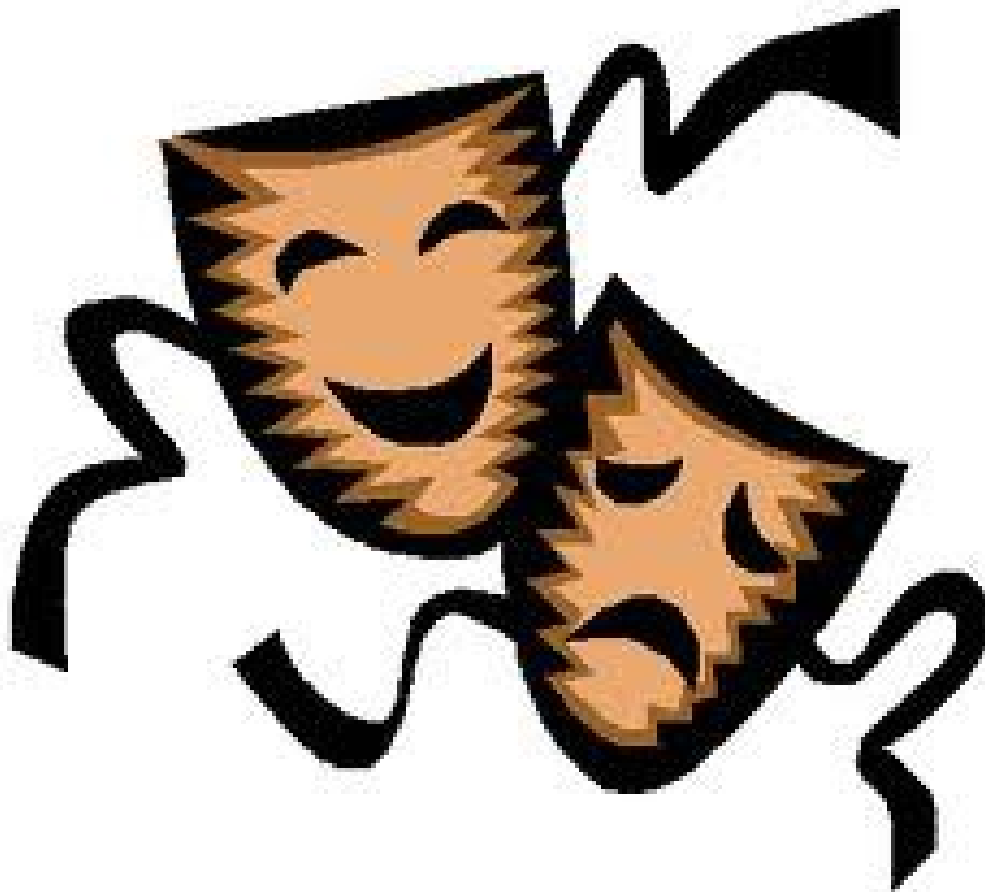




**MAEL- 103**

## **DRAMA**



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

**Uttarakhand Open University**

**MAEL- 103**

**DRAMA**



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**UNIT 1:                DRAMA AND ITS CONTEXT**

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1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

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**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Though many of us have been exposed to drama in a classroom setting, it remains a fact nevertheless that drama is essentially a performing art.

In order to correct our taste and perception about drama, it is necessary to see the origins and development of drama in its theatrical perspective.

Once you have discovered this new insight into drama, you will be able to enjoy anew many of the performances that are part of our everyday life and society.

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**1.2 OBJECTIVES:**

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After reading this Unit you will be able to

- Explain the historical and theatrical context of drama
- List the operations of the theatre and the dramatist's frame of the text
- Analyse the basic function of a drama that is praxis and not lexis
- Explain the *avant-garde* experiments in theatre

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**1.3 PRIMARY CLASSIFICATIONS OF THEATRE**

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Drama as a written script is meant for presentation and its success depends on how effectively it comes out on the stage. Two kinds of performance spaces are normally found all over the world. The first is called "proscenium" or stage. The second kind is known as arena theatre or open theatre. An arena is an open space in the temple yard or village courtyard. It can also be open fields as was the case with the performances of medieval Mystery and Morality plays.

In the last decades of the twentieth century Richard Schechner introduced a new kind of performance space called found space. One has to make use of a found space—a classroom, a workshop, a filling station or whatever—for performance of theatre and adjust to the found circumstances. He named this kind of theatre as environmental theatre.

Most of the ritual theatre takes place in arena theatre whereas the naturalistic plays written from the existence of the Globe Theatre are presented in a proscenium theatre, which is covered with three walls. On the open direction of the fourth wall is seated the audience. Hence the theatre critics address the audience as "the fourth wall". The production of a play in the theatre takes twenty times more energy and talent than analysing it critically, because it engages participation of so many production elements: Directors, rehearsals, costume, property, set design, make up, lights, music. All these elements combined together fabricate the technology of theatre.

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#### 1.4. DEFINING DRAMA

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Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance (Keir Elam, *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 1980). The term “drama” comes from a Greek word *dra*, translated into English as “to act, to do”. Drama, thus, is a performance in an ambiance which presupposes a theatre space and the audience. It is a story performed on stage by the actors before a group of audience. The audience, the actors, performance space and performative elements like light, sound, curtain, music, costume, property, make up, movement, interaction etc. fused together create the concept of theatre. The term “*théatron*”, literally translated, means “a place for viewing”; or “*theáomai*”, “to see”, “to watch”, “to observe”.

Drama read singly by a reader is just a piece of fiction and does not qualify for becoming either a drama or a piece of theatre. Drama involves a collaborative mode of production by actors and Director, and a collective mode of reception by the audience. The theatre is made up of three elements: What is performed (script, scenario or plan), the performance (rehearsal and presentation), and the audience (the perceivers).

##### 1.4.1. Dramas are not meant for reading

Dramas are always meant for production on the stage. When the director asks an actor or group of actors to read a script, he is asking them just to memorize the script and improve the diction for purpose of production and not for answering examination questions. N.S.Pradan in his Introduction to *The Collected Plays of Arthur Miller* writes:

A Drama ought not be looked at first and foremost from literary perspectives merely because it uses words, verbal rhythm, and poetic image. These can be its most memorable parts, it is true, but they are not its inevitable accompaniments. Nor is it only convention which from Aristotle onward decreed that the play must be dramatic rather than narrative in concept and execution. A Greek's seat was harder than an American's and even he had to call a halt to a dramatic presentation after a couple of hours. The physiological limits of attention in a seated position enforce upon this art an interconnected group of laws, in turn expressed by aesthetic criteria, which no other writing art requires....

A few of the inevitable materials of the art dictate to me certain aesthetic commitments which may as well be mentioned at the outset.... These plays were written on the assumption that they would be acted before audiences. (5-6)

This study should include all the technical details that are indispensable for the study of a play, viz, lights, properties, costumes, masks and make-up, levels and distances, music, expressions, stage-design, stage-movement etc. Their study becomes even more important when the play's action totally depends upon these techniques, for example, the masque scene in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the ghost scene in *Hamlet* and so on.

All this is to be done after witnessing a performance or trying to reconstruct a performance of the corresponding play in the classroom for a proper understanding of drama because mere study of drama without practical experience is like holding a medical degree without any practical experience of operating a human-body.

### 1.4.2. Drama in Classrooms

Drama teaching all over the world has fallen into a fallacy that it is to be read like a text of an epic, a novel or a short story. The teachers have been, in a grandiloquent language, and with the help of all available critical tools, lecturing on the critique of dramas. And finally the critical concepts are straight jacketed into the question-answer formats likely to be used for semester or annual examinations. The dramas are analysed on the tools of theme, characterization, social milieu, language, imagery, symbolism, expressionism, impressionism dialogues, purpose and style of writing. Thus the difference between the fictional text of a drama and its theatrical uses has been completely obliterated.

It is high time that the Universities and schools began to study dramas as theatrical pieces and not as literary texts with their ethical and mythical dimensions. No drama in the world has ever been written for a cursory or critical reading in a classroom. No dramatist ever born has thought of writing a play which would not see the light of the stage. The playwright's choice for writing a play and not a novel or a short story is obvious. (S)He wants her play to be staged and recreated on the stage. Therefore whenever we are given to read a play, the curriculum should have provisions for staging plays with students themselves as role players or by the invited repertory which also seeks participation of the former in staging the play(s).

The gross ignorance about the ways of theatre on the part of students leads to miss the important improvisations in scenes like the porter scene in *Macbeth* or Shakespeare's creation of female characters that live in disguise as boys all through the plays. Thus Viola in *The Twelfth Night* and Rosalind in *As You Like It* disguise themselves as boys so that a boy compelled to act as a girl might freely act as a natural boy. Until 1667 when Nell Gwyn the first female artist appeared on the stage, the females were not allowed to impersonate. The limitations of a set or light and music compelled Shakespeare to use extensive verbal imagery for creating an ambience: Since a cloud or a jungle could not be shown on the stage, verbal images of the same were created by the actors. For every situation, a drum was beaten behind the stage to create background music. Either a sennet or a trumpet was played to suit to the varying moods of action. Since no curtain or "fade in" and "fade out" system existed, every actor had to take entry at the beginning of the scene and exit from the stage at the end. No teacher ever explains to his students how Ariel in *The Tempest* or Eumenides in *The Family Reunion* were presented on the stage. Or no student ever thinks how Gogo and Didi move on the stage to generate multiple layers of meaning in Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, or how the four characters in the *Endgame* can sustain the audience for two long hours?

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## 1.5. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DRAMA AND THEATRE

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Origin of drama all over the globe is traced back to the ritual performances which involved exhaustive dramatic action. A hunter returning successful from the hunt recreated the hunting situation. For several centuries the Greeks presented their dramas at the festival of Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine. He is the son of Zeus (the greatest of Greek gods) and Semele, a mortal woman. He, as per the myth, was killed, dismembered and then resurrected. (G.C. Brocket, 35). His life cycle was closely related with the cycles of the annual seasons. His birth was the spring; his growth, summer; his decay, the fall; and his death, the winter. Evidences reveal that by seventh or eighth century dithyrambs were performed at festivals honoring Dionysus. Dithyrambs were hymns sung to dance performed by a repertory of dancers called Chorus. The dithyrambs were similar to the Jhora-Chanchari, Thadya and Tandi dances of Uttarakhand hills. To ensure the return of the seasons Dionysia were performed: Rural Dionysia in December, Lenaia in January and City Dionysia by the end of March. On the occasion of these festivals, dramas were performed. Historical record of the performance of City Dionysia is found in 534 B.C. when a large dramatic contest for the best tragedy was held. Hundreds of plays by several writers were written for the occasions but only the plays of five writers survive: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Menander. Thirty two tragedies, twelve comedies and one satire play out of a vast number of plays survive today (G.C. Brocket, 37).

### 1.5.1 Acting space of Greek Drama

The festival of Dionysus which enacted the birth, growth, decay, death, and resurrection ritual of *Dionysus* and other invited plays, was held on a flat terrace on the foot of a hill. While the orchestra (singers, musicians and performers) sat on the flat space, the audience adjusted on the amphi-theatrical space on the hillside. Later the flat terrace was supported from behind by a rectangular structure called *skene*. This space was used by actors for retiring and change of costume. Side wings called *paraskenia* were also added. And much later the passage called *paradoi* for connecting the auditorium with the orchestra was constructed. For scenic effect a triangular shape made up by putting three flats together was used. On the surface of the three flats were painted different scenes for different occasions.

### 1.5.2 Origin of Modern English Drama

Modern European drama originated from a church ritual called *Quem Quaeritis or Regularis Concordia*. During the Midnight mass on Christmas, a scene called trope, from the life of the Savior was presented. After crucifixion, the Saviour's body was kept in a borrowed grave (in a cave). Three Mary's visited the sepulcher of the Savior and found angels standing there. The angels asked them:

**Angels:** Whom seek ye in the tomb, O, Christians?

**Maries:** Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. O heavenly beings.

**Angels:** He is not here; he is risen as he foretold. Go and announce that he is risen from the tomb.

This particular scene became very popular among the devotees and because of ever increasing audience coming to witness it, was shifted from the chancel to the porch and then to churchyard. Other episodes from the Old and New Testament were also added for presentation. Gradually all these dramatic presentations on the life of Christ, God, prophets and saints became part of the dramatic repertory and were presented at the market places and open fields. On the basis of the number and variety of plays, different cycles like Wakefield, Coventry Yorkshire emerged. On a particular day of May, all the plays were presented on carts –on- wheels or in a stationary form in open fields. The communities, expert in performance of specific plays, were entrusted to stage such plays only because they knew the mystery (technique) of such scenes. As a result the plays were also known as Mystery plays. The plays then grew into Morality plays, Interludes and finally landed in the shape of Elizabethan drama.

### 1.5.3 Origin of Sanskrit Drama:

*Natyaśāstra*, the canonical text on the theatrical tradition in Sanskrit literature, tells of the mythical origin of the genre. Gods went to Brahma and pleaded that the humanity was suffering from numerous worldly woes. Although four Vedas were already available for the wellbeing of the humanity, the gods continued, the fourth *varṇa* was denied access to the same. They prayed Brahma for granting some remedy for the human pains and sufferings. Brahma, in response granted them the fifth Veda, called *Natyaśāstra*. And he said to the gods that the *path* (text) of the *natya* was taken out of the *Rigveda*, the *git* (music) from *Samveda*, *Abhinaya* (mime ) out of *Yajurveda* and *rasa* (sentiment) out of *Atharvaveda*. (N.S. 1, 11-19). Critics like Bharat Gupt attribute the theory to an endeavor seeking dignity and prestige for the theatre which was not held in high esteem during the Vedic and post Vedic period (Bharat Gupt, 71). He establishes that a certain kind of theatre existed even during the Vedic period but because the Veda rituals had to be separated for their purity and sanctity, the society created a distinction between the rituals of *natya* and Veda. The practitioners of Veda maintained a distinction between *vedyavahara* and *lok vyavahara*. *Lok vyavahara* was obviously the enactments of the *nataka*. However except for Dhananjaya's *Dashrūpaka*, no other text on Sanskrit drama belonging to the pre-Vedic or Vedic period is available.

*Natyaśāstra*, unlike Poetics, lays down detailed rules on the architecture of theatre, performance space, visual contents, aural contents, dramatic genres and the arousal of *rasas*. The architecture is described on the basis of the dimensions of the playhouse, and there exist elaborate rituals for construction and maintenance of the playhouses. Vestiges of such playhouses are still existent in Kerala in the shape of Kutambpalams which are used for performing the Sanskrit theatre called Kudiattam. The stage is further divided into *Nepathya*, *Rangsira*, *Rangpitha*, *Mattavarani*, *Kutapa*, Doors and Audience Space.

The visual and aural content of Sanskrit drama include dance, song and spectacle performed through the stages called *vardhmanakdrupa*, *purvaranga*, *chari*, and *abhinaya*. There are elaborate directions on how the dialogues are spoken.

On the dramatic genres, Bharatmuni more or less follows Dhananjay who has in detail described the genres in *Dasrupakas*.

The last but the most important part is the arousal of *rasas* which is considered to be the most significant contribution of Indian aesthetics to the world literature. *Rasnisipatti* is similar to Aristotle's concept of *catharsis*. It is the emotional process which communicates in exact amount the emotion to the audience which is felt by the playwright and the actor. According to Wikipedia,

A large section deals with meanings conveyed by the performance (*bhavas*) get particular emphasis, leading to a broad theory of aesthetics (*rasas*). Four kinds of *abhinaya* (acting or histrionics) are described – that by body part motions (*angika*), that by speech (*vachika*), that by costumes and make up (*aharya*) and the highest mode by means of internal emotions, expressed through minute movement of lips, eyebrows, ear etc. (*sattvika*)

The architecture of theatre space has influenced the structure of a play: number of characters, movement of scenes from place to place and the nature of action. Sanskrit drama as a whole enjoyed variety and volume of plays staged down the ages. Unfortunately most of the scripts have been lost during the turbulent times of history. Whatever exists is because the texts were memorized and passed on from the father to the son. Music and dance were the dominant elements of the Sanskrit drama. And the element of poetry has immortalized Sanskrit texts like *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, *Mirchakatikam*, *Swapna Vasava Datta*, *Mudraraksam*.

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## **1.6 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DRAMA AND THEATRE**

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### **1.6.1 Greek theatre and Poetics**

In the festival honouring Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, can be seen the beginnings of Greek drama. According to Aristotle, tragedy developed out of dithyrambs that were the hymns sung and danced by a chorus in honour of Dionysus.

The earliest dramatist of that time whose name survives today is Thespis. He is also the first known actor. All the characters were played by a single actor. Though the number of actors gradually increased, a single actor had to do a number of characters. Masks played an important role here as those were used to shift identities.

Theatre Structure played a significant part because improvisations were made in accordance with the theatre, making the study of its structure indispensable to an understanding of the plays.

Aristotle's *Poetics* defines tragedy as,

The imitation of an action, serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, in a language beautiful in different parts with different kinds of embellishment, through action and not narration, and through scenes of pity and fear bringing about the catharsis of these (or such like) emotions.

If understood well, this definition points towards the “action” (on the stage) side of drama. The action, its implication and its effect (*catharsis*) are given due importance but in actual practice of play-analysis these parts are casually omitted and mere script-analysis is carried out.

Some important terms in poetics depict the prominence of the practical side of dramatic arts:

*Mimesis*- imitation, representation

*Catharsis*- purgation, purification, clarification

*Peripeteia*- reversal

*Anagnorisis*- recognition, identification

*Melos*- melody

*Opsis*- spectacle (costume, make-up, etc.)

### **1.6.2 Elizabethan theatre and drama**

Secularization of thought led to Secular themes and subjects in the field of drama giving rise to the development of playhouses categorized broadly as: common playhouses and private theatres. The former was for the common audiences and the latter for upper classes where respective tastes of the audiences were taken into account.

Thomas Kyd's *Senecan Tragedy* used ghost and this makes the analysis of technical support indispensable here.

Nine playhouses grew and of them, The Theatre, The Globe, and The Fortune were prominent.

Playhouses were of different shapes – round, square, octagonal. A large central unroofed space, called pit or yard, was enclosed by three tiers of roofed galleries. Two rear doors to the stage encouraged a continuous flow of dramatic action. Not much scenery was used.

Trapdoors in the floor allowed for grave scenes, appearances of ghosts and devils, for fire and smoke, and for other special effects.

A roof (supported by posts at the front of the stage) extended over the stage. Cranes, ropes, and pulleys for raising and lowering objects are housed there.

Two basic kinds of costumes – contemporary clothing and conventional dress, appropriate to the rank of the character were used.

Since the performance took place outdoors, no artificial lighting was used. Candlelight was probably used in private theatres.

### **1.6.3 Concept of Avant Garde theatre:**

The term Avant-garde literally means pioneers or innovators, especially in art and literature. The avant-Garde theatre is used more or less interchangeably with the term experimental theatre. The term acquired its name from theatre experimentalists like Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba Antonin Artaud, Jean Genet, Samuel Becket, and Richard Schechner who have made extensive experiments based on their respective backgrounds they came from: like anthropology, ritual, Marxism, yoga etc. However the basic principles and design of the experimental theatre was designed by Constantin Stanislavski (1865-1938) who for the first time laid out detailed exercises for the theatre actors. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski says that an actor passes through four stages of learning: observation, concentration, imagination and adaptation. An actor observes the behaviour and happenings of the real life. During his rehearsals and acting he concentrates and remembers his experience with the help of “emotion memory”. Then he imagines himself in the situation of the character he is playing. And finally he adapts all these elements into his acting. Stanislavski believed that an actor should thoroughly train his body and voice to suit to any demand of acting. However the actor should have a basic talent called “spine” which alone can lead him to the profession of acting. He was then followed by his coartist Meyerhold who said that the actor’s body should be so trained that it works like a machine. This stage of perfection in body and process of training was called “Biomechanics”. The next exponent of this kind of training was Jerzy Grotowski who declared that human body alone was sufficient to perform theatre. An actor’s body can function both as hand-props, set and light. He named his theatre as “Poor Theatre” (Towards Poor Theatre) Next to follow him was Eugenio Barba who worked in detail on the angles and postures created by an actor’s body while on stage and the proportionate emotions conveyed by the same (Theatre Anthropology).

These experimentalists have freely drawn their idioms from Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Balinese and African theatres. The Avant-Garde tried to introduce different uses of language and body, to change the mode of perception and to create a new, more active relation with the audience. It challenged the traditional belief – audiences are passive observers. Audience participation can range, they said, from asking for volunteering onto a stage, to screaming in their faces.

Physically, theatre spaces took on different shapes and therefore practitioners re-explored different ways of staging performance and eventually a scientific revisit into Elizabethan and Greek theatre spaces.

The primacy of the Director and writer was challenged directly, and the thinking that the Director's role can exist as an outside eye or a facilitator rather than the supreme authority figure (they once would have been able to assume) developed.

Experimental theatre alters traditional conventions of space, movements, mood, tension, language, symbolism, and other elements.

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### **1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Write a brief note on: Historical perspective on Drama
2. Describe features of Ancient Greek Theatre.
3. Write an essay on Natyasastra.
4. Describe the Development of Avant garde theatre citing the theatre practice of one of the practitioners.



**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

In the earlier Unit you read a brief history of theatre and drama with reference to Greek, English and Sanskrit theatre and also the current trends in theatre and its tendency to turn once again to ritual theatre.

The present Unit analyses the stage script of two plays, Oedipus Rex and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. The unit underlines an idea that without the knowledge and practice of theatre it is impossible to understand the genre named “Drama”.

Once you have mastered these concepts, you will be able to see drama in a new perspective.

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**2.2 OBJECTIVES:**

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After reading this Unit you will be able to

- Distinguish between Hieropraxis and lexical drama
- Analyse the growth and significance of ritual drama
- Offer an analysis of theatre script

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**2.3 HIEROPRAXIS AND LEXICAL DRAMA**

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Hieropraxis combines the words “*hieros*” meaning “sacred” and “*praxis*” meaning “practice” or “action”, in Greek. According to Hieropraxis.com, “*Hieropraxis* is the art of sacred drama.”

Theories were propounded for sacred drama but eventually it gave rise to lexical drama, which is more concerned with the language.

Bharat Gupta confronts “the rival theories of dramatics, Greek and Indian, with a view to draw conceptual parallels and differences”

It is argued that the Greek system of poetics, of which drama was one part, began semiotically but in its later European application tapered into the lexical. On the other hand, the Indian system remained semiotic.

Sacred drama, Bharat Gupta continues, required the perfection of production techniques which were synesthetic. Music, dance and semiotized gesture were all unified to produce a unified performance text. Comparing the Greek and Sanskrit traditions, Bharat Gupta comments:

Aristotle's *Poetics* and the *Natya Sastra* of Bharata Muni are, above all, manuals that present theories for the production of such performance texts. Thus, in this study, the emphasis is on techniques of production or elements of theatrical representation and not upon dramatic genres such as tragedy, comedy or the Indian *dasarupakas*. These genres as lexical structures have been the basis of comparison between Greek and Indian dramatic theories all too long.

Besides pointing out the common Indo-European factor and the hieropraxic nature of the two ancient traditions, Bharat Gupt emphasizes that with the rise of post-Renaissance drama in Europe, the recreation of the Greek tradition tapered from the semiotic to the word-centered performance text. This change, Gupt believes, was a departure from the *hieropraxic* towards the secular. This resulted in the break-up of the aural-visual unity of the hieropraxic kind which was primarily an expression of human and cosmic unity. Bharat Gupt elaborates:

In both Greek and Sanskrit traditions, Gupt writes further, theatre's space was divided into areas marked for speech activity, dance motions and musical expressions. It is pointed out that in the ancient theatre, gesture was an independent language, neither subservient to the verbal nor just an amplification of the verbal intent, but a complimentary device that created its own area of signification. The relationship between the spoken and the sung words in theatre is examined in detail. It is shown that rhythm was accepted as the common basis for speech, metre and song in both traditions. Greek musical theory is compared with the Indian musical system called Gandharva.

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## 2.4 THE RETURN JOURNEY TO RITUAL THEATRE

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To get the true essence of theatre we should go back to ritual theatre tradition and merge it with our present day understanding of theatre and dramatic arts because ritual theatre is the root, the origin of theatre and dramatic arts. The Avant Garde practitioners lay stress on the ritual content of theatre. Richard Schechner goes to the extent that an optimum effect in theatre is possible when ritual and dramatic contents are equal on the ritual theatre continuum. (*Between Theatre and Anthropology*). Jean Genet is an exponent of ritual theatre, Peter Brook advocates holy theatre, Antonin Artaud practices ritual violence in theatre and Eugenio Barba talks of theatre anthropology.

Let us now have a look at the ritual theatres of two different countries: Japan and India, as given in the UNESCO Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2008 and 2009 respectively.

### 2.4.1 Japan: Kabuki Theatre

Kabuki is a Japanese traditional theatre form, which originated in the Edo period at the beginning of the seventeenth century and was particularly popular among townspeople.

Originally, both men and women acted in Kabuki plays, but eventually only male actors performed the plays: a tradition that has remained to the present day. Male actors specialized in women's roles are called *onnagata*. Two other major role types are *aragoto* (rough style) and *wagoto* (soft style).

Kabuki plays are about historical events and moral conflict in relationships of the heart. The actors speak in a monotone voice and are accompanied by traditional instruments. The Kabuki stage is equipped with several gadgets, such as revolving stages and trapdoors through which the actors can appear and disappear. Another specialty of the Kabuki stage is a footbridge (*hanamichi*) that extends into the audience. Important characteristics of Kabuki theatre include its particular music, costumes, stage devices and props as well as specific plays, language and acting styles, such as the *mie*, in which the actor holds a characteristic pose to establish his character. *Keshyō*, the particular make-up, provides an element of style easily recognizable even by those unfamiliar with the art form.

After 1868, when Japan opened to Western influence, actors strove to heighten the reputation of Kabuki among the upper classes and to adapt the traditional styles to modern tastes. Today, Kabuki is the most popular of the traditional styles of Japanese drama.

#### 2.4.2 India: Ramman in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand

The Ramkatha narrative in Saloor Dungra and some surrounding villages in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand is rendered through dance and drama choreography by characters wearing masks. The tradition is “a theatre in pure ritual form”. UNESCO has declared the tradition as an intangible heritage of the world in the year 2009. Every year in the late April, the twin villages of Saloor-Dungra in the state of Uttarakhand, are marked by Ramman, a religious festival in the honour of the tutelary god Bhumiya Devta, a local divinity whose temple houses most of the festivities.

This event is made up of highly complex rituals: recitation of a Ramkatha and associated legends sung parallel to dance and dramas. The festival is organized by the villagers and each caste and occupational group has a distinct role. For example, the brahmins lead the prayers and perform the rituals, and the Bhandaris representing the Kshatriya caste are alone entitled to wear one of the sacred masks, that of the half-man, half-lion Hindu deity, Narasimha. The drummers hold the central place in the performance as the drum music is pivotal to the dance and drama performance. (Roma, 9-13). Similar ritual theatres galore in entire Uttarakhand: Hiljaatra in Pithoragarh, Pandav Lila in Garhwal, six variants mask dance dramas, and Ramlila present the most authentic concept of what a ritual theatre is like.

There are hundreds of other ritual theatre forms, viz, Lai Harabo, Bhaona, Chau, Kathakali, Raas Lila, Ramlila, Pandavalila, and Bhagwatmela which are still being performed in different parts of India.

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**2.5. ANALYSIS OF DRAMA AS THEATRE SCRIPTS**

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**2.5.1 Oedipus Rex****2.5.1.1 Story Outline**

Oedipus Rex is a Greek tragedy by Sophocles.

The play is divided into a prologue and five episodes separated by choral passages. The prologue provides the necessary information in brief: a plague is destroying the city of Thebes; Creon returns from Delphi with a command from the Oracle to find and punish the murderer of Laius; Oedipus promises to obey the command.

In the first episode, Oedipus proclaims his curse upon the murderer. Then Tiresias, the seer, enters. His refusal to answer questions provokes Oedipus' anger. When Tiresias answers, Oedipus suspects some trickery. The episode ends in accusations.

In the second episode, Creon comes to defend himself against the accusations of conspiracy with Tiresias. Jocasta, the queen, is drawn to the scene by the quarrel, she persuades Oedipus to abate his anger. Eventually it is realized by Oedipus that he himself is the murderer of Laius.

In the third episode, while Jocasta is making offerings to the gods, she is interrupted by the entrance of a messenger from Corinth, who brings the news of the death of Oedipus' supposed father, Polybus. This news seems to disapprove the Oracle which had predicted that Oedipus would kill his father. Oedipus still fears returning to Corinth because the Oracle also had prophesied that he will marry his own mother. Thinking that he will set Oedipus' mind at ease, the messenger reveals that he himself brought infant Oedipus to Polybus. The revelation of the circumstances under which Oedipus was acquired by the messenger brings home the truth to Jocasta that Oedipus is her own son. She goes to the palace never to be seen in the play.

In the climax, the herdsman from whom the messenger had acquired infant Oedipus is brought in front of Oedipus as he is also the only survivor of Laius' party at the time of his murder. The dark truth is finally revealed, Oedipus is the real son of Laius and Jocasta, and the prophecy of the Oracle has turned out to be true—Oedipus has killed his father and married his own mother. Oedipus rushes into the palace, disgusted and shattered.

Oedipus blinds himself and returns to the stage and seeks to prepare himself for the future.

Three actors played all the characters and light make-up used. To change appearance the three actors wore masks for each new character. Costumes were unstitched clothes wrapped around the body. Actors' voice, pitch, and volume were taken great care of in

live performances. Theatre then was without much equipment and there was no proscenium arch or curtain. Division of the play is into a prologue and five episodes, with chorus dividing the episodes. As the episodes move forward, the story moves back in time.

The scenes always opened with a ritual offering to the gods paralleled with the dithyrambic dance and song of the Chorus. The three characters wearing masks appeared on the orchestra space and paralleled and acted out the scene of the birth of Oedipus. From behind the *skene* a loud voice of the Oracle was heard and the actors took out the just born Oedipus off stage. Then the narrator entered the stage and in poetic meters described how Oedipus brought up by another king became a king himself. The narrative was alternately presented by the Chorus and an actor. The last catastrophic scene was made effective with the use of music, dance and spectacle of frantic movements and colours. The most effective device of presentation of plays was variety of dance and music.

### 2.5.1.2 Oedipus on the Modern Stage

**Acting Space:** Since the Greek amphitheatres are no more in use except in Greece and Italy, the plays are presented in the modern proscenium theatre. The space used therefore adapts the new style with proper levels, front stage, and backstage.

The stage script for the play on the modern stage changes from place to place. The play has been translated in several languages of the world and even the events which were originally reported off stage are now presented on stage. Unlike the original Greek theatre, all the characters of the story are impersonated and presented on stage.

**Costume:** The most complicated task involved in production of this play is the Greek costume. The costume designer has to be very meticulous in designing the costume of Oedipus, the queen, the soldiers and the commoners.

**The music and song** are equally difficult to be imitated. The songs were composed in nine stanzas of three triads of Odes. Each triad was sung with the standing, forward and backward movement of the chorus. On the Indian stage actors find it difficult follow a typical diction and cadence of the original Greek speech.

**Lighting design** may be simple or complicated as the Director chooses it to be.

**Diction:** Since all Greek dramas are poetic dramas, the diction and dialogue delivery is the most arduous task for the modern actors. The poetic metre has to be spoken with a typical rhythm and cadence so that it may not only give the feel of an ancient drama but may also not look artificial.

### 2.5.2. *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*

#### 2.5.2.1 Story Outline

*Abhijnana Sakuntalam* enacts the mythical history of Bharata, the founder of Ancient Bharata nation. The story begins with the encounter of Dushyanta with Shakuntala, and the eventual love and marriage.

Shakuntala, who is born of the union of Viswamitra and Meneka, is living in the ashram of Kanva, who has adopted her as her parents desert her soon after her birth.

Dushyanta, the king of Hastinapur, is on a hunting-mission in the forest where he meets Shakuntala, and falls in love with her. After a brief tryst they go for a *gandharva* (love) marriage and soon after the king has to leave for Hastinapur.

Lost in the passion of love for her husband, Shakuntala forgets to answer the call of hospitality to rishi Durvasa, who has come to visit Kanva's hermitage. The hot-headed Durvasa curses her that the person she was selflessly thinking of, and who prevented Shakuntala from attending on rishi Durvasa, will forget, in spite of himself, to recognize her. On the intercession of Priyamvada and Anusuya, two friends of Shakuntala, Durvasa attenuates his curse and amends his curse, "but if Shakuntala produces an evidence of her love to Dushyanta, the later will recover his memory."

Kanva who has been away from the hermitage throughout this episode comes home and through his divine vision learns about the happenings. Shakuntala is then sent to Hastinapur Gautami, the matron and the two disciples, Sarnagarava and Saradhvat are sent as her escorts. On her way, while drinking water from a rivulet Shakuntala's finger-ring (souvenir given by Dushyanta) drops into the water. Obviously, the king forgets the event of marriage and refuses to recognize her as his wife. Disheartened Shakuntala takes shelter in the ashram of rishi Marichi.

In the meantime, the ring which was swallowed by a fish is recovered by a fisherman, who in turn is arrested by police for carrying the Royal Insignia. The fisherman along with the ring is taken to the court of Dushyanta, who on seeing the ring recollects his memory of love and marriage with Shakuntala. He repents profoundly but Shakuntala is nowhere to be found.

Long after, while Dushyanta is on a mission to fight demons in Indra-lok he meets a young boy called Sharvadaman who is playing with a lion's cub. Surprise leads to the discovery that Sharvadaman is Sakuntala's son and both the mother and son have been living in the hermitage of rishi Marichi. Three of them re-unite and live happily ever after.

#### 2.5.2.2 A Tentative Stage Script for *Abhijnana Sakuntalam*

**Set design:** The locale of the first four scenes of the play is a forest and the hermitage of Kanva. Therefore the stage will have to be divided into two: Forest in the front stage and the hermitage in the upstage. Or the scenes can be placed on the left and right halves of the stage. Since presentation of a full forest is not possible, a huge sprawling banyan tree can be created which will be used for exchange of dialogues between Dushyanta and

Shakuntala and other inmates of the hermitage. There can also be shown a bush of flowers beneath the foliage of the tree. The hermitage can be represented by the front wall of a cottage with a pitcher of water on one side and saffron coloured clothes, a couple of tree barks hung on a line for drying, At one corner of the front stage under a spot light can be shown a big boulder to be used by Shakuntala or Dushyanta in the scenes of tryst.

For the fifth and sixth scenes, the court of Hastinapur will be created by using a painted backdrop and a few courtly chairs. The lords and royal guards will stand in two files on both the flanks of the stage spread just in front of the king.

For the last scene, i.e., the Marichi Ashram, the scene used for Kanva hermitage can be reused with a couple of changes in the stage property. Dushyanta flying to Indra-lok and back can be shown with the help of a transparent curtain behind which the flight can easily be simulated. Another option is shooting the scene on a video camera and then projecting it on to the screen. The scene in which Sarvadaman plays with the lion cub can be shown off stage just with the help of off stage voices.

**Selection of Artists:** The artist acting as Dushyanta has to be tall, beautiful and well built. He should be capable of speaking not only dialogues but should also be gifted with a melodious throat because he has to sing so many metres of poetry. Shakuntala should be represented by a tall, young, innocent looking, beautiful girl between 15 to 20 years. Apart from the beautiful parts of personality, she should also be able to sing and dance. Anusuya and Priyanvada should be equally beautiful. The artist acting as Vidushaka should be quick witted and capable of producing humour. The artist acting as Kanva should be deep-throated, full of gravity and give a staid appearance.

**Costume designing:** Costume rich in appearance should be selected for the king and his party. Shakuntala can wear bark garments but the same should be tidily made so that the actor does not feel uncomfortable while acting. Dushyanta should wear rich and bright garments. Royal garments used by Ramlila actors can also be used by Dushyanta if the new designing is not opted.

**Music:** Since Kalidasa has used about 30 used of traditional poetry, the most challenging job is to set them to the tunes of classical music. The tunes can be composed with the help of an accomplished classical musician. Otherwise audio music prepared by National Sanskrit Akademi, New Delhi can be used for rehearsals and presentation. The Director has to use music for creating moods in the play. Music for the moment when the love is at the climax, for the moment when Durvasa pronounces his curse or when Dushyanta refuses to recognize Shakuntala as his wife.....so many other situations has to be composed on the classical instruments and not on the modern synthesizer.

**Levels and Distances:** Different levels for performance will have to be designed. Kanva should be showing descending from a higher level to the ground level in every interaction. In the same way Shakuntala and her friends should be shown standing at a

higher level when Dushyanta has the first sight of them. The growing intimacy between the two lovers should be represented by reduction in distance between the two. Similarly the distance between Kanva and his disciples should also be symbolic of the spiritual distances.

**Hand props:** The hand props vary from the Kamandal of Kanva and Durvasa Rishi to the pitchers used for watering the plants by Shakuntala and her friends. The King and his guards can use swords and shields, but most of the inmates of the hermitage will be using staffs and kamandalu. In the fourth Act, it is referred that the various elements of nature have gifted their respective bounties to Shakuntala and of course so must have been done by the inmates of the hermitage. It gives scope for a new property, i.e., a bamboo basket which contains all these gifts. The basket has to be shown being carried along by Shardhvāt or Sharanrava while escorting Shakuntala to her in-law's house. The Director can contemplate of many other properties to be used in the play.

**Blocking:** The term “blocking” in theatre means the design and pattern on which the characters stand on the stage and move from one spot to another. The blocking in the first place is a technique of stage use directed at creating an impressive spectacle for the audience. It is in the next place meant to show the relationship among the characters: e.g., a king is positioned at a higher level and a soldier at a lower one. If the positions are interchanged, the meaning will change: there is a coup; the soldier has dethroned the king.

