only I have changed. (In a deep voice)To day I am a prisoner in my son’s hand - as helpless as a woman, as weak as a child. Sometimes I roar in anger - but that is like the roar of the autumn clouds - nothing but a fruitless agonised cry. I wither and waste by my venomless vaunting. Alal! How the Emperor of India has fallen!)

His prose dialogue has been tinged with poetry.

Dwijendralal was well acquainted with the dramatic art of world literature, so there is a great deal of modern influence on his drama. The heroic and self-right...
women caught his imagination more than women of humble
devotional and self-less nature. That is why his women
characters like Noorjahan, Jahanara, Helen, Mahamaya
and others are compatriots or rivals of men in the
field of action. The glorious pictures of women and
the idea of equality between men and women are not a
rarity in our ancient literature, but Dwijendralal took
those ideas from the West. It may be mentioned here
that Dwijendralal's initiation in drama took place on
western soil. He was attracted to the western drama
while he was in England. When after returning home, he
was engaged in writing dramas, then the assimilated
western ideas and his patriotism found an outlet of
expression in the chronicle plays. The psychological
matters in his plays have been presented very deftly.
In this regard the Bengali dramatic critic Ajit Kumar
Ghosh has said - "kintu manuser jibam ye jalar
niyay saccha, spasta nahe, ihā ye ganiter
swatasidwa niyamer niy abical o sparibartita
nahe, ādhunik manastwate tāhā pramanita hayāche.
mobilikan tatwer sukham alocanīy manuser
cheten acheten stwarer madhye nānā bīnīdwa ehom
bismaykar bhāber astitwa dharā paliāche.
Dwijendralāler nātakeo gabhīr manastweter sukham
samghatguli ati sayatna cheṭar sahit prakās
kārē hayāche".2

2. Bangla Mataker Itihas - Ajit Kumar Ghosh,
"But modern psychology has proved that men's life is neither transparent and clear like water nor is it static and unchanged like the axioms of mathematics. Psycho-analysis has detected the existence of many contradictory and astonishing ideas between the conscious and unconscious layers of human mind. In his plays Dwijendralal has expressed very carefully the finer aspects of the conflicts in the mind'.

Another mark of modernity of his plays is the elimination of the long lingering character of the court jester. But when required he has created comic relief.

The influence of Shakespeare remained effective on Bengali drama from its birth in 1852 to 1920. Dwijendralal, Khirodeprasad and Girishchandra were overwhelmingly influenced by Shakespeare. The playwrights of the next generation like Sachindranath Sengupta and Manmatha Roy, though attracted to Shakespeare in their early career, came under the spell of Ibsen. Among the three main streams of Bengali drama - mythical, social and historical - the historical romances were very much influenced by Shakespeare.

If we analysis "Chanda" and "Sirajdoulla" it becomes clear that Girishchandra followed the Shakespeare's steps. The sad end of Moorjahan in D.L. Roy's play reminds us Lady Macbeth. A close resemblance between Jahangir and Antony can be found - the former enamoured of Moorjahan and the latter unable to break off the infatuating net of Cleopatra. The planning of "Shahjahan" and its tragic atmosphere owe much to the influence of Shakespeare's King Lear. It is not contd...
difficult to discover resemblance between crafty, conspiring, power-hungry Aurangzeb and Richard III. In the venomous heart of Richard III we find a pining pain of remorse. The same thing is found in Aurangzeb when he begs forgiveness to Shajahan — “āmaēke er cheye aro aparādhī karbennā pitā. āmi pēpl. ghorettām pāpi. sei pāper prādhe jwale pūle yēcchi. dekhun pita- ei sīrna deha, ei kotarāgata cakṣhu, ei suska pāndur mukh tār sākṣhya debe.” 1.

(Don't make me a bigger offender than this, father. I am a sinner - a damnable sinner. I am now burning with the fire of that sin. Look, father, this withered body, sunken eyes and wisened pale face will bear witness to it).

Dialogue is an important vehicle of drama. In order to express sublime and lofty ideas of a tragedy language must be effective and impressive. Prose is a pliant vehicle in this respect. Prose was used in dialogues of almost all the patriotic chronicle plays written in Bengali.

In both comedy and tragedy of Shakespeare along with the main plot one or more subplots have been organically joined. The presentation of such subplots are found in Bengali Chronical plays. In "King Lear" 1. Shajahan - D. L. Roy. - Act.V, Scene-VI.

contd....
the sub-plot of Gloucester has been connected with the main plot. In "Shajahan" too the sub-plots of Dara, Suja and Yashowant Singha have been joined skilfully. In "Chandragupta" too the sub-plot of Chhya and Chandraketu has been added to the main plot. In many cases these sub-plots have helped to enhance dramatic quality and accelerate dramatic movement. Notwithstanding the facts that the Bengali playwrights owed allegiance to the Shakespearean method, very few real tragedies were written in Bengali.