**Light designing:** In case the play is staged in a proper auditorium, lights have to be designed as per the demand of the scenes. The scene for *Purvaranga* opening with Nandi “*ya shrishṭi, shrusturaya, vahati vidhihutam.....*” can be created by mixing together several spots and Fresnels. Light designing in theatre is a separate profession and may earn handsome money for the professionals. A light designer's notebook contains as complicated graphics as an architect's. The light designer conducts at least three “light rehearsals” with the actors. Open flat lights can be used while showing the court of the king. Flicker lights (strobe) can be used to show the movement of the chariot in the first scene. Thus every scene will require a number of varieties of light designs.

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## 2.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

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1. Based on your own understanding, write the differences between Hieropraxis and lexical drama.
2. Write a note on ritual theatres of India.
3. Describe the characteristic features of Kabuki Theatre of Japan.

4. What, according to you, are the similarities between ritual theatres of India and Japan?
5. Write a detailed stage script of a play you have read.
6. Prepare a detailed music chart for the music of the play *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* or any other play of your choice
7. Write a note on all the elements of theatre
8. How will you present a play to a village audience where no proscenium and lighting systems exist?

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**UNIT 3**

**CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE**

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3.1. Introduction

3.2. Objectives

3.3. Christopher Marlowe: Life and Career

3.4. Marlowe as a Dramatist

3.5. Marlowe's Contribution to the English Drama

3.6. Marlowe and Blank Verse

3.7. Summing Up

3.8. Answers to Self -Assessment Questions

3.9. References

3.10. Terminal and Model Questions

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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A group of English playwrights in the late sixteenth century, all of whom were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge, came to be known as University Wits. They made bold experiments and paved the way for Shakespeare.

Christopher Marlowe was the most prominent of the group. The focus in this Unit is on Marlowe's contribution to English drama and his use of Blank Verse.

A critical reading of Marlowe in this Unit will lead to a better appreciation of the richness of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Theatre.

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### 3.2 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit you will be able to

- Analyse the main features of the University Wits
- List the qualities of Christopher Marlowe as a dramatist
- Place him as a Man of Renaissance
- Evaluate his contribution to the development of blank verse in Elizabethan drama

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### 3.3 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : LIFE AND CAREER

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Christopher Marlowe was the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. He may be regarded as the true founder of English drama. He was born in 1564, two months before Shakespeare, in the town of Canterbury. He was the son of a poor shoemaker. Through the kindness of a patron, he was educated at the town Grammar School and then at the University of Cambridge. He graduated at the age of nineteen; and then went to London where he became an actor, living in a low tavern atmosphere of excess and wretchedness. In 1587, at the age of twenty-three, he produced his first play, *Tamburlaine*, which brought him instant success and recognition. Thereafter, although he led a wretched life, he remained loyal to a high literary purpose. In five years, while Shakespeare was serving apprenticeship, Marlowe produced his great work. Then he was stabbed in a drunken fight and died as wretchedly as he had lived. He was only twenty-nine when he died. The epilogue of *Faustus* could very well be inscribed on his tombstone.

Cut in the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough  
That sometime grew within this learned man.

Francis Kett, the mystic, who was burned in 1589 for heresy, was a fellow and tutor of his college at Cambridge. It is surmised that this man had some share in developing Marlowe's opinion in religious matters. Marlowe also knew Thomas Kyd, who was a

man of unorthodox opinions. Marlowe too was associated with what was denounced as Sir Walter Raleigh's School of Atheism, and held opinions which were then regarded as highly objectionable and obnoxious. In October 1588, Marlowe gave bail for his appearance for some unknown offence. Serious charges were brought against him in 1593. As a result of certain confessions made by Thomas Kyd under the influence of torture, the Privy Council started an investigation of the charges of atheism and blasphemy against Marlowe and Marlowe's career was abruptly cut short.

Various accounts of Marlowe's death have been given by various writers. However, according to the most reliable version, based on the evidence of documents in the Public Record Office, Marlowe was killed by a companion of his, one Ingram Frizer, at an inn on the 30th May, 1593. Frizer and Marlowe, together with two friends named Robert Poley and Nicholas Skeres, had gone to the inn to drink and dine. A quarrel arose about paying the bill. Marlowe in a sudden fit of anger, attacked Frizer from behind. In the ensuing struggle, Frizer stabbed Marlowe who died instantly. Frizer was subsequently pardoned on the ground that he had killed Marlowe in self defence. A full account of the documentary evidence which supports this version of Marlowe's death is given in Dr. Hotson's book, *The Death Of Christopher Marlowe*, which appeared in 1925. Dr. Hotson points out that Ingram Frizer was a gentleman and did not even after killing Marlowe, forfeit the good graces of his employers, the Walsinghams, who were friends of Marlowe.

Marlowe's classical acquirements were of a kind which was then extremely common, being based for the most part on a close acquaintance with Roman mythology as revealed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. His spirited translation of Ovid's *Amores* commenced at Cambridge.

Marlowe had the reputation of being an atheist, epicure and a mocker of religion during his lifetime. His contemporaries, Thomas Kyd and Richard Baines, brought against him many charges of blasphemy, heresy and atheism. He was accused, for instance, of saying:

That the first beginning of religion was only to keep men in awe and that Moses was a juggler and Aaron a cozenor, the one for his miracles to Pharaoh to prove there was a God, and the other for taking the earrings of the children of Israel to make a golden calf.

Other reported sayings are of an even more serious nature and it seems Marlowe delivered a lecture in defence of atheism and perhaps started on an atheistic treatise. There is no need to shut our eyes to these charges. We may admit them as true, but at the same time, we should not jump to the conclusion that Marlowe was incapable of reverence or a serious evaluation of Christianity. His sceptical and rebellious temperament was not simply his personal tendency; it made him one of the great representative figures of his time, capable of the fullest experience of the intellectual and moral troubles of his generation.

Marlowe was the greatest of a group of young writers generally called the University Wits. Before his untimely death at the age of twenty nine, he had founded English romantic tragedy, had written one of the greatest poetical dramas in the English language and had converted the stiff mechanical blank verse of *Gorboduc* into a vital verse form, which was further mastered by Shakespeare who utilized it in the speeches of his great characters. But Marlowe was far more than a pioneer. Till date he shines bright in the firmament of Drama. No one save Milton could touch the grand style of Marlowe. His plays show only moderate constructive ability or power of characterisation, but they have the power to carry the reader away by the sheer force and beauty of their language and by the great visions which they call up in the mind. Tamburlaine, his earliest and crudest character, comes upon the stage driving a team of kings before his chariot; Barabas rules the world by the power of gold; Faustus sells his soul to acquire the knowledge of black magic. Each protagonist is governed by lust of power which brings about his downfall. From the technical point of view, Marlowe's best work is *Edward II*, but it cannot be compared in psychological interest or poetic grandeur with *Doctor Faustus*. For this great symbolic tragedy deals with a theme which was part not only of the author's inner experience but of the very stuff which nourished the Renaissance spirit in him. The pride of intellect by which both Faustus of Marlowe and Lucifer of Milton fell, was the most dangerous temptation of the ages of Marlowe and Milton. After wandering for centuries through the mists of ignorance, man found himself once more before the Tree of Knowledge. There, within his reach, burned like a thousand lamps the coveted fruit of his desire; but there, too coiled about the roots, lay the old serpent, still unconquered, still thirsting for his soul's blood.

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### 3.4 MARLOWE AS A DRAMATIST

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Marlowe's first tragedy, *Tamburlaine the Great*, a play in two parts, introduced a pliant, rhetorical, passionate and resonant form of blank verse which was described by Jonson as Marlowe's mighty lines and which gave a permanent stamp and lasting impetus to the English Romantic drama. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* contains some of the finest poetry in the English language. *The Jew of Malta* shows a remarkable advance over these two popular plays in the knitting together of cause and effect, although this play degenerates into melodrama of the bloodiest kind. Marlowe appears as the first successful tragic dramatist of English. Marlowe's dramatic construction is faulty and he creates no heroine. His two principal heroes are men of humble origin, however with superhuman desires. Tamburlaine typifies the will to conquer by physical force and the play proved tremendously popular in its days because the English people were feeling stirred by the defeat of the Spanish Armada; Faustus symbolises the lust for knowledge. Marlowe may truly be regarded as the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors in the field of drama.

The growth of Marlowe's dramatic genius may be traced by considering each of his plays separately. Nothing is more characteristic of Marlowe than the choice of his first hero.

His imagination was fired by the story of the life of this great adventurer who from a mere shepherd became the most powerful man in the whole world. Tamburlaine seemed to Marlowe a superman to whom the petty rules of morality did not apply. In Marlowe's play, we see that Tamburlaine kills men, women and children ruthlessly, laughing at the blood he sheds, imprisoning a defeated emperor in a cage, having his chariot drawn by kings, burning a town in honour of the funeral of his wife. Marlowe represents his hero as the scorner of men and gods. Marlowe transfigures him by exalting his barbarities. However, Tamburlaine is, at the same time, capable of extraordinary love. He lays the earth at the feet of his Zenocrate and when death snatches her away from him, he threatens heaven with his fury. Marlowe wrote two plays pertaining to Tamburlaine. Unanimity of theme and tone pervades both the plays. Both the play contain scenes which haunt men's memories. The audiences watched this play from end to end, thus showing that the fire in the author's heart had spread to their hearts too. There is plenty of declamation and rhetoric in the play but Marlowe makes his blank verse thunder and echo like a drum that never ceases. The verse for which men had been waiting for so long now sounded on the stage for the first time.

In his subsequent plays, Marlowe continued to be mainly oratorical and lyrical as he had been in *Tamburlaine*. He was, however, leading a life of intense dissipation which hardly allowed him time to produce a complete work like *Tamburlaine*. He became an improviser who flings a couple of powerful scenes into a botched play. Such was the composition of *Doctor Faustus*. This play deals with a necromancer who pledges his soul to the devil in return of supreme knowledge and supreme power, and who is thus able to satiate his appetites twenty-four years. Although the play contains a number of crude and farcical scenes, it is believed that these were not the work of Marlowe himself. When Faustus obtains a vision of Helen of Greece, Marlowe, imagining her supreme beauty, is inspired to write lines of incomparable lyricism. The last scenes of *Dr. Faustus* are among the most pathetic yet the most grandiose in Renaissance drama. They stand up for themselves, distinct from all the rest of the drama. They are unsurpassable, even by Shakespeare. As Marlowe was a young dramatist, and had a long way to go, yet he had genius to reach great sublimity. When Goethe took the same legend for the basis of one of the chief accomplishments of modern poetry, he could not eclipse the poignant greatness of his forerunner's scenes.

*The Jew of Malta*, though a melodrama, yet contains passages of lyrical power. The Jew, Barabas, having been unjustly deprived of his property by the Christians, avenges himself on them by an extraordinary series of crimes. Compelled to use cunning in order to achieve his purpose, he becomes Machiavellian by nature. His horrific crimes leave the audience agap. Before the Jew becomes a criminal maniac, he has both dignity and greatness. Enormously rich, he is first seen with heaps of gold before him and as he speaks, he seems to be a person intoxicated by the vastness of his own wealth and the immense power which it brings. As he mentions the countries from where his treasures have come, he exudes great mystical greatness. There is something about the Jew that in spite of his misdemeanours, he retains Marlowe sympathies till the very end.

Before he died at the age of twenty nine, Marlowe was able to produce *Edward II* which is the best of the tragedies on English national history written before the works of Shakespeare. This play has qualities which are properly dramatic and are not to be found in any of Marlowe's other plays. The lyrical declamation, so plentiful in Tamburlaine and even in other plays, is now under control. The tirades are shorter, and the dialogue is better distributed in speeches. The blank verse is less strained and more pliable; it is nearer to the tones of the human voice. Characterisation is more varied. The subject of this play is the tragedy of a king who is dominated by two favourites named Gaveston and Mortimer. Mortimer reaches an understanding with Queen Isabella who becomes his mistress. The betrayed king is thrown into prison and then put to death by the order of the two accomplices who are in their turn executed by the son of their victim. Marlowe returned to one of his favourite types in Mortimer, with his uncontrolled ambition. It is Mortimer who links this play with Marlowe's earlier dramas. Except for the death of Faustus, nothing in Marlowe's play is more touching and pathetic than the scenes of the murder of King Edward II by the two ruffians. The end of the bad king is so miserable that he becomes an object of pity.

Thus, you saw that through his works Marlowe tried to bring to light the seamier and the ambitious side of human side of human nature. Some of the most extraordinarily ambitious people from the pages of history were resuscitated in Marlowe's plays. Marlowe was truly the most representative writer of the Elizabethan period as his works truly embody the spirit of the Elizabethan times.

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### **3.5 MARLOWE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENGLISH DRAMA**

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Marlowe occupies an important place in the field of English drama. He is considered to be the father of genuine Blank Verse and mature English tragedy. In the Medieval times, Morality and Miracle plays were in vogue. You have read about these plays in graduation and would be remembering that the primary objective of these plays was to instruct. These kind of plays were vehicles of moral and religious instructions and did not focus on individuality of the protagonist. These plays wanted to bring about reformation in society through representatives or types. However, it was Marlowe, who through his plays gave voice to individual characters for the first time.

At this point it would also be interesting to note that by the fifteenth century tragedy had made a prominent place for itself in the English dramatic scene. It was not just the Mysteries and the Moralities that had contributed to its development but this genre of literature was also made popular in England due to the influence of European Renaissance, in particular the Italian Renaissance, and a large number of Italian tragedies were translated into English around this time. The first English tragedy that saw the light of day was *Gorboduc* (1565) by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. *Gorboduc* was modelled on Senecan tragedy. Although it showed some deviation from the Senecan model, nevertheless, it did not display much innovation either in style or in technique. It

was Marlowe who liberated English tragedy from the yoke of its Italian predecessor and established its place in the sphere of Drama. Furthermore Marlowe also did groundwork for Shakespeare and provided raw material for some of Shakespeare's most famous plays. In this way, Marlowe is rightly called the Morning Star of English Drama

Although due to his untimely death, Marlowe's career as a dramatist came to an abrupt end, yet in his brief life he left a lasting legacy in the field of English drama. His plays help us gain an understanding of the Elizabethan drama. Marlowe was a genius who placed the hitherto non-existent English drama into the sphere of high literature. He carried in him his own unique conception of man and life. His exclusiveness produced intensity and vehemence, which was also the need of the English stage during the Elizabethan times. The Elizabethan audience had savoured the taste of grace, wit and fancy through the earlier English plays, but had never witnessed intensity and loftiness both in rhetoric and style, which Marlowe introduced and the Elizabethan audience relished thoroughly.

Through his plays, Marlowe was able to give his audiences a taste of loftiness accomplished by some of the most extraordinary men in human history. His plays filled the audience with renewed zeal and enthusiasm. Although Marlowe borrowed his plots and characters, he gave them new vivacity. His characters became his own mouthpiece, and voiced his aspirations and dreams. For Marlowe's characters, just as it was for him, sky was the limit.

With regard to both plot and character, Marlowe can rightly be called the father of genuine Tragedy. Before him, the characters portrayed in the plays were mere puppets in the hands of the playwright. It was Marlowe who brought about a revolution in the field of Drama and pumped his characters with vigour and passion. Marlowe was a great admirer of Machiavelli and based his characters on Machiavelli. For instance, Tamburlaine who goes about trampling humanity during his conquest, Faustus whose thirst for knowledge brings about his damnation, the prodigious and revengeful Barabas, in *The Jew of Malta*, Mortimer, in *Edward II*, and the Guise in *The Massacre at Paris*, all mirror Machiavelli in some way or the other.

Marlowe raised the subject matter of English drama to a higher level. He dealt with heroic subjects that stirred the imagination of the audience. As mentioned above, his heroes were men like Tamburlaine, a world conqueror; Faustus, a scholar, seeking supreme knowledge, Barabas, dreaming of opulence, Edward II, with his mingling of nobility and ignobility, reaching the heights and touching the depths of human nature. Thus, Marlowe's heroes were those adventurers who displayed towering passions of love, hate and ambition. Furthermore, Marlowe's powerful rhetoric and craftsmanship makes them larger than life characters. His incredible talent as a playwright won him the awe and admiration of the audience.

Besides the abovementioned points, Marlowe showed an admirable capacity for character portrayal. The characters in his plays were not puppets manipulated by strings, but living

and breathing realities. Marlowe made his audience feel the fierce exaltation of the conqueror, Tamburlaine; the vibrant passion and rapturous longing of Faustus; and the fierce selfishness and cruelty of Barabas.

Furthermore, Marlowe gave to the English Drama the Unity which had hitherto not existed. Plays written by his predecessors did not have any form. The earlier plays were a succession of scenes having no proper connecting links. However, Marlowe wrote plays in which there was a regular development of the plot. Although he did not attain perfection in this respect, but he managed to register a considerable improvement on the previous works.

Marlowe has been called the father of English dramatic poetry, just as Chaucer is regarded as the father of English narrative poetry, and Defoe the father of English prose fiction. Preceding poets had certainly produced pictorial effects, but those effects in no way match Marlowe's talent. Marlowe had an instinct for selecting those scenes that could best impress the imagination. He employed similes that went home most effectively. Just like Keats and Morris, Marlowe tried to create effect through colours in his work, as they say, "There is the glitter of gold and scarlet about his verse." He also makes use of the magic of old world names. Such names give warmth and colour to his verse. Marlowe's pictorial quality is no mere visualising of a dreamer's fancy: it shows the inspiration of that spirit of adventure which characterised the Renaissance. For instance, Tamburlaine's passion for conquest is similar to the passion of the explorers and adventurers like Drake and Hawkins.

Marlowe's achievement can best be summed up as one in which he did not glorify just the subject matter of Drama but also vitalised the manner in which it was delivered. Marlowe showed himself in revolt against the common morality of the age and through his plays exposed the hypocrisies of his Age. His overreaching protagonists epitomise the Renaissance spirit which regarded ambition as the loftiest of all human virtues.

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### **3.6 MARLOWE AND BLANK VERSE**

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Blank Verse is poetry written with regular metrical but unrhymed lines, almost always in Iambic Pentameter. The Blank verse was introduced into England by the Earl of Surrey. The first to use it in tragedy was Thomas Sackville whose *Gorboduc* was written in this metre. But the blank verse of Sackvill was dull and monotonous and rigid. It was Marlowe who made it supple and natural and quickly established itself as the most suitable metre for English poetic drama. He discarded the rhyming lines which had been employed by his predecessors, and he established Blank Verse as the most appropriate medium for the writing of plays. Blank Verse had certainly been used before him, but he improved upon it and enriched it. Blank Verse, prior to him, consisted of lines, ending with an accented monosyllable; each line standing by itself. There was a monotony in this kind of Blank Verse. Marlowe varied the rhythmic pauses, altered the accents, made the metre suit the subject, instead of fitting the subject to the metre. It was because of what

he did with the Blank Verse that his successors, especially Shakespeare, were able to discover the infinite variety of this metre. He taught his successors to play upon its hundred stops, if he himself could not play upon them.

Marlowe's most important contribution to the English drama was that he established the supremacy of Blank Verse as the most appropriate metre for dramatic work.

Marlowe was the real creator of Blank Verse and has employed it beautifully in *Doctor Faustus*. The final monologue of Dr. Faustus is the most striking specimen of the Blank Verse. Ben Jonson was so impressed with the poetry in Marlowe's drama that he called it "The Mighty Line". Similar tributes were paid by Leigh Hunt who placed Spenser and Marlowe in the same league and said, "Marlowe and Spenser are the first of our poets who perceived the beauty of words."

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### **3.7 SUMMING UP**

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In this Unit we discussed the contributions of Christopher Marlowe as a Dramatist. We also saw how Marlowe transformed the Blank Verse from a stiff and monotonous verse form into the most appropriate medium of poetic drama.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Who were the University Wits?
2. Give an account of Marlowe as a dramatist.
3. Name four great works by Christopher Marlowe.

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### **3.8. ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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1. Refer to Section 3.1.
2. Refer to Section 3.4.
3. Refer to Section 3.5.

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### **3.9. REFERENCES**

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**3.10.TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss Marlowe as a dramatist.
2. What is Christopher Marlowe's contribution to English drama?
3. Write a paragraph on Marlowe's contribution to Blank Verse.

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**UNIT 4**

***DOCTOR FAUSTUS***

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4.1. Introduction

4.2. Objectives

4.3. *Doctor Faustus* as a Morality Play

4.4. Allegory and Symbolism in *Doctor Faustus*

4.4.1. Moral Allegory in the Play

4.4.2. Significance of the Good and the Bad Angels

4.4.2.1. Two Angels and Tragic Conflict

4.4.2.2. Significance of Helen and the Old Man

4.4.2.3. Significance of the Show of the Seven Deadly Sins

4.4.2.4. Significance of the character of Mephistopheles

4.5. Faustus as a Renaissance Man

4.6. Conflict in *Doctor Faustus*

4.7. Summing Up

4.8. Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

4.9. References

4.10. Terminal and Model Questions

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#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

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In the last Unit you were introduced to Christopher Marlowe as a Renaissance playwright. You traced his contribution to the field of English drama. You saw how Marlowe experimented with the rigid Blank Verse form, endowed flexibility to it and popularised it as a verse form. In this Unit we will be doing an in-depth analysis of Marlowe's famous play *Doctor Faustus*.

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#### 4.2. OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to

- Analyse *Doctor Faustus* as a Renaissance play
- Analyse the central theme of the play *Doctor Faustus*
- Analyse the character of Doctor Faustus

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#### 4.3. DOCTOR FAUSTUS AS A MORALITY PLAY

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The morality play is a fusion of the medieval allegory and the religious drama of the miracle plays. It developed at the end of the fourteenth century and gained much popularity in the fifteenth century. In these plays the characters were generally personified abstractions of vice or virtues such as Good Deeds, Faith, Mercy, Anger etc. The general theme of the Moralities was theological and the main one was the struggle between good and evil powers for capturing man's soul and the journey of life with its choice of eternal destination and the aim is to teach ethics and doctrines of Christianity.

*Doctor Faustus* may be called a morality play to a very great extent. By selling his soul to the Devil, Faustus lives a very blasphemous life full of vain and sensual pleasures just for twenty four years. He does not shirk from insulting and even assaulting the Pope along with the Holy Fathers of Rome. Of course, there is a fierce struggle in his soul between his over-weening ambition and conscience, between the Good Angel and the Evil Angel that externalize this internal conflict. But Faustus ultimately surrenders to the allurements of Evil Angel, thereby paving the way for eternal damnation. When the final hour approaches, Faustus, to his utmost pain and horror, realizes that his sins are unpardonable and nothing can save him from eternal damnation. And before the devils snatch away his soul to burning hell, the excreting pangs of a deeply agonized soul finds the most poignant expression in Faustus' final soliloquy.

My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!  
Alders and serpents let me breathe a while!  
Ugly hell, gape not: come not Lucifer:  
I'll burn my books: Ah Mephistopheles!  
Moral Sermon or Didactic Aim

Morality plays are didactic in tone. Their sole aim was to bring home the point that whoever discards the path of virtue and abjures faith in God and Christ is destined to despair and eternal damnation. This theme was built by Marlowe in his opus, *Doctor*

*Faustus*. And it has found the most touching expression in the mournful monody of the chorus in the closing lines.

Faustus is gone, regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

In morality plays the characters were personified abstractions of vice or virtues. So too in *Doctor Faustus*, we find the Good Angel and Evil Angel, the former stands for the path of virtue and the latter for sin and damnation. We have the Old Man, symbolizing the forces of righteousness and morality.

The comic scenes of *Doctor Faustus* also belong to the tradition of old Miracle and Morality plays, especially Scene I of the Third Act where Faustus is found playing vile tricks on the Pope and Scene IV of Act IV where the horse-courser is totally outwitted and be-fooled by Faustus.

These are the characteristics, which are taken to prove that *Doctor Faustus* is a Morality Play with its vindication of humility, faith and obedience to the law of God.

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#### 4.4. ALLEGORY AND SYMBOLISM IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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In Greek, 'Allegoria' means to imply something else. Allegory is just a form of art presenting a second meaning beneath the surface meaning. It may be taken as an extended metaphor in which the characters, action or ideas stand for something that is implied not expressly stated. Hence, the reader of an allegory is expected to get not only the apparent or surface meaning of the story but also the second meaning or the hidden truth lurking behind it.

Very often allegories are simple stories conveying metaphorically some spiritual or ethical ideas with a didactic purpose. All Morality plays in English literature are more or less allegorical. We also get allegories in the form of prose, poetry or drama. Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Swift's *Tale of a Tub* are outstanding works in this form of art.

Symbolism in general means the presentation of objects, moods and ideas through the medium of emblems or symbols. It is a conscious and deliberate technique of the use of symbols in art and literature. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'symbol' means "thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought." Thus the lion symbolizes courage, the moon, a lovely face and the cross Christianity. So symbols are words that mean much more than their simple literal meaning.

##### 4.4.1. Moral Allegory in the Play

A close and critical study of *Doctor Faustus* enables us to go deeper and get the hidden truth or moral allegory of the play that relates "the form of Faustus's fortunes good or bad."

This engrossing tale of a proud and an inordinately ambitious medieval magician who sold his soul to the Devil is undoubtedly allegorical. It has a moral allegory of universal

significance. In spite of Marlowe's agnosticism and atheistic inclinations, his *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* turns out to be a religious, rather a Christian, moral sermon, and the sermon is that whoever shuns the path of virtue, denounces God and His laws, and aligns himself with the forces of the evil to gain limitless power and position is doomed to despair and eternal damnation. So Hudson has rightly said: "No finer sermon than Marlowe's Faustus even came from the pulpit. What more fearsome exposure was ever offered of the punishment man brings upon himself by giving way to temptations of his grosser appetites?" And the mournful monody of the Chorus makes the moral allegory of the play crystal clear:

Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
To practise more than heavenly power permits.

Then the introduction of the stock devices of the Miracle and Morality plays, such as the Good and Bad Angels, the Devils, the Old Man, The Seven Deadly Sins etc., clearly points out the moral and allegorical aspect of the play. All the above characters or apparitions deserve symbolical or allegorical interpretation. We may take them up one after another for such interpretation.

#### **4.4.2. Significance of the Good and the Evil Angel**

##### **4.4.2.1. Two Angels and Tragic Conflict**

It should be noted that there is hardly any external action in the play. We find that the real action presented in the play is the spiritual conflict within the soul of the hero—a conflict, we may be sure, between law and desire, religion and skepticism, or between curiosity and conscience. Hence, Ellis Fermor rightly remarks that "the scene is set in no spot upon the physical earth but in the limitless regions of the mind and the battle is fought, not for kingdoms or crowns, but upon the question of man's ultimate fate. Before him lies the possibility of escape to spiritual freedom or a doom of slavery to demoniac powers. Thus, and in such terms is staged the greatest conflict that drama has ever undertaken to present." And in the light of this remark Faustus may stand as the symbol of man in general with the strange admixture of virtue and vice in his soul. And then the Good and Evil Angels also appear in the play with their own symbolic significance personifying the two aspects of Faustus's character. The former stands for order, virtue or goodness and the latter represents the baser spirit of Faustus, his indomitable passions and desires. One stands for his conscience and the other, his curiosity for 'unlawful things.' Hence, Harold Osborne has rightly observed: "The Good and Evil Angels are really externalizations of the two aspects of Faustus's own character on the one hand, conscience, and on the other, that aspiration to the novel and romantic that led to his downfall." It may be noted that Marlowe is quite original in the use of his angels and they differ a lot from those abstract figures in the Morality plays.

##### **4.4.2.2. Significance of Helen and the Old Man**

As Faustus's fascination for Helen, the 'only paragon of excellence' reveals the Renaissance characteristic of love and adoration of classical art and beauty, Helen epitomizes the charms of classical art, learning and beauty. And her shade or apparition may also be the symbol of sensual pleasures of life which are but transitory, and lead to despair and damnation. If it is so, the Old Man represents Christian faith with its

obedience to laws of God and its need for prayer and penitence that can assure eternal joy and bliss. The Old Man also represents another moral aspect; that is one who has firm faith in God can boldly face the temptations and tortures presented by the forces of Evil and ‘can ascend to heaven while the fiends sink back into hell.’

#### 4.4.2.3. Significance of the Show of the Seven Deadly Sins

We have this pageant of Seven Deadly Sins in the sixth scene or second scene of Act II. This spectacle also shows that Marlowe in his *Doctor Faustus* adopted some of the conventions of the old Miracle and Morality plays. So the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery—of good old Morality plays are also very much here in this play in a grand spectacle to cheer up the wavering and dejected soul of Doctor Faustus. But Marlowe is quite original in his treatment of the scene. In the ‘Faustbuch’, or ‘Faust Book’ it is a masque of the seven animal forms representing the seven principal Devils. We get this pageant of Seven Deadly Sins also in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and this also might have been a source for Marlowe.

Some critics are of the view that the show is meant as a comic relief for the audience. But this is hard to accept. In fact, the show is not meant for any comic relief but is really meant for bringing back Faustus to the path of hell when he was much irritated by Mephistophelis for not giving right answers to some of his questions related to the creation of this universe. And we find Lucifer, Belzebub alongwith Mephistophelis appearing on the stage at the moment when Faustus, to a great extent disillusioned, utters the name of Christ with a fervent appeal to save his soul:

“Ah, Christ, my saviour,  
Seek to save distressed Faustus’ Soul!”

They put up the show to cheer up his drooping mind and lure him back to the path of hell; and they succeed mightily when Faustus in rapture expresses his delight after the show:

“Oh, this feeds my soul!”

Symbolically, it means Faustus’s abject surrender to these Deadly Sins which lead to the path of hell. In fact the sins are already there in his soul and the show of the sins simply symbolizes or externalizes them. Another point to note is that Pride leads the procession. In fact, Pride deserves this, as Pride is the worst vice that brings about the downfall. And our Faustus was puffed up with pride to fly too near the Sun with ‘waxen wings’ to bring about his own ultimate doom and damnation.

#### 4.4.2.4. Significance of The Character of Mephistopheles

If in *Doctor Faustus* there is any other character other than Faustus that deserves some consideration, it is Mephistopheles. He is with Faustus from the very beginning of his proud career till his tragic downfall. He is considered to be one of the seven spirits of second rank. He is also called Lucifer’s vice-regent. But the Mephistopheles of *Doctor Faustus* with his ‘signs of remorse and passion’ is Marlowe’s unique creation.

Of course we may treat Mephistopheles as the villain of the play as it is he who seems to lure away Faustus to the path of hell. But a closer study reveals that Faustus himself with his extreme pride and inordinate ambition is the root cause of his own damnation. The point is made clear when Mephistopheles in the very third scene of the Act I tells Faustus in response to his query:

For, when we hear one rack the name of God,  
Abjure the scriptures and his Saviour Christ,  
We fly in hope to get his soul;  
Nor will we come, unless he uses such means  
Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd.

So it was Faustus who first racked the name of God and abjured 'the scripture and his Saviour Christ' and only then Mephistopheles, the Devil, flew 'in hope to get his soul.' And this leads to the symbolic significance of the character of Mephistopheles. The evil is actually in his own soul and Mephistopheles is the symbolic representation of it. He is nothing but a projection of the self of Faustus. We may also say with a critic that 'he symbolizes power without conscience, the danger of which is the motif of the play.' And this power without conscience ultimately brings about the downfall and eternal damnation of Doctor Faustus. If Mephistopheles sometimes warns him against the evils of practising the black art of magic, that is, the brighter aspect of Faustus's mind, an acute struggle between the good and the evil rages in his soul. So Mephistopheles may also be said to be externalizing the split conscience of Doctor Faustus.

Then again, we may also treat Mephistopheles as the symbol of dramatic irony in the play. Having bitter experiences of hell as a fallen angel, Mephistopheles warns Faustus of the evils of necromancy and the suffering in hell. But Faustus with his pride and ambition turns a deaf ear to all this, shuns the path of virtue and dreams of becoming 'as great as Lucifer' or to be as powerful 'as Jove in the sky' and 'Lord and Commander of these elements.' And thus Mephistopheles is made the symbol of dramatic irony that intensifies the tragic appeal of this great drama.

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#### **4.5. FAUSTUS AS A RENAISSANCE MAN**

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Faustus appears as a man of Renaissance in the very opening scene when, rejecting the traditional subjects of study, he turns to magic and considers the varied uses to which he can put his magic skill after he has acquired it. He contemplated the "world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence" which he hopes to enjoy as a magician. In dwelling upon the advantage which will accrue to him by the exercise of his magical power, he shows his ardent curiosity, his desire for wealth and luxury, his nationalism, and his longing for power. These were precisely the qualities of Renaissance, which was the age of discovery. A number of allusions in the first scene of Act I maintain our sense of the enlarged outlook and extended horizons of that great period of English history. Faustus desires gold from the East Indies, pearls from the depths of the sea, pleasant fruits and princely delicacies from America. His friend Valdes refers to the Indians in the Spanish colonies, to Lapland giants, to the Argosies of Venice, and to the annual plate fleet which supplied gold and silver to the Spanish treasury from the New World. There was much in this scene to inflame the hearts of English audiences who must have heartily approved of Faustus's intention to chase away the prince of Parma from the Netherlands. After all, only the defeat of the Spanish Armada had prevented Parma from invading England in 1588. Englishmen knew also about "the fiery keel at Antwerp's bridge", the Italian inventor of which had been in the service of England in 1588. Thus Faustus's

dream of power included much that had a strong appeal for the English people including Marlowe himself.

Faustus certainly embodies the new enquiring and aspiring spirit of the age of the Renaissance. Marlowe expresses in this play both his fervent sympathy with that new spirit and ultimately his awed and pitiful recognition of the danger into which it could lead those who were dominated by it. The danger is clearly seen in Faustus's last soliloquy in which Faustus offers to burn his books. No doubt these books are chiefly the books of magic, but we are surely reminded of his exclamation to the Scholars earlier in this scene: "O, world I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book!" Thus we get the impression that Faustus attributed his downfall, partly at least, to his learning.

Doctor Faustus is not only the first major Elizabethan tragedy, but the first to explore the tragic possibilities of the direct clash between the Renaissance compulsions and the Hebraic-Christian tradition. Tamburlaine symbolises the outward thrust of the Renaissance. But in Doctor Faustus, Marlowe turned the focus inward. Here he depicted the human soul as the tragic battlefield and wrote the first Christian tragedy.

This play has a typical morality play ending. It closes with a speech by the Chorus warning 'forward wits' against such fiendish practices as Faustus followed. But if the play has a pious conclusion, the truth of the play goes far beyond the final piety of the speech of chorus. No figure of the medieval morality plays does so much and so boldly as *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus in thought and action, brooding, philosophising, disputing, conjuring, defying God, risking his body and soul, does not suggest merely the lay figure of the morality plays; he suggests Adam and he suggests Prometheus. In other words, Marlowe put into an old legend a new meaning. He inserted into the old medieval or Christian moral equation the new and ambiguous dynamic of the Renaissance. He treated the legend of Faustus in such a manner, as to give it a fascination and a dignity never realised in previous treatments of the story. He made Faustus the first modern man. The story of this twenty four year action compressed by Marlowe in a few vivid scenes, represents a soul torn between the desire to stretch to its utmost limit, its new mastery and freedom on the one hand and on the other hand, the claims of the old teachings, a defiance of which meant guilt and growing sense of alienation from society.

The legend of Faustus was believed to be a terrible and ennobling example, and a warning to all Christians to avoid the pitfalls of science, pleasure and ambition which had led to Faustus's damnation. But it has to be noted that all that the Renaissance valued, is represented in what the devil has to offer, and one is left wondering whether it is the religious life or the worldly life that is more attractive. All that the Good Angel in this play has to offer is warnings. For example, the Good angel warns Faustus against reading the book of magic because it will bring God's heavy wrath upon his head and asks him to think of Heaven. To this the Evil Angel replies: "No, Faustus, think of honour and of wealth." At another point in the play, the Evil Angel urges Faustus to go forward in the famous art of magic and to become a lord and commander of the Earth. There can be no doubt that the devil here represents the natural ideal of the Renaissance by appealing to

the vague but healthy ambitions of a young soul which wishes to launch itself upon the wide world. No wonder that Faustus, a child of the Renaissance, cannot resist the devil's suggestions. We are like him for his love of life, for his trust in Nature and for his enthusiasm in the objects of beauty.

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**4.6. CONFLICT IN DOCTOR FAUSTUS**

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Conflict is the essence and the soul of tragedy and it is born out of some motivating cause. This conflict may be on two planes, physical and spiritual plane. Hence there may be external conflict and internal conflict. The conflict generally occurs between the forces of two rival groups. The hero belongs to one of these groups and the conflict often takes the form of a battle, a conspiracy or the like. But the hero's heart and soul is the great battlefield for the internal or spiritual conflict. Two opposite thoughts, desires, emotions, loyalties, or affiliations may contend against each other in human soul giving rise to the most acute spiritual conflict.

Marlow's contribution to English drama was great and manifold. And one of his greatest is the introduction of the internal or spiritual conflict in the mind of his proud and ambitious hero Faustus.

In the very first scene we find that Faustus is disappointed with all branches of knowledge like Physics, Philosophy, Law and Divinity as they are absolutely inadequate to serve his purpose. Finally he decides in favor of the black art of magic as

These metaphysics of magicians  
And necromantic books are heavenly.

And he convinces himself that, 'A sound magician is a mighty god'.

But Faustus' emotional attachment to the medieval doctrines of Christianity is too deep to be rooted out. Hence, just after his final decision in favor of necromancy, he feels the prick of conscience and in this very scene the Good Angel and the Evil Angel make their first appearance. These two angels, in fact, represent the two aspects of human mind. The Good angel urges Faustus to shun that damned book and to read the scriptures. But the Evil Angel scores a victory by luring away Faustus with the assurance that by mastering the black art of magic Faustus will be Lord and Commander of the elements. In the second stage is depicted Faustus' pathetic struggle to escape his impending doom and damnation and his deep sense of helplessness. This is revealed when he confesses to Mephistopheles that:

When I behold the heaven, then I repent,  
And curse thee, wicked Mephistopheles,  
Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.

The two angels appear again, one urging him to pray and repent so that he may have God's mercy and the other tells him that he is a spirit, God can never pity him. Faustus, very sadly, realizes 'My heart's so harden'd. I cannot repent'.

Again at the end of this very scene the conflict in his soul becomes very acute when Mephistopheles refuses to answer some of his questions. And the Angels appear to externalize his inner conflict. This time Good Angel's appeal has some effect on his mind. But the Evil Angel tells him that the devils will tear him to pieces if he listened to the voice of conscience. Realizing the critical situation, Lucifer himself, Beelzebub and

Mephistopheles appear before him and finally warn him not to think of God so that there may not be any break of his bond. And Faustus has to submit to the demand of the Devil once more.

The spiritual conflict takes a most acute turn in the first scene of Act V, when the Old Man, the symbol of the good, appears before him. His was the last attempt to guide his step "unto the way of life". The acute mental tension is revealed forcefully in these lines:

Where art thou Faustus, wretch what hast thou done;  
Damn'd art thou, Faustus, damned, despair and die.

In the closing scene we find the climax culminating into a terrible catastrophe. Faustus has realized that he is doomed to eternal damnation without the least hope of redemption. And when the final hour strikes, the Devil's disciples snatch away the agonized and trouble-torn soul of Faustus to hell to suffer eternal damnation.

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#### **4.7. SUMMING UP**

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In this unit we have:

- Analysed *Doctor Faustus* as a Morality Play
- Examined the allegorical and the symbolic elements in *Doctor Faustus*
- Interpreted Doctor Faustus as a Renaissance man
- Discussed the element of conflict in Doctor Faustus

#### **Self-Assessment Questions:**

1. What are the allegorical elements in *Doctor Faustus*?
2. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as a Renaissance play.
3. Discuss the internal conflict in *Doctor Faustus*.

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#### **4.8. Answers to Self-Assessment Questions**

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1. Please refer to Section 4.4.1.
2. Please refer to Section 4.5.
3. Please refer to Section 4.6.

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**4.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. What were the reasons for the tragic end of Doctor Faustus?
2. Why does *Doctor Faustus* fall in the category of a morality play?
3. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as one-man tragedy.

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## **UNIT 5 RESTORATION AGE AND THE COMEDY OF MANNERS**

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5.1. Introduction

5.2. Objectives

5.3. Restoration Age

5.3.1. Historical background

5.3.2. Characteristics

5.3.3. Restoration drama

5.4. Comedy of Manners

5.4.1. Definition

5.4.2. History

5.4.3. Characteristics

5.5. Congreve

5.5.1. Congreve: life

5.5.2. Works

5.5.3. As a writer of the Comedy of Manners

5.6. Summing up

5.7. Answers to Self-Assessment Question

5.8. References

5.9 Terminal and Model Questions

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**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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To understand and appreciate an artist and his creation, we have to first of all understand and study the age in which he lived and worked. What were the factors which shaped his life and influenced his work? What were the important happenings in the period and country in which he was born, educated and worked that had some kind of effect on him? What were his surroundings like, the society that made him the man he was? All this is important and needs to be studied before we can even think of taking up and reading the creation of the artist.

William Congreve is a dramatist who belonged to the Restoration period of British English Literature. *The Way of the World* is his masterpiece and is appreciated and admired even today. It is pure comedy, light and airy with nothing vulgar or obscene about it, in spite of the fact that it was written in an age when sexual licentiousness was the order of the day. It is an intellectual and cerebral play, sparkling with wit and humour.

The Restoration Age in British history began in 1660. It refers to the actual restoration of the monarchy in England and includes the period afterwards in which a new political order was established. The term is used to describe the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) and then the brief rule of his younger brother James II (1685-1688). It also includes the whole period of later Stuart monarchs as far as the death of Queen Anne and the accession of George I to the throne in 1714. The Restoration Period in English Literature includes literary works up to 1710- Congreve, Rochester, Dryden, Etherege, Shadwell, Wycherley and Vanbrugh are some of the literary figures that dot the landscape of the restoration period.

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**5.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through the unit you will be able to:

- Understand the age in which Congreve lived and worked – The Restoration Age
- Get an idea of Restoration Comedy or the comedy of manners and its main characteristics
- Be familiar with Congreve and his works.
- Study Congreve as a writer of the Comedy of Manners.

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**5.3 RESTORATION AGE**

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Restoration Age, in English Literature is the term given to the period between 1660-1710. It is used to describe the actual event of the restoration of monarchy to the throne of England – when once again a King ruled over England after 20 years of Parliament

rule under Oliver Cromwell and his son. It also refers to the years afterwards in which a new order was established 1660 -1710.

### **5.3.1 Historical Background**

The excessive joy of the renaissance soon faded. The richness and vitality of Shakespeare, Spenser and others soon gave way to excesses. In politics as well as in literature there was no control and the baser elements started rising. There was so much of licentiousness that very soon the common man started yearning for sobriety and sedateness. He wanted a little order in his life and that gave rise to Puritanism. The puritans were people who believed that life should be lived according to the Bible. There was moral degradation all around, in life as well as in literature and in such an environment, Puritanism began to flourish. The finer type of puritan was not blind to the beauty of art or to the joy of life. He appreciated beauty in both and was very welcome in the atmosphere of moral degradation.

In such a scene, Charles I was executed in 1639 and Parliament rule under Oliver Cromwell was established. Cromwell was a good man with nothing of the hardness and austerity generally associated with the figure of a Puritan. The people too welcomed order and discipline after the lax ways of Charles I and his men. However as time passed a change came about. Now the Puritans went to the other extreme. All kind of entertainment was looked down upon. Music and dancing was banned. Cinema halls and theatres were closed. Fashion was frowned upon and gaiety and laughter discouraged. The spirit of toleration and moderation was missing and the people started feeling suffocated in this rule. Cromwell too had passed away and England was now under his son.

When Charles I was executed, his son Charles II made his way to France and spent his years in exile in the French Court. In this atmosphere of intolerance there were talks of Charles II returning to England to end Parliament rule under the Puritans. In 1660 Charles II did return to the throne of England thus bringing to an end the Puritan regime. This is known as the restoration, when monarchy was once again restored to England. The Puritans were thrown out and the king returned to rule over England.

Charles II had spent his exile in France. Hence he was deeply influenced by the French way of life. When he became king, he brought the French way of life to the courts of England- gaiety, music, dance and laughter returned to England. It was no longer a sober nation frowning upon gaiety and laughter. Music halls and theatres reopened. Fashion ruled the day. Sobriety and decency, restraint in speech, plainness of dress and good morals were discarded as being Puritan qualities. England was beginning to laugh again.

### **5.3.2 Characteristics of the Restoration**

When Charles II returned to England after his exile, he and his men brought with them a way of life with lax morals, dissipated habits and love of wanton pleasure. There was

drinking and carousing, loose habits, no true love, just flitting from one lover to another. Freed from all restraints and influenced by the French manners, the court and the king and after him the people indulged themselves fully. Lords and ladies lived frivolous lives. No serious aim was followed. It was only drinking, dancing, love affairs, cheating and deception. This was the world of the rich and their lives were based on deception and false hood. Husband cheated on wife and vice versa, lovers were not faithful to each other and marriages were more of a contract than anything else. Dowry or money played a big part in marriage and love had no role to play.

With the theatres open once again, people rushed to see the plays. But public taste had changed and they found little interest in the plays of Shakespeare. The playwrights had to write new plays, catering to the taste of the Court and this determined the character and themes of the plays. The new plays reflected the times and caricatured the Puritans. By 1663, the new plays had begun to appear. They were witty and charming, with no plot as such but with brilliant dialogues and fine lords and ladies as characters. They caught the fancy of the public because they reflected the times. They were gay humorous and licentious.

### **5.3.3. Restoration Literature**

By now you must have made a picture of the Restoration Age in your mind. Free of restraints, life was full of enjoyment, in fact sexual licentiousness, loose morals and gaiety and wit were the hallmarks of the society.

The literature of the age was a reflection of all this. Poetry, tragedy and drama were written during this time. Satire had replaced love poetry. Wit was given a lot of importance over and above passion of any kind, especially in poetry where the poet was a gay irresponsible courtier. Every man of fashion wrote songs and true love had hardly a role to play in poetry. Sincerity of feeling and passion were nowhere to be found. In drama, tragedies were written but not in Shakespeare's style but in a ranting style far removed from real life. Dryden wrote heroic tragedy.

The greatest influence of France can be seen, the most in drama especially in restoration comedy. Comedy became the fashion of the day and Dryden, Shadwell Wycherley and Vanbrugh owed a lot to the French comedy of the day. In both plot and witty dialogue, Restoration comedy is witty, gay and licentious. The plot is vague, the dialogue witty and the characters are all lords and ladies of the age – the men and women of fashion, the fop, the dandy and the old who refuse to accept their age and insist on behaving as if they are still young. It is an age that seems to favour comedy and has as its audience the same upper class whose life style is reflected in the comedies. Hence it was widely popular. The comedy of the age portrayed upper class society with its gallants and ladies, looking down upon the accepted values of life and a moral attitude to life with its sexual licentiousness and light hearted gaiety which can be explained as reaction against the Puritan rule of no music and entertainment.

This is Restoration Comedy or the comedy of Manners. It deals with upper class society. It reflects their life, manners, speech and interests and is set in those coffee houses and parlours and parks they frequented. The main characters are the people of fashion and the theme mostly love intrigues developed by clever, witty dialogue. If the tone is slightly loose morally, it can be explained as being a reaction to puritan sternness. The conventions are those of the rich and the clever, witty dialogue smacks of indecency but then that was part and parcel of the life of the times and hence too much should not be made of it. We shall talk about Restoration Comedy or Comedy of Manners in more detailed in the next section.

**EXERCISE - 1**

1. What does the term Restoration age refer to?
2. What is the historical background of the restoration?
3. Who were the Puritans?
4. Paint a picture of upper class life in Restoration England.
5. Write a brief note on Restoration literature.
6. Name the king who restored monarchy to England in 1660.
  - A. James I
  - B. Queen Anne
  - C. Charles I
  - D. Charles II
7. The Restoration ge in literature extends from 1660 to –
  - A. 1710
  - B. 1788
  - C. 1800
  - D. 1729
8. Where did Charles II spend his exile?
  - A. England
  - B. France
  - C. Germany
  - D. Spain

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**5.4 RESTORATION COMEDIES OR COMEDY OF MANNERS**

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As mentioned earlier the Restoration age was better suited to comedy. This does not mean that poetry or tragedy was not written. It was. Dryden wrote his heroic tragedies and Rochester, Sedley and Buckhurst penned poetry. But it was pre-eminently an age of comedy and comedy flourished as never before.

**5.4.1 Definition**

Restoration comedy is the comedy of manners. It reflects the life, ideals and manners of upper class society. The restoration period was an exciting period in theatre and drama. During the Puritan regime theatres had been closed and all entertainment banned. With Charles II's return to the throne of England in 1660, a change came over society. He was a fun loving, good life loving, and theatre loving king and under him drama flourished.

The comedy was concerned with life in upper class society which was interested in fashion. It reflects its manners, speech and interests and is set in the parlours, coffee-houses, parks and chocolate-houses of the men & women of fashion. The characters are the same lords and ladies who frequented these areas and themes were their love intrigues developed with witty and clever dialogue. The plays had an air of indecency about them because they reflected the society of the times which itself was steeped in loose morals and sexual licentiousness. Too much should not be made of this. It was the life of the upper class reflected in these plays, which were meant for this very same upper class.

#### **5.4.2 History**

The comedy of manners may be said to have had its beginning in the comedy plays of the seventeenth century, French dramatist Moliere, who satirized the hypocrisy of the seventeenth century. Some critics have also traced its roots as far back as ancient Greek plays. Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* is thought of as being the first comedy of manners but it really flourished during the Restoration period. It was greatly influenced by Jonson's comedy of humours, which made fun of the affected wit and follies of the time. Thomas Shadwell modeled his characters on those of Jonson's. He may not have had Jonson's craftsmanship and sense of style but he was well acquainted with his society and portrayed many odd and eccentric humours in his plays. Others who wrote the comedy of manners were – Wycherley - *The Country Wife*, Congreve – *The Way of the World*, Goldsmith - *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan in the *Rivals* and *School for Scandal*, Much later in the nineteenth and twentieth century plays were written with artificial plots and witty dialogues - all characteristics of the comedy of manners. Oscar Wilde wrote *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892 and, *The Importance of Being Ernest* in 1895. Noel Coward wrote *Hay Fever* in 1925 and Somerset Maugham and P.G.Wodehouse too showed traces of this in their novels.

#### **5.4.3 CHARACTERISTICS**

The comedy of manners is set in the world of the upper class and makes fun of them. It ridicules those who think they are superior to others socially. The ridicule is through clever and witty dialogues in which he pokes fun at them but with humour so that we are entertained. It comments on the standards of society which themselves are trivial but look down on those characters that are below them - the rich society men and women make fun of the simple and perhaps foolish country people and also the lower classes that do

not meet the standards of society. They do not realize that their social standards too are petty and trivial and artificial.

The following are the main characteristics of the comedy of manners:

1. It explores the relationship of the sexes. Marriage is a theme which brings out the shallow relations - husband and wife are busy in their own affairs and also marriages based on money.
2. There are bedrooms intrigues- no marriage is true and the partners are not loyal to each other.
3. Constancy in love was supposed to be dull and boring. During the restoration, passion and sincerity of feeling find no place in the literature of the times.
4. Sex was supposed to be tempting and hence loyalty and true love uncommon. Love thrived on variety. Hence in *The Way of the World* we have Mirabell who flirted with Mrs. Fainall first and then turned to Millamant.
5. There was conflict in the plays which was due to intrigues. Thus Mirabell and Fainall clash because Fainall is angry that Mrs. Marwood finds Mirabell attractive. Also Mirabell plots and schemes to get his way and this leads to conflict with the various characters.
6. Country Life was supposed to be boring and country men foolish and looked down upon. In fact, one clash in the comedy of manners was between the young man about town & the country bumpkin with the country bumpkin losing.
7. Humour lay in the satiric treatment of those who allowed themselves to be deceived or tried to deceive others. Thus Lady Wishfort is a figure of ridicule and we laugh at her because in spite of the fact that she is old, she still yearns for the pleasures of youth and easily believes that a young man like Mirabell can fall in love with her. Mirabell plays another trick on her to get her to sanction his marriage to her niece Millamant- he sends his servant, Waitwell as his uncle Rowling to woo her and propose marriage to her and she believes him even though others reveal Mirabell's plot. The follies of age are ridiculed in her.
8. The other figures of ridicule in a comedy of manners were – the fop, the pretender at wit, the old trying to be young and the old man with a young wife.
9. Wit was the most important element of the play and wit is always intellectual. Hence it gives the play especially Congreve's *Way of the World* a cerebral touch, doing away with vulgarity and cheapness and indecency. The other dramatists could not quite get his smooth touch. The play dazzled and sparkled with witty dialogues, engrossing one and all. Through wit, the aristocratic society is focused on in this comedy and its follies and affectations are ridiculed.

10. Every play had a prologue and an epilogue which were important. They had special pieces of poetry delivered in a coarse hilarious and boisterous fashion. They were welcomed by the audience.
11. The characterization of the plays was one dimensional. This meant the characters were driven by a single emotion as lust, greed, hate, jealousy etc. There were no well-rounded characters. Thus Fainall is all greed and jealousy. He wants his wife's money and is jealous and angry because his mistress Mrs. Marwood finds Mirabell attractive Lady Wishfort is lust personified. She is old and a widow and yearns to get married to a young man. Millamant and Mirabell are the only ones who are not governed by a single emotion.
12. The comedy of manners is also characterized by its witty, blunt sexual dialogue which gives it an air of indecency. However it is not vulgar as the wit gives it an air of sophistication which makes it acceptable.

The Restoration comedy of manners then is a form of dramatic comedy that shows and satirizes the manners and affectations of contemporary society which was restoration society. It is influenced by the Jonsonian comedy of humours but is lighter and more vivacious and brighter in tone. There is little depth to its characters which are not deeply studied or shown. They are governed by a single emotion and are the usual, common stock characters like the fop, dandy, old trying to be young etc. Every play had the same characters only the names were different. The plots had not much clarity. They had a lot of twists and turns which made them confusing. They were almost entirely about the aristocratic, upper class, rich sections of society and had the same sections as the audience too. Hence the world was that of the upper class.

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### 5.5 WILLIAM CONGREVE (1670-1729)

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Congreve is the best representative of his age and times. His place in English literature is assured as a writer of the comedy of manners. *The Way of the World* is his masterpiece and a good example of intellectual or cerebral comedy which had more of witty dialogues. In fact this was one of the reasons why it was a failure in the beginning. It was too unusual for the age.

The plays, then had plots which had a lot of sexual licentiousness. In fact it was a battle of the sexes which also had much of indecency and reflected the lax and loose morals of the day. In Congreve, the battle of the sexes is a battle of wits. Wit and fancy give his plays a sophisticated touch. The loose morals and the life style of the times are still reflected but wit and fancy give it a humorous touch which does away with the cheapness and vulgarity. His plays have the comic spirit and the public took some time to accept it and get used to it. Once the people were used to his wit, the play proved to be a huge success. Even today it is regarded as his masterpiece and a delight to read and see on stage.

### 5.5.1 CONGREVE: HIS LIFE

When looking at the biographical sketch of a writer, you should be able to focus on those elements which have helped in shaping his artistic genius. Many facts are unnecessary and need to be kept out. You should focus on those events in his life that help you to understand and appreciate his work better. Background is important because it moulds his character and experience is something he draws inspiration from.

However, not much is known about Congreve's life except for the bare details. He came from an old Staffordshire family and was born in 1670 at Bardsey. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin where Swift was his friend and two years senior. He was a good student and after leaving Trinity he entered the Middle Temple to study Law. He started writing at a very early age and in 1692 published his first book – *Incognita or Love & Duty Reconciled* under the name of Cleophil. It was not very good and did not deserve the attention it received. He later wrote a number of plays – *The Old Bachelor*, *The Double Dealer* and *Love for Love*, which were very well received and were also praised by Dryden. *The Mourning Bride* was a tragedy written next and highly praised then but later it was not very highly thought of as Congreve had a genius which was largely comic. As a master of comedy he is unsurpassed. *The Way of the World*, his next comedy was a failure and so disappointed him that he gave up writing altogether. He had written it to please himself and when not received well, he retired, hurt. He gave up writing.

He lived for twenty nine more years after this but never wrote again. He became rich and was a popular figure. In his later years he suffered from gout and was almost blind but remained cheerful and upbeat to the very end which came on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1729. He was buried at Westminster Abbey.

### 5.5.2 HIS WORKS

His first work was published under the name of Cleophil. It was named *Incognita*. It was not very good. His first play was *The Old Bachelor* which was published in 1693 when he was 23 years of age. It was written when he was recovering from illness and is a remarkable work for one so young for you must understand that at such a young and tender age it is not easy to write so confidently. Not many will be able to boast of such a fact but Congreve seems to have done it and was highly praised by Dryden. It was a success. It shows the influence of Ben Jonson. The characters are based on Jonson's theory of humours. The plot is bare and complicated with a lot of tricks and counter tricks which soon became common with Congreve. We see it in his later plays too. It has witty dialogues too which was to become his main asset as a dramatist.

The success he got with the *Old Bachelor* encouraged him to write and later in 1693 he brought out his next play '*The Double Dealer*'. It is a better constructed play than *The Old Bachelor*. The plot is simple but it was less appreciated by the public perhaps because it had a semi tragic note, which did not go with the times. Dryden however

praised it and this kept up the sprit of Congreve. At a later date, when the people got used to his style, it became quite popular.

His next play was '*Love for Love*' in 1695. It showed the development of his dramatic genius – the plot is better crafted than his earlier ones; the characters too are more natural. They are individualized – Sir Sampson is tough and ill – natured, Foresight is a peevish and positive old fellow who pretends to be an astrologer and a palmist. Valentine too has been drawn with care. There is a little of farce and low comedy but wit is also present. There is much to like in the play and it deserves the popularity it received in its time.

*The Mourning Bride* (1697) his next play was a tragedy and highly praised then. Today it is less appreciated because Congreve is essentially a comic genius, a master of comedy. Tragedy is not his line.

*The Way of the World* (1700) was his last play. It was a failure when it first came on stage. It was unusual and the people did not know how to appreciate it. It had wit and fancy and an intellectual aura. It sparkled with wit especially in the scenes in which Millamant appeared. In it we have Congreve at his happiest. Construction, characterization, dialogues- everything is brilliant. Of course there is not much of a storyline and what there is, is complicated but it hardly matters. In any case Restoration drama never had much realism in its plots. Here too, it is the same Congreve does not look at life as a whole. He only concentrates on one slice of life – the rich upper class and in reflecting the shallowness of their life, he is superb. He gives us the shallowness, deception and falsehood of their lives. That is the way of their world. It may not be very nice but that is the way it is and he mirrors it faithfully.

It was a failure in his life time and he was so hurt by it that he retired from dramatic writing. He stopped writing drama and thus English literature lost a much-valued son. Even today *The Way of the World* is much appreciated for its pure comic sprit, its wit and its fancy. It is a delight to read.

### 5.5.3 CONGREVE AS A WRITER OF THE COMEDY OF MANNERS

Congreve is famous today as the writer of the comedy of manners. You have studied the Restoration age and have also gone through what makes a comedy of manners play. In the next unit you will study his play *The Way of the World*. Here we will discuss Congreve as a dramatist and writer of the Restoration comedy which was also known as the comedy of manners.

He wrote these plays which can be called Restoration comedies. – *The Double Dealer*, *Love for Love*, and his greatest – *The Way of the World*. They are good plays and masterpiece as brilliant artificial comedies of the time. The intrigues – the plots and schemes are clever, the characterization is lively and arresting – have characters like Millamant, Mirabell, Lady Wishfort etc. and most important of all they have witty and

sparkling dialogues. From the very beginning Congreve presented himself as the master of light and witty dialogues – that was his greatest strength and in this he surpassed the other dramatists of his time – Etherege and perhaps even Wycherley. He had the satirical force of Wycherley and added to it was his witty dialogues. It was a winning combination and Congreve's plays are a delight to read and see on stage.

In *Double Dealer* construction of the plot is superior to that of his earlier plays. The dialogue is rich but the characterization is not so good. His next play *Love for Love* is one step ahead of *Double Dealer*. The characterization is lively – we have the surly tempered Sir Sampson Legend, the youthful Valentine and the pretentious false wit, astrologer and palmist, Foresight. It is something of a farce but was well received and appreciated in his time.

In *The Way of the World* you can see Congreve at his best – whether it is construction of the plot characterization or dialogue. The story does not matter. As it is, restoration drama had not very realistic plots and *The Way of the World* is the same. There are all kinds of twists and turns and plots and schemes and intrigues. It hardly matters but the scenes and dialogues are excellent, especially those scenes in which Millamant and Mirabell appear, where Mrs. Marwood and Millamant talk and in fact every scene in which Millamant appears – they are sparkling with wit and draw our attention and interest.

All these plays take place in the present, by which is meant in the contemporary society which was the society of the Restoration Age. This is a necessary condition of the comedy of manners. It had to reflect the times. And so Congreve took for his material the life about him – a life reflected in the gaiety of Charles II court. The life he gives us is not that of the common people. It is a life of pleasure and gallantry that had a code of behaviour and speech of its own. It is this that he selects and not the lower class life with all its realism and problems. He never sees life as a whole, only the upper class life.

He shows us how the lords and ladies of the time lived. They led frivolous lives with no serious purpose in life. Their daily routine consisted of eating, drinking and partying. They were men and women of fashion and their lives centred on fashion, gossip, intrigues, bedroom intrigues love and jealousy and also the desire for revenge. If all this reflected loose and lax morals, so be it because it was part of the age and society and Congreve mirrored it faithfully.

In fact, in this reflection of the manners of the age Congreve was holding a mirror up to society and also ridiculing it. He satirized by holding up to ridicule the typical figures of a Restoration Comedy - the fop, the pretender to wit or the false wit, the old trying to be young and the old man with a young wife. We have these figures in Mirabell, Fainall, Witwood, Lady Wishfort also the country bumpkin in Sir Willful Witwood. Sir Willful is a country figure and in Congreve's plays in the clash between the city and village, it was the village that was ridiculed. Hence Sir Willful is held up to ridicule in spite of the fact that he had genuinely good qualities – goodness of heart and spirit of sacrifice.

Apart from ridiculing the figures, he also satirizes their way of life and shows it for what it is – shallow and not worth living. A Comedy of Manners play always satirized the age by holding it up to ridicule. Thus here too, he does so by arousing our laughter at their way of life. The comic material is based on sexual relations and confrontation. His plays are based on marriage and he reveals the basis of marriage. They are made for convenience and not love with the exception of the ideal couple – Mirabell and Millamant. Even there, their love is not glossed about. They talk about conditions and negotiation and pre-nuptial agreements and seem to give more importance to the fact that even after marriage, each intends to retain his or her independence and not merge their identity in that of the others. There is even a hint of money; after all if they marry against the wishes of their guardian, Lady Wishfort, they stand to lose the money. Hence, Mirabell plots and plans to win her approval so that he may not lose her money. But underlying all this is a hint of the love they have for each other. During Restoration times sincerity of feeling and emotion was not emphasized. Wit was given more importance.

The marriages, then, that he shows are not based on love but on convenience. Thus Fainall gets married to his wife because he wants her money. Also because he wishes to hide his affair with Mrs. Marwood and marriage gives him a good cover. Mrs. Fainall too has had an affair with Mirabell and gets married to her husband to hide the affair. Thus affairs abound. Dowry too plays an important role. Fainall eyes his wife's wealth and is willing to go to any length to lay his hands on it.

Love and bedroom intrigues are the very stuff of a comedy of manners. Mirabell schemes to win Lady Wishfort's approval. At first he pretends to love her and when this is discovered, Lady Wishfort is angry for having being made a fool of. Later Mirabell plans to send his servant, Waitwell as his uncle Sir Rowling to woo Lady Wishfort, so that at a later stage he can reveal him to be his servant and save her from a disastrous marriage on condition that she approve his marriage to her niece Millamant.

Congreve underlines the fact that this way of life is more about dowries and intrigues and contracts and affairs. It may be funny but it certainly is not nice. It is shallow and cruel.

And overlaying all there is his comic genius which is his strongest point. His plays sparkle with wit and brilliant dialogues. He is a master of clever and witty dialogues and in fact what ties the whole play together is the wit and brilliance of the many different scenes. It is fancy and wit which makes his plays interesting and which also gives them character. The charge of indecency has been brought against his plays but the society of the times itself was a little immoral and hence the plays cannot help but have an air of indecency about them. But through satire, wit and fancy he gives his plays an intellectual and cerebral touch, which was the one of the reasons it failed in the beginning. The public was used to plays with more obvious sexual licentiousness. Here you have a sophisticated atmosphere, wit and sparkle. They are pure comedies. There is a clash of personalities which is a battle of wits. Sex in fact is a battle of wits and this gives rise to humour. Towards the end we do get a hint of their emotions but it is not of the passionate kind.

Confusion and deception are the way of the world here and it is marked by contracts & hilarity. Thus as a writer of the comedy of manners, Congreve is superb.

**EXERCISE - 2**

1. Define the comedy of manners and what are the characteristics of a comedy of manners?
2. Give a short history of the comedy of manners.
3. Discuss Congreve as a writer of the comedy of manners.
4. Can you account for the failure of *The Way of the World*? Why was it not popular with the audience?
5. Throw light on the immorality of the age of Congreve.
6. Write a short life sketch of Congreve.
7. Write a brief note on Congreve's wit and humour.
8. Congreve's first work was
  - a. *Incognita*
  - b. *Love for Love*
  - c. *Way of the World*
9. *The Mourning Bride* was a
  - a. History Play
  - b. Comedy
  - c. Tragedy
10. Congreve satirizes which way of life
  - a. The restoration way of life
  - b. The Victorians
  - c. The Elizabethans
11. Congreve was born in
  - a. 1700
  - b. 1629
  - c. 1670
12. Congreve, in his plays shows the influence of
  - a. Johnson
  - b. Ben Jonson
  - c. Shakespeare

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**5.6 SUMMING UP**

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After going through this unit you will be able to :

1. Understand the age in which Congreve lived and worked – the Restoration age.
2. Get an idea of Restoration Comedy or the Comedy of Manners.
3. Be familiar with the dramatist Congreve and his works.
4. Study Congreve as a writer of the comedy of manners.

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**5.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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Exercise – 1-

1. Refer to 6.1
2. Refer to 6.3.1
3. Refer to the paragraph in 6.3.1
4. Refer to 6.3.2
5. Refer to 6.3.3
6. (d)
7. (a)
8. (b)

Exercise – 2-

1. Refer to the paragraph on the comedy of manners in 6.4.1 and 6.4.3
2. Refer to 6.4.2
3. Refer to 6.5.3
4. Refer to 6.5
5. Refer to paragraph on the immorality of the age in 6.5.3
6. Refer to 6.5.1
7. Refer to paragraphs on wit in 6.5.3
8. (a)
9. (c)
10. (a)
11. (c)
12. (b)

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**5.8 REFERENCES**

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1. *History of English Literature* - Compton Rickett.
2. *History of English literature*. Louis Cazamian
3. *William Congreve* – Bonamy Dobree
4. *Restoration Comedy 1660-1710* – Bonamy Dobree

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**5.9 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. “Fainall and Mrs. Marwood seem to be matched in villainy” ‘Discuss and analyse their characters.’
2. Analyse the following characters – Mirabell and Millamant.
3. Discuss *The Way of the World* as a comedy of manners.
4. Write a brief note on the famous proviso-scene

5. The Way of the World reflects the social life of the upper classes in Restoration England. Discuss.
6. Is 'The Way of the World' immoral in tone?
7. 'Plot counts hardly at all; characters are finely shaded; manners are the principal theme, style the necessary excellence.' Discuss with reference to The Way of the World.
8. What is Congreve's place in English Literature?

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**UNIT 6: CONGREVE – *THE WAY OF THE WORLD***

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- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 The Way of the World: A Summary
- 6.4 Analysing the Play
  - 6.4.1 As a Restoration Comedy
  - 6.4.2 Plot
  - 6.4.3 Theme
  - 6.4.4 Wit and Humour
  - 6.4.5 As a Satire
  - 6.4.6 Style and Technique
  - 6.4.7 Aptness of the Title
  - 6.4.8 Characters
    - 6.4.8.1 Mirabell
    - 6.4.8.2 Fainall
    - 6.4.8.3 Millamant
    - 6.4.8.4 Lady Wishfort
    - 6.4.8.5 Mrs. Marwood
- 6.5 Summing up
- 6.6 Answers to Self-Assessment Questions
- 6.7 References
- 6.8 Terminal and Model Questions

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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The play that is subscribed in your course '*The Way of the World*' is William Congreve's masterpiece. It was not always so, though. When first written and staged it proved to be a failure. It was not accepted by the public. The fact was that it was an unusual play for the times. During the restoration when Charles II returned to the throne of England, a wave of joy swept through the country. After years of strict puritan rule, theatres and movie halls were now opened. Music and dancing were no longer banned and a new sexual licentiousness came into society. Drinking, partying, vulgarity and cheapness became the order of the day. Restoration comedy reflected this society and in it the conflict was between the young city man and the country fool with the city youth winning. The country and country folk were ridiculed. But as time passed, the extreme joy and dissolute ways settled down. They became more sober and serious and the comedy of the times mirrored this. Also in the clash between the city and village it was the village which triumphed. The country was no longer looked down upon.

Some thirty years had passed since Charles II ascended the throne and the atmosphere had sobered slightly. In this period Congreve wrote his plays. They were known to be unusual because they were a throwback to the early days of the Restoration. Instead of the country boy, you have a city youth, Mirabell urbane, graceful and with some decorum. The country bumpkin is once again ridiculed here. Also though Congreve does reflect restoration society with its loose morals and lax ways it is intellectual and cerebral comedy with its wit and humour. *The Way of the World* is pure comedy, graceful, urbane, witty and sparkling. There is nothing cheap or vulgar about it and hence people found it difficult to accept. They were used to the cheap and vulgar plays of their time. Hence it was a failure. After sometime those people got used to his style and accepted it. With the change in audience taste it became a success and all was well.

However during Congreve's time the play was unsuccessful and he was deeply disappointed. He had written it to please himself, not his audience and hurt at its rejection, he resolved never to write again. He gave up dramatic writing and English literature lost a valuable son. Today it is his most well known play and a brilliant example of the comedy of the time – Restoration comedy or the comedy of manners.

In *The Way of the World*, Congreve reflected the society of the times superficial and artificial. He was not interested in the reality of the poor people, the lower or working class. He concentrated on the upper class – lords and ladies and their lives. He holds up a mirror to the fashionable world with all its frivolity and confusion. The society men and women led inconsequential lives running after petty things. Their lives cantered on parties, make up, love affairs and of course money. They had no serious purpose in life and this is brought out brilliantly by Congreve.

The play is based around the story of two lovers – the urbane Mirabell and the graceful Millamant, who want to get married and for that they have to get the blessings of Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort. The aunt is angry with Mirabell because in order to

woo Millamant he had pretended to be in love with the aunt so that he could get close to the niece. When Lady Wishfort realizes that she has been made a fool of, she is hurt and refuses to sanction and bless their union. The play revolves around the intrigue hatched by Mirabell to win Lady Wishfort's consent. Of course it ends happily with Lady Wishfort forgiving Mirabell and blessing the marriage, not however before the story takes many other twists and turns.

As you go through the play you realize that the story line is not really important because witty dialogues hold your interest. The brilliant and witty dialogues more than make up for the lack of a proper story line. With so many twists and turns, the story lacks clarity but is overlooked because of the sparkling wit and humour. The scenes with wit and humour are more important than the plot itself.

Congreve is excellent in certain situations and with certain characters. Millamant is his most exquisite creation and when she is on the scene, she over's shadows everything else. She dominates the scene.

All in all, *The Way of the World* is Congreve's masterpiece. It is pure comedy and a delight to read. Sparkling with wit and humour and not a drop of vulgarity, cheapness or even any kind of dross, it remains till today the best example of Restoration Comedy or the Comedy of Manners.

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## **6.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit you will be able to –

- Undertake an analysis of the play and be able to understand and appreciate it better.
- Appreciate his dramatic genius - as a master of light and witty dialogues which is his strong point.
- Understand that in Restoration Comedy the story line hardly matters. The characters and wit and humour more than make up for the lack of coherence and clarity in the story line.

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## **6.3 THE WAY OF THE WORLD – A SUMMARY**

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Before reading the summary, what you have to understand is that in Restoration Comedy there is no plot or story as such. In this play too, Congreve has a very complicated story line, which is not really important because scenes, characters, and dialogues are more important than the whole. There is no proper story line and what there is, is meaningless. Congreve is good in certain scenes and situations and his play is a string of scenes which are full of brilliant and witty dialogues and characters like Millamant who makes the scenes very interesting. The different parts are more important than the whole.

The story is complicated. It is about two lovers – Mirabell and Millamant who want to get married and for this they have to get the blessings of Lady Wishfort who is Millamant's aunt. However, she hates Mirabell because at one time Mirabell pretended to be in love with Lady Wishfort, so that he could come close to her niece, Millamant. Lady Wishfort is 55 years old and her vanity is hurt when she realizes that Mirabell has made a fool of her.

Millamant has two more followers – Petulant and Witwood who are courting her only because she is the most popular girl in society. Mirabell's uncle too is coming to court Lady Wishfort. All this reflects the superficial life of society – we only hear of parties and balls and courting and love affairs.

Mrs. Fainall is Lady Wishfort's daughter married to Fainall who is in love with Mrs. Marwood, who, in turn, loves Mirabell. Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell too were lovers once and she has married Fainall as a cover up for her affair with Mirabell. Fainall, himself has married his wife for her money and also as a cover for his affair with Mrs. Marwood. He is also aware of the fact that Mrs. Marwood is the cause of much argument between them. All this reflects the ways of the world of upper class society where everyone is having affairs with someone else. No marriage is true and lovers are not loyal to one another.

This brings us to the main plot of Mirabell. He plans to trick Lady Wishfort and marry Millamant. He thinks of presenting his servant, Waitwell, as his uncle Sir Rowland to propose marriage to Lady Wishfort. The fake uncle has already met and charmed Lady Wishfort. To be on the safe side, however he gets the servant married to Lady Wishfort's maid Foible, so that he cannot trick him into an actual marriage. Later on he plans to blackmail Lady Wishfort and reveal Sir Rowland as his servant, thus saving her from a disastrous marriage, on condition that she agrees to his marriage to her niece Millamant.

In the meantime Lady Wishfort decides to accept Sir Rowland because she is angry with Mirabell and after she leaves, Mrs. Marwood comes to know of Mirabell's plan and also that he finds her unattractive. She is angry and wants revenge and hence tells Fainall all and also outlines a plan for Fainall to get even with Mirabell for Fainall has come to know that his wife has had an affair with Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood tells Fainall that Lady Wishfort controls Millamant's fortune and since she loves her daughter, Mrs. Fainall he can insist that Millamant's fortune be given to him or else he will make public Mrs. Fainall's affair with Mirabell.

In Act IV, is the proviso scene where Millamant and Mirabell discuss their contract of marriage – the conditions they lay down for each other to get married. Sir Rowland also proposes marriage and Lady Wishfort accepts him.

In Act V, Fainall makes his demands. He wants Millamant's money and also that of his wife. If she does not give him the money he will tell everyone that his wife has had an affair with Mirabell.

In the end Fainall's own affair with Mrs. Marwood is revealed and Mrs. Fainall says that knowing how greedy Fainall was she had given her wealth to Mirabell just before her marriage to Fainall. Thus there is no money for Fainall. Both Fainall and Mrs. Marwood leave vowing revenge and Lady Wishfort finally agrees to the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant, having realized that Fainall was a villain and Mrs. Marwood no friend.

The plot is thus full of intrigue and complicated. It is also a reflection of the life of the times with husbands and wives having affairs and not being true to each other. The whole play is based on intrigues, deception, love-affairs and revenge.

### EXERCISE – 1

1. Discuss the proviso scene in Act IV which has been mentioned in the summary.
2. Give a brief summary of the play.
3. Was 'The Way of the World' a success when it first appeared in 1700 and what effect did it have on Congreve?