In Assam composition of plays after western model was introduced towards the end of the 19th century when attempts were made to set up theatrical stages for the performance of dramas. Upto that period the influence of Sanskrit and Ankiya drama prevailed upon Assam's dramatic world. New drama that was introduced was western as well as realistic. The old Sanskrit drama was divided into several acts but there were no scenes in those acts. The Sanskrit and Ankiya plays were bound by rigid rules of dramatic creation, and so the dramatists had no freedom. On the other hand western dramatists were absolutely free. The dramatists in Assam looked upon Shakespeare as a model for imitation. The use of soliloquy, introduction of comic

(*) The Sanskrit and Ankiya plays are idealistic, but the newly imported Western plays are realistic.- Asamiya Natya Sahitya - S. N. Sharma, Page-106.

contd...
scenes in between tragic ones for dramatic relief, to give
a hint of future events at the end of five act plays -
these methods are detected in the dramas of Padmanath Gohai
Barua and Lakshminath Bezbarua and the succeeding play-
wrights inherited these traditions as a matter of course.

In the play "Gadadhar" Gohain Barua has brought to
light Gadadhar's helpless but firm picture through
soliloquies. In the same way Atul Chandra Hazarika in his
"Chhatrapati Shivaji" has expressed Shivaji's viewpoints
through self-analysis - "Hindu jāti bahut din sulle.
topamit lačkal di pari thākibaloe āru samay lay.
ḵanmar kāsat joydāmkā bajāi di supta nara-nārīk
jāgṛata kari hindūstānāt āryar goerabar bijay mēthā
urubāi lāqiba, āri bāhi thākiba noāri."¹

(For a long time the Hindus have remained dormant and
inactive in their self-forgetting sleep. Now there is no
time left. Let me beat the drum of victory and awake the
slumbering men and women. Let me fly the flag of the
glories of the Aryans in Hindustan. There's no time to
sit idle)"¹.

The Assamese playwrights did not adopt any planned
methods in dividing their plays into acts and scenes. Very
often consistency is lost between the plot and the
advancement of incidents. Consequently a lot of scenes
have been incorporated in a single act. Such crowding of
of scenes in a single act can be found in Lakshminath

¹Chhatrapati Shivaji - Act.I, Scene-III.
Along with the introduction of the genre of five-act plays the practice of incorporation of sub-plots are also found in Assamese plays. The main objects of these sub-plots are to strengthen the main plots. But the dramatic unity is lost if the sub-plots are not connected in a proper way. The story of Oreshanath, Pijali, Maju Aideum in Bezbarua's 'Belimar', the episodes of Gajapuria - Gajapuriani - Priyaram and the love story of Sadihakhoa Gohain - Chenehār in "Chakradhawj Singha", Gadapani and Dalimi incident in Jaymati, amorous story of Gandharvanarayan - Pijali in "Lachit Barphukan" and again the love episode of Dilip Ran, Amiya in Atul Hazarika's "Chatrapati Shivaji" have added variety to the dramatic stories by juxtaposing themselves with the historical main plots. The practice of introducing sub-plots declined as the plays began to be written in three acts instead of usual five.

Dialogue gives life to a drama. Even a powerful and lively plot fades if there is a conflict between idea and language. No significant dramatic quality is found in the dialogue used by Gohain Barua and Bezbarua. A forceful and colourful prose is required to bring into life a historical incident. In "Chatrapati Shivaji" by Atul Hazarika such a vigorous prose is found in some places. Here is an example—

1. Belimar. (2) Jaymati - Act.V, Scene IX.

contd...
"In this great turning point of life I remember the golden days of my boyhood. I remember those days full of dreams when I used to roam on horseback in the hills of Maharashtra. The inspiring words of Dadaji brings a rush of blood to my heart even to-day. That was a day of days when at the feet of Mother Bhawani I saw freedom of the nation - freedom of the country. Before my eyes is unrolled the glorious history of Hindustan. I see before my eyes the Ideal State of the Ramayana, the Holy State of the Mahabharata. The horns and the drums ring in boisterous sound - the "Panchayatana" of Shri Krishna, the whis of Arjuna's
"Gandiva". One by one pass before my eyes Chandragupta, 
Ashok, Vikramaditya, Harshabardhan, Bappa Rao, Prithviraj, 
Ranampratap and others. I see before my eyes the map of free 
India. In my mind waves of thoughts rekn. Gradually the 
map of Hindustan floats before my eyes. I am charmed with 

wonder. Do you know what I see, Tanoji? It seems to me that 
the slumbering India has awakened - hundreds of thousands 
of oppressed and down trodden men" (Chhatrapati Shivaji-

(ii) "Rām-āru iyāko manat rākhībā - āmār ei 
abhijān muchalmānār birudde nahāy - annyāy- āru 
anācārār biruddehe. lāmchita mahāmānābar atme 
pratisthār bābe āmār ei bipul āyojan. tāt pāp nai, 
himsā nai, kshudra swāhārātā nai. swades mantrat 
dīkshīta āi bhābāhir sebak āmi. ei mahāyaggar pradhan 
hotā bahsa sibājī - tumī. jay tomār anibarya. 
mābhosh mābhosh".