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## 6.4 ANALYSING THE PLAY

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When you are asked to analyse a play, you have to examine it critically – to assess the play with all its strong points and weaknesses. How is the characterization? Has the dramatist drawn strong rounded characters or are they only one-sided? How well have they been sketched? What is the style like – is it simple and clear or grand? Does the play reflect the times? Which section of society does it mirror? How strong is the story line and how are the scenes?

All these factors have to be taken into account and only then can you come to any conclusion about the play in question. Here we shall be analysing the plot, characters and style.

### 6.4.1. As a Restoration Comedy or Comedy of Manners

*The Way of the World* is a comedy of manners. It was not very well received in Congreve's time but later on became a big success. It is a reflection of the life and times of the Restoration Age. He focuses on the upper classes – the nobility and their life style. The lower or working class did not interest him. What he gives his readers is the frivolous life of the society men and women. Their whole life cantered on fashion, make up, love affairs, intrigue and revenge. He is excellent when drawing this and gives us the wit and humour of this class too especially in the scenes in which Millamant appears. She sparkles with wit – the proviso scene where Millamant and Mirabell lay down conditions for their marriage. It is Restoration Comedy at its best with Congreve reflecting the society of the age.

### 6.4.2 Plot

As you go through the play you will realize that the story line hardly matters. It is complicated but hardly important because there is no plot or story as such, just a

succession of brilliant scenes, which somehow make up for the lack of a proper story line. Scenes and dialogues are of more importance and the different parts are more important than the whole.

There is a vague story and we come to know that things have happened in the past which mould the future – the action works out through plot and counter plot. The action covers just one day but through their dialogue we come to know of what has happened in the past – that Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell were lovers in the past; that Mirabell has made a fool of Lady Wishfort as a result of which she is against his marriage to Millamant. But these scenes interest us much more than the fact that the story or whatever there is of it, is meaningless. The scenes and characters are fascinating.

Where the construction of the plot is concerned, it has been done with almost neo classical precision. The neo classical age believed in order and form and Congreve seems to have done just that. The play has the following – an exposition, development of the plot or conflict, the climax or the turning point and the outcome.

The exposition is the introduction to the main action. Here it is long and extends into Act II. Things are not clear in the beginning, as we do not know what is happening. It is only in Act II that we come to know many details – why Lady Wishfort is angry with Mirabell and the story of Fainall and his wife. Fainall is having an affair with Mrs. Marwood and has married his wife for her money and his wife has had an affair with Mirabell in the past.

The conflict or development of the plot is in Act III when the movement goes forward. On one side we have Mirabell who plots and plans to get married to Millamant and on the other side are Fainall and Mrs. Marwood who try their best to prevent Mirabell and Millamant from getting married. Plot and counter plot move forward. There are other conflicts too – city versus the village, Witwoud and Petulant against Sir Wilfull Witwoud who is the country bumpkin.

Act IV is the most dramatic when we have the moment of greatest excitement. Sir Wilfull goes to propose to Millamant but overawed by her, he returns without proposing and then the great proviso – scene where we have Mirabell set against Millamant in a battle of wits and finally the servant Waitwell who comes as Sir Rowland to woo Lady Wishfort. Mirabell's plan to fool and blackmail Lady Wishfort is revealed but she refuses to believe it. The plot (Mirabell's plan) and counterplot (Fainall's plan) move ahead.

The outcome comes in the last act, when Mirabell defeats the counterplot of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. He prevents them from blackmailing Lady Wishfort into giving them the money. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood have to retire, defeated and Lady Wishfort blesses the union of Mirabell and Millamant.

The three unities too are observed – the unity of time, place and action. The play takes just twenty-four hours, though a lot of activity is compressed into that period. Hence there is a crowding of events and this leads to the action moving very fast.

Where unity of place is concerned Congreve was a bit casual – the 3 Locations here are the chocolate house, St. James Park and Lady Wishfort's house. He does not adhere to this unity very strictly.

Where unity of action is concerned, we have one main plot – that of Mirabell. The story revolves around him and his plan to get married to Millamant. The counter plot or sub-plot is hatched by Fainall to defeat Mirabell. The plot however is subordinate to the characters and witty dialogues of the play. The wit makes us forget the involved story line and lack of clarity.

### **6.4.3 Theme**

The main theme of the play is reflected in the title itself. It deals with the ways of the world of high class society men and women in Restoration England. It reflects the ugly and sordid facts of life in the social world.

Marriage and money are the theme here. On one hand is shown the marriage of Fainall and on the other that of Mirabell and Millamant. Fainall has married for money and also to hide his affair with Mrs. Marwood. Mrs. Fainall too has married her husband to hide her affair with Mirabell. Their marriage is based on deceit and greed. Mirabell wants to get married to Millamant and in the proviso scene we have both of them discussing a pre-nuptial agreement. They are laying down conditions for getting married. In other words it is a contract based on reason trust and frankness with no mention of love or passion. Money seems to play an important part in all this for they seem to realize that without money there is very little chance of happiness. In fact, towards the end Millamant even agrees to marry the man of her guardian's choice so that she can keep her money. Confusion and deception and greed are the ways of the world and it is marked by contracts and bargaining. However there is a deeper layer to this. Perhaps Congreve was offering a new option to the usual restoration marriages based on deceit and falsehood. The option is that of Mirabell and Millamant marriage which is based on reason and humour.

In fact sex, in Congreve is a battle of wits not a battlefield of emotions. Thus Mirabell and Millamant indulge in a combat of wits. This can be compared to Shakespeare's. Much Ado About Nothing where Beatrice and Benedict play at love in their battle of wits. This arouses much laughter but there is something serious too. Towards the end we get a hint of their feelings for each other but still it is not of the passionate kind. It is more intellectual and cerebral.

Money is also the reason Fainall gets married to his wife and later on his greed makes him plot to seize the wealth of Millamant which is held by Lady Wishfort. Mirabell foils this plot and Fainall has to flee.

The play is also about love. It is combined with the desire for money as in the case of Fainall. It comes in the form of lust too - Fainall's relationship with Mrs. Marwood and Mirabell's relation with Mrs. Fainall, also Lady Wishfort's feelings for Mirabell or Sir Rowling. She stands for the old Lady of fashion who refuses to accept her age and is made a fool of. Mirabell and Millamant represent ideal love. Congreve believed that lovers in love should preserve their individuality and not merge it in that of their lovers. Thus Mirabell is separate from Millamant and she refuses to give in to him. Even after marriage she is intent on doing as she pleases. You do not have to submerge yourself in your love. Love is not a sacrifice, nor is it lust. It should have trust, dignity and mutual respect, e.g. the love of Mirabell and Millamant.

#### 6.4.4 Wit and Humour

The *Way of the World* is a 'cerebral' or intellectual comedy. There is no hint of cheapness or vulgarity about it. It sparkles with wit and humour and this makes the play fascinating. It is through the dialogues that this play moves forward. There is not much action and through their conversations we come to know of what has happened in the past. The conversation is witty and self revealing also revealing the situation and characters involved. In fact it is this sparkling wit which makes the scenes so arresting. We are engrossed by the witty dialogues so that they seem more important than the whole. Every scene in which Millamant appears is engrossing.

#### 6.4.5 As a Satire

In one sense it can be seen as a satire because he is making fun of the life and manners of the upper class lords and ladies who live their inconsequential lives, busy with their conspiracies, love affairs and revenge. It was his aim to design characters which should appear ridiculous through their affectedness. He makes fun of the upper class who thinks they are superior to others merely because of their wealth. Their follies and vices are exposed but not praised, just held up to ridicule – the fop, the young man of fashion, the old trying to be young like Lady Wishfort. In fact he ridicules their whole way of life while seeming to draw their picture – thus we have couples not being true to one another. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall are busy with their affairs. Marriages are made for convenience – to either get the wife's money or as a cover up for an affair. And the proviso scene when Millamant and Mirabell lay down conditions for their marriage but love is not mentioned anywhere. There is talk of dowry in marriages but the very basis of marriage – love, is nowhere. Congreve draws a very scathing picture of Restoration society on the surface, superficial and with no depth of feeling. He satirizes the manners and affectations of contemporary society.

But it is never immoral. The language is within limits and decent. The life shown is that of the times when love affairs were accepted. Hence we have Mirabell flirting with Mrs. Fainall and also Millamant; Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood pursuing the good life; not forgetting Lady Wishfort who at 55 yrs. of age still dreamt of having fun. There can be no charge of vulgarity brought against Congreve. He is just painting the life of the times and is not making it attractive but ridiculous and we end up laughing at the idea of Lady Wishfort even thinking that a young man like Mirabell can fall in love with her. He is a mild satirist, painting with light fingers. Besides villainy does not triumph in the end. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are defeated. Goodness does win.

#### 6.4.6 Style and Technique

The play shows Congreve's technical skill as a playwright. The three settings of the play – a chocolate house, St. James park and the home of Lady Wishfort – symbolize the restricted society with which the play deals – the rich upper class and their world – the park and the shopping area and their stately homes - they symbolize the world of the title. The way of the world of the rich is the way of deceit, falseness and pretence and the couples in that world live by deceit and pretence. In the characters of Fainall and his wife, Congreve shows us a typical married couple who live according to the code in a relationship which makes them unhappy – he marries for money and as a cover for his affair with Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall to hide her affair with Mirabell. The proviso scene, in that sense, is much more than a mere comic scene for it gives point by point a reasonable basis for marriage – based on frankness and trust as against the marriage of Fainall and Mrs. Fainall which is based on deceit.

Congreve's comic genius, in fact, lies in his dialogues. He is a master of clever and witty dialogues which reveal character. If you examine the play closely, you will realize that it is just a number of episodes strung together. It is the dialogues which ties them together into a whole and which brings out the difference between one character and another. It is fancy and wit which makes his play interesting and gives it character. He shows us the fashionable society of the time and since it was a little immoral and indecent, his plays cannot but have an air of indecency about it because it was in the air of the times. But through satire, wit and fancy, he gives an intellectual touch to his play which was the reason why it was a failure in the beginning. The people were not used to such wit and sparkle.

#### 6.4.7 Aptness of the Title

The play is aptly titled. It is called *The Way of the World* and that is what Congreve highlights. He throws light on the ways of the world. The section of society he has chosen to highlight is the upper class – the lords and ladies who led rich frivolous lives, running after a good time. The fashionable world with all its deception, falsehood, drinking and partying is focused upon and exposed to view.

Congreve's purpose here is to expose to public scrutiny and laughter the human follies and vices that characterize social behaviour. Thus we have Lady Wishfort, despite her age, behaving as a young woman and yearning after marriage; the young running after money etc. These are traits that belong to no one age or time but to all ages. The fashionable world with all its frivolity and confusion is ridiculed and at the same time something more precious and sensible is set up as an option to such behaviour. Thus we have the deceit and falsehood of Fainall's marriage set up against the love of Mirabell and Millamant which is based on trust, frankness and reason and all this is put forward with wit and humour.

The main focus is sexual relationships and confrontation though there is not much of love here. Money and dowry seem the prime motive behind many relationships. Congreve makes it clear that the general way of the world may be funny but it is not particularly nice. It is cruel. The ideal marriage too is achieved in the end but through many twists and turns. The play is not meant to change the world for the better. It just offers an insightful and amusing view of both its seedy and sympathetic aspects – Fainall's marriage based on deceit and greed as against Mirabell and Millamant's, love based on trust and respect for each other; characters like Fainall and Mrs. Marwood against decent characters like Millamant and Mirabell. It is just the way of the world of the upper classes and Congreve highlights it without comment.

#### **6.4.8 Characters**

The main characters here are – Mirabell, Millamant, Fainall, Mrs. Marwood, Mrs. Fainall and Lady Wishfort. The characters are one dimensional, driven by a single emotion. He does not give us well-rounded characters that have many facets to them. We see them in only one light, either lust or love or greed or jealousy.

##### **6.4.8.1 Mirabell**

Mirabell is a handsome young man, admired by the ladies – Lady Wishfort's daughter (Mrs. Fainall) has an affair with him before she marries Fainall. Mrs. Marwood finds him attractive but her feelings are not returned by Mirabell who finds her unattractive. There is something false and designing about him. He pretends to be courting the widow, Lady Wishfort so that he can get close to her niece, Millamant. Of course, when this is revealed, Lady Wishfort is rightly angry with him and refuses to sanction their marriage. He promptly hatches another plot – to trap Lady Wishfort in a situation by sending his servant Waitwell as his uncle Rowling to woo her. At the right moment he plans to reveal all so that she has to agree to his marriage to Millamant. The plot is discovered by Mrs. Marwood who together with Fainall plans to defeat him and win the fortune of Millamant and Mrs. Fainall. However things work out smoothly and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are revealed for what they are – villains and Mirabell wins Millamant in the end with Lady Wishfort's blessings. The whole play thus hinges on Mirabell's intrigues.

However, he has a serious side to him. He is light and friendly with Witwoud and Petulant but unlike them has a serious purpose to his life – his love for Millamant. In pursuit of love, he is not above using a trick or two to win Millamant but that was the way the men behaved in that age. But he has a good heart and saves Mrs. Fainall from the designs of her greedy husband Fainall. He is a likeable man and is constant in love, as Millamant says. He has his heart in the right place as the end shows.

#### **6.4.8.2 Fainall**

Fainall is the villain. He marries his wife for her money and also eyes Millamant's wealth. When it seems he may not be able to get both their wealth, he says frankly – that he had married his wife to get her money and if he can't get it, his marriage is useless. At which even Mrs. Marwood is shocked and Fainall has to pacify her by saying that if he could, he would rob his wife and spend it on Mrs. Marwood. He is a villain through and through.

Mrs. Marwood and Fainall scheme to get Millamant's wealth too – he would threaten to expose his wife's affair with Mirabell unless the mother handed over the money to him. Both thus come together in villainy, one as evil as the other. In the end however, both are defeated and they leave vowing to take revenge.

Together with his wife, he also represents the typical married couple of the times. The way of the world refers to the deceit and falseness of the society of the times. Fainall marries his wife for the money and also to hide his affair with Mrs. Marwood. His wife marries to hide her affair with Mirabell. Thus it is a false world and those in this world are just as false and deceitful.

He is a sinister and evil figure – is greedy for money. He eyes the wealth of both his wife and also that of Millamant. He does not mind that his wife has had an affair with Mirabell but is wildly angry that his mistress Mrs. Marwood loves Mirabell too. He hates Mirabell and wants to defeat him. However he is unsuccessful in this and has to leave in the end defeated and exposed for what he is.

#### **6.4.8.3 Millamant**

Millamant is the heroine of the play. She is a charmer. She teases Mirabell, is witty and also a woman of the world but at the same time is chaste and determined to remain so. She is a typical woman of her age – graceful and affected with all the fine airs of a lady. But there is a serious side to her, as well. She realizes her worth and will not give in easily to Mirabell. She can hold her own against him. She finally agrees to marry him but knows she cannot change him and does not even try to do so. She relies on her own charm and attraction to win him completely and in doing so converts a young man about town into a simple husband who follows her.

She is a lady with great individuality grace and charm. Her most striking feature is her wit. Any scene which has Millamant in it sparkles with her wit. She gets the better of

Mirabell in the combat of wits. When Mirabell tells her that her cruelty will destroy her lover and she will stop being beautiful when she loses her lover, for beauty is the gift of the lover, Millamant retorts that a lover cannot give beauty where there is none and a woman can make lovers as fast as she wants. And when he tries to control her in the marriage contract scene she says she will not be dictated to.

Whenever she is on stage Congreve is at his best. She is a living, breathing creature and always true to herself. She and Mirabell were intended by Congreve to represent the new order – a marriage based not on deceit and falsehood but on reason, frankness and love, as the proviso scene shows.

Millamant then is airy, teasing, light, beautiful and amazing. She can be sweet and charming but she can be ironic in her wit too. She is sure of her feminine power over others & hence can laugh at herself & at Mirabell too. She is intelligent too. Congreve has not made her just beautiful and foolish. She can see through people and realises who are true wits and who are pretenders. She thus sees through Witwould and Petulant and also sees Mrs. Marwood for what she is-a selfish, vicious woman who knows only how to make use of those she calls friends. She loves Millamant but refuses to acknowledge it in front of him so that she can continue to have power over him.

#### **6.4.8.4 Lady Wishfort**

Lady Wishfort is the old widow who is determined to have a good time. When young Mirabell pretends to fall in love with her, she believes it easily and finds nothing odd about it. She is 55 yrs. old and uses cosmetics to hide her age. She is fighting a losing battle against time and doing so bravely. When she realizes that Mirabell has made a fool of her, she is angry and refuses to sanction his marriage to her niece, Millamant. In the end she is made to realize the folly of her ways and she lets the two lovers come together.

But she never gives up hope and when Mirabell again plots to win her sanction, she falls into the trap. She believes that his uncle has come to woo her whereas it is his servant Waitwell pretending to be her uncle Sir Rowling.

She is vain. Her vanity is made clear right from the beginning. It is why she behaves the way she does. She does not accept her age gracefully and her interest in men makes her an easy prey for people to play their tricks on. That is the basic reason Mirabell can even think of making a fool of her because he knows she is interested in men and in marriage.

As a woman who controls considerable wealth – her own, her daughter's and that of Millamant – she is used to having her own way. Hence she is rude and abrupt, at times, with her maid. She does not bother about her and also plans her niece's marriage to Sir Wilfull without taking her consent.

She lives in a world of fantasy. She keeps looking into the mirror but does not see what others do. She still sees herself as a young girl and not an old woman and hence believes Mirabell's stories. She does not have any good sense or even common sense and

therefore cannot choose good friends. All of them betray her and make use of her. Her closest friend is Mrs. Marwood who is taking advantages of her; her daughter and her niece are willing to go along with a plot that would trick her and make fun of her. It makes no difference to them. Her maid, Foible, on whom she depends, plays an important role in the plot against her and that is why she is bewildered and helpless at what is happening.

However there is another side to her. She may be foolish and may not always act wisely, but she is also a mother and cares for her daughter. Therefore Fainall's plans to blackmail her into giving him money are nearly successful because she does not want her daughter, Mrs. Fainall's name and reputation to be spoiled. Hence she is ready to give Fainall money. She wants to protect her. Also she may have chosen the wrong man for Millamant but it is well intentioned and she only has her welfare at heart. Sir Wilfull Witwoud may not be the right man for Millamant but he has many good qualities – has a good heart and a spirit of sacrifice.

In her Congreve has ridiculed the follies & vices of age. But because she is basically good though perhaps foolish, we end up sympathizing with her.

#### **6.4.8.5 Mrs. Marwood**

Mrs. Marwood is the female counterpart of Fainall in villainy. In fact she outdoes him in it. She is vicious and a schemer. She loves Mirabell but also hates him and wants to destroy him because he rejects her and finds her unattractive.

There is no good quality in her. She prevents the marriage of Millamant and Mirabell and pretends to be friendly with Lady Wishfort and for her concern reveals Mirabell's plot but actually it is only because she wants to take revenge on Mirabell for rejecting her. She tells Fainall all and gives him the idea of blackmailing Lady Wishfort into giving him money. She is evil and rightfully does not get anything in the end. She is defeated and has to flee.

Hypocrisy is one of her qualities. She pretends to be what she is not. Thus she is hypocritical in her relation with Fainall. She pretends to love him but in her heart of hearts harbours feelings for Mirabell. Her disguised love for Mirabell is the reason why she behaves the way she does - plotting revenge when Millamant makes fun of her and her hidden feelings for Mirabell, she is angry and becomes revengeful because her vanity is hurt. But the worst part of her character and her real hypocrisy is her friendship with Lady Wishfort. She pretends to be a true friend and reveals Mirabell's plot to her but her real reason is to prevent the marriage of Mirabel and Millamant. She also tries to make Lady Wishfort give in to Fainall's demand for money. She is vicious and selfish and all her relationships are based on lies.

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**EXERCISE 2**

1. Write a short note on the plot of the play.
2. Can 'The Way of the World' be called an intellectual comedy?
3. What is Congreve ridiculing in the play?
4. Can the play be called indecent and immoral?
5. Are the characters well rounded?
6. Write a brief note on Congreve's comic genius.
7. Mirabell pretends to court Lady Wishfort because
  - a. He wants to get married to her.
  - b. He wants her wealth.
  - c. So that he can get close to her niece – Millamant.
  - d. He wants to take revenge.
8. Congreve is at his best when who is on stage
  - a. Millamant
  - b. Mirabell
  - c. Mrs. Fainall
  - d. Fainall
9. Congreve ridicules the vices and follies of the age through.....?
  - a. Sir Rowling
  - b. Lady Wishfort
  - c. Witwoud
  - d. Waitwell

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**6.5 SUMMING UP**

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In this unit you have studied

- About Congreve as a dramatist – his strong and weak points.
- How to analyse a play.
- About the technical skill used to write a play.
- The characterization.

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**6.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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**EXERCISE 1**

1. Refer to the play.
2. Refer to 7.1
3. Refer to 7.1

**EXERCISE 2**

1. Refer to 7.4.2
2. Refer to 7.4.4
3. Refer to 7.4.5
4. Refer to 7.4.5
5. Refer to 7.4.8
6. Refer to 7.4.6
7. (c)
8. (a)
9. (b)

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**6.7 REFERENCES**

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1. *History of English literature* – Compton Rickett.
2. *William Congreve* – Bonamy Dobree.
3. *Restoration Comedy 1660-1710* – Bonamy Dobree.

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**6.8 MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss ‘The Way of the World’ as a comedy of manners.
2. The Way of the World is a true reflection of the Restoration Age. How far is this true?
3. “The play lacks coherence and the parts are more important than the whole”. Discuss.

4. Write notes on any two of the following:
  - a. Millamant
  - b. Mirabell
  - c. Fainall
  - d. Lady Wishfort
5. In 'The Way of the World', Congreve holds up to ridicule the follies and vices of the age. How far is this true?
6. Write a short note on Congreve's technical skill.

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**UNIT 7: GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *CANDIDA***

**PART 1**

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7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Bernard Shaw and English Drama

7.3.1 English Drama in the Nineteenth Century

7.3.2 Emergence of a New Drama

7.3.3 George Bernard Shaw and the New Drama

7.4 Bernard Shaw: the Man and Dramatist

7.5 Characteristic Features of the Shavian Drama

7.5.1 Problem Play

7.5.2 Comedy of Ideas

7.5.3 Anti-Romantic Comedy

7.5.4 Wit and Humour

7.6 *Candida*: a Critical Introduction

7.7 Summary

7.8 Glossary

7.9 References

7.10 Suggested Reading

7.11 Model Questions

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**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Through earlier units of this paper you have already been introduced to this form of literature in general and British drama in particular. Drama is different from other forms of literature in the sense that it is primarily not meant to be read but to be viewed in action on the stage. So elements like theatre and stage, actors, producer and director have all a hand in its shaping. Nonetheless, it is the dramatist who is the prime creator of a play. This is all the more so when we read a play rather than watch it on the stage. That is why, while reading a play we focus on the dramatist, the characters who personify the theme of the play, the world that the writer creates through words and the dramatic techniques that he uses to make his play effective.

In this unit we are going to read about George Bernard Shaw, a leading British dramatist of the twentieth century. To appreciate properly his contribution to English drama we will have to consider the state of English drama in the nineteenth century and Shaw's role in re-establishing it in the realm of literature from where it had been dislodged. He was the dramatist who was mainly instrumental in ushering in a new kind of drama in the twentieth century which came to be known as the Problem play or the Comedy of Ideas. We will also try to find out what makes Shaw the popular dramatist that he is even in the twenty first century. His play that we are going to study in detail is *Candida*, one of his most remarkable plays.

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**7.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to appreciate not only a major twentieth century dramatist but also an important kind of drama that ruled the British stage for nearly half a century. You will also realize, after comparing the earlier plays which you have read in your course with *Candida*, that plays shape the ideas of their time as much as they are shaped by them.

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**7.3 BERNARD SHAW AND ENGLISH DRAMA**

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George Bernard Shaw is one of the greatest dramatists in English and he is generally considered to be next only to Shakespeare. His more than fifty plays – most of them full length – and his association of more than four decades with theatre as a dramatic critic and dramatist make him the most influential figure of the British drama during the twentieth century. He was also one of the most vocal men of his generation. He expressed his views on social and economic issues of his time, philosophy, science, theology, music, art, drama, politics, education, health and many other topics that concerned his generation. He had realized the power of the dramatic medium and as a dramatic critic in the early days of his career he felt that English plays that he was watching were not utilizing its full potential. Drama could be used as a means of social change. So he began to write plays around social issues of his time. To make the theatre going audience interested in his plays, he used his wit and brilliant dialogues. This saved his plays from

being tedious and merely argumentative. Though commercially not successful in the beginning, his plays became immensely popular later on and set the trend for a new kind of drama entirely different from the typical nineteenth century drama. Thus Shaw became the man who led the revival of drama towards the end of the nineteenth century.

### 7.3.1 English Drama in the Nineteenth Century

The first half of the nineteenth century was a barren period from the point of view of drama. It seems as if the creative genius of the era was channelized in the fields of poetry and fiction. While the early nineteenth century saw great Romantic poets, the succeeding period saw no less remarkable Victorian poets. The entire period also produced great novelists, from Jane Austen and Bronte sisters to Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. But we do not come across a single great name in the field of drama. Ifor Evans has summed up the situation in the following words:

The audiences were content with farce and melodrama and extravagant displays and no management had the courage to attempt any elevation in their taste. The legitimate theatres had been constantly enlarged so that natural acting was no longer possible, and spectacle and declamation could alone appeal to the large and sometimes unruly audiences that filled the vast auditoria of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The players, apart from the brilliant exceptions, were too often a group isolated from ordinary society, and without adequate taste or education.  
(143)

It is not that great literary minds did not try their hands at drama, but for one reason or the other they did not succeed in producing great dramatic works. For example, nearly all Romantic poets wrote plays, but, except Shelley's *Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain*, no other play by them deserves much consideration. Even these plays are not very stage worthy. One major reason was that these plays had much emotion but little dramatic action. The romantic mind was basically introspective whereas drama requires externalization of thoughts and emotions. The dialogues written by Romantic poets were merely lyrical effusions. Among the Victorians, Browning had a talent for character study but he was mainly interested in abnormal psychology and he could not develop dramatic situations into full-fledged plots. His talent was for dramatic monologues rather than for drama. Thus the entire first half of the nineteenth century did not produce any play that could survive the test of time. It is not that theatre did not flourish during this period. The plays of Shakespeare and some other dramatists were regularly produced in the theatres of that period. It was also a period of great acting. Actors like Edmund Kean, who became popular in the role of Hamlet, and Macready, who left a lasting impression as Macbeth, were the main attractions of the stage. The dramatists were not concerned with drama as creative literature but looked upon it merely as a means of public entertainment. Scribe, the noted French dramatist, addressing the French Academy in 1836, said:

You go to the theatre, not for instruction or correction, but for relaxation and amusement. Now what amuses you most is not truth, but fiction. To represent what is before your eyes every day is not the way to please you; but what does not come to you in your usual life, the extraordinary, the romantic, that is what charms you, that is what one is eager to offer you. (Hudson 11)

Several of the English plays produced during this period were rehashes of the popular French plays of that time. The theatres were run by actor managers who wanted dramatists to write memorable roles for them that could give them opportunities for melodramatic acting. They were not interested in realistic pictures of everyday life but in creating make-believe romantic worlds for the audience.

All this began to change in the second half of the nineteenth century. The idea of a realistic drama in which the characters should be common men and women with their everyday problems and in which the dialogue should be written not in the form of poetic ranting but in the language of real life was gradually taking shape. By an Act of 1843 the restriction on plays being staged outside the patent theatres had been removed. This resulted in the coming up of a large number of theatres in the Victorian age. Queen Victoria herself was a patron of drama. This gave it a social prestige. Playwriting also became lucrative when the system of profit sharing for the dramatists was introduced. New talents now began to be attracted towards theatre. Awareness of social problems, which was already manifest in the novels of the period, began to find its way in the drama also.

### 7.3.2 Emergence of a new Drama

A new kind of drama which broke away from the trends of the earlier drama emerged with the works of T. W. Robertson in 1860s. His play, *Society* was produced in 1865. The success of this play marked the beginning of the revival of English drama. The gain was consolidated in his next play, *Caste* which came out in 1867. The play shows the conflict of social classes presented through the marriage of a working class girl with a rich person. The plays of Robertson cannot be called great but they deserve the credit of starting the trend of serious drama which culminated in the plays of Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy. With him typed characters of the English stage gave way to individual men and women. He also discarded rhetoric and blank verse for natural human speech. The two dramatists who consolidated the gains of Robertson were Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. Jones, in the preface to his *Saints and Sinners* (1884), held that drama was not merely “the art of sensational and spectacular illusion” but “mainly and chiefly the art of representing English life”. (Hudson 13) Thus the focus of the dramatist was clearly shifting from a romantic, illusory world to a realistic familiar world. Jones, however, exhibits flashes of the coming face of British drama without breaking away from the trends of the earlier drama. *The Middleman* (1889), containing satiric commentary on the exploitation of workers by capitalist middlemen, is often cited as the play that saw Jones turn towards the New Drama. It contains a slight shift away from the drama of pure action towards the drama of character and social criticism, but it is still

basically a melodrama. When we take into account the entire dramatic work of Jones we find that they fall into two categories. In the first category come those plays where Jones is looking mainly at the commercial success of the play and adopting popular devices for that purpose. In the second category come plays where he is trying to cut loose from the stereotyped plays of the period and moving towards the emerging realistic drama. Often he followed a commercial success on the stage with a more experimental play of the sort that he really wanted to write. From his play, *Masquerader*, which came out in 1894, to 1901, Jones was at the top of his dramatic career, producing hits often at the rate of two per year. Critics are divided about what sort of play really represented Jones's real achievement. Some hold the type of realistic social comedy represented by *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900) to be his best while others prefer realistic social comedy with a light satiric touch, of which *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) and *The Liars* (1897) are examples. *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is perhaps Jones's most remarkable attempt to write the well-made, realistic problem play. The 'problem' in the play is whether Mrs. Dane – supposedly a widow but actually a woman involved in a scandal in Vienna a few years ago – can negate her 'fallen' state and get back into respectable society. She has settled in a country community in England and fallen in love with Lionel Carteret. They are about to marry when accidentally a woman who was familiar with Mrs. Dane's past comes across her and her reality is threatened to be known. Initially she succeeds in refuting it but finally has to confess it. She has to leave the place disgraced. So far Jones makes a realistic play depicting the complexity in Dane's character very effectively and revealing the moral code of the society of his time, but then he seems to have yielded to the pressure of the popular taste. In the end of the play the old love of Mrs. Danes returns to her and she is happily married to him. Despite the commercial happy ending, the play reveals Arthur Jones's masterly in constructing a plot and developing a climax. Jones himself dismissed the play as "drawing room melodrama" perhaps because he knew in his heart of hearts that once again he had allowed convention to overrule characterization. Consideration for convention also cancelled the 'problem' because the conclusion was foregone. In none of his plays Jones could gather courage to defy the moral code of his period. In many plays he has used the character of an elderly, experienced and conservative person who cautions the young not to transgress the moral code of the society. The dramatist seems to be holding that society is justified in giving unhappiness to those who defy its conventions.

Arthur Wing Pinero was the other dramatist who took English drama closer to the realistic social drama of the twentieth century in which Bernard Shaw excelled. Like Jones, Pinero also wrote plays of unequal merit. His early plays are of slight dramatic value for in them we largely find the melodrama that ruled the stage of the time. It is in the mid-eighties that his plays began to be noticed. Altogether Pinero wrote fifty seven plays which consisted of farces, sentimental comedies, comedies of manners and realistic problem plays. The farce that made him famous was *The Magistrate* produced in 1885. With over three hundred performances it set a record. This was followed by similar farces that were staged at the old Court Theatre. Pinero raised farce from its low pantomime level and made it a more realistic genre. His technique was to show normal respectable

people caught in funny situations and doing improbable things. He takes pillars of society – a judge in *The Magistrate*, a teacher in *The Schoolmistress*, a church dean in *Dandy Dick* and a respected politician in *The Cabinet Minister* – and shows them caught in positions of indignity. For example, the magistrate is nearly tried in his own courtroom for a crime before being rescued at the last minute. Pinero, by making the comical downfall of the upright Victorians purely circumstantial and accidental, avoids the suggestion of being subversive of the conventional society. No satiric comment is generally directed at institutions of the Victorian society. The fun is created by exposing individuals to the test of trying circumstances, usually of an improbable nature. Pinero's sentimental comedies like *Sweet Lavendar* (1886) and *Lady Bountiful* (1891) were also commercial successes. This enabled Pinero to try his hands at the drama that he wanted to write – serious, realistic, problem plays. His *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) was a landmark in this direction. The story is of high minded Aubrey Tanqueray, a man of forty three and long widowed, who marries a twenty seven year old woman, Paula Ray who had a disreputable past. Paula convinces Tanqueray that she had always been ill treated by others who had promised to marry her but had backed out. She even gives him a list of men in her life but Tanqueray destroys it without looking at it. The problem arises when his innocent convent-raised daughter, Ellean comes to live with them. Complications occur when pleasure-loving Paula, bored with her austere life in the country, quarrels with her husband that he has a greater regard for his daughter than for her. Tanqueray allows his daughter to go to Paris with a neighbour without knowing that his name also figured on the list that Paula had given him. As the young girl cannot be expected to marry a man who has been the lover of her stepmother, the prospective marriage is broken. Having ruined everybody's life, Paula feels remorse and finally commits suicide. Bernard Shaw attacked this play on the ground that the play relied too much on coincidences and thus stood on contrived machinery. He also criticized the end of the play which was dictated by the social convention. Pinero did not make his heroine behave in the manner which her character dictated but in the way society would accept it. Despite the truth of this criticism the play breaks new grounds on many counts. It dispensed with many dramatic techniques that had become hackneyed. For example, there was no soliloquy or aside in this play. Pinero did not depend for the unfolding of his plot on domestic servants or timely delivery of letters - techniques that had become too stale to give any thrill.

Another dramatist who made a mark on the drama of the time and led to its revival was Oscar Wilde. He was also a dramatist to influence Bernard Shaw in certain respects. Apart from his French play, *Salome* (1892), he wrote four comedies – *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) that led to the revival of English drama in their own way. In story line his plays did not seem to be different from the standard plays of the period. For example, *Lady Windermere's Fan* deals with the story of the fallen woman. In the play Mrs. Erlynne leaves her husband and baby to go away with another man. The man, however, betrays her and leaves her. She is thus forced to live the life of a fallen woman. After twenty years she comes to know that her daughter, a grown up

woman now, has married a rich man and is now Lady Windermere. She starts to blackmail her daughter's husband who wishes to save his wife from the knowledge of her fallen mother. But when Mrs. Erlynne discovers that her daughter is about to make the same mistake that she had made twenty years ago of running away with another man, her maternal instinct is aroused. She comes out and saves her daughter's marriage. Her other two plays also follow similar story lines but what the stories do not reveal is the treatment that Wilde gives to them and the witty dialogues that remind us of the Restoration drama. In all the three plays Wilde introduced an element of moral ambiguity in the conventional situations. The plays of the period despite showing a little moral boldness ultimately conformed to the moral values of the period. Story wise Wilde also did so, but subtly he tried to subvert the conventional story line. One of his devices for doing so was that he gave the cleverest dialogues of the play to the villainous characters. He thus made them escape any absolute moral condemnation. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is Oscar Wilde's masterpiece. It is here that he makes the moral world of his time topsy-turvy. In a world that habitually confused the serious with the trivial, Wilde felt that 'we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality'. Thus Wilde set an example of putting things upside down before Bernard Shaw. He also showed to Shaw how brilliance of dialogue could keep the spectator or the reader engaged with the play.

In this way English drama of the last two decades of the nineteenth century led to the revival of the English drama. It also took it out of the romantic illusory world and brought it closer to real life. It saw the emergence of better developed characters in place of stereotyped ones. An important factor in the emergence of the New Drama in England was the establishment of the Independent Theatre by J. T. Grein in 1891. From 1891 to 1898 it tried to bring modern drama to the theatre. It was the Independent Theatre that introduced Henrik Ibsen to the British public. One important factor that became visible in English drama was intellectualism. Drama now was not merely a source of entertainment but a means of analysis of contemporary life. In the hands of a dramatist like Oscar Wilde dialogue writing became an art. His witty dialogues were far removed from the artificial and sentimental dialogues written by his predecessors. The greatest influence on the British drama of the period, indeed on the European drama itself, was that of the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen used drama for creating social awareness. In his hands it became a tool of discussing socio-economic issues and exploring the conscious and subconscious motives of human action. Hudson remarks:

He was the first modern dramatist who had a message and also the technique necessary to give it through plays that were convincingly real and came to life when acted on the stage. He was the first modern dramatist to handle serious problems with material drawn from everyday life. His characters were ordinary people. His plays were domestic tragedies, the struggles of individuals in conflict with the forces of convention. They were pregnant with ideas. (16)

With plays like *Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882) Ibsen took European drama by storm. He was translated into several languages, including English, and his plays ushered in the era of modern serious drama. Ibsen left a great impact on Bernard Shaw also who wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891. Shaw learnt from him how serious problems of life can be material for effective drama. He began to write plays in the last decade of the nineteenth century on the pattern of Ibsen.

### 7.3.3 Bernard Shaw and the New Drama

If you are asked to name the most important English dramatist of the first half of the twentieth century, perhaps all of you would name George Bernard Shaw. And you would be right in doing so. Modern English drama virtually begins with George Bernard Shaw. It is with him that the new drama occupied the attention of the theatre-going public as well as the readers of the play. His plays were not immediately successful on the stage but once they caught the attention of the audience they changed the character of English drama. In his Preface to *Plays Pleasant* Shaw writes:

I turned my hand to play writing when a great deal of talk about 'the New Drama' followed by the actual establishment of a 'New Theatre' (the Independent) threatened to end in humiliating discovery that the New Drama, in England at least, was a figment of the revolutionary imagination. This was not to be endured. I had rashly taken up the case; and rather than let it collapse I manufactured the evidence. (iii)

In that very Preface he explained why the old drama ceased to interest him. Drama traditionally followed a pattern which depicted the conflict between the good and the bad represented respectively by the hero and the villain. The spectator or the reader was led to believe that he or she should follow the good and shun the evil. Shaw was not interested in this artificial black and white division. That is why he discarded the traditional representation of human character on the stage. Moreover, he was interested not in emotional tangles but in ideas that governed life. He also believed, following Ibsen, that drama should be a medium of discussing social and economic issues that affected the lives of men and women. His early plays were directed towards the presentation of the contemporary social evils. The first play that he produced, *Widowers' Houses*, dealt with the inhuman treatment of those living in the city slums by their rich landlords. The second play, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is about prostitution. His *Arms and the Man* attacked the romantic view of war and love. *Candida* attacked the patriarchal concept of man-woman relationship. Ifor Evans observes about the emergence of Bernard Shaw as a dramatist:

In the other plays, after an uneasy start in *Widowers' Houses*, he proved to himself, though not immediately to the public, that he was a dramatist of great power and originality. From Ibsen he had learned how to manage the stage for plays with a contemporary setting, and scenes which admit discussion as well as

action. From his predecessors in England there was little that he could learn except to discover that with Wilde he shared a brilliance in dialogue. Unlike Wilde, he was determined to use this verbal gaiety not merely for entertainment but to explore every known problem, social, moral, political and religious. (152)

It was the establishment of the New Theatre that gave Shaw an opportunity of writing plays that did not merely entertain but provoke the spectator. It took some years before the British public began to appreciate his plays. As a critic of drama, Shaw was familiar with the essential sentimentality and conventional falsity of the English drama being staged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The convention-ridden audience did not allow drama to break free from the dead conventions of the theatre. Dramatists like Jones and Pinero had sown the seeds of the New Drama but they had failed to put it on a firm footing. Shaw decided to do that. His early plays had to face not only the criticism of the public but also in one case the ban by the Censor. So he decided to publish them, providing long prefaces in which he explained his views about what he was trying to do. He wanted to use the stage as he had already used the public platform – to spread his socialistic, anti-romantic and anti-sentimental views about the contemporary social, economic and moral issues. J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre staged his *Widowers' Houses*. The hostility with which the public in general received his early plays, which seemed sordid to the snobbish middle class English society of the time, did not discourage Shaw. He realized that he will have to create his audience as well. His way of putting things up side down earned him a reputation for cynicism but also for wit. He used his witty dialogues and humorous scenes to make his spectators gradually accept him, even though it took him quite some time to make them accept his ideas. Success of his plays came first not in England but in America where in 1903-4 four of his plays – *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, *You Never can tell* and *Arms and the Man* were all running concurrently. His genius was already recognized in the continent. England was also not far behind. In the three seasons beginning in 1904 his plays began to be repeatedly performed at the Court Theatre. His *Man and Superman* had a long run in the theatre. Bernard Shaw had finally established not only himself but the New Drama in England.

#### 7.4 BERNARD SHAW: THE MAN AND THE DRAMATIST

In this section we shall discuss the life and major plays of Bernard Shaw. The story of the making of Bernard Shaw, the dramatist, is the story of a man who determinedly overcame all the obstacles of life with which he was born and proved to himself and the world that a man is not merely born with a talent but has to acquire and hone it as well. The formative years of his life were spent in adverse circumstances. He was born in Dublin on 26 July 1856 to George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw. His father, who descended from the impoverished branch of an aristocratic family, was incapable of giving his family a decent life. He had retired prematurely from a minor bureaucratic position and entered, by selling his pension, into business where he failed miserably. His lack of practical sense and love for drink made the life of his wife and their three children difficult. Bernard Shaw later described this life to be more humiliating than the life of the

born poor who have no social standing or cultural background to maintain. His father's love of drink made Shaw a teetotaler for life. George Carr Shaw always encouraged his son not only to read but also to frequent the National Gallery and to attend the theatre and opera. Young Bernard Shaw visited the National Gallery so often that he was quite familiar with the works of renowned painters. This laid the foundation of his career as a critic of art. His father had also a sense of humour which enabled him to look not only at his own misfortune but also at conventional ideas as some of the funniest things of life. He had a comic sense of the anti-climax. This sense of the anti-climax was inherited by Bernard Shaw who used it with striking effect in his plays.

Bernard Shaw's mother, whose maiden name was Lucinda Gurley, was much younger than her husband. She married him against the advice of her family but soon realized her mistake and was disillusioned with her marriage. Shaw's deep distrust of the fanciful, romantic attitude towards life, love and marriage reflected in his plays might have taken its root early in his life. Lucinda Shaw sought solace from frustration in life in music which soon became her profession. George John Vandaleur Lee, a well known music teacher in Dublin, discovered her voice and trained her in singing. Lee became important in Shaw's life when the family moved into Lee's house in 1868. During the next four years he was surrounded by musical people constantly rehearsing Italian and German operas. Not only did this informal musical education provide the grounding which qualified him to become a music critic in London years afterwards but it also affected his plays in a marked manner. A. C. Ward, in his booklet on Shaw, remarks about the musical element in his plays:

Their orchestral and operatic quality (which none of Shaw's 'realistic' imitators was able to reproduce) is most apparent in Act III of *Man and Superman*. It is not without significance, also, that *Arms and the Man* was utilized as the basis for libretto of a popular light opera, *The Chocolate Soldier*, while some years after his death *Pygmalion* was adapted as *My Fair Lady*, one of the most successful of all musical comedies. (13)

Shaw's sense of music is also reflected in his dialogue writing. Lee's influence on Shaw ran beyond the sphere of music. Lee was an iconoclast who challenged established beliefs and refused to conform to conventions. It was he who proved to Shaw that the world could be safely defied. From Lee Shaw also learned how to dramatize himself and become an effective personality. He must have remembered Lee when he later converted his own shy and introverted self into a larger than life public figure popularly known as GBS.

Bernard Shaw's formal education was not remarkable. The first school that he attended was the Dublin Wesleyan Connexional School from where he went to a private school in the country. In 1869 he was sent to the Central Model Boys' School in Dublin. The school was attended mostly by the Roman Catholic children of the trading class. Since Ireland was ruled by the Protestant England, Protestantism was associated with the elite class and Catholicism stood for social and political inferiority. Studying in a Catholic

school produced a sense of shame in Shaw. Though later he recognized the irrationality of this belief, yet this incident left a scar on his mind.

When Shaw left school in 1871 he went to work as a junior clerk for a Dublin estate agent. His wage was eighteen shillings a month and his work was to file the incoming letters, keep a record of the outgoing letters and postage. Shaw was regularly given a raise in his salary and later on became a temporary cashier in the firm. Shaw worked in that office for four and a half years and in 1876 left Dublin to move to London where his mother and two sisters were already living. In London he lived with his mother and tried to make a living by doing various literary works. Success, however, was more than a decade away from him. His mother, in the meanwhile, supplemented the meagre amount that he earned.

Bernard Shaw began his literary career as a novelist. He wrote five novels which were published serially in journals but without bringing either fame or money for the author. The novels are *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love Among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist*. Shaw finally realized that novel was not a suitable literary medium for him. In the meanwhile he had come under the sway of socialist philosophy. He was initiated into it by a lecture of Henry George. He then read George's book, *Progress and Poverty*. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, as Shaw himself admitted, changed his outlook and turned him into a revolutionary, socialist speaker and writer. He then joined the newly founded socialist society called 'The Fabian'. Fabianism was essentially a middle class movement headed by some of the known intellectuals of that time such as Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, Sydney Olivier and Annie Besant. Working in this group Shaw began to develop his ideas on scientific socialism and the regular debates and discussion in the Fabian Society helped to sharpen his argumentative skill. In 1885 Shaw met William Archer who not only established him in journalism but also directed his mind to drama. They even planned to write a play jointly but this venture did not proceed beyond writing the first act of that play. Through Archer, Shaw became book reviewer to the *Pall Mall Gazette* where he continued till 1888. He also joined another magazine, *The World* as art critic. Later, he became music critic in the same magazine. In this way his early unofficial training in art and music helped him in making a temporary career and also earning some money. It is as a drama critic in *The Saturday Review* that Shaw learnt the art of dramatic writing. His articles, published under his initials, G. B. S. in that magazine, made him famous in the theatrical world. In 1898 Shaw married Charlotte Frances Payne Townshend, a rich lady who freed him from constant financial worries. It was still a few years before Bernard Shaw would start earning a lot of money through his plays.

Bernard Shaw, inspired by Ibsen, wanted to write plays that were different from the earlier plays he was familiar with. He also decided to do away with conventional labeling of comedy and tragedy. So he called the first three plays that he wrote as "Unpleasant". *Widowers' Houses* (1892), *The Philanderer* (1893) and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) were titled as "Plays Unpleasant" by Shaw when they were published in 1898. The

reason behind it was that they dealt with social issues which were regarded by many as unmentionable in public. Unlike Jones and Pinero, Shaw did not treat the social issues by making everything come out well at the end and allowing convention to triumph over realism. In *Widowers' Houses*, which deals with the issue of slums, Shaw makes his central character, Trench, expose the complicity of all in tainted money. The play demonstrates how people get rich by exploiting those who are forced to live in slums. The respectability of the capitalist class and of the younger sons of the aristocracy is maintained by and fattened upon the poverty of the slums. The play, however, does not advocate socialism. Throughout his dramatic career, Shaw did not offer any ready-made solution for the problems he presented. In *The Philanderer* he attacked the marriage laws of the time. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was the best of the tree plays. It dealt with a theme which Jones, Pinero and other dramatists of the period had treated – the place of a woman with a tainted past in society. The play has two of Shaw's very powerful female characters – Mrs. Warren and her daughter, Vivie. Mrs. Warren, after a life of extreme poverty and hardship, had taken to prostitution. Gradually, she had started running a chain of brothels. She gave her daughter, Vivie a comfortable life and higher education. When young Vivie came to know about the source of the prosperity of her mother, she was horrified. Mrs. Warren, however, was unapologetic about her profession which she regarded as a business venture in which many respectable members of society had invested and which she considered to be the universal condition of the capitalist society. Vivie goes through a bitter disillusionment at the discovery of universal complicity in 'tainted' money. She does not make any compromise with what she could not accept and finally leaves her mother's house to lead an independent life. The play could not be accepted by the conventional society of the time and was banned by the Censor. It was only in 1925 that it could be publicly staged in England though it had a few private productions earlier and was staged in America. In his 'unpleasant' plays Bernard Shaw tried to show to his audience that they were all responsible for the evils of their society. His endeavour was to make people see the social evils arose from the fact that the common man, however honourable and good natured he may be in his private capacity, was responsible for those evils as he benefitted socially and economically from them.

The failure of the 'unpleasant' plays made Bernard Shaw change his dramatic strategy. He now wrote plays dealing less with the crimes of society and more with romantic follies and with the struggle of the individual against those follies. He called these plays "Plays Pleasant". The four "pleasant" plays were – *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895), *The Man of Destiny* (1895) and *You Never can Tell* (1896). In the first play of this group Shaw attacked the romantic attitude of society towards war and love. The characters of the play are broadly divided into two groups – those steeped in the romantic attitude towards life and those who look upon life realistically. To the first category belong Raina and Sergius and in the second category are Bluntschli and Louka. In this play, as in several of his later plays, Shaw's technique is to reverse the order of things. He begins with presenting the romantic attitude when Raina and her mother are thrilled at the news of a successful cavalry charge led by Sergius, the fiancé of Raina. They imagine handsome Sergius riding his horse and attacking his enemies like a god of war and the

wretched soldiers running away from the fury of that attack. Soon a refugee enemy officer running away from his pursuers enters Rain's bedroom. He presents a pitiable sight, quite opposite to the romantic image of a soldier that Raina has in her mind. She is full of contempt for him when he tells her that he carries chocolates instead of cartridges on the battlefield. The army officer, later known as Bluntschli, describes the cavalry charge led by Sergius as not only foolish but also suicidal. Raina is furious with him for saying this but nonetheless saves his life by concealing him from her own soldiers. When Sergius comes back from the war after a ceasefire, he too is disillusioned with it. He has resigned from the army as he has realized that soldiering is "the coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak." (35). Soon the hollowness of the romantic love that Sergius and Raina profess for each other is also exposed. Sergius, who claims to be a votary of higher love, starts flirting with Louka, Raina's maidservant, as soon as Raina goes from his presence. He describes higher love as "very fatiguing thing to keep up for any length of time, Louka. One feels the need of some relief after it." (40) Raina has also given her picture to Bluntschli before Sergius's arrival. Towards the end of the play a thoroughly disillusioned Sergius exclaims, "Oh, war! war! The dream of patriots and heroes! A fraud, Bluntschli. A hollow sham like love." (76) Thus *Arms and the Man* marks the beginning of Shaw's life-long attack on romantic attitude towards life. Shaw's next play, *Candida*, is one of his most popular plays. It exposed the myth of man as the master of the house and protector of the woman. Since you are going to learn in detail about this play there is no need to dwell upon it here. *The Man of Destiny* is Shaw's portrayal of Napoleon. He presents him as the representative of the realistic hero, quite different from the heroes of the romances. In *You Never can Tell* Shaw attacks the education system that stifles the growth of the individual will and advocates a realistic system of education that would allow a man to think for himself ignoring what custom demands from him. The character which represents Shaw's views on education in the play is Mrs. Clandon and the embodiments of her education are her children, Gloria, Philip and Dolly.

Bernard Shaw next came up with the plays which he called *Three Plays for Puritans*. They were so named because in them the heroes gain victory over love. They are *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Commenting on the first play of this group, Augustin Hamon in his book on Shaw remarks:

Theological beliefs do not modify nature, which knows how to resume its rights; for the eyes of those who are able to see, conventional religion, the practice of ritual, religious appearances, do not really prevent the manifestation of natural sentiments; legal marriage does not create love and it does develop hypocrisy; the professional soldier cannot think, but is a machine for obedience; judgments are formed before reasons are examined; social and worldly conventions conceal the real thing of life; strength is to be gained from the contemplation of realities. Such are the leading ideas expounded in *The Devil's Disciple*. (81)

The hero of the play is Richard Dudgeon, named the Devil's Disciple because he is liberated from all prejudices and conventions. Shaw presents in him an image of the superman which he develops in his later plays.

Shaw's Puritanism is restricted to the field of art. He held that the highest art must serve indirectly a moral purpose. He was vehemently opposed to theory of art for art's sake and declared that he would not undertake the trouble of writing even a single sentence for the sake of art. So he wrote plays not to entertain but to provoke rational thoughts about the issues that came before him. Later on he developed a philosophy of Life Force or Creative Evolution. From the beginning of his career to the turn of the century, Shaw believed in a natural law of progress, carrying mankind automatically through the centuries to higher and higher levels of being. The idea that mankind is steadily improving and that each age is better than the last one is implicit in all his early works. The age of faith giving way to the age of reason and gradually age of reason being succeeded by the age of will – this is how Shaw looked at the development of civilization. But by the end of the century he began to disbelieve the continuous progress of mankind and by the time he came to write *Man and Superman* he changed his philosophy. He argued that history did not bear out this belief in the continuous progress of mankind. In his Notes to *Caesar and Cleopatra* he discarded the idea of progress from ancient time to the modern age. He now advocated Creative Evolution. *Man and Superman* presents this philosophy in detail. It was in the dream interlude of the play in Act III that he made an elaborate statement of it. This Act, together with the Preface and the supplementary Revolutionist's Handbook, embodies Shaw's philosophy of Life Force and Creative Evolution. In the dream interlude which takes place in Hell, Don Juan, who is Shaw's spokesman, has discovered that happiness does not count. He is fed up with his existence in hell which is the home of the unreal and the seekers of happiness. Life, he has found out, is the only reality and he declares his intention of going to Heaven, not because it is a place of perpetual happiness as is commonly believed but because this is the abode of Reality. The Devil is contemptuous about these 'Life worshippers' He declares that Death and not Life governs the earth. Refuting this, Don Juan holds that it is the Life Force which is the ultimate reality.

*Man and Superman* is an important play of Shaw from the point of view of his philosophy but as a play it tends to be discursive with too many subplots. The character of Ann, who in a way represents the life force in the play, is charming. And the greatest charm of the play is its witty dialogue. Shaw himself considered his play, *Back to Methuselah*, which deals with the consequences of losing traditional religious beliefs, to be his greatest. The reason, again, lies in the fact of the play embodying Shaw's philosophy. Critics, however, do not agree with Shaw. As a play it is cumbersome. Popular opinion considers *Saint Joan* (1923) to be his most remarkable play. The object of Bernard Shaw in writing this play was not to write a panegyric on that 15<sup>th</sup> century saint, nor to write a tragedy on her life. He calls this play a 'chronicle play'. The play presents the life story of Joan of Arc, popularly known as the Maid of Orleans, who was burnt at stake in the fifteenth century as a heretic but was later rehabilitated in the same century

and finally canonized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bernard Shaw was a realist and as such did not believe in miracles associated with the Maid. Though Joan claimed and was popularly believed to be guided by the Divine voices, Shaw makes other characters in the play say that they followed her because her course of action was very practical and sound. Throughout the play Shaw follows the historical detail about the life of Joan but the interpretation that he gives to them is typically his own. Joan was born well ahead of her time. So her ideas, which Shaw puts as 'Protestantism' and 'Nationalism', were in confrontation with the values and systems of her time. Those whose interest lay in the continuation of the prevalent system were ranged against her and wanted her to be dead. Joan herself could not understand the reason of the antagonism that she created. At heart she was an honest, simple and religious person who met a cruel death doing what she felt was the command of God.

Bernard Shaw, who died in 1950, continued to write till late in life. Among the plays that succeeded *Saint Joan*, *The Apple Cart* (1928) is remarkable. It is a political satire that presents the story of a monarch who is confronted by his elected cabinet of ministers. They consider the king too meddlesome and so want to put a stop to his powers. They pressurize him to make a proclamation abdicating all his powers to the cabinet and retaining kingship merely as a figurehead. In his typical style Shaw presents the different views on the ideal form of governance. He exposes "the unreality of both democracy and royalty as our idealists conceive them". Added to the political debate is an interlude on marriage and adultery. There is also a scene in which an American mocks full democracy and capitalism.

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## **7.5 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF SHAVIAN DRAMA**

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### **7.5.1 Problem Play**

By the account given in the previous sections you must have realized the extent of Shaw's contribution to the modern English drama. What strikes you to be the most important feature of the Shavian drama? Yes, the establishment of the Problem Play on the British stage. With the plays of Shaw the British drama underwent a change. In the plays of the dramatists of the earlier centuries, many of which you have read either in this course or at earlier stages, the main conflict was that of emotions and values. In the tragedies of Shakespeare you come across a mighty hero who, otherwise good but suffering from a tragic flaw, meets circumstances where this flaw leads to his downfall and finally death. In his comedies, which are mostly love comedies, you find facets of romantic love where handsome heroes and beautiful and intelligent heroines overcome the challenges that come before them and are finally united in a happy wedlock. In the comedies of Ben Jonson, which are known as Comedies of Humour, we find the dramatist exposing the foibles of individuals and trying to correct them by laughing at them. In the Heroic Tragedies of the Restoration period the dramatist shows a conflict between love and honour. The Sentimental comedies eulogized what were considered to

be the noble sentiments. Thus in all these types of drama which flourished in different ages it is the individual with his passions who is the focus of attention. The dramatist is content with focusing on the human predicament. Society and its vital issues were not given dramatic presentation. Even in the Comedy of Manners, which dealt with the English society of the Restoration period, drama had nothing to do with the broader issues of the English society. It merely showed the love life of the contemporary aristocratic society where sex intrigues ruled and outwitting the opponent was the primary concern of the lords and ladies. This was the state of drama not only in England but in the entire continent. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that the Norwegian dramatist, Ibsen showed that drama could be an effective means of presenting not only the passions of men and women but also the fact that society conditioned the lives of people. Under his influence the English drama also began to discuss the issues of society. This type of drama came to be known as problem play. And the man who established it firmly on the British stage was none other than George Bernard Shaw. In the previous section, through a brief account of some of Shaw's plays you have been made familiar with the major issues that Shaw's plays dealt with. Whether it be economy or religion or morality or politics Shaw never shrinks from showing the issues faced by his society realistically. He, however, is not a propagandist. His plays do not preach a particular ideology. On the other hand, he believes in presenting both the sides of a problem. He does not ask us to favour this or that side but leaves us to make our own choice. This is the technique that other major writers of the problem play like John Galsworthy also followed. In nearly all the great plays of Shaw- and they are quite a few – the problem presented is not merely ephemeral. Had this been so, his plays would not have outlived his time and continued to interest us. The fact that many of Shaw's plays still draw a crowd in the theatre whenever they are staged and they are read by a large number of readers shows that his problem plays do present issues that are basic to human nature. For example, the problem of slum ownership presented in *The Widowers' Houses* may be over in England but the issue of human greed leading to exploitation of others is basic to human nature.

### 7.5.2 Comedy of Ideas

The type of drama written by Bernard Shaw is also known as the Comedy of Ideas. Basically, Shaw was a social thinker who took deep interest in discussing the issues of society. As a member of the Fabian Society and public speaker he was in the habit of expressing his ideas on the public platforms. His plays, in a way, serve the same purpose. They provide him an opportunity of presenting his ideas to a larger public in his witty way. If we analyze any of his plays, we soon come to realize that the most powerful feature of the play is the cross current of ideas. "I always have to preach," he admitted himself. "My plays all have a purpose". In his view, "a good play is essentially identical with a church service as a combination of artistic rituals, profession of faith, and sermon." (Hudson 20) He wrote:

Though plays have neither political constitutions nor established churches, they must all, if they are to be anything more than the merest tissue of stage effects, have philosophy, even if it be no more than the unconscious expression of the author's temperament. Your great dramatist philosophizes quite openly. (Hudson 20)

For him his plays are a means of uttering his ideas aloud. It is this fact that makes his plays drama of ideas. By this time you must have read his play, *Candida* and seen for yourself that the play does not present a love story where a man falls in love with the wife of another man and the issue is who will win, the lover or the husband. The play, as we shall discuss in the next unit, is concerned with the idea of man-woman relationship and the role of woman in a man's life.

It is the dominance of ideas in Shaw's plays that accounts for the lack of external action in most of his plays. It has also led to the criticism of his characters that they are not individuals but mouthpieces for his ideas. But to criticize the plays of Shaw on these grounds is to misunderstand the basic nature of his plays. Since the focus of the play is not on characters or incidents but on ideas, the external action in the play is subordinated to the intellectual action. If we look at a play like *Man and Superman*, the action in the play is so slight and even improbable that considered solely on this ground the play deserves no merit. But on the level of ideas it embodies a whole philosophy of life, whether we agree with that philosophy or not. In his plays Shaw's focus is not on the development of plot but on the development of idea or ideas with which the play deals. That is the reason we do not find such characters in Shaw's plays as we find in the plays of Marlowe or Shakespeare or Webster. His characters do not embody human passions, joys and sufferings, weaknesses and strength. They, on the other hand, represent ideas that condition social behavior. To say that his characters are not complex human beings but mouthpieces is to seek in him something that he does not intend to provide.

### 7.5.3 Anti-Romantic Comedy

A striking feature of the Shavian drama is its realism. When accused by his detractors that he was standing on his head, Shaw retorted that since he was standing on his head he was able to see the reality of the world more clearly. This in nutshell is his approach towards life. He looks at people and issues not through the spectacles of convention or morality or idealism but goes straight to their core. He strips them of all covering and exposes them to the glaring light of reason. He distrusted romanticism all his life because it concealed reality and created an imaginary world. He is an avowed anti-romantic. In most of his plays he takes up a conventional thought, puts it under the lens of realism and exposes its distortions. Take the example of *Arms and the Man*. In it Shaw takes up two of the most romanticized subjects – war and love. War has been romanticized since ages in all societies. A man is considered to be a hero who is a great warrior, who defies death and shows exemplary courage on the battlefield. Epics and ballads are full of such exploits of heroes on battlefields. And love has been the subject of countless poems and stories. Lovers like Romeo and Juliet, Laila and Majnu, and Heer and Ranjha who laid

down their lives for the sake of love have become immortal not only in literature but also in public memory. Among all the human passions love has been the most romanticized one. In *Arms and the Man* Shaw takes up both love and war and exposes the romantic façade that surrounds them. His technique is to first present the prevalent romantic view of them and then subject them to the scrutiny of human behavior as found in real life. The opening scene of the play first gives the romantic picture of the soldier through the report of cavalry charge led by Sergius and the imaginative recreation of the scene by Raina in which Sergius is described as leading the charge, defying death and facing bullets and finally making the enemies flee in fright. When Bluntschli, the enemy officer who had witnessed the cavalry charge, comes, he presents the real picture of that charge. He compares Sergius to Don Quixote, the famous character of Cervantes who foolishly attacked the windmill taking it to be a monster in disguise. Bluntschli says that Sergius and his men had simply committed suicide as they would have been butchered if they had come within the firing range, but as luck would have it their side was supplied the wrong ammunition and so had to run away from the cavalry charge. By the time there is a ceasefire Sergius too has come to know the reality of war which has nothing to do with chivalry but is simply a game of superior strategy and better arms power. So he resigns from army. In the case of Raina and Sergius who profess romantic love the reality of their so called 'higher love' is exposed when we come to know that both of them have been unfaithful to each other. Thus Shaw shows to us that the romantic notion of life is merely a pose which does not stand before the real test of life. In *Candida* also Shaw exposes the idealistic concept of marital relationship. But about this you will know in detail in your next unit.

#### 7.5.4 Wit and Humour

If you are asked, after reading a Shavian play or watching it on the stage, what you have liked most in that play, your answer very likely is to be its humour and witty dialogues. You may not endorse Shaw's philosophy of life, you may even disagree with Shaw's views on the issues dealt with in that play, but you seldom leave the play in the middle because it is boring you. A Shavian play is nothing if not entertaining. Shaw had realized it early in his dramatic career that if he wanted to make the public listen to his ideas, he will have to sugarcoat them with humour and wit. Wit consists in word play whereas humour is chiefly born out of the contrast between appearance and reality. Wit is found in the words used and as such it is expressed by the writer. Humour is not expressed by the writer but is perceived by the reader or the spectator. It is induced by the writer through a situation or a character. Shaw is a master of wit and humour. You take up any of his play and you are immediately struck by the brilliance of dialogue in it. The Hell scene in *Man and Superman* where characters utter very long speeches is saved from being dull and boring by the brilliance of dialogues. In *Arms and the Man* when Raina is outraged at learning that Bluntschli carries chocolate instead of ammunition on the battleground, he says, "You can always tell an old soldier by the inside of his holsters and cartridge boxes. The young ones carry pistols and cartridges: the old ones grub." (13) Later on in the play, Petkoff says about taking bath:

I don't believe in going too far with these modern customs. All this washing cannot be good for the health: it's not normal. . . . Look at my father! He never had a bath in his life; and he lived to be ninety eight, the healthiest man in Bulgaria. I don't mind a good wash once a week to keep up my position; but once a day is carrying the thing to a ridiculous extreme. (28-29)

You open any play of Shaw and you would be immediately tickled by witty dialogues. Shaw created humour not only through dialogues but also through comic situations. In *Man and Superman* Tanner runs away from England to avoid getting married to Ann but in the first place where he is stopped by anarchists, he finds Ann following him. In *Arms and the Man* Captain Bluntschli comes to return the overcoat in which Raina and her mother had sent him away. But they don't want him to be seen their house as they don't want to be caught by Petkoff and Sergius. So they ask him to leave the place, but he is seen by Petkoff. This leads to a series of hilarious situations. In *Saint Joan* the Dauphin hides behind courtiers but the way Joan goes straight to him and catches him makes us laugh. In *Candida* the encounter of Burgess with Proserpine is a source of humour. In *The Devil's Disciple* Richard dudgeon is mistaken for the minister Anderson and this gives birth to a funny situation. We find similar misunderstandings in *You Never Can Tell* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Some of the characters- though they are always minor characters- are also a source of humour in Shaw's plays. The Steward in *Saint Joan* is an example of it.

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### 7.6 CANDIDA: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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*Candida* is one of the most popular plays of Bernard Shaw. Written in 1895, it is one of his early plays but it contains all the features of Shavian drama. The Play is subtitled, "A Mystery". About the play Hamon remarks:

It is a remarkable fact that *Candida*, one of the four *Pleasant Plays*, whose meaning is so clear, has been misunderstood by the great majority of critics in England or elsewhere. This failure of understanding must depend on causes foreign to the play itself, for, let me repeat, the clarity of *Candida*, as of all Bernard Shaw's plays, is extreme. If it bears "a Mystery" as a subtitle, this is merely because at the end of the play the poet goes away with a secret in his heart which is a mystery for Candida and her husband. (85)

There may be mystery in the heart of the poet who goes away, but certainly there is no mystery about the basic issue with which the play deals. The play is about the role of a woman in domestic life. The world has by and large been peopled with patriarchal societies. And tradition has it that man would be the leader of the family. He is the bread earner, the custodian of the family honour, the pillar of strength and the woman is the keeper of the house, mother to children and subservient to the male in the family. This has been the concept of the man-woman relationship propagated by literatures all over

the world before the advent of feminism. So far drama is concerned, Ibsen's *The Doll's House* was the first notable play that challenged this stereotype of man-woman relationship. *Candida* was Shaw's response to this issue on the English stage.

*Candida* contains all the features of the Shavian play. It is a comedy of ideas. It is anti-romantic. It is full of wit and humour. But more than all this the play is a brilliant example of Shaw's dramatic technique. Shaw works with what has come to be known as the reversal technique. He first puts the popular, conventional and often romantic view of something and then goes on to demolish this image. By the end of the play he completely reverses that view and establishes a rational and realistic interpretation of the issue. In *Candida* also he does so. We shall discuss each of these aspects of *Candida* in detail in our next unit.

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## 7.7 SUMMARY

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It is now time that we recapitulate what we have discussed in the previous sections of this unit. Having gone through them you must have got a fair idea of the Shavian drama and the creator of it – George Bernard Shaw. Shaw is one of the greatest dramatists in English, generally regarded to be next only to Shakespeare. He was certainly the most influential dramatist of the twentieth century who established a new kind of drama on the British stage. Influenced by the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen, whose plays were translated into English and staged in England towards the end of the nineteenth century, Shaw started writing plays with a social purpose. He regarded theatre as a means of social change and did not agree with those who advocated art for art's sake. In his plays he discussed social, economic and other issues of his time. Thus he popularized the kind of drama that came to be known as the problem Play or the Comedy of Ideas.

Shaw started his writing career with novels but none of his five novels proved successful. He became a music and theatre critic in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This gave him an intimate knowledge of the theatre of the time. He had already come under the influence of socialism and joined the Fabian Society. The early plays that he wrote dealt with the social and economic problems faced by contemporary society. Later, he came to attack the romantic concept of life which took men away from reality. In all his plays Shaw has exposed the hollowness of the traditional beliefs followed blindly by society. His plays encourage us to think afresh about life around us. Shaw propagated the philosophy of Life Force in his later plays.

The most remarkable feature of the plays of Bernard Shaw is wit and humour. It is through them that he keeps us interested in the exposition of his thoughts. Howsoever dated the topic that some of his plays deal with might have become they still retain our attention because of the witty dialogues and comic scenes that we find in them. Critics accuse that Shaw's characters are less individuals than mouthpieces of the dramatist. But

characters like Joan, Bluntschli, Raina, Ann, Candida and Burgess are memorable characters of the British drama.

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### 7.8 GLOSSARY

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**Theatre:** building or outdoors area for the performance of plays and similar entertainments.

**Farce:** a 'low' comedy which provokes laughter of the simplest and most basic kind. The basic elements of farce are exaggerated physical action and absurd characters and improbable situations

**Melodrama:** drama full of sensational events and exaggerated emotions. Exaggerated characters and bombastic dialogues are its other features.

**Realistic Drama:** drama which rejected exaggerated characters and emotions and presented life as it is commonly lived.

**Art for Art's sake:** the concept of art and literature which holds that a work of art has an intrinsic value and it need not serve any social or moral purpose.

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### 7.10. SUGGESTED READING

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Hudson, Lynton. *The Twentieth Century Drama*. London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1946.

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**7.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. What was the state of English drama during the nineteenth century?
2. Describe the various stages through which the revival of English drama took place in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
3. How did George Bernard Shaw lead to the revival of the English drama?
4. What is a Problem Play? Would you put the plays of Bernard Shaw under this category?
5. Discuss the characteristic features of the Shavian drama.
6. Comment on the element of wit and humour in Shaw's plays.

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**UNIT 8: GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *CANDIDA***

**PART 2**

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8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objective

8.3 Detailed Analysis of the Play

8.4 Themes & Subthemes

8.4.1 Man-Woman Relationship

8.4.2 Anti-Romantic Love

8.4.3 Socialist Economy

8.4.4 Church and Society

8.5 Characterization

8.5.1 Major Characters

i. Candida

ii. Morell

iii. Marchbanks

8.5.2 Minor Characters

i. Burgess

ii. Proserpine

iii. Lexy

8.6 As a Comedy of Ideas

8.7 Wit and Humour

8.8 Summary

8.9 Glossary

8.10 References

8.11 Suggested Reading

8.12 Model Questions

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### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

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In the last unit you read about the state of English drama in the nineteenth century and the emergence of the New Drama towards the end of the century. In fact, between the plays of R. B. Sheridan- *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* – which came in 1775 and 1777 and T.W. Robertson's *Society* that came in 1865 there is hardly any play that left a mark on the English drama. And it is only when we come to George Bernard Shaw that we find the real beginning of the modern drama in English. Here at last was a dramatist whose genius was recognized, at first hesitatingly but finally unquestionably, not only in England but also in America and Europe. With his thought-provoking plays Shaw established a new kind of drama, the Comedy of Ideas. The element of wit and humour in his plays made them highly entertaining while the ideas in them made people look afresh at conventional thoughts. His three early plays, *The Widowers' Houses*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *The Philanderer*, which were titled as *Plays Unpleasant* when they were published, were attacks on the socio-economic evils of the contemporary society. Shaw then came out with four plays which he called *Plays Pleasant*. They are *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell*. The first two plays, *Arms and the Man* and *Candida* proved to be highly successful and even today are considered among the most remarkable plays of Shaw. *Candida*, at first, looks like a story of the love triangle where two men are in love with a woman who is the wife of one of the two. She also does not give the impression of being averse to the feelings of the other man who is madly in love with her. The situation finally comes down to the stage where she must choose either her husband or her lover. That she chooses to live with her husband is not because of any consideration for religion, morality or society. The reason that she gives for her choice is typically Shavian and this is what makes this play so remarkable. The play contains all the striking features of the Shavian drama. It also has some of the memorable characters of Shaw – Candida, Marchbanks and Burgess.

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### 8.2 OBJECTIVES

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The present unit will not only introduce you to a remarkable play but also give you an insight into the thoughts and dramatic techniques of one of the greatest English dramatists. While the section on the themes and subthemes will give you an idea how great dramatists combine their themes and sub-themes into a unified whole, the section on characterization will explain to you how Shaw created his characters to embody his ideas. In the last unit you have learnt about the Comedy of Ideas. In this unit you will come across an example of it. You have also read about Shaw's use of wit and humour as a dramatic technique. This unit will give you an example of it.

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**8.3 DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY**

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When Bernard Shaw wrote this play in 1895, he gave it the title – “Candida: A Mystery”. The ‘mystery’ is not a part of its theme; it is a part of its end. The story of the play is not new in the sense that it presents a situation with which theatre-goers as well as readers of drama were already familiar. Known as the ‘love triangle’ it had been treated in several of the European plays and as a dramatic critic for the *Saturday Review* Shaw was familiar with it. It presented a situation in which two men were in love with the same woman, usually a woman already married to one of them. Commenting on this theme, A. C. Ward in his ‘Introduction’ to *Candida* writes:

In the customary treatment of this theme the woman becomes secretly involved with the second man and for a while the husband is unsuspecting. When, in that usual treatment, the husband at length discovers the intrigue, there is a highly dramatic and emotional scene in which the erring wife either repents and parts from her lover, or is cast off by her husband and left to continue the illicit relationship. The moral, or immoral, key to that type of play is in the sexual intrigue, the deception of the honest husband by the unfaithful wife. (94)

In *Candida* Shaw takes up the love triangle but gives it a completely new treatment. He takes up each stage of this conventional story but every time he gives it a new twist. Candida in the play is not an unfaithful wife in the customary sense of the term. There is no sexual intrigue, though Candida openly says to her husband, Morell that she should have taught love to Marchbanks, the traditional lover of the love triangle, but many years her younger. There is a ‘highly dramatic and emotional scene’, as Ward puts it, when Candida is asked to choose between her husband and her ‘lover’. The end is indeed one of the two options mentioned above, but not for the reason given there or adopted by any dramatist in such a story. Shaw gives this conventional story a treatment entirely his own.

The structure of the play is a tight one. This is one play of Shaw that maintains the three unities of Time, Place and Action as advocated by the followers of the Classical school of criticism, though Shaw himself was no such follower. The entire action takes place in the house of the Reverend James Mavor Morell at the St. Dominic Parsonage in the north east quarter of London. The play begins in the morning and ends in the night of the same day. Despite a discussion between Morell and his father-in-law, Burgess on minimum wages to workers, the action of the play is centred on Morell-Candida-Marchbanks relationship only. When the play begins we find ourselves in the sitting room of Morell’s house where he works. His typist, Miss Proserpine Garnett, called Prossy, is working on the typewriter. Morell is reading his letters. When he knows through one of the letters that he has been invited to deliver a lecture, he throws his hands in a hopeless gesture. After a consultation with Miss Proserpine he realizes that he is not free for a lecture for quite a long time. The fact that all his free days are already engaged for lectures at various forums tells us about his stature as a clergyman-speaker. His curate, the Reverend Alexander Mill, nicknamed, Lexy, arrives there. He is somewhat late for his work. His talks with Proserpine indicate that they are not on the best of terms. Soon, Morell tells

him that he is not going to do any work this morning as Candida, his wife who had gone for a vacation with children, is coming for two days to get something for the children and also to know how they are doing without her at home. Her train is due at 11.45 a.m. and he would be going to the railway station to receive her. Lexy informs him that Burgess is coming to meet him. For Morell the visit of Burgess whom he has not met for quite some time is unexpected. When they meet it soon becomes apparent that their relationship is not cordial. Three years ago Morell had persuaded the County councilors not to give a contract to Burgess, a municipal contractor, as he paid very low wages to his workers. Burgess had not forgiven him for that while Morell still felt that Burgess exploited his workers. Burgess now tells him that he has turned into a model employer and pays his workers the approved rates. From his talks, however, Morell realizes that Burgess has not changed and if he pays the approved wages to his workers it is only because he is forced to do so. He asks Burgess to own this fact honestly and not to pretend to be a changed man. While they are engaged in this talk, Candida appears on the scene and asks Morell to be friends with Burgess. A startled Morell realizes that being lost in discussion with Burgess he had forgotten to go to the railway station to receive Candida. Candida tells him that she faced no difficulty as she was not alone. Marchbanks was with her and she has brought him along with her. She tells Burgess that Marchbanks is a shy young man whom Morell had found sleeping on the river embankment. Burgess takes him to be a poor man on whom Morell had taken pity and so is really impressed when Candida tells him that he is in fact the nephew of an earl. He treats him respectfully when he comes in with Morell.