(Ram - Bear in mind that this expedition of mine is not 
against the Muslims - this is against wrongs and injustice. 
The object of this massive scheme is self establishment of 
the oppressed humanity. There is no sin, no violence, no 
narrowness in it. My religion is patriotism, and I am a 
humble servant of Bhawani. You Shivaji is the principal 

priest of this great sacrificial festival. Victory must be 

The use of blank verse in Gohain Barua's chronicle 
plays has made them rather artificial. Shakespeare has 
contd....
given blank verse to his characters of noble birth and
dialects to the lowly ones. In the Sanskrit drama also a
distinction has been made between the language used by
people of high birth and that of the riff-raff. In this
context Satyendranath Sharma has written - "smläp vetiya
caritrar mukhar kathā naho samgra satwār abhibakti
hoe para tetiāi smlāpe sarthak rup lábh kare".
(The dialogue that expresses the personality of the speaker
instead of being queer words his successful)\(^1\). In the
Assamese plays in some places some distinctions have been
made in the dialogues used by different characters.

In anciant dramas music and songs occupied a
distinctive place. Though music occupied a place in the
Assamese dramas written after western model, this did not
serve any purpose as it was irrelevant.

In modern drama pre-eminence has been given to the
analysis of the mental world in preference to the outer
actions. But, even the famous dramatists of Assam, have
followed the old beaten track in this respect. It is not
due to the want of talents that the playwrights adopted the
old traditional ways. The surrounding circumstances were
mainly responsible for this. The condition of the stage in
Assam was deplorable. Dramas were being written at the
demand of the common spectators. The playwrights of the
period thought it desirable to adopt the devices of
construction of the Elizabethan dramas. So they divided

their play into five acts and incorporated more than one scene in an act. They had also recourse to soliloquies, asides and melo-dramatic elements in their plays.

The dramatic movement started by the newly educated in Assam in imitation of the western drama produced no real tragedy. In the chronicle plays like "Jaymati", "Gadadhar", "Maniram Dewan" and others, though the heroes and the heroines fight against adverse circumstances, they cannot be called real tragedies. The two scenes that have been added after Jaymati's death in imitation of a Shakespearean tragedy serve no purpose. In Shakespeare such scenes are added to heighten tragic invursity. But in "Jaymati" no such tragic atmosphere has been created. In Gohain Barua's "Sadhani" though the heroine struggles against heavy odds, she lacks that unbending and uncompromising attitude that is so essential for a tragic character.

The three plays of Lakshminath Bezbarua - "Belimar", "Chakradhawj Singha" and "Jaymati-Kuori" were written in the same year, and each of the plays are divided into five acts. In all the three plays along with the historical main plots imaginary sub-plots have been incorporated. The influence of Shakespeare's foul can be found in the character of Bhumuk Bahuar in "Belimar". Besides, the character of Ophelia in Hamlet has cast a shadow on that of Maju Aideox. The scenes that centre around Gajapuria, Priyaram and Gajapuriani recall the scenes in Henry IV, Part-I in which cont'd.
Prince Hall and Falstaff appear. In some places the playwright has crossed the limit of decency in comic scenes. An element of bawdry has crept into the comic scenes in "Chakradhawj Singha". An absence of decency is felt in the attachment between the youth Priyaram and Gajapuriani.

A sense of national consciousness and an attitude of love and respect towards the country led to the writing of patriotic historical plays in Bengal and Asam in the first half of the 20th century. Though both the countries were imbued with the same ideas, Bengal was the pioneer in this field because she came first under the western spell. So far as western influence is concerned the playwrights of both the countries were akin to one another. The field of dramatic creation was limited to mythical tales before the writing of chronicle plays was undertaken. When under western influence the playwrights of both the countries made up their minds to compose tragedy, they needed field of history to glean the plots for their tragedy. One of the principal objects of this choice was to express patriotic feelings.

contd.....
In the past independent period the area of Bengali and Assamese drama has been widened. In conformity with modern practice the Shakespearean device of dividing a play into five acts has been discarded. In some places plays are being constructed without any scene at all.