Bernard Shaw is known for his technique of reversal. He first puts an idea or a situation or a character on its face value, that is, as it is conventionally thought and accepted to be. He then exposes the fallacy of the conventional belief by pointing out the difference between what it seems to be and what it actually is, if put to a test of rational scrutiny. By the time he is through with it our perception of that idea or situation or character is completely reversed. This is the technique we find in *Candida* also. In the beginning of the play we get the impression of entering into a normal household. Here is a powerful but humane clergyman who is in great demand as a public speaker. He not only talks but also acts in favour of the poor. He did not allow even his father-in-law to get away with an unfair contract. He has a beautiful wife whom he loves dearly. Though his children do not come on the stage, we get an impression that he is a loving father. Marchbanks, whom we come to know as a poet, is a welcome friend in this house. When he tells that he will not stay for lunch, Morell does not listen to him. Marchbanks says that he wants to stay but Candida has told him not to do so even if Morell asked him to stay for lunch. He owns that he has not understood what Candida meant by that. Morell patiently explains to him that the return of a wife to her home after an absence is something special for a husband and a casual acquaintance is not welcome on such occasions. But since he is a friend, he is actually not in the way and so he should stay.

So far things seem to be normal. But then the process of reversal starts. Marchbanks suddenly announces to Morell that he loves his wife. Morell is at first taken aback and

then starts laughing. He tells him that everybody loves Candida and that is nothing to talk about. He reminds him that he is not even twenty years old while Candida is over thirty and so it seems rather like a case of calf love. Marchbanks bursts out: "You dare say that of her! You think that way of the love she inspires! It is an insult to her." (28) Morell now is losing patience: "To her! Eugene, take care. I have been patient. I hope to remain patient. But there are some things which I won't allow. Don't force me to shew you the indulgence that I should shew to a child." (28) Though he is irritated, he is still not taking Marchbanks seriously. But soon his self-confidence is shaken when Marchbanks meets him on his own ground. He tells him that he considers his behaviour foolish but that is his own perception and that in no way proves Marchbanks wrong. Marchbanks gives the example of Burgess who considers Morell's socialistic ideas foolish but that does not make Morell foolish. So how can he be foolish about his wife? Morell now is shaken. He first tries to win him over by his oratory:

Some day, I hope and trust, you will be a happy man like me. You will be married; and you will be working with all your might and valour to make every spot on earth as happy as your own home. You will be one of the makers of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; and - who knows? - you may be a master builder where I am only a humble journeyman; for don't think, my boy, that I cannot see in you, young as you are, promise of higher powers than I can ever pretend to. I well know that it is in the poet that the holy spirit of man - the god within him - is most godlike. (30)

Marchbanks, however, remains unmoved. He rather scorns at him:

Is it like this for her here always? A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth freedom, being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching? (30-31)

Morell now is completely shaken. Marchbanks goes on hurting him in the same vein. Morell finally loses his control and roughs him up by grabbing his collar. He asks him to leave his house. But there is a problem before him. He knows that if Marchbanks goes away like this, Candida would like to know the reason of his sudden departure and he does not want to give her any explanation of what happened between him and Marchbanks. But Marchbanks insists that he must tell the truth to Candida and if Morell will not do so he himself will write a letter to her telling her the truth. Before Marchbanks could go away from there Candida comes and asks him to stay for lunch. She also smooths his roughed up collar which brightens him. When Candida and Morell are alone, she tells him that though Marchbanks does not know it, he has fallen in love with her. She also says that one day he will understand the importance of love and how he will think about her will depend upon from whom he learns about love. Morell does not understand the meaning of what she says. He only says that he has full faith in her purity and goodness. Candida pooh-poohs his thought and asks him to have faith only in her love for him because if this went away she will care very little for purity and goodness. Morell decides to give Candida and Marchbanks a chance of settling the matter between

them and so goes to a public meeting where he had decided earlier not to go. He takes all others along with him, thus leaving only Candida and Marchbanks at home. When he comes back he wants to know from Marchbanks what happened between him and Candida. Marchbanks only teases him. It is at that time that Candida comes there. She suspects that everything is not normal there. It is then that Morell explains the situation to her and says that she will have to choose between the two.

It is at this stage that Bernard Shaw uses his reversal technique. In the conventional story, it is the men who decide with whom the woman will go. Here the choice is given to Candida. The first response of Candida is ironical- “Oh! I am to choose, am I? I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other.” (76) Morell does not understand the meaning of her statement but Marchbanks is quick to grasp it – “Morell, you don’t understand. She means that she belongs to herself.” (76) Candida asks both of them to spell out what they have to offer to her. In the male-dominated society a man is supposed to be the master of a woman and so a woman is expected to stick to a man who is capable of looking after her and who is strong enough to protect her from the hardships of life. But here Candida chooses to go with the weaker of the two. Thus Bernard Shaw reverses the conventional story. But the climax is yet to come. When Candida starts analyzing the situation of the two men, it becomes clear that Morell, in spite of his physical strength, successful career and social influence, is weaker of the two. It is the women in his life – first his mother and sisters and then Candida – who have been his pillars of strength. They, with the labour of their hands and care of their hearts, created a carefree world of comfort for him so that he could succeed in life. Marchbanks, on the other hand, had always to depend on his own to survive the neglect of his parents and brothers and sisters who never understood him. With his inner strength he has been able to survive all that. So, in fact, he is the stronger of the two. Morell now accepts the truth of his life and Marchbanks goes out in the dark world to find what life has in store for him. Both of them have been made aware of the reality of life through this wonderful woman – Candida. Marchbanks goes out with a mystery in his heart. Explaining this mystery, A. C. Ward comments:

For a brief time he was emotionally dazed by his glimpse of happiness that Candida spreads about her, and a sudden wave of boyish affection and gratitude created in him the illusion and the hope that romantic love for a woman could satisfy his deepest need. But Candida’s long speech at the end of the auction scene reveals to Marchbanks a life of domestic dependence and contentment which his lonely spirit would find imprisoning and disgusting. He discovers at the moment that the secret of life for him lies in the willing abandonment of hope; only by abandoning hope in personal relationship can secure freedom from the pains and jealousies and desolation that they would breed in him. (97-98)

The play thus ends on a note where nobody is a loser. On the other hand, both Morell and Marchbanks learn their lessons of life.

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**Self Assessment Questions 1**

1. How does Shaw use a conventional story for his own purpose?
2. What is Shaw's technique of reversal? How has he used this technique in *Candida*?
3. What is the 'mystery' in the heart of Marchbanks with which he leaves Morell's house?

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#### 8.4 THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

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Though *Candida* deals with the central theme of man-woman relationship it contains some sub-themes as well. The achievement of the dramatist lies in the fact that these sub-themes have been woven dexterously in the texture of the main theme. Thus they become a part of the central theme. Let us first discuss the main theme and then have a look at some other themes in the play.

##### 8.4.1 Man-woman Relationship

In the patriarchal societies throughout the world man has been occupying a dominant position and woman has been given a subordinate place. But towards the end of the nineteenth century women in America and Europe began to protest against their unequal status. They began to claim equality with men both at home and outside. The protest of women against their subordination by men came to be known as the Woman Question. This is now known more popularly as feminism. And a woman who fought for her rightful place was called the New Woman. Shaw was among those who believed in the New Woman. In European drama Ibsen had already depicted the emergence of the New Woman in his play, *A Doll's House*. His Nora symbolized the awakening of the woman to the truth of her existence. Most of the heroines of Shaw have the characteristics of the New Woman. They are capable, self-confident, bold, strong and emotionally balanced. What is more important, they are aware of their strength. *Candida* is a striking example of the Shawian woman. She is capable and confident and fully aware of her strength. In the final scene of the play, she says about Morell who considers himself to be the master of his house:

I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it, and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so. (79)

Shaw believed that woman was not inferior to man but was, in fact, the source of his strength. In his philosophy of the Life Force, woman fulfils a more important role than a woman. Elaborating this, Ward says:

Shaw was convinced, as *Man and Superman* shows, that human beings were created to carry out the divine purpose of raising mankind to a progressively higher level until Man becomes perfected in the Superman. For the achievement of this purpose, Woman (in Shaw's philosophy) is of primary importance as – ideally – the bearer of better and better children while Man is the instrument through whom Woman's destined function is

fulfilled. Whereas the common conventional belief is that the man seeks and pursues and masters the woman he desires to marry, in Shaw's plays it is the woman who seeks out and masters the man she has selected to be the father of her children. Women are, he believed, unconsciously controlled by the Life Force (the divine spirit working in us) and, being guided by the Life Force in its upward striving, they have the superior rank and active control. (95)

In *Candida* Shaw illustrates his philosophy through the women in Morell's life – his mother, his sisters but more than them, his wife, Candida. They make Morell what he is. Candida embodies Shaw's philosophy of the Ideal Woman. The play thus does not present the conventional picture of man-woman relationship where man is strong and woman is weak; he is the master and she is dependent on him. On the other hand, it establishes that man's strength is rooted in woman.

#### 8.4.2 Anti-romantic Love

George Bernard Shaw was a realist who disapproved of any romantic and sentimental approach towards life. In *Arms and the Man*, the play that came before *Candida*, Bernard Shaw had presented an anti-romantic picture of love. In that play 'the higher love' professed by Raina and Sergius was merely a sham and both of them came to realize it after professing it for some time. At the end of the play Raina chooses Bluntschli and Sergius chooses Louka as life partner. These people are realists and as such likely to lead life on a practical plane. In *Candida* Shaw does not openly castigate romantic love, but through its central character, Candida, makes it very clear that Life Force which aims at the betterment of life can work only through realistic love which takes into account the harsh realities of life and makes all efforts to take life to a higher level. Marchbanks represents the romantic love in the play. But in his case it is not a sham. He is only eighteen years of age – an age when a man's mind is likely to be among stars. And he being a poet, this is all the more so. He is attracted towards Candida who is thirty three years old but charming, confident and with a motherly instinct which at once draws lonely Marchbanks towards her. He falls in love with her but this is the kind of love which inspires poetry. That is why, Marchbanks thinks that Morell is not a man worthy of Candida. He is horrified when he finds Candida doing household works such as peeling onions and filling lamps with paraffin oil. When Candida says that he should not worry about her scrubbing brush which has been spoilt and should present her a new one, Marchbanks exclaims:

No, not a scrubbing brush, but a boat: a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the smooth wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot! To carry us up into the sky, where the lamps are stars and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day. (46)

Candida, unlike Morell, does not stop his poetic outburst but her feet are firmly grounded in reality. When she talks about cleaning boots, Marchbanks stops her by saying: "Oh,

don't talk about boots! Your feet should be beautiful on the mountains." She then reminds him: "My feet would not be beautiful on the Hackney Road without boots. " (46)

In the last scene of the play *Candida* removes all illusions of both Morell and Marchbanks about love. To Morell she reveals that it is not marriage or morality or convention that is stopping her from going away with Marchbanks, but only her love for him. Her love for Morell is too strong to be swept away by any romantic effusion. To Marchbanks she reveals that love means taking care of the one you love.

### 8.4.3 Socialist Economy

In the last unit you have read that when Bernard Shaw came to live in London he fell under the sway of socialist economy. He became an active member of the Fabian Society which was an association of socialist thinkers and began to preach socialism on public forums. His plays also bear his socialist philosophy. In *Candida* Morell is a Christian Socialist. He believes in the virtue of unselfish work done for the sake of establishing a happy society. He says to Lexy:

An honest man feels that he must pay Heaven for every hour of happiness with a good spell of hard unselfish work to make others happy. We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it. (9)

Like Shaw, he also preaches socialism wherever he is invited to deliver lectures. He is very much against the exploitation of labour. That is the reason he had opposed Burgess's bid for a County contract to supply clothing to the workhouse. When Burgess says that he should have got the contract because his was the lowest bid, Morell bursts out:

Yes, the lowest because you paid worse wages than any other employer – starvation wages – aye, worse than starvation wages – to the women who made the clothing. Your wages would have driven them to the streets to keep body and soul together. Those women were my parishioners. I shamed the Guardians out of accepting your tender: I shamed the ratepayers out of letting them do it; I shamed everybody but you. (15)

Thus through the character of Burgess Bernard Shaw introduces the theme of socialism in the play.

### 8.4.4 Church and Society

The Victorian age witnessed the social and religious unease born out of the Industrial Revolution. The loss of Faith that Matthew Arnold describes in his poem, "Dover Beach" had created a spiritual crisis in the men and women of that age. One outcome of this was that people were once again looking towards the Church to provide them succor. In *Candida* Shaw refers to this fact. Burgess comes to mend his relationship with his son-in-law after three years of their quarrel not because he has any remorse at that but because

he has realized the growing power of the Church. That Morell has a long list of engagements to deliver lectures is also a testimony of the growing influence of the church.

**Self-assessment Questions 2**

1. How does Shaw combine his themes and subthemes in this play?
2. Does Shaw agree with the tradition concept of woman in society? If not, how does he look at it?
3. How would you describe Shaw's attitude towards love in this play?
4. Write a note on Shaw's economic philosophy?
5. What does the play tell you about the influence of the church on the contemporary society?

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**8.5 CHARACTERIZATION**

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Critics have held that the characters of Bernard Shaw are not living human beings but merely his mouthpieces. It is true that Shaw's plays are plays of ideas and as such the characters in them are bound to be embodiments of the ideas contained in the play. So it is not correct to say that these characters are Shaw's mouthpieces, because he allows even those who appear as the adversaries of his main thesis in a play to present their point of view. Thus our assessment of the characters should be based on how effectively a character succeeds in presenting his or her point of view. In *Candida* all the characters, whether major or minor, contribute to the development of the themes.

**8.5.1 Major Characters****i. Candida**

Candida, as the title of the play itself suggests, is the central character of the play. It is through her that Shaw propounds his philosophy of the role of woman in the scheme of Creation. As we have discussed earlier, Shaw regarded woman to be more powerful than man. It is she who domesticates him and it is in her that man's real strength lies. Woman's love is the love tinged by motherhood. It is as a loving and caring woman that she fulfills her role in the Scheme of Life. From this point of view she is a perfect creation. It is in his stage direction at the time of Candida's first appearance in the play that Shaw highlights the characteristic features of her character:

Candida has just come in and is looking at them with an amused maternal indulgence which is her characteristic expression. She is a woman of 33, well-built, well nourished, likely, one guesses, to become matronly later on, but now quite at her best, with the double charm of youth and motherhood. Her ways are those of a woman who has found that she can always manage people by engaging

their affection, and who does so frankly and instinctively without the smallest scruple. (19)

Morell is obviously very much in love with her but with the illusion that it is he who looks after her. Candida also allows him to have his illusion. It is only in the auction scene that she lets him know the truth. She says:

Ask James's mother and his three sisters what it cost to save James the trouble of doing anything but be strong and clever and happy. Ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one. ... When there is money to give, he gives it: when there is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him and stand sentinel always to keep vulgar cares out. (79)

Candida loves Morell very much and it is this love that binds her to him and no other consideration. She is a strong-minded woman who is not afraid of what people would say. She holds that what binds a man and a woman together is not legal marriage but love. She says to Morell:

Ah, James, how little you understand me to talk of your confidence in my goodness and purity! I would give them both to poor Eugene as willingly as I would give my shawl to a beggar dying of cold, if there were nothing else to restrain me. Put your trust in my love for you, James, for if that went, I should care very little for your sermons: mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day. (52-53)

It is in fact the dominant mother in her, combined with the charm of beauty and intelligence, that draws Eugene towards her. She has a soft corner for him but she is certainly not in love with him. When Eugene realizes her love for Morell, he decides to leave.

## **ii. Morell**

The character of Morell in this play represents the typical male attitude in a male-dominated society. Shaw introduces him as a forty years old clergyman who has reached a state of social and professional eminence. He is confident of himself and maintains an authoritative posture. In his conversation with Burgess in the beginning of the play we get a glimpse of this attitude. His popularity as a public speaker is indicative both of his ability and social eminence. Morell has a loving wife, whom he loves dearly, and affectionate children. In this way Morell is leading a happy life.

He faces the crisis of his life when Marchbanks comes to his house with Candida. When Marchbanks announces that he loves Candida, Morell at first does not take him seriously. The gap in their ages makes this situation look preposterous. But Marchbanks tells him that what looks foolish to a person may not be so for another. He gives the example of Burgess who considers Morell's socialism foolish but that does not make it so. Morell's

self-confidence is dented for the first time. Marchbanks calls him a windbag whose preachings are mere words without substance. His final blow comes when he quotes the Bible to Morell in support of his argument. He refers to the story of King David who began to dance in a trance and was applauded by his courtiers but his wife hated him for this in her heart. A shaken Morell now begins to appeal to him not to go on like that. He tells that to shake a man's self-confidence is the Devil's work and that everyone needs the help of another to save him from self-doubt. As Marchbanks continues to go on like that Morell is irritated and he grabs his collar and asks him to leave his house. Marchbanks begins to go but he insists that Morell should tell Candida the actual reason of his going away. If he will not do so he will write a letter to her describing what happened between him and Morell.

Morell would perhaps have ignored what Marchbanks said to him about Candida, had Candida herself not told him that Marchbanks had fallen in love with her though he was yet unaware of it. Her attitude to the whole episode makes a conventional Morell uneasy. He knows that if he has lost the love of Candida nothing will bind her to him. So he decides to give them a chance to sort it out by leaving them alone at home. Though he shows magnanimity, he is actually on the racks. So he asks Marchbanks on the first opportunity that he is alone with him what happened between him and Candida. He grows furious when he gets evasive answers from him. When Candida appears on the scene she realizes that something is amiss. Morell now comes out with what had happened between him and Marchbanks. Candida grows angry with Marchbanks, but Morell showing the typical male attitude says that it is between the two men and he is the right person to handle it. He says to Candida that she will have to choose between him and Marchbanks. A visibly angry Candida asks the two men to make their bid by spelling out what they have to offer to her. Morell's bid shows his typical male attitude:

I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defence, my honesty for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman. (77)

He assumes that Candida is dependent on him for his very survival. It is then that Candida begins to explain, not to him but to Marchbanks, how since his childhood Morell has been looked after by his mother and sisters. They had made all kinds of sacrifices for ensuring a brilliant academic career for Morell. After marriage it is Candida who has been taking care of all his problems. When Candida elaborates what she does for him that Morell realizes the truth of her statement. He admits his debt of gratitude to her. He accepts that without Candida his life would not be what it is. He thus qualifies for being the weaker of the two, a condition Candida had put for her selection.

### iii. Marchbanks

The character of Marchbanks is one of the master creations of Shaw. This eighteen years old poet is a bundle of contradictions. He belongs to an aristocratic family but has been a neglected child. He does not have the ambitions of his class but is content to be a poet.

When Morell found him for the first time, he was starving and sleeping on the Embankment. He is physically weak but intellectually strong. When Morell in his fit of anger rushes towards him, he cowers before him. But as soon as the physical danger is gone, he is his old provoking self. He says to Morell that he may not be physically as strong as him but intellectually he is his match. He not only says it, he proves it also. He gives a befitting response to Morell's reference to his age. Even when Candida refers to his being quite younger than her, he says that in a hundred years both would be of the same age. In the auction scene when Morell offers his strength and position and industry for his bid, Marchbanks offers his weakness and heart's desolation as his bid. But when Candida says that she will choose the weaker of the two, it is Marchbanks who understands her meaning. Candida has to explain to Morell that he is in fact not strong but weak, dependant on his wife for his strength. Candida asks Marchbanks if she is his mother and sister to him, he rejects the very idea. He has learnt a new lesson of life and is ready to face the challenges lying ahead. He goes out in the night with a 'mystery' in his heart.

### **8.5.2 Minor Characters**

A dramatist uses minor characters either to highlight his theme or themes by creating subthemes or to throw light on the major characters. In *Candida*, Shaw has created three minor characters- Burgess, Proserpine and Lexy. These characters highlight the character of Morell and also throw light on some of the subthemes of the play.

#### **i. Burgess**

Burgess is a memorable character of Shaw. He, in fact, is the most lively character of *Candida*. He is a typical representative of the businessman whose sole motto in life is profit. Since he knew that the lowest bid would be accepted by the County Council for a contract, he had quoted a bid which, as Morell realized, would have given only starvation wages to his workers. That is why he prevailed upon the members of the council and stopped Burgess from getting the contract. When the play begins Burgess has called upon his son-in-law after three years. Though he professes to have forgiven Morell for what he had done, soon it becomes evident that this not so. He has come to mend his relationship with him because he has realized the growing power of Morell. His ideas have not changed at all. He says to Morell that giving more money than is absolutely necessary to workers is only harmful for them. They would spend it only on drink. Burgess does not believe in the socialist ideas of Morell. He is not even a happy churchgoer. When Morell asks him to go with him to his public lecture, he is very reluctant. But when he comes to know that the chief guest that evening is one who can get him contracts, he is immediately ready to go. The character of Burgess is a rich source of comedy in the play. However, Shaw has created this character chiefly to express his ideas on socialism.

#### **ii. Proserpine**

The character of Proserpine gives us commentary on the characters of Morell and Candida. She is the typist of Morell. We come to know that she has left her earlier job where she used to get a higher salary to work for Morell. Morell is unaware of the reason behind it but Candida knows it. She tells him that Proserpine is in love with him. That is why she agrees to do even household works for him. This fact has a dramatic significance in the play. Marchbanks considers Morell to be an unlovable person. In his eyes he is a mere windbag who is in love with his voice and his image and he is neither capable of loving others nor is worthy of being loved by others. This is the basis of his premise that Candida cannot possibly be in love with Morell. The fact that Proserpine is in love with him – not to talk of Candida's love for him – denies this very premise. Marchbank's conversation with Proserpine about love also throws light on Shaw's philosophy of love. Proserpine's conversation with Burgess throws light on both the characters.

### **iii. Lexy**

Lexy is one character in the play who is totally colourless. He does not have any characteristic features of his own. Bernard Shaw has used his character to highlight the character of Morell. He is the curate of Morell and has almost a sense of hero worship for him. He walks and talks in the manner of Morell. Proserpine makes fun of this, but this does not make any difference to him. Morell's behavior towards him is friendly. Burgess even remarks that he does not know how to treat his subordinates, but Morell says that he treats him as he should – as his curate and fellow church official. Thus through Lexy Bernard Shaw reveals the character of Morell.

### **Self-assessment Questions 3**

1. Which character is stronger – Morell or Marchbanks? How can you say that?
2. Describe some of the traits to prove that Candida is a New Woman.
3. Would you say that Burgess presents a contrast to the character of Morell?
4. What purpose do minor characters serve in the play?

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## **8.6 CANDIDA AS A COMEDY OF IDEAS**

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In the previous unit you have read about the Comedy of Ideas. Let me refresh your memory by reminding you that unlike comedies written by earlier dramatists, a comedy of ideas deals not with characters or situations or emotions but with ideas. The plays of Bernard Shaw fall under this very category. He had realized very early in his dramatic career that drama can be an effective means of discussing prominent issues concerning man and his society. So he used his plays for propagating his ideas. The conflict in his plays is not between two sets of characters but between two sets of ideas. Shaw felt that man was governed by conventional ideas that were handed down to him by the previous generation, and did not take the trouble of examining them afresh. If examined closely, many of the beliefs and practices would be found untenable. This is what he started doing

in his plays – examining prevalent ideas that governed contemporary society closely and putting them to the test of reality. He made his spectators/ readers think afresh about those ideas.

*Candida*, as you must have realized after going through the discussion of its themes in an earlier section, does the same thing. It deals with the conventional idea of man-woman relationship and shows that man's claim of superiority and woman's dependence on him is more a creation of patriarchal society than the truth. You have also seen how Shaw exposes the falsity of this conventional belief, first by putting the known belief and then attacking it by reversing the whole situation. In this play he first projects Morell as a strong man dominating others, his authority being acknowledged and accepted by others, and then proceeds to reverse this impression by showing that his real strength lies somewhere else – in Candida. Another idea that Shaw attacks in this play is that of romantic love. The play also discusses the issue of socialism. You have come across a detailed discussion of all these ideas in earlier sections of this unit.

#### **Self-assessment Questions 4**

1. What is a comedy of Ideas? How is it different from other types of comedy?
2. What are the important ideas that *Candida* deals with?

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### **8.7 WIT AND HUMOUR**

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As you have come to know Shaw makes his ideas palatable by wrapping them in wit and humour. Without it they would look pedantic. He makes us laugh and then makes us think. So his plays are never boring. As a successful public speaker Shaw knew how to retain the attention of his listeners. In the same way he took care that his spectators/ readers are absorbed in the play. All his plays are highly entertaining. *Candida* is a good example of Shaw's brilliant wit and unfailing sense of comedy. In the very opening scene when Lexy is late on his work and says that he does not know how to get rid of his habit of sleeping till late, Morell, like a good clergyman says – "Watch and pray". In response Lexy says, "How can I watch when I am sleeping?" The play is full of such witty statements. A rich source of humour in the play is conversation between Burgess and Proserpine. When hearing that Candida has to do menial and filthy works like peeling onions and filling lamps with paraffin oil, Marchbanks exclaims, "Horror! horror!" Burgess is alarmed at this, but Candida says that it is poetic horror only. The most comic part of the play is the situation when Burgess begins to consider everybody in the house to be mad.

#### **Self-assessment Questions 5**

1. How does Bernard Shaw make his ideas palatable?
2. You have been given some examples of witty statements in the play. Can you find some others like them.
3. Find some humorous situations in the play.

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**8.8 SUMMARY**

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It is time that we recapitulated what we have learnt so far. We have seen how Bernard Shaw popularized a new kind of drama – the Comedy of Ideas on the British stage. It shifted the focus of the play from story to ideas. Drama became a means of discussing contemporary socio-economic life and dramatists led by Shaw encouraged the spectators/readers to probe into the accepted beliefs and thoughts that governed man's social behavior. *Candida*, for example, makes us ask the question whether man is really the master of his house and woman merely a dependent on him. We have also known how Bernard Shaw uses characters to present his ideas. His characters are not, as alleged by some, merely his mouthpieces, but he is certainly not interested in character as such. His characters are created around certain ideas. They are the mouthpieces of the ideas that Shaw is putting forward in that play. To keep us interested in his ideas Shaw uses wit and humour in his plays.

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**8.9 GLOSSARY**

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Parish – a district in the Christian Church

Parson – the priest in the parish

Parsonage – a house provided by the Church for a parson

Clergyman – a Christian priest

Curate – an assistant to a parson

Earl – a British nobleman; a high ranking person in the British social hierarchy

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**8.10 REFERENCES**

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Ward, A. C. 'Introduction' to *Candida*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975.

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**8.11 SUGGESTED READING**

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Dietrich, Farr Richard. *British Drama: 1890 – 1950*. Boston: Tawney Publishers, 1989.

Hamon Augustin, *Bernard Shaw*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1999.

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**8.12 MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss *Candida* as a Comedy of Ideas.

- 2 What are the major themes and subthemes in *Candida*.
3. Give a comparison of the characters of Morell and Marchbanks.
- 4 How does Candida embody Shaw's idea of a New Woman.
5. Write a critical note on the element of wit and humour in *Candida*.
6. Discuss Bernard Shaw as a dramatist in the light of the play, *Candida*.

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**UNIT 9: T. S. ELIOT: *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL***

**PART 1**

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9.1 Introduction

9.2. Objectives

9.3T.S. Eliot: Life and Works

9.4. Revival of the Verse Drama

9.5 Eliot and the Verse Drama

9.6 Murder in the Cathedral: a Critical Introduction

9.7 Detailed Summary of the Play

9.8 Summing up

9.9 Glossary

9.10 References

9.11 Suggested reading

9.12 Terminal and Model Questions

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**9.1 INTRODUCTION**

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T. S. Eliot is one of the greatest literary figures of the twentieth century. With his poetry, criticism and drama he exerted a powerful influence not only on English literature but also on other literatures of his period, including modern Hindi literature. He is chiefly remembered for his poetry and criticism but his plays occupy a special place in his writings. He played an important role in the revival of the verse drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote five full-length plays and two short pieces. Moreover, he had always had a deep interest in drama. A considerable part of his critical writing is concerned with drama, particularly Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. He has been very much occupied with issues of language in drama. *Murder in the Cathedral* is the first full-length play that Eliot wrote. It was written in 1935 for the Canterbury Festival and deals with a theme suitable for the occasion. Nonetheless, it gives us an insight into Eliot's dramatic writing. In presentation and language it marks a departure from the plays being written during that period in England.

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**9.2 OBJECTIVES**

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In this and the following unit you will be introduced to the verse drama, its revival in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and T. S. Eliot's experiments in this field. The units will present an in-depth study of *Murder in the Cathedral*, one of the remarkable English plays of the last century. Its theme of martyrdom introduces us to one of the most important spiritual concerns of man in all ages.

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**9.3 T. S. ELIOT: LIFE AND WORKS**

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Thomas Stearns Eliot was an American who later came to live in England and became its citizen. He was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888. He lived in St. Louis during the first eighteen years of his life and attended Harvard University. After a year in Paris, he returned to Harvard to pursue his doctorate in philosophy but left for Europe again and settled in England in 1914, studying at Merton College, Oxford. The following year he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and began working in London first as a teacher and then in Lloyd's bank. It was in London that Eliot came under the influence of Ezra Pound, the poet-critic who recognized his poetic genius and helped in the publication of his poems in literary magazines. Eliot's first important poem, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was published in the magazine *Poetry* in 1915. His first book of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published in 1917 and it made him famous. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922 Eliot became the leading voice of modern English poetry. This is regarded as the most influential English book of poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which influenced a large number of poets. By 1930 Eliot became the dominant English poet of his time. His major later poetic works include *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets*

(1943). As a poet Eliot was influenced by the Metaphysical poets of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and the French Symbolist poets.

Not only as a poet but also as a critic T. S. Eliot dominated the literary world of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His books of literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood*, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, *After Strange Gods* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. He was, as he claimed, a classicist in literature. In his criticism he targeted the subjectivity and vague romantic effusion in poetry. His criticism includes a large number of essays on plays, including those of Shakespeare and of Jacobean dramatists.

Eliot's dramatic works make an important part of his writings. There was a strong dramatic element in his poetry, particularly the early poetry. This shows his interest in drama. His *Sweeney Agonistes* written in 1926 is generally considered to be a fine piece of dramatic poetry. As a play it remains fragmentary and incomplete – 'Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama' as it was called. Eliot writes about this play in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*:

My intention was to have one character whose sensibility and intelligence should be on the plane of the most sensitive and intelligent members of the audience; his speeches should be addressed to them as much as to the other personages in the plays or rather should be addressed to the latter, who were to be material, liberal minded and visionless, with the consciousness of being overheard by the former.  
(153)

This character is Sweeney. *Sweeney Agonistes* was a tentative effort of Eliot towards drama and it remains only that. Eliot's next attempt at drama was also fragmentary. *The Rock*, written in 1934, was a collaborative effort with E. Martin Browne and Eliot had contributed a scene and the speech of the chorus to it. It was a pageant play written in aid of a church building fund. The next year, Eliot was again asked to write a play for a particular occasion, the Canterbury Festival and he came out with a play suitable for the occasion. *Murder in the Cathedral* was the play that he wrote for this occasion and this was the first full –length play that Eliot wrote. It dealt with the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1170. The play proved a success and has been performed since then several times at different places. It was, however, written for a religious occasion and had incidents and characters from the twelfth century. So when Eliot thought next of writing a play with a contemporary setting he did not find this play to be of much help to him. That is why he writes in his *Poetry and Drama*, "It was only when I put my mind to thinking what sort of play I wanted to do next, that I realized that in *Murder in the Cathedral* I had not solved any general problem; but that from my point of view the play was a dead end." (23) The next play that Eliot wrote was *The Family Reunion* which was produced in 1939. The scene of the play is the family drawing room of a twentieth century house and the characters are modern men and women. Though the setting of the play is modern it does not deal with any contemporary issue. It presents the theme of sin and redemption and for its framework Eliot has again looked towards the

ancient Greek drama. *The Cocktail Party* produced in 1949 was a decisive step towards a contemporary drama so far its setting and characters are concerned but again the theme of the play is of spiritual rather than social significance in the ordinary sense of the term. D. E. Jones remarks about the thematic concern of Eliot in these plays:

In Eliot's plays in a contemporary setting, as in the life they reflect, the saint becomes more and more remote and ordinary experience is brought into the foreground. In *The Family Reunion* the exceptional person is still in the centre of the picture, but it is a family portrait and his spiritual election is made on behalf of the family. In *The Cocktail Party*, the exceptional person has been moved to one side of the composition and the social group is in the centre. (124-125)

The next play that Eliot wrote came out in 1953. This was *The Confidential Clerk*. As in the earlier two plays, in this play also a choice is made between a normal family and a dedicated life leading away from the family. But in *The Confidential Clerk* the exceptional person is much more closely integrated in the pattern of ordinary life. Eliot's last play, *The Elder Statesman* came out in 1959. It uses a simple situation and uncomplicated characters to present a profound vision of human life. The plays of T. S. Eliot can be succinctly summed up in the words of D. E. Jones:

The sense of the un-heroic dimensions of our age which has been strong in Eliot from the time of *Prufrock* led him away from tragedy for a time; yet he has come back, in his latest play, to the borders of the tragic realm, has come back, in fact, to the realm of melodrama, into which he made a foray in *Sweeney Agonistes* and, in that first dramatic essay, the melodrama is tempered with an admixture of comedy. The first major play was a tragedy, though a Christian tragedy, which, in the larger pattern of Providence, may be seen as a Divine Comedy. The first of the plays in a contemporary setting, was, in effect, an attempt to modernize a Greek tragedy without softening the tragic outlines. In *The Cocktail Party*, however, he turned tragic-comedy into much nearer comedy; the tragic element which he introduced – the death of Celia – is merely reported and takes its place within the comic pattern. He went on in *The Confidential Clerk* to render melodrama, a lower form of tragedy, into something very like farce, a lower form of comedy. With *The Elder Statesman* he returns to the sterner form of Greek tragedy. (179-180)

All Eliot's plays have been verse dramas and they played a considerable role in the revival of verse drama in English in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of popularity, *Murder in the Cathedral* still remains the most popular of Eliot's plays.

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#### 9.4 REVIVAL OF THE VERSE DRAMA

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A verse drama is a play in which dialogues are written in metrical form or rhyme. Most of the Elizabethan plays, including those of Shakespeare and Marlowe were written in verse. Since verse was supposed to be the natural medium for the expression of emotional outbursts as well as romantic feelings it was only befitting that the leading characters of the play should speak in verse. Shakespeare made a brilliant use of the blank verse for dramatic purposes. The Jacobean dramatists like Webster and Middleton also used verse for their dialogues. So did Dryden for his heroic tragedies. But the situation changed during the eighteenth century. For the Comedy of Manners that the dramatists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century wrote prose rather than verse was the suitable medium for dialogues. For their witty dialogues prose was the natural medium. So dramatists like Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh and later on Goldsmith and Sheridan wrote prose drama rather than verse drama. The Romantic and Victorian poets tried their hands at verse drama but did not succeed at it. The poetic plays of Shelley and Byron had some fine poetry in them but as drama these plays were not very good. That is the reason these plays could not lead to a revival of verse drama in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the only remarkable dramatist between Sheridan and Shaw was Oscar Wilde who was a master of witty dialogues written in prose. With Bernard Shaw a new kind of drama – the problem play or the comedy of ideas – was established on the British stage. Dramatists like Shaw and Galsworthy began to use drama for the purpose of social change. They raised important socio-economic issues of their time through their plays. It is obvious that prose and not poetry could be a suitable medium for this.

Nonetheless, there took place a revival of the verse drama during the first half of the twentieth century. W. B. Yeats was the most remarkable poet-dramatist to lead this revival. He had rightly put his finger at the deficiency of the contemporary drama when he said:

It cannot be impassioned, that is to say vital, without making somebody gushing and sentimental. Educated and well-bred people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves and they have no artistic and charming language, except light persiflage, and no powerful language at all, and when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace. (Hudson 49)

Yeats went back to Irish myths, legends and folk tales for the themes of his plays. The Irish Literary Theatre founded in 1899 became a workshop in which he shaped his plays. With poetic plays like *The Countess Cathleen*, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *The Shadowy Waters*, *Deirdre* and *Purgatory* Yeats gave the verse drama a new lease of life. About Yeats's contribution to verse drama Eliot observes:

In his first period he wrote plays in verse about subjects conventionally accepted as suitable for verse in a metric which – though even at that early stage having the personal Yeats rhythm – is not really a form of speech quit suitable for anybody except mythical kings and queens. His middle period *Plays for Dancers*

are very beautiful but they do not solve any problem for the dramatist in verse. It was only in his last play *Purgatory* that he solved his problem of speech in verse, and laid all his successors under obligation to him. (*Poetry and Drama* 20)

Other dramatists that led to the revival of the poetic drama were T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden and Christopher Fry.

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### **9.5 ELIOT AND THE VERSE DRAMA**

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Eliot had since the very beginning of his literary career been interested in drama and the language of drama. An issue that occupied his thought was the verse drama and its revival in the twentieth century. In *Poetry and Drama* he writes that it is the nature of the subject in a play that should determine the medium of dialogue in it. No play should be written in verse for which prose is dramatically adequate. From this comes out the assumption that poetry should serve a dramatic function in a verse play and should not be used merely for the sake of added pleasure. Eliot says that if poetry “merely gives the people of literary tastes the pleasure of listening to poetry at the same time that they are witnessing a play, then it is superfluous. It must justify itself dramatically, and not merely be fine poetry shaped into a dramatic form.” (12) The test of it lies in the fact that in that case poetry does not attract a spectator’s attention towards itself. The audience, its attention held by the dramatic action, its emotions stirred by the situation between the characters, should be too intent upon the play to be wholly conscious of the medium.

Eliot does not agree with the commonly accepted belief that prose dialogues in a play sound natural while dialogues in verse are not natural. He holds that the prose dialogues in a play are as remote from the vocabulary, syntax and rhythm of ordinary speech as dialogues in verse are. So “if you look at it in this way, it will appear that prose, on the stage, is as artificial as verse: or alternately, that verse can be as natural as prose.” (13) Moreover, he believes that it is poetry which is more capable of expressing the permanent and universal emotions of man:

People have tended to think of verse as a restriction upon drama. They think that the emotional range, and the realistic truth, of drama is limited and circumscribed by verse. People were once content with verse in drama, they say, because they were content with a restricted and artificial range of emotion. Only prose can give the full gamut of modern feeling, can correspond to actuality. But is not every dramatic representation artificial? And are we not merely deceiving ourselves with appearances, instead of insisting upon fundamentals? Has human feeling altered much from Aeschylus to ourselves? I maintain the contrary. I say that prose drama is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for neurologists, to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral

and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse. (Hinchliffe 22)

In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot was dealing with a theme and background which required a different kind of verse, but in his later plays which are set in contemporary background he tried and succeeded in creating verse suitable to their theme.

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### 9.6 MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

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As you know, *Murder in the Cathedral* is Eliot's first full-length play. You also know that he was asked to write a play for the Canterbury Festival and this was the play that he wrote. It was only natural that he should write on a theme suitable for the occasion and he chose the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury as the subject of this play. But, as D. E. Jones aptly notes,

In his first play Eliot turned immediately to what was to be the central theme of almost all his plays – the role of the spiritually elect in society, the fructification of communal life by the example of the saint and the saintly. And he began with the full-scale study of martyrdom. (50)

Eliot wanted to avoid the Shakespearean model for his play which he regarded as the reason of the failure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century verse dramatists. So he went to the medieval religious drama and the ancient Greek drama to select features of his play. He decided to adopt the versification of the Morality play, *Everyman* and the chorus of the Greek drama. The murder of Thomas Becket at the hands of four knights was a historical fact and Eliot has adhered strictly to the historical facts in his play. He focuses on the last days of Becket and the earlier details are filled in during the course of the action through the conversation between the tempters and the Archbishop and later on between him and the knights. So structurally the crisis and the denouement of the play merge with each other. This has left no scope for the dramatist to develop the various stages leading to the final action. This, however, has its advantage also. The swiftness of the action creates a shocking impact on the spectator. Except Thomas Becket no other character in the play has been individualized. This leaves the focus entirely on Becket. The last speech of the knights is addressed to the audience which is a 20<sup>th</sup> century audience. In this way Eliot links the past with the present and establishes the contemporary relevance of the play.

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### 9.7 DETAILED SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

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The play presents before us the events of the last part of the year 1170. It begins with the chorus consisting of the poor women of Canterbury. These women have gathered outside the Cathedral of Canterbury. They have a foreboding of some impending danger. But they cannot guess its nature or source. Even the cathedral does not seem to provide them

any safety. They, however, realize that some unknown force has compelled them to come there and they are going to witness some momentous event. The plentiful October has turned into sombre November and the land has become brown with mud. The coming New Year does not seem to bring any promise of a bright future. Destiny seems to be waiting round the corner. It is the time when Christ was born and it is also the time of the martyrdom of saints.

The women recollect that seven years have passed since Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury left them. He was always kind to his people. But it would not be well if he returns. His return would mean an upheaval in their placid lives. Whether the king rules or the barons rule they have been largely left to themselves. And they are happy if they are left alone. They have been carrying on with their sufferings and their joys. They have continued with the affairs of their lives, tilling the land, plying their trades and keeping their household in order. They have suffered various oppressions but they have been content with their obscure lives. Now they fear the disturbance of the coming events. Winter seems to bring death from the sea. Nor shall spring bring any happiness. Disastrous summer would burn up the beds of their streams and the poor would be facing a decaying October. But they can do nothing but wait-

We wait, we wait,  
And the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be  
martyrs and saints.  
Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen. (13)

Three priests come there and they also talk about the seven years that have passed since the Archbishop left them. They do not know what the Archbishop and the Pope are doing with the English and French kings who are involved in ceaseless intrigues. The third priest says that the temporal powers are involved in endless violence, treachery and corruption. They are governed by one law only – cease power and keep it. The first priest cries in agony that if these things do not cease the poor will forget “their friend, their Father in God.”

While the priests are expressing their grief, a messenger comes to announce that the Archbishop is in England and will be reaching Canterbury shortly. So they have very little time to prepare for his welcome. The first priest asks him if there has been any reconciliation between the king and the archbishop. He is sceptical about the reconciliation of two proud men. The second priest asks whether the arrival of the archbishop means war or peace. The third priest comments that there can be no peace between the hammer and the anvil. The first priest asks if the Archbishop is coming with full assurance from the King or only secure in the power of Rome, the spiritual rule and the love of the people. The messenger is sure about the love of the people who have thronged the streets through which the archbishop is passing. He also knows that the Pope and the king of France are fully backing the archbishop, but he cannot say anything about the attitude of the English king. When the Archbishop had parted from the King he is reported to have said that he will not see him again in this life. Opinions about his

meaning vary but in any case it does not augur well. When the messenger goes away the priests begin to reflect upon the situation. They are quite uneasy about it. Referring to the time when Thomas Becket was the Chancellor, the first priest says that even then he was alone, hating and being hated by the feudal lords. The king then loved him, but now pride of both these men stands between them ruling out any reconciliation between the two. The chorus again chants its foreboding of some impending evil. They do not wish the Archbishop to come there:

O Thomas, return, Archbishop return, return to France.  
Return quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet.  
You come with applause, you come with rejoicing,  
but you come bringing death into Canterbury. (18)

They do not wish anything to happen. For seven years they have lived quietly, living and partly living. Now the arrival of the Archbishop would mean that they would not be able to continue with their old life. The second priest scolds them for speaking in that manner. At this juncture the Archbishop enters there and asks the priest not to scold them. They know and do not know that action is suffering and suffering action. The priests welcome the archbishop and say that he will find his rooms as he had left them. The Archbishop says that he will try to leave them as he will find them. The second priest asks him if his enemies still pursued him. The Archbishop says that at the moment they were waiting and watching. He too can do nothing except wait for the turn of the events.

Then four Tempters come before the archbishop one after the other. Each of them tries to lure him with an offer and an assurance. The first Tempter reminds him of the happy times when he was a friend of the king. It was a life of pleasure and sensuous gratification. He urges the archbishop to give up his ascetic life and return to the good time of mirth and pleasures. The archbishop tells him that he “comes twenty years too late”. Then comes the second Tempter who reminds him of his powers when he was the Chancellor. He says, “Power is present. Holiness hereafter.” Moreover, as a chancellor he has an opportunity to serve the poor and the needy. When the archbishop asks him what he shall have to do, the tempter tells him to submit to the authority of the king. The archbishop asks him to go way and let him continue with his duties as a churchman. The third Tempter now appears before the archbishop. He represents the feudal lords and asks the archbishop to join hands with the feudal lords. The archbishop reminds him that it was he who had helped the king in curbing the powers of the barons. So the third tempter also goes away from there. The arrival of the fourth Tempter surprises the archbishop. He had expected the three tempters but not the fourth one. The fourth tempter presents before him the vision of a glorious martyrdom. Kings come and go but the martyrs rule people from their tombs. So he asks the archbishop to go on his way and achieve spiritual glory. The archbishop finds him echoing his own thoughts and the realization dawn upon him that the vision of spiritual glory is no less sinful than the vision of temporal power. He now knows that

The last temptation is the greatest treason:  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason. (44)

Thomas Becket thus succeeds in overcoming the temptations that come his way and is now ready to submit to the will of God.

Between Part I and Part II of the play there is an Interlude which comprises the sermon that the Archbishop gives in the morning of the Christmas in the year 1170. He tells them to ponder over the meaning of the masses of Christmas Day:

For whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on the Christmas Day we do this in celebration of His Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in his coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. (47)

He then explains the Christian meaning of peace which stands for the spiritual peace. Finally, he reminds the congregation that while they celebrate Christ's birth and death on Christmas, the next day they celebrate the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity. He concludes that martyrdom is never an accident, nor is it a man's will to become a martyr. It is always a Divine design.

The Part II of the play presents the murder of the Archbishop in his cathedral on 29 December, 1170. It begins with the chorus which creates the atmosphere of that fateful day. The priests enter with the flags of the martyrs Stephen and John and the flag of the Holy Innocents. And then enter four Knights. The knights demand to be taken straight to the archbishop as they have some urgent business with him. When the archbishop comes before them, they charge him with rebellion against the king and the law of the land. It was the king who appointed him the archbishop and so it was his duty to carry out the wishes of the king. The archbishop denies the charges and says that he does not defy the king's command except in the matters where he has to perform his duties as the archbishop. This enrages the knights and they ask him to appear before the king or face the consequences. When they find the archbishop unmoved they prepare to kill him. The priests hurriedly take the archbishop away from there to the inside of the church and lock the doors. The archbishop asks them to unlock the doors as he would not want the door of the church barred for anyone. The knights enter the hall and kill the archbishop. The play ends with the address of the knights to the audience where they defend their action. They assert that what they did was not motivated by any personal motive but was done in the larger interest of the country. They even go the extent of saying that Thomas Becket deliberately courted his death. So it was a case of suicide and not murder.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. What is a verse drama? What were the reasons of the decline of the verse drama?
2. What is T. S. Eliot's opinion about the verse drama?
3. What was the occasion that led to the writing of *Murder in the Cathedral*?
4. Comment on the various features of this play.

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### 9.8 SUMMING UP

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The unit gives an introduction to the works of T. S. Eliot, particularly his dramatic works. You have also known about the verse drama, its popularity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' its decline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and finally its revival in the twentieth century. T. S. Eliot, one of the leading poet-dramatists believed that while prose tended to express the superficial and the ephemeral, poetry was the suitable medium to express the basic human emotions. He was always interested in drama and particularly the language of drama. After two early fragmentary attempts, Eliot wrote his first full-length play, *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935. He wrote this play for the Canterbury Festival. The play deals with the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is one of the notable verse plays of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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### 10.9 GLOSSARY

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**Chorus** – In the Greek drama, chorus was a group of singers/ actors which usually commented upon the events in the play from the point of view of the common person touched by the action.

**Denouement:** the final part of a play or story in which the crisis of the story is resolved.

**Morality Play:** type of play popular in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in which moral qualities are represented as characters.

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### 10.10 REFERENCES

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### 10.11 MODEL AND TERMINAL QUESTIONS

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Q.1 Write a critical note on the revival of the verse drama and T. S. Eliot's contribution to it.

Q.2 Write a critical appreciation of *Murder in the Cathedral*.

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**UNIT 10: T. S. ELIOT: *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL* PART 2**

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10.1 Introduction

10.2 Objectives

10.3 Historical Background of the Play

10.4 Theme of the Play

10.5 *Murder in the Cathedral* as Verse Drama

10.6 Plot Construction

10.7 Characterization

10.8 Chorus

10.9 Summing Up

10.10 References

10.11 Suggested Reading

11.12 Model and Terminal Questions

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**10.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the last unit you read about the verse drama and its revival in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You also came to know about the plays of T. S. Eliot and how he contributed to the revival of the poetic drama in the twentieth century. *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot's first full length play, was written in 1935 for the Canterbury Festival. The occasion gave Eliot an opportunity to explore a religious theme in which he was interested. Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1170 in his own cathedral. Three years later he was canonized and Canterbury became a popular place of pilgrimage for the Christians. Based on this historical event, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* deals with the theme of martyrdom. It is not only one of the best religious plays in English but also a remarkable verse play of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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**10.2 OBJECTIVE**

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This unit will give you a detailed analysis of *Murder in the Cathedral*. By examining its various aspects you will learn how a dramatist weaves his theme in a plot and presents them through different characters. You will also know how he uses various dramatic techniques to unfold his plot.

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**10.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY**

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T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* presents a historical event – the murder of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury in his cathedral on 29 December, 1170 by four knights supposedly at the wish of the king of England, Henry II. Dramatists often take liberty with the historical facts, not so much by distorting it as by adding features on which history is silent or by inserting personal details of the historical figures about which histories generally do not say anything. Alfred Tennyson did so when he wrote a play on Thomas Becket. He introduced in his play a beloved of Becket, suggesting that he was crossed in love when he was young. T. S. Eliot did not do anything of the sort when he came to write this play. He followed the historical details strictly and added nothing on his part.

Thomas Becket was born in c.1118 in Cheapside, London. His parents were Gilbert Becket and Matilda. His father was a rich merchant. Thomas Becket studied theology in Paris and worked for a time in a lawyer's office. Later on, he got an opportunity of working for Henry II, the king of England. He came close to him and the king began to rely on him. In 1154 he was appointed Chancellor. In that capacity he worked for the interest of the king. He ruthlessly suppressed the powers of the barons who were posing a threat to the king. He forced them to submit to the king's authority. In 1162 the king made him the Archbishop of Canterbury with the hope that through him he would be able to curb the power of the church in the matters of state. Becket was unwilling to become

the Archbishop and pleaded before the king that he would not be able to serve two masters. The king, however, did not realize his dilemma. He thought that by combining both the political and ecclesiastical authorities Becket would be able to serve the throne better. But he proved wrong. After becoming the Archbishop he resigned from the post of the Chancellor and began to live an ascetic life. He was soon in conflict with the king when the king wanted to bring the ‘criminous clerks’ under the legal authority of the king. The Archbishop refused to agree to it. He was all for the authority of the church now. The growing conflict with the king forced Thomas Becket to leave England. While he was away the king made Archbishop of York crown his son, Prince Henry the Junior King of England. This was traditionally the right of the Archbishop of Canterbury to crown the king of England. So this was an infringement of his right. He complained to the Pope and soon got the Papal authority to excommunicate the Archbishop of York and two other bishops who had helped him. The king was outraged when he heard of it. He is reported to have exclaimed, “Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?” Four knights took it as his wish to kill the Archbishop and decided to do just that. Meanwhile the Archbishop returned to England after a seven years’ exile. Before a month elapsed the knights reached Canterbury and first asked Thomas Becket to submit to the authority of the king and when he refused to do anything that came in the way of his obligation to the Church, they killed him in the cathedral itself. In his play T. S. Eliot follows the course of events with total fidelity to historical details. All these details are incorporated in the plot of the play.

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#### **10.4 THEME OF THE PLAY**

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T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* deals with the theme of martyrdom. Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus defines martyr as a “person who undergoes death or suffering for great cause”. In this play Eliot focuses on the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. While going through the historical background of the story you must have noted the personal relationship of Becket with the king when the former was the Chancellor and also his estrangement from the latter when he became the Archbishop. So the story has a very strong personal element. Again, the whole situation evolved because of a political struggle for supremacy between the king and the church. So the story has a political theme as well. But Eliot in his play focuses neither on the friend-turned-foe theme nor on the theme of political conflict. His sole concern here is to present the theme of martyrdom dramatically. *Murder in the Cathedral* is not the dramatization of the death of Becket. It is a deep searching study of the significance of martyrdom. Thus though the conflict between Church and state is a recurrent theme in the play, it never assumes major significance. Moreover, the clash of character and personal antagonism is deliberately avoided. The king does not appear in the play and the Archbishop also does not refer to him in personal terms. The characters of the knights are also not individualized. They are not presented as individual characters but as a group. They also assert after they have murdered the archbishop that they did not act out of any personal motive. So the

dramatist has excluded all other angles from the play and focused solely on the martyrdom of Becket.

When Thomas Becket returns to England, he is already aware what awaits him there. He has come prepared to lay down his life for the Church. But in the deep recesses of his heart lies the desire for glory that such martyrdom would bring for him. He has not yet become free from this grossness of his desire. So when the fourth Tempter echoes his own inner most thoughts, he is startled. The Tempter says to him:

What can compare with glory of Saints  
Dwelling forever in presence of God?  
What earthly glory of king or emperor,  
What earthly pride that is not poverty  
Compared with richness of heavenly grandeur?  
Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest  
On earth, to be high in heaven. (39)

Becket asks him who he is, tempting him with his own desires? He realizes the grossness of his apparently selfless and pious desire, and overcomes it:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:  
Temptation shall not come in this kind again.  
The last temptation is the greatest treason:  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason. (44)

Becket now is ready to merge his will in the Will of God. This is the true spirit of martyrdom. In his sermon to his congregation on the Christmas morning- a few days before he would be martyred – he explains the meaning of martyrdom:

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom. (49)

Thomas Becket is not merely preaching about martyrdom. He is now ready to act upon it. So when his murderers come he is ready for them in the true spirit of a martyr.

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### **10.5 MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL AS A VERSE DRAMA**

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After tentative efforts in *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Rock*, T. S. Eliot wrote his first full length verse drama when he wrote *Murder in the Cathedral*. The play was commissioned

for a special occasion and so verse was a befitting medium for the play that Eliot wrote, not that he had any intention of ever writing prose drama. He notes in his *Poetry and Drama*:

When I wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* I had the advantage for a beginner, of an occasion which called for a subject generally admitted to be suitable for verse. Verse plays, it has been generally held, should either take their subject matter from some mythology, or else should be about some remote historical period, far enough away from the present for the characters not to need to be recognizable as human beings, and therefore for them to be licensed to talk in verse. (22)

Despite his bantering tone, Eliot here is referring to an advantage he had when he wrote this play in verse. It was a period play as well as a religious play – facts which conferred acceptability on the verse medium. The play, however, is not written entirely in verse. Thomas Becket's sermon to his congregation on the Christmas morning which forms the Interlude between the two parts of the play has been written in prose. As T. S. Eliot himself says, a sermon in verse would have seemed highly unnatural and so dramatically unacceptable. Again, at the end of the play the dialogues of the four knights have been written in prose. The knights here are addressing not their contemporaries but the twentieth century audience. They are defending their action. They, however, are doing so not to the 12<sup>th</sup> century public but to a future generation. Since they are presenting arguments prose seems to be the suitable medium for it and so the dramatist has written these dialogues in prose. The rest of the play is written in verse. Eliot has not used the blank verse for his dialogues. He held that Shakespeare had exploited the blank verse to its fullest capacity. So it would have sounded like a poor version of the Shakespearean dialogues had he used the blank verse for his dialogues. To avoid that Eliot has gone back to an earlier English drama – the morality plays, particularly, *Everyman*. He has used the alliterative verse of *Everyman* in this play. The most effective part of the dialogue in the play is not the dialogues of the protagonist or the tempters but the choric chant of the poor women of Canterbury. The choruses have the simplicity of syntax, emphatic repetitions and rhythmical variations one finds in the Bible. In language and tonal variation the play presents a great range. The verse varies from the conversational pitch of the lighter passages, to the tight rhythm of the emotional passages. An example of the former is:

I see nothing quite conclusive in the art of temporal government,  
But violence, duplicity and frequent malversation.  
King rules or barons rule:  
The strong man strongly and the weak man by caprice. (14)

The rhythm becomes quicker and sentences shorter when we come to lines where the poor women afraid of some impending danger wish to be left undisturbed with the tenor of their lives:

We do not wish anything to happen.

Seven years we have lived quietly,  
Succeeded in avoiding notice,  
Living and partly living.  
There have been poverty and licence,  
There has been minor injustice.  
Yet we have gone on living,  
Living and partly living. (18-19)

The imagery of the play also varies from the images of barrenness and futility to savagery and ferocity and from physical pleasure to spiritual sublimity.

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## 10. 6 PLOT CONSTRUCTION

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*Murder in the Cathedral* is a tightly constructed play. It covers a time span of less than a month and the place of action is confined to one – the cathedral of Canterbury. The play has got two parts with an interlude between them. The first part of the play centres on the arrival of Thomas Becket in Canterbury after a lapse of seven years. Here he meets the poor women of the town forming the chorus of the play, the priests of the cathedral and four tempters. The action moves round the issue of his return and the future course of action that he would be taking. The interlude deals with the Christian concept of death, birth and martyrdom. Thus it focuses on the central theme of the play – martyrdom. The second part of the play focuses on the martyrdom of Becket. In this way the play is tight woven. The dramatist begins the play at its climax. There is no exposition or the crisis in it. The crisis becomes a part of the climax and its resolution also does not take any external form. Whatever takes place happens inside the mind of the protagonist. The second part of the play, on the other hand, is full of external action but devoid of any internal growth. Thus structurally, both the parts of the play complement each other.

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## 10.7 CHARACTERIZATION

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The dramatis personae of *Murder in the Cathedral* consist of the protagonist, Thomas Becket, the chorus, the three priests, four tempters and four knights. Except Thomas Becket, the others form parts of groups. The chorus consists of the poor women of Canterbury. In any case the chorus is always a group. The priests are merely representatives of the church and Eliot does not confer any individuality on them. However, he does try to distinguish them by making the Second priest a more ardent follower of the Archbishop than the other two. The subtle difference in characters of the knights also becomes visible when they address the audience. But we know nothing of them as individual human beings. The tempters are allegorical figures. In fact, they are parts of Becket's own psyche. Thus the only person to be individualized is Thomas Becket but in his case also the dramatist does not aim at providing personal details. We do not know Thomas Becket as a man. He appears before us only as the Archbishop. His

earlier friendship with the king is merely reported and not presented in any detail. So Eliot does not show any conflict of loyalties. By the time we see Becket he has overcome his personal weaknesses. Even the last weakness to be overcome – the desire for the glory of martyrdom- is not dramatized but only reported by Becket himself when he says:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:  
Temptation shall not come in this kind again. (44)

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### **10.8 CHORUS**

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The chorus was an integral part of the Greek drama. Tragedies are indeed supposed to have grown out of the choric songs. Originally, the chorus was a group of performers at a religious function, especially fertility rites. How they came to be integrated in the Greek drama or how Greek drama grew out of it is not documented. But by the fifth century B.C. they had become an integral part of the Greek tragedy. In the tragedies of Aeschylus the chorus often took part in the action; in Sophocles it served as a commentator on the action and in Euripides it provided a lyric element. The Roman dramatists followed the Greeks in their use of the chorus and the Elizabethan dramatists took it over from the Romans. However, the Elizabethan dramatists did not make a full use of the chorus in their plays. It was Milton who did so in his *Samson Agonistes*. The next dramatist who did so was T. S. Eliot when he used the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* acts as a commentator on the action in the play. Eliot also uses it to create the atmosphere of the play. When the play begins the chorus consisting of the poor women of Canterbury expresses the disquiet in their minds at some impending doom. They know that they have been drawn towards the cathedral to witness some momentous event:

Some presage of an act  
Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our feet  
Towards the cathedral. We are forced to bear witness. (11)

These women urge the Archbishop to go back to France from where he has come as they fear not only for him but also for themselves. As the tempters appear one by one with their promises and are finally rejected by the Archbishop the fear of these women mounts. They say to him:

The Lords of Hell are here.  
They curl round you, lie at your feet, swing and wing  
through the dark air.  
O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself  
that we may be saved. (43-44)

The wailing of the chorus just before Thomas Becket is murdered combines their fear, helplessness and also their resigned acceptance of the dictates of Destiny.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Write a note on the historical background of the play.
2. How far does the dramatist show fidelity to history in this play?
3. What is the theme of the play?
4. How does the dramatist subjugate other facts to the central theme of the play?
5. What is Chorus? Describe the situations where the chorus appears in the play.

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**10.9 SUMMING UP**

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Written for a specific occasion Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* deals with a subject suitable for the occasion. A play to be staged at the occasion of the Canterbury Festival had presumably something to do with the patron saint of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. Eliot takes up the story of his martyrdom and through it explores the meaning and significance of Christian martyrdom. He, however, shows complete fidelity to the historical details about the life and death of Thomas Becket. *Murder in the Cathedral* is a verse play in which Eliot mixes prose segments very effectively. For versification he has gone to the early Morality plays in English. He has also adopted Greek features in his play, the most notable of which is the use of the chorus in the play.

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**10.10 REFERENCES**

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Eliot, T. S. *Poetry and Drama*. London: Faber and Faber  
—, *Murder in the Cathedral*. London: Faber and Faber

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**10.11 SUGGESTED READING**

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Hinchliffe, A. P. T. S. *Eliot: Plays*. London: Macmillan, 1985.  
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**10.12 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS**

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- 1 How does T. S. Eliot use a historical even to present a Christian play in *Murder in the cathedral*?
2. Write a critical analysis of the treatment of the theme of martyrdom in the play.
- 3 Discuss *Murder in the Cathedral* as verse drama.
- 4 Analyse Eliot's characterization in the play.
- 5 Write an essay on the use of chorus in the play.

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**UNIT 11: SAMUEL BECKETT: *WAITING FOR GODOT* - 1**

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11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objective

11.3 Samuel Beckett: Life and Works

11.4 The Theory of Existentialism and Absurd Philosophy

11.4.1 The Theory of Existentialism

11.4.2 Absurd Philosophy

11.4.3 The Influence of Absurd Philosophy on Modern Drama.

11.5. Synopsis of the Play *Waiting for Godot*

11.5.1 Title of the Play

11.5.2 Tragicomedy

11.6 Summary

11.7 Glossary

11.8 References

11.9 Suggested reading

11.10 Terminal and Model Questions

**11.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this Unit, you will be introduced to a brief account of Beckett's life and works.

The unit will then introduce you to some key concepts of Existentialism and the Absurd philosophy.

Finally, a synopsis of the play *Waiting for Godot* with comments on its title and genre is given in the concluding sections.

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**11.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- Understand the context of Beckett's Writings,
- Explain and define the philosophy of the Absurd and Existentialism
- Analyse the title and the subtitle of the play

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**11.3 SAMUEL BECKETT: HIS LIFE AND WORKS**

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Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1906 at Fox rock, near Dublin in Ireland. He had a fairly comfortable and conventional upbringing by his middle class Protestant parents. He was educated in Ulster at Portora Royal School, which was considered one of the best and most expensive schools in Ireland. He read Modern Languages at Trinity College, Dublin and eventually took his M.A. From 1928 to 1930 he lectured in English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, and in French at Trinity College, Dublin from 1930-1932. But he soon decided to move away from teaching, went to London, footloose and after five years of travelling finally settled in Paris in 1937. The genesis of Beckett's tramps and wanderers in his works may be found in these personal experiences.

Even in his first stay in Paris in 1928, he became part of the famous Irish novelist James Joyce's circle. Joyce and Beckett came from the same background, had similar intellectual tastes and both suffered from bouts of depression. In 1929 Joyce invited him to contribute to his collection of essays, entitled *Our Examination....* Beckett's essay was entitled "*Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce*". Joyce praised Beckett and felt he showed promise. He also began doing research on the life and works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Descartes. In 1930 he won the first prize in a poetry contest for his poem entitled *Whoroscope*, a highly self conscious and erudite poem on Descartes.

In 1931 Beckett published a long essay on Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the French novelist. Many of Beckett's preoccupations with Time, Habit, Suffering and memory are first discussed here. During my discussion of the play I will be referring to this essay.

Around this time Beckett published his now famous story *Dante and the Lobster*. The story clearly shows Beckett moving away from his earlier erudite style. He has now developed a simple colloquial language moving easily to the allusive. The story has all the hallmarks of the later Beckett—wit, despair and compassion are intertwined with references to death and suffering. The central character Belacqua finds echo in Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*.

In 1938 his first novel *Murphy* was published in London with a hero who is going to be central to most of Beckett's novels and plays—wandering, despairing and unhappy, on the margins of society, with traces of that black humour one later notice in *Waiting for Godot*. But the novel has a tightly woven structure which Beckett was to discard later.

In 1939 Beckett was in Ireland when World War II broke out. He immediately returned to France even though he was holding a neutral passport as the Irish Republic had declared it was neutral. Beckett joined the Resistance—the underground movement against the Nazis with his friend Alfred Peron. Peron was arrested by the Nazis and never returned. Beckett managed to escape and went into hiding in unoccupied France. Beckett's conscious choice of joining the Resistance shows a side of his character that few have highlighted—his love of freedom and political activism. This was when he started working on his novel *Watt* which deals with a schizophrenic character coping with his own terrifying inner character. When Beckett finished *Watt* he was almost 40.

1945-1950 were the most creative years for Beckett. He wrote his famous trilogy – the three novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*—as well as *En attendant Godot*, written in French and translated into English as *Waiting for Godot*. Clearly breaking from his past, Beckett found French as less rhetorical, more logical, having greater clarity and economy of expression. Yet Beckett showed his mastery over English in his translations of these works. The trilogy of novels rejects the traditional structure of the novel and is dominated by the voice of the narrators, the quest for identity and a search for the meaning of our existence.

However it was now time for Beckett to turn to the theatre. *En Attendant Godot* was written between October 1948 and the end of January, 1949. It was published in French in 1952 and in English as *Waiting for Godot* in 1954. The first production of *En Attendant Godot* was at Theatre de Babylone, Paris on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1953, and in English in 1955 in London. The play with its unique theme of waiting and nothingness, its equally unique pair of characters and its language simple yet dense in meaning, and the use of repetition, silences and pauses created an indelible impact and changed the face of modern drama.

During this period his *Dialogues with George Duthuit* were published in *Transition Forty-Nine* where he made his famous statement of the compulsive need to write:

“The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, together with the obligation to express.” (cited Alvarez: 47)<sup>1</sup>

That is the dilemma of the artist as Beckett sees it. Beckett has always had the courage to push his theatre to its limits, refusing to compromise on his commitment to experimentation. *Waiting for Godot* was followed closely by his other plays- *All That Fall* (1957), *Endgame* (1957), *Act Without Words I* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and in the sixties *Act without words II* (1960), *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1963) and *Come and Go* (1966).

These plays show that Beckett's dramatic technique became even more experimental after *Waiting for Godot*. For example *Endgame* is set in a single room where the characters are constantly talking of their past in contrast to the sterile present.

In *Krapp's Last Tape* an old man sits at a table listening to a tape of him talking thirty years ago. He is dressed as clown as he recalls his past with a deep sense of loss and grief.

In *Come and go*, three women sit in a circle of light on a dark stage and they exchange the same words three times with some variation. The play lasts about three minutes and uses 121 spoken words!

In his play *Breath* staged in 1969, there are no actors, no words, only an empty stage with a little rubbish strewn on it, a dim light, a faint cry, a single breath drawn in and out, a second cry and then silence.

What do all these examples suggest? They are a clear indicator that Beckett can be placed in the forefront of modern /post modern drama as he is constantly searching for new ways of expressing the central concerns of his age. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

Between 1956 and 1959 Beckett wrote only for the theatre. Then in 1960 he wrote a novel *How It Is*. After that he concentrated entirely on drama his last play being *What Where* (1984). He died in 1989.

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<sup>1</sup>See References , section 1.9 for publication details

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## 11.4 THE THEORY OF EXISTENTIALISM AND ABSURD PHILOSOPHY

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### 11.4.1 The Theory of Existentialism

Beckett was greatly influenced by the French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905 –1980) and the philosophy of the Absurd of Albert Camus (1913 –1960).

As Jean Paul Sartre in his book *Existentialism and Humanism* states there are two kinds of existentialists. On the one hand are the Christians like Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel and on the other hand are the existential atheists like the French existentialists which include Sartre himself.

The source of the existentialist movement is to be found in the works of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). As Bertrand Russell says in *The Wisdom of the West*, existentialism focuses on the need “for men to act and choose, not as a result of philosophic reflection but from some spontaneous function of the will.” (Russell 1964:332) Kierkegaard gives greater importance to will and less importance to reason and scientific thinking. He argued that a man’s life should be based on religious rather than ethical principles. Kierkegaard, a fervent Christian himself, believed that man is responsible only to God and religion “is a matter of existential thinking since it comes from within the soul.” (Russell 1964:33) Faith is divorced from reason. The reality of an individual’s existence is from the inward relation of one to oneself, because truth is subjective. Kierkegaard bases his philosophy on the individual man, with his anxieties, doubts, agonies and struggle with faith. But ultimately he reaffirms his belief in traditional faith.

Modern existentialist theory evolved out of Kierkegaard’s theories and continued to emphasise that rationalism as a philosophy is unable to give a meaning to human existence.

Beckett was influenced to a greater extent by the atheistic French existentialists, but one should emphasise that he did submit this philosophy to close scrutiny and did not embrace it whole heartedly.

The finest exposition of the existentialist atheists is in Sartre’s own explanation of their position in his book *Existentialism and Humanism* first published in French in 1946.

The central belief to both the Christian and atheistic existentialists, according to Sartre is the belief that existence comes before essence, or “that we must begin from the subjective”. (Sartre 1968:26) Sartre defines the phrase ‘existence comes before essence’ as follows:

“We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world -and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus there is no human nature, because there is no God to

have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing –as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism.” (Sartre 1968:28)

The central tenet of existentialism is thus made clear –man has to make his choices and that is his essence. “Man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be.” (Sartre 1968:28)

However this stress on the individual is related by Sartre to his responsibility to the rest of mankind. Every action that an individual takes is also a “commitment on behalf of all mankind.” (Sartre 1968:30)

Sartre also defines three words that are central to Existentialist thought-anguish, abandonment and despair. Man is in anguish because he is not only responsible to himself but to others. Abandonment is the choice that man faces as he is responsible for everything he does. He has to fashion his own future “we ourselves decide our being.” (Sartre 1968:39) Man, as Sartre constantly reminds us, is condemned to be free. (Sartre 1968:34)

Despair is the recognition by man that we should act without hope, and limit ourselves to that which is within our walls. Man realizes that there is nothing else but the sum of his actions. The existentialist chooses his purpose and commitment “in all clearness and in all sincerity” and also believes in moral values. (Sartre 1968:50) At the foundation of all these values is freedom. In conclusion Sartre sees the philosophy of existentialism as optimistic. “It is a doctrine of action....” (Sartre 1968:56)

#### **11.4.2 Absurd Philosophy**

Another influential book of this period was Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus* published first in French in 1942. Martin Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd* has rightly pointed out that the period saw the “certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages disappearing.” The Second World War saw not only the “decline of religious faith” but also the shattering of faith in “progress, nationalism and various totalitarian fallacies.” (Esslin 2004:23)

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus attempts to analyse and search for a meaning to life in a world where man has lost the will to live.

“A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.” (Camus 1977:13) In desperation man thinks of suicide, but Camus rejects this solution. The feeling of absurdity “bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world

that transcends it.” (Camus 1977:33) The absurd man is not searching for solutions. Rather he wants to confront the truth which is “the divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together.” (Camus 1977:50) The absurd man has to live with this truth. Life will be lived better if he is conscious that it has no meaning and he contemplates this fact with all its contradictions and with a sense of revolt. This means that he is indifferent to the future but has freedom of thought and action, an inner freedom. As Camus says “What counts most is not the best living but the most living.”(Camus 1977:59)

#### 11.4.3 The influence of Absurd Philosophy on Modern Drama.

In his path breaking study, *The Theatre Of the Absurd* published in 1961, Martin Esslin was among the first to recognize the new wave that was sweeping across post-war European drama. Europe was no stranger to experimental drama. I have already discussed this in the various movements in the thirties that had left its mark on drama.

However Esslin saw a new kind of experimentation in a group of playwrights –Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Pinter and others- to whom he gave the label” Theatre of the Absurd.” He saw the influence of Camus’ philosophy on these plays.

Esslin uses the dictionary definition of the word absurd as “out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.” He quotes from Ionesco’s essay on the writer Kafka where he defines the word ‘absurd’ as “ That which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless ,absurd, useless.”(Esslin 2004:23)

The absurd dramatist searches for the reality of his condition and the truth of his situation and existence. Moving out of the social and historical context, absurd drama presents the individual’s confrontation with the universe. The theatre of the absurd is not didactic.

The absurdists focus on the despair and anguish of the absurdity of life in a form that is anti-realistic and anti-naturalistic. These plays move away from the conventional form which has a beginning, middle and end. These plays have no plot or story to hold the attention of the audience nor do they have a logical structure. The character are not fully developed .The dialogue is not a smooth flow of coherent thought but discontinuous, illogical, fragmentary and sometimes even incoherent. Silences and pauses are used effectively and meaningfully. The theatricality of the absurd play has been often commented on. The sets are not realistic, nor do they reflect the period and class of people that they depict, but are often empty or have the barest minimum or filled with mysterious suggestion. In a conventional play the audience looks forward to the climax, but in an absurd play there is no climax or resolution of the action. Sometimes the actor’s voice dominates the play and at other times he stands stock-still. The image is central to this theatre. Thus form is important to this theatre as in abandoning the rational it

emphasises the meaninglessness of life. The absurd playwright not only liberated drama from the well-crafted text but it also liberated the performative techniques.

The Theatre of Absurd also draws from age-old techniques. It is influenced by the non-verbal art of the clown, the jugglers, and the acrobats that one often sees in the circus. Dancing, singing and mime are also part of this performative technique.

Absurd drama also drew ideas from the Italian Renaissance comedy known as *commedia dell'arte*. This form was largely based on improvisation, with a lot of fooling on the stage in order to raise spontaneous laughter. It called for a great deal of skill on the part of the performers.

The English music-hall and the American vaudeville with their use of cross-talk, tap dancing and comic songs were also important influences on the form of absurd drama.

The silent film of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton showed the dexterity and diversity in clowning and acrobatic dancing.

Once sound entered the films, Laurel and Hardy and the Marx brothers showed the range of comic art available to the absurd dramatist.

Absurd Drama undoubtedly drew from all these sources.

It is important here to note the difference that Esslin underlines between Existentialist and Absurd theatre. The plays of existentialist dramatists like Anouilh, Sartre and Giraudoux use the conventional form and are logical and rational in their arguments. But the absurd dramatist discards this method. (Esslin 2004:24)

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### **11.5. SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY *WAITING FOR GODOT***

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*Waiting for Godot* consists of two acts. Act 1 opens with Estragon struggling to put on his boots. Vladimir enters and as they talk it is obvious that they have known each other for a very long time. They are waiting for someone called Godot. In the process of waiting for Godot, they spend time talking to each other, discussing a variety of issues like Christ's crucifixion, suicide, the possibility of meeting Godot or the state of their health. They also move around on the stage and show a range of emotions varying from doubt to fear. The coming of Pozzo dragging Lucky with a rope around his neck adds more dramatic interest. The Pozzo - Lucky relationship emphasizes the master-slave relationship. Lucky's dance and his lengthy disjointed speech are important moments in the first act. After Pozzo and Lucky leave, a boy appears who claims he is a messenger of Godot. He tells Vladimir and Estragon that Godot will not come that evening but tomorrow. After the boy disappears, Vladimir and Estragon say they want to leave but remain glued to the spot.

Act II opens with Vladimir singing a round song which is cyclical and repetitive in nature. The song is a reminder to us of the endless cycle of waiting for Godot. The setting seems to be the same except that the tree now has three leaves. Moreover the boots that were tight for Estragon in Act I now fit him. He is puzzled as to whether he has got the right boots or whether his feet have shrunk. Vladimir and Estragon continue in the same tone as in Act I while they wait endlessly for Godot, sometimes imitating Pozzo and Lucky, changing hats with each other or quarrelling and insulting each other. Pozzo and Lucky now enter but things have changed for them. Pozzo has become blind and claims that Lucky is dumb. The master -slave relationship is now changed and Lucky is leading Pozzo. Pozzo does not recognise Vladimir and Estragon and there seems to be less of a pompous air about him. The Boy once again enters as in Act I and tells Vladimir and Estragon that Godot will certainly come the next day. Estragon and Vladimir are overcome with helplessness and attempt to commit suicide but fail. They again do not move from the spot even though they claim they want to go.

### 11.5.1 Title of the play

*Waiting for Godot* was first performed in 1953 in Paris in French under the title *En attendant Godot*. Translated in English it reads as “While Waiting for Godot”. This gives importance to the process of waiting – i.e. what do the characters, Vladimir and Estragon do while waiting for Godot.

The English title *Waiting for Godot* leaves out the crucial word ‘while’, thereby giving an entirely different meaning to the play. The stress now is on the word ‘Waiting’ and further points to the fact that they are waiting for Godot. The process of waiting also highlights the question of time which is an important theme in the play.

One should also comment on the name Godot.

Several interpretations of the name have been given. It has been suggested that the name might be a reference to God. But in Beckett’s play this suggestion is not obvious.

A more convincing explanation is given by the critic Martin Esslin. He refers to a comedy by the late eighteenth French playwright Balzac— *Le Faiseur*, also known as *Mercadet*. Mercadet is a stock exchange speculator who blames all his financial difficulties on his former partner Godeau who had disappeared with all their money. Finally when it seems that Mercadet is completely ruined, Godeau appears after having made a lot of money in India. (Esslin 2001:49-50).

In both Balzac’s play and Beckett’s play, the arrival of this mysterious character is eagerly awaited. But while Godeau actually comes, this never happens in Beckett’s play. He is the object of Vladimir and Estragon’s fears and hope but as Esslin very rightly points out that the subject of the play “is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition”.(Esslin:50). More on this aspect in my analysis of the text.

### 11.5.2 Tragicomedy

The sub title reads ‘A tragicomedy in two Acts’. What is the definition of a tragicomedy?

As the word tragicomedy suggests, it is a form that combines both tragedy and comedy. The terms ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’ need some discussion. A simple definition of tragedy is that it ends with the death of the hero while comedy ends with a marriage. But one could give several examples of this not always being the case.

Another definition is that tragedies move towards bad fortune or unhappiness while comedies move towards good fortune or happiness.

Both tragedy and comedy have their central characters go through a journey of self discovery.

In tragedy it is marked by suffering and an error of judgement committed by the hero knowingly or unknowingly. In comedy the journey is marked by coincidences and lucky accidents so that the hero is able to overcome the obstacles in his way, even if he commits a mistake.

However one must remember none of these definitions are water tight. One could always find examples of plays that do not fit into these categories, especially in modern drama.

George Bernard Shaw, the British dramatist, defined tragi-comedy as a form where one laughs with one side of the mouth and cries with the other.

In 1906 the Italian playwright Pirandello used the word ‘grotesque’ to explain the word tragi-comic.

“I see a sort of labyrinth in which the soul moves through all sorts of diverse, opposed and intricate paths, without finding any way out. And in this labyrinth I see a hero with a laughing face and another face that weeps, it laughs indeed with one face at the tears of the other.”

In modern tragi-comedy, a play might open with characteristics of tragedy but might not end with death or an irreversible condition. Similarly if it opens with comic effects it does not end with a laugh or a smile.

Beckett uses the tragi- comic to good effect in *Waiting for Godot*. It is important to note that Beckett was deeply influenced by the great poem *The Divine Comedy* by the medieval Italian poet Dante. Beckett shows hope and despair in his play. The theme of salvation, of Jesus Christ as the saviour of humanity is constantly undercut by doubt and scepticism. At another level, the comic element is present in the play especially in the several exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon. All these aspects will be taken up in greater detail at the relevant points in the play.

The play is divided into two Acts with the same characters in both of them and several incidents that occur in the first act being repeated in the second act-but with a difference. This gives the impression of a neat symmetry and balance.

There is a brief stage direction about the setting: A country road. A tree. Evening.

All these aspects-road, tree and evening- are crucial in building up the atmosphere of the play. The stage is therefore bare, except for the object of the tree. Later at the end of Act 1 we have the image of the moon rising. One could compare the brief description of the setting with the elaborate settings that are to be found in the plays of Ibsen or Chekhov where the location, the details of furniture etc. are very specific, so as to give an exact picture to the audience of the period and milieu of the play. On the other hand by giving a general description, Beckett suggests to the audience and the reader that the play could be located anywhere. This immediately establishes the play as different from the solid specificity of naturalistic and realistic plays.

The 'country road' has many suggestions to it. 'Country' points to a rural setting, away from urban life. The word 'road' gives the idea of a journey. 'A tree' being mentioned underlines the barrenness and emptiness of the rest of the setting. The tree also has important religious associations, like for e.g. the well known reference to the tree of life. In the play Vladimir says in the first act, "Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?" (2). The actual quotation is from the Bible, Proverbs (Chapter 13:12) and reads: 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh it is a tree of life'. It is ironical that the tree in *Waiting for Godot* is withered. But the tree also creates uncertainty. Both Vladimir and Estragon are not sure whether it is the same tree they saw earlier, or whether it is a willow, shrub or bush. Hence it creates a sense of fear and panic as they feel they might be waiting for Godot at the wrong place. Vladimir asks, "What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place." (6) The sense of time and place is blurred and uncertain and we see this aspect throughout the play. 'Evening' is the time between day and night which again suggests the sense of nothing being clear cut.

### **Self-Assessment Questions**

1. Explain the theory of existentialism as Jean Paul Sartre defines it.
2. Explain the philosophy of the Absurd as Albert Camus defines it.
3. Discuss the main characteristics of Absurd Drama.
4. Give a brief summary of the Play after having carefully read the text of the Play.
5. Discuss the title, sub-title and opening stage directions of the play.

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### **11.6 SUMMARY**

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In this unit we have discussed Existentialism and Absurd philosophy. We also learned how absurd philosophy influenced Absurd drama. We also introduce you to the plot of

the play, *Waiting for Godot*. We have discussed the title, sub-title and stage directions of the play.

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### 11.7 GLOSSARY

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**Absurd-** This word is first in a philosophical sense by Albert Camus. He uses this word to describe the condition of man when the world seems to have lost its meaning and he has lost the will to live.

**Commedia dell'arte** – a comic form that developed in the Italian Renaissance around the fifteenth century. It involved improvisation, lot of fooling on the stage and spontaneous laughter.

**Existentialism-** There were two forms of existentialism: Christian and Atheistic. Both believed that existence comes before essence-i.e. man first exists and then defines himself. Existentialism emphasised man's need to act and choose from his own will. Reason was not an answer to the problems of existence.

**Music Hall** – A hall used for variety entertainment like comic acts, singing or dancing.

**Myth of Sisyphus-** Sisyphus was the king of Corinth, and was known for his cunning. For his misdeeds on earth, he was condemned to roll a large stone to the top of a hill, which when it reached the summit rolled down again, so that his punishment was eternal.

**Pause-**a temporary stop in the conversation which might often suggest doubt or hesitation.

**Silences-** a moment when the characters stop speaking, and can indicate a variety of emotions.

**Vaudeville-** a variety show that consisted of comedy, cross talk, singing and dancing.

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**11.10 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS**

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1. Explain the phrase "existence comes before essence."
2. Explain Albert Camus theory of the absurd.
3. How does Martin Esslin define Absurd Drama?
4. What were the influences on Absurd Drama?
5. Explain the meaning of tragi-comic.

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**UNIT 12: SAMUEL BECKETT: *WAITING FOR GODOT* II**

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## 12.1 Introduction

## 11.2 Objective

12.3 A Critical Analysis of Act i of *Waiting for Godot*

## 12.3.1 Opening of the Play

## 12.3.2 Characters of Vladimir and Estragon

## 12.3.3 Theme of Waiting

## 12.3.4 Episode of the Boy

## 12.3.5 Religious Theme of the Play

## 12.3.6. Characters of Lucky and Pozzo in the first act

## 12.3.6.1 Entry of Lucky and Pozzo

## 12.3.6.2. Responses of Vladimir and Estragon

## 12.3.6.3. Role Playing and Meta Theatre

## 12.3.6.4. Master-slave Relationship

## 12.3.6.5. Lucky's Dance and Speech

## 12.3.6.5.1 Lucky's Speech

## 12.3.6.5.2 Repetition

## 12.3.6.5.3 Reactions of Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo to Lucky's Speech

## 12.3.6.5.4 Beckett's Use of Language in Lucky's Speech

## 12.3.6.5.5 Lucky's Speech and Post-Modernism

12.4 A Critical Analysis of Act ii of *Waiting for Godot*

## 12.4.1. The Opening of Act ii

## 12.4.1.1 Loss of Memory

## 12.4.1.2 Dead Voices

12.4.1.3 Passing the Time

12.4.2. Entry of Pozzo and Lucky

12.4.3. Vladimir's First Speech

12.4.4. Vladimir's Soliloquy

12.4.5. Entry of the Boy

12.4.6. Ending of the Play

12.5. Conceptualizing the Play

12.5.1 *Waiting for Godot* as a Modernist/Postmodernist Play

12.5.2. *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd Play

12.5.3. Existentialism and *Waiting for Godot*

12.5.4. Language in *Waiting for Godot*

12.6 Summary

12.7 Glossary

12.8 References

12.9 Suggested Reading

12.10 Terminal and Model Questions

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**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit you will see how the characteristics of absurd drama can be applied to the text to some extent. This unit also presents a close reading of the play, an analysis of characters and a commentary on the dramatically significant situations.

It also looks closely at the key themes and issues in the play. We conclude by summing up the main characteristics of the play.

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**12.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Analyse the opening section of the play
- Explain the theme of waiting
- Discuss the several references to religion in the play
- Write an introduction to the beginning of the Second Act
- Explain the main speeches
- Analyse the events of the second act.
- Sum up the main characteristics of the play.

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**12.3. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACT I OF *WAITING FOR GODOT***

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**12.3.1 Opening of the Play**

The play opens with a stage description of Estragon, sitting on a low mound trying to take off his boot. In spite of repeated attempts he fails to do so and finally gives up out of sheer exhaustion. He then utters the famous opening sentence of the play, “Nothing to be done.” (1)

The opening gives us three important points:

Estragon, throughout the play has an obsession with his boots and his feet. Sometimes the boots fit him; sometimes they seem too large for him. This problem with boots is expressive of his personality. Several times in Act 1, Estragon complains that his feet are hurting because the boots are too tight, and he often limps. His boots stink. (5) Vladimir at one point exclaims in disgust, “There’s man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet” (3). When Estragon says the first line he is talking of his inability to solve the problem of his boots and feet. Estragon’s statement is picked up by Vladimir who responds by transforming it into a metaphysical generalization.

“I’m beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I’ve tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir be reasonable you haven’t tried everything. And I resumed the struggle.” (1)

Here both Estragon and Vladimir are talking of two entirely different things. While Estragon is merely talking of the physical act of struggling to remove his shoes, Vladimir is talking of a struggle in his life which is far removed from the physical. What kind of struggle is it then? That is left deliberately ambiguous just as the process of waiting or the identity of Godot. It reflects the Existentialist /Absurd point of view that the individual continues to struggle even when he feels that nothing can be done.

A third important point about the opening is the repetitive nature of action. If you read the stage direction carefully of the opening lines, it says “He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.” (1) The words ‘tries again’ and ‘as before’ emphasise the repetitive nature of the actions. Repetition is central to the play. On the one hand it suggests habit, as for e.g. Estragon struggling with his shoes, or just a means of filling up their time while they wait for Godot. Vladimir also suggests repetition when he says he ‘resumed’ the struggle.

Some of the key themes are indicated in the opening—the theme of nothingness, struggle and repetition.

### 12.3.2 Characters of Vladimir and Estragon

The opening section also clearly portrays the characters of Vladimir and Estragon. They are presented as old, tired with no money and respectability. They are obviously tramps as they have no home and are all the time on the road and travelling with no particular goal in hand. As Vladimir and Estragon talk to each other we come to learn that their friendship goes back in time. Their intimate give and take of conversation reminds us of an old married couple. Vladimir eagerly wishes to embrace Estragon but is pushed away by him in irritation. Vladimir likes to see himself as the one who has given more to the relationship, and who is always protective of Estragon.

“When I think of it...all these years...but for me ...where would you be...? (Decisively.) You’d be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.”(1-2)

Again he talks of them being presentable enough at one time when they would have been permitted to enter the Eiffel Tower and could have contemplated suicide. The possibility of suicide is ever present as an escape route for both of them.

“...We should have thought of it a million years ago in the nineties.”

... Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it’s too late. They wouldn’t even let us up.”(2)

They have known each other for a very long time. At the end of Act 1, Estragon reminds Vladimir of their friendship which goes back to fifty years.

Their present condition is clearly shown. They are two vagabonds with no social status. Obviously they have fallen on bad days. Estragon, as we have already mentioned has bad feet, Vladimir has a weak bladder. His mouth stinks because he has garlic for his kidneys. (9) he always carries carrots and turnips in his pocket. While Estragon is obsessed with his boots, Vladimir is obsessed with his hat. They have nicknames for each other. Vladimir is Didi, Estragon is Gogo. They quarrel with each other, yet can't do without each other. When Vladimir gets angry, Estragon gently attempts to make up. (9) Estragon asks Vladimir, "Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?" (8)

Vladimir appears to be the more philosophical of the two, while Estragon seems to be more concerned with his physical needs like hunger. This leads to several tragi-comic scenes in the play. We have already discussed this in the context of the opening line of the play. For example, when Estragon is eating the carrot he looks at the stub and exclaims, "the more you eat the worse it gets."

Vladimir retorts that in his case it is the opposite and he "gets used to the muck as I go along." (13)

But Estragon is also a poet. At the end of Act 1 he looks at the moon rising and says, "Pale for weariness.... Of climbing and gazing on the likes of us." (45-46) Here Estragon is quoting from Shelley's poem "To the Moon" though his lines are not accurate. Shelley's lines read as follows: "Art thou pale for weariness / Of climbing Heaven and gazing on the earth..."

In the exchange that follows, the discussion takes on a more profound turn as both the characters discuss the emptiness and nothingness of their situation.

Vladimir: Question of temperament.

Estragon: Of character.

Vladimir: Nothing you can do about it.

Estragon: No use struggling.

Vladimir: One is what one is.

Estragon: No use wriggling.

Vladimir: The essential doesn't change.

Estragon: Nothing to be done. (14)

This is a good example of how the play functions on so many levels-both the comic and the serious. Here both of them are feeling hopeless not only of their situation but of their own selves, as they feel they can never change.

### 12.3.3 Theme of Waiting.

A crucial theme of the play is waiting for Godot and the first Act exemplifies this in great detail. It begins with Vladimir and Estragon questioning each other as to why they are not leaving. They have to remind themselves that they are waiting for Godot.

“Estragon: Charming spot... Let’s go.

Vladimir: We can’t.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We’re waiting for Godot.

Estragon: [Despairingly.] Ah! [Pause.]...” (6)

These lines are repeated at least six times with some variations at crucial points in the play. As Ruby Cohn in *Just Play: Beckett’s Theatre* mentions that the phrase ‘waiting for Godot’ almost sounds like a refrain. The word Godot itself is also like a refrain (Cohn 1980:102) The refrain also echoes the sentiment of the first line “Nothing to be done”. The interminable wait is also an expression of habit- both Vladimir and Estragon do things just because they are used to doing it, with no rational reason behind it.

Waiting also suggests that a goal is being kept in mind which should be reached at some point. As Andrew Kennedy states that in this play, waiting is a combination of “expectations and let-downs, of uncertainty and of gradual run down without end.”(Kennedy 1992:17)

Waiting is also linked to the idea of the flow of time. As Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot they are acutely aware of the passage of time, but are also deeply confused of the actual truth of their situation.

As Beckett says in his monograph on Proust, “there is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday....” (Beckett1931: 2). A little later in the same monograph, Beckett says, “Memory and Habit are attributes of the Time cancer.”

He clarifies

Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit... (Beckett1931:8)

Estragon and Vladimir are tied to the act of waiting not only out of a desire to meet Godot but out of habit. Beckett asks, “But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire.”(Beckett 1931: 3)

In their inability to move away from the spot where they have been standing, time seems to stand still. Time is seen functioning at two levels— one, time is in a state of motion and flux, but on the other hand for these two characters it is static. As the self is in the grip of time it is also in a process of constant change, as Beckett states in his essay on Proust, “the individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.”(Beckett 1931: 4-5) Waiting gives the characters the feeling that something is about to change. Yet that change is just an illusion, as nothing really ever happens. Pozzo says at one point that “The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops.”(25)

Yet for Vladimir and Estragon the only hope is that Godot will arrive, though they are not sure what they expect from him. Martin Esslin points out that in the French version of the play there is a more specific reference to their imagined meeting with Godot. “Tonight perhaps we shall sleep in his place in the warmth, dry, our bellies full, on the straw. It is worth waiting for that, is it not?” As Esslin states, these lines clearly suggest the “peace, the rest from waiting, the sense of arriving in a haven, that Godot represents to the two tramps”. (Esslin 2004:53)

By omitting this passage in the English version, Beckett wishes to increase the uncertainty and anxiety in the process of waiting. There is a great deal of confusion in the minds of Vladimir and Estragon as to where and when exactly the meeting is to take place. This confusion is further compounded by the fact that they are full of doubt about their own perceptions of time and place.

Estragon asks Vladimir if he is sure that they had to wait by the tree. The tree’s identity itself as mentioned earlier, is in confusion. To them it looks more like a bush or a shrub.

Estragon’s continuous questioning leads to further doubt in the mind of Vladimir and he exclaims angrily “nothing is certain when you’re about.”(7)

Time and days seem to have faded into a distance:

Estragon: (very insidious). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (pause.) Or Monday? (pause.) Or Friday?

The uncertainty of waiting is an outcome of the uncertainty that surrounds Godot. Vladimir suggests that they might have met him once, but he is not quite sure what he asked Godot to do for them. “It was nothing very definite....” Maybe as Estragon tells him it was “a kind of prayer” or a “vague supplication.” And what had Godot promised them? According to Vladimir, “That he’d see...That he would think it over...” (10-11)

### 12.3.4 Episode of the Boy

At the end of Act I, We have the famous episode of the boy who claims he has come with a message from Godot to Vladimir and Estragon. It is interesting to note that Vladimir responds to the boy who calls him Mister Albert. Is this a hint that Vladimir has several identities? The responses of Vladimir and Estragon are different. Estragon is highly agitated and confronts the boy asking him why he is so late. Vladimir is kinder as he is more keen to hear what the boy has to say. It is significant that they seem to expect the boy and immediately accept his statement that he has come from Godot. A further question arises. Does this mean that Godot actually exists and is not a figment of their imagination? The boy's message is that Godot won't be able to keep the appointment today but will come tomorrow. (44) Vladimir's answer is confused and ambiguous."Tell him... [He hesitates]... tell him you saw us. [Pause.] You did see us, didn't you?"(45)

Vladimir's anxiety that the boy should confirm that he can see him is an expression of the existentialist view that we must be perceived by others in order to realize that we exist.

### 12.3.5 Religious Theme of the Play

The episode of the boy also brings to the forefront the religious theme of the play. Though the play is widely accepted to be influenced by atheist existentialism and absurd philosophy, the several references to the Bible and to salvation and grace are an explicit reminder to the reader that Beckett is concerned with religious issues. As Katherine Worth in her essay "Beckett's Divine Comedy" says, "comedy and a sense of the divine are wonderfully intertwined, making the mystical seem strangely real and the comical a saving grace."(Worth: 2010:245)

The vision of God's Grace and salvation is seen through the perspective of modern day doubt and scepticism. According to the Christian belief, Jesus Christ is the Saviour who will save humanity as man is essentially sinful. The final verdict on the souls who will be saved or damned will be decided by God on Judgement Day.

The reference to the thief who was saved is of great importance in the context of the religious references in the play. (3). It starts with Vladimir asking Estragon if he has ever read the Bible and remembers the Gospels. (The Gospels refers to the narrative of the life of Christ included in the New Testament by the four Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.) Estragon in his characteristic way replies rather flippantly that he remembers the pretty maps of the Holy Land (Palestine).For him it is just another book ,a book that he may read or merely look at rather than believing it to be 'Gospel truth'.

It is Vladimir who continues to bring back the discussion to the episode of the two thieves.

"Vladimir: ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

Estragon: no.

Vladimir: shall I tell it to you?

Estragon: no.

Vladimir: it'll pass the time. (pause.) Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our saviour. One—

Estragon: our what?

Vladimir: our saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . (he searches for the contrary of saved) . . . Damned. (5)

This refers to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the two thieves who were crucified with him. Different versions are given in the four Gospels. In St. Matthew's version the two thieves revile and mock at Christ along with the passers-by and the chief priests. (27:44) In St. Mark's version also there is a similar reference to the thieves insulting him (15:32). In the St. John version there is no reference even to the thieves. It only mentions that Christ was crucified with two others "on either side one." (19:18) It is only in the gospel of St. Luke that a detailed version of the episode is given. In this version one of the thieves mocks him by saying if he indeed is Christ he should prove it by saving himself. These details are not given in any of the other versions. The second thief rebukes the first by saying that they deserve punishment for their misdeeds but not Christ: "this man had done nothing amiss". He turns to Christ and asks him to "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom". Christ replies that "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". (23:39-42)

Vladimir is sceptical enough to ask,

"But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

Estragon: Who believes him?

Vladimir: Everybody. It's the only version they know.

Estragon: People are bloody ignorant apes." (4-5)

While Beckett was sensitive to the power and mystery of the Bible, he had often rejected a Christian interpretation of the play. In these lines Beckett is raising several important questions. Vladimir's questioning of Luke's version reflects Beckett's well-known viewpoint that no sacred or secular text should be believed wholeheartedly. This undercuts the hope that is generated by the reference to one thief being saved.

At the end of Act 1 Estragon compares himself to Christ much to Vladimir's surprise when he abandons his boots centre stage.

"Vladimir: But you can't go barefoot!

Estragon: Christ did.

Vladimir: Christ! What's Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him." (46)

While Beckett often questioned the authority of the Bible, he also recognised its authority in his culture. Both his parents were Protestants and his mother May Beckett insisted that her children should know the Bible thoroughly and ensured that her children learn passages by heart.

This explains the several Biblical words and phrases that enter his writing. For example when Estragon threatens to walk out on Vladimir, and then in a conciliatory manner says, "That would be too bad, really too bad? [Pause] When you think of the beauty of the way. [Pause.] And the goodness of the wayfarers." (8) The word 'wayfarer' also in the Biblical sense means pilgrims.

Little later, a strange sound makes them clutch each other in terror as they think Godot is coming. They heave a sigh of relief when they realize that it is not so. Estragon brushes it aside by saying that it is "The wind in the reeds." (12) This is an echo of Christ's remarks on John the Baptist to the multitudes in the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?... But what went ye out for to see? A prophet?... For this is *he* of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." (11:7-10)

The reference to wind in the reeds then becomes ironical. The coming of Godot only creates mixed feelings of terror and hope in Vladimir and Estragon and has none of the religious significance that is there in the Bible.

The episode of the Boy is also important in understanding the references to the Bible in the play. The boy tends the goats while his brother tends the sheep.

"Vladimir: you work for Mr. Godot?

Boy: yes sir.

Vladimir: what do you do?

Boy: i mind the goats, sir.

Vladimir: is he good to you?

Boy: yes sir.

Vladimir: he doesn't beat you?

Boy: no sir, not me.

Vladimir: whom does he beat?

Boy: he beats my brother, sir.

Vladimir: ah, you have a brother?

Boy: yes sir.

Vladimir: what does he do?

Boy: he minds the sheep, sir.

Vladimir: and why doesn't he beat you?

Boy: i don't know, sir.

Vladimir: he must be fond of you.

Boy: i don't know, sir." (44)

This might appear to be an innocent statement, but is having several important allusions. The reference to two brothers recalls the story of the two brothers Abel and Cain, sons of Adam and Eve in the Bible. Cain later killed Adam. Similarly the reference to sheep and goats recalls the lines in the Gospel of St. Matthew where at the Last Judgement the people will be divided as a "shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set

the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” (25:32-33) i.e. he saved the righteous and sent the rest to everlasting punishment.

Here Godot acts contrary to the Son of Man for as the boy says he beats the minder of sheep and looks after the minder of goats. Godot is unpredictable in his choice of whom he should be kind to. When Vladimir asks him why Godot doesn't beat him, the boy replies, "I don't know, sir." There is no rational explanation for Godot's behaviour. Salvation, God's Grace is bestowed on some and is a matter of chance. There is always division and difference both in heaven and on earth.

### **Self-Assessment Questions 1**

1. Analyse the opening line of the play.
2. Discuss the theme of waiting in the play.
3. What characteristics of Vladimir and Estragon are revealed in this unit.
4. Discuss the importance of the episode of the boy in the First Act.
5. Discuss the religious references in the First Act.

### **12.3.6. Characters of Lucky and Pozzo in the First Act**

#### **12.3.6.1 Entry of Lucky and Pozzo**

The entry of Lucky and Pozzo is of great dramatic interest. Their entry is at a crucial point in the play. Vladimir and Estragon are talking in circles and Estragon repeats once again the first line of the play, "Nothing to be done," (14), when they hear a terrible cry. The stage directions are very detailed. They rush to the side of the stage and huddled together, "shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait." (14) The word 'menace' is significant. It suggests an unknown danger and recalls the opening section of the play where Estragon complains to Vladimir that 'they' beat him up (1). We are never told who the 'they' are. This time however the menace turns out to be only the entry of Lucky and Pozzo.

A detailed description of them is given. Pozzo drives Lucky with a long rope around his neck, with a whip in his hand. Lucky "carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a heavy coat." (14). The description is vivid and creates an immediate impact on the audience/reader. Pozzo treats Lucky as if he is a beast of burden. He cracks the whip and gives him instructions (14; 16). The first word that Pozzo mentions is also significant: 'on.' (14). The word suggests movement and we are immediately able to contrast this with Vladimir and Estragon who are always tied to a spot.

There is also a mixture of the comic and the serious, especially in the description of Estragon running up and down on the stage. The encounter of Pozzo and Lucky with Vladimir and Estragon raises important questions.

The first aspect that strikes us is the nature of the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. Lucky's name itself is ironical. Pozzo treats Lucky like an animal and gives him (Lucky)

instructions by pulling at the rope as one would with an animal. (16-17) Later after he is made a hearty meal, he throws the chicken bones to Lucky.

The audience is repelled by this gesture. But in keeping with the tragi-comic form, Estragon greedily eyes the bones and much to the embarrassment and horror of Vladimir, asks Pozzo if he can take the bones.

### 12.3.6.2. Responses of Vladimir and Estragon

The responses of Vladimir and Estragon range from the comic to the serious.

Comic effects are shown in their response to Pozzo when they first see him, after they have got over their initial panic and fear. Pozzo tries to impress them by loudly declaring his name. “Does that name mean nothing to you?” (15) A little later Vladimir asks a little impudently, “Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?” (15)

Pozzo, in fact, is presented in an ironic and comic light. His self-importance and pompous manner of talking makes him an easy target of the two tramps, as in the example quoted above. He acts as if he is a land lord:

“Pozzo: Waiting? you were waiting for him?

Pozzo: Here? On my land?” (16)

He states quite arrogantly that “You are human beings none the less. ...As far as one can see. ...Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God’s image!” (15)

Pozzo’s character is neatly etched in this episode. He loves to hear his own voice and delivers eloquent speeches and statements to impress Vladimir and Estragon. For example, he says, “The more people I meet the happier I become. From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, and more conscious of one’s blessings.” (22) A little later he states, “The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops....” (25)

Vladimir and Estragon are intelligent enough not to be impressed by these speeches as Beckett wishes the reader /audience to see through the hypocrisy and hollowness of Pozzo. Vladimir and Estragon are not in awe of him. They see Pozzo’s shortcomings. In a conciliatory manner Vladimir says, “I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother had the clap.” (15) The word ‘clap’ means syphilis and this immediately pricks the balloon of Pozzo’s egoism.

A little later Pozzo indulges in self-pity and bursts into melodramatic sobbing, accusing Lucky of ungratefulness and then a moment later reverts to his normal self-saying confidently, “Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer?” (27)

**12.3.6.3. Role playing and Meta theatre.**

Michael Worton rightly points out that there are many references to “theatre and theatricality” in Beckett’s plays. Worton believes that these references makes *Waiting for Godot* meta-theatre, “in that they simultaneously *are* and *comment* upon theatre.” Worton continues “We are forcibly reminded that we are being confronted by pieces of theatre and so we seek not so much an identification with the characters and their predicaments as an understanding of what the plays mean and why they (can) mean in a new way.” (Worton 1994:74)

For example, Pozzo is indulging in acting a role to impress the two tramps. This is made abundantly clear in the reactions and comments of Vladimir and Estragon.

Vladimir: Charming evening we’re having.

Estragon: Unforgettable.

Vladimir: And it’s not over.

Estragon: Apparently not.

Vladimir: It’s only beginning.

Estragon: It’s awful.

Vladimir: Worse than the pantomime.

Estragon: The circus.

Vladimir: The music–hall.

Estragon: The circus. (27-28)

The references to the pantomime, the circus, and the music-hall remind us that these forms played a significant influence on absurd drama. It also, as Andrew Kennedy points out, reminds us of the “circus clown antics of Vladimir and Estragon... and the music–hall patter in their dialogue can be distinctly heard.” (Kennedy 1992:26) But more important it highlights the fact that Pozzo is just playing a role as an actor plays a role on the stage. The audience here is not only us but also Vladimir and Estragon who are commenting on Pozzo as if he is an actor. Therefore this episode of Lucky and Pozzo acts as a play within a play.

Pozzo can also deliberately play different roles. He is aware of this fact and catches Vladimir and Estragon unaware when he eloquently describes the setting of the sun and the coming of the night:

“An hour ago (*he looks at his watch, prosaic*) roughly (*lyrical*) after having poured forth even since (*he hesitates, prosaic*) say ten o’clock in the morning

(*lyrical*) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale (*gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages*) pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until (*dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart*) pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But– (*hand raised in admonition*) – but behind this veil of gentleness and peace, night is charging (*vibrantly*) and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! (*his inspiration leaves him*) just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily.*) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth..." (30-31)

In yet another instance when Pozzo searches for his spray, Estragon mockingly imitates him. (33-34)

Pozzo is controlled by linear time and constantly consults his watch, while for Vladimir and Estragon time moves beyond hours, minutes and seconds and past and present are blurred. However the serious is not far behind as the Pozzo-Lucky relationship raises several important questions.

#### 12.3.6.4. Master-Slave relationship.

The Pozzo – Lucky relationship brings in all kinds of new power equations into the play. In Act I Pozzo is the dominant partner yet in strange ways he is also dependent on Lucky for his material needs. Just as Vladimir and Estragon are seen as one pair, so also Pozzo and Lucky are also always seen together. But their relationship is quite different from that of the two tramps. Pozzo, as Martin Esslin states, is the "sadistic master, Lucky the submissive slave." (Esslin2004:48) Lucky's condition raises a lot of concern on the part of Vladimir and Estragon. (18) They wonder why he does not put down his bags. Pozzo's answer is unconvincing," He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity." A little later he says in a matter-of-fact way that,"The best thing would be to kill him." (24-25)

Pozzo's manner of dismissing the state of Lucky speaks volumes about the former's character. The master-slave relationship is clearly brought out in the Pozzo- Lucky relationship. Pozzo calls him hog and pushes him away because, according to him, he stinks.

#### 12.3.6.5. Lucky's dance and speech.

In order to pass the time, Pozzo commands Lucky to dance. Lucky barely makes a movement and repeats it again in the same manner. Pozzo says he calls the dance,"The Net. He thinks he is entangled in the net." (33) Pozzo has unknowingly summed up Lucky's state. The net suggests that Lucky feels he is trapped and cannot escape from his present condition. Pozzo reminds us that Lucky at one time could dance, sing and entertain his master. The pathetic attempt to dance shows the deterioration in his condition and emphasises that both Lucky and Pozzo, are governed by time.

Lucky's speech is one of the important highlights of Act I. Before reading my comments it is important that you read the speech.

The scene leading to the speech is also important. Estragon is bored and complains, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (34) Vladimir suggests that maybe Lucky can entertain them by thinking. Pozzo says that Lucky can only think if he wears his hat. Again while we are disgusted at Lucky being treated like a performing animal, we are also amused at the idea that the hat is like a thinking cap. (It also underlines the clever use of the hat for comic relief at several points in the play.)

#### **12.3.6.5.1 Lucky's speech**

Lucky's speech or monologue at a first reading seems meaningless. It has no pauses, no punctuation. Beckett does not expect us to extract a coherent meaning from this speech. However a closer reading would make the reader pick up a few words and phrases that do make some sense.

In the opening lines of his speech Lucky says:

"Given the existence ...of a personal God...with white beard...outside time without extension who from the height of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown...and suffers... with those who for reasons unknown are plunged in torment..." (36)

Martin Esslin rightly comments:

"Here again we have the personal God, with his divine apathy, his speechlessness (aphasia), and his lack of capacity for terror and or amazement (athambia), who loves us dearly –with some exceptions who will be plunged into the torments of hell. In other words, God, who does not communicate with us, cannot feel for us, and condemns us for reasons unknown."(Esslin 2004:56)

The speech can be looked at from two viewpoints. From the viewpoint of the actor playing the role it would demand tremendous expertise as it has, as already pointed out, no pauses or full stops. But, on the other hand, the speech is crucial in raising several questions and cannot be dismissed as sheer nonsense.

The description of God is in keeping with some of the central issues that are raised in the play. In the opening lines of the speech, Lucky talks of a "personal God quaquaquaqu with a white beard quaquaquaqu outside time.." (36) Here Beckett is obviously mocking at Western philosophy (quaquaqu..) and a historical approach (outside time).

Katherine Worth refers to the explanation given by Walter Asmus. Asmus stated that Beckett had told him that in "qua quaquaqu" Lucky "was trying to pronounce the word 'quaversalis', referring to 'god who turns himself in all directions at the same time.' "

(cited Worth 2010:239) He uses the same mocking tone when he targets academic institutions as “the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry.” (36)

Lucky’s speech borrows vocabulary from logic, theology, medicine, sports and meteorology. Many aspects of Western civilization like religion, philosophy, science, art and sport are referred to in a fragmentary manner. At one point he inserts a reference to Bishop Berkeley, the Irish philosopher who believed that which is not perceived cannot be held to exist; God however perceives everything and thus ensures its existence.

Lucky also refers to the gradual dwindling and shrinkage of man.. “... that man in short that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation is seen to waste and pine and waste and pine... what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football...for reasons unknown to shrink and dwindle...”(36)

In Act 2 we see this shrinkage and dwindling in Lucky and Pozzo.

But we also see the passage of time in a cosmic sense when Lucky’s speech refers to the earth as an abode of stones, “ ...the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold alas in the year of their Lord six hundred and something...”. (37) The speech ends with a reference to the skull and the stones suggesting man’s ephemeral nature.

#### **12.3.6.5.2 Repetition**

Repetition of words and phrases is obvious in this speech. The word ‘divine’ is repeated four times - three times with reference to an indifferent God and once with reference to Miranda, the heroine of Shakespeare’s play, “The Tempest.” Katherine Worth rightly points out that it is significant that the word is used by Lucky. By using it for Miranda Lucky suggests that she was divine because she could “so feel for total strangers.”(Worth 2010:239)

The most frequently repeated phrase is “for reasons unknown.” It reflects in many ways the endless wait for Godot by Vladimir and Estragon with no clear –cut reason given for their waiting or any explanation on the identity of Godot.

The idea of the inevitable decay of man is highlighted by the repetition of words and phrases like “skull”, “pine and waste”, “dwindle and shrink”, “shrink and waste”.

There are scattered references to ‘flames’, “hell”, “plunged in torment”, “plunged in fire” but also in the same breath Lucky speaks of “blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm so calm with a calm” . Another word which is repeated and seems significant is the word “unfinished.” It is a reflection of Lucky’s own speech which is unfinished, (as Vladimir and Estragon do not allow him to finish it), fragmentary and with sentences that are never completed. It also reflects the condition of the two tramps whose waiting for Godot will always remain unfinished.

Another phrase that Lucky uses is that “time will tell.” Lucky’s treatment of time is more subtle than Pozzo as he embraces a much larger dimension of time reaching from God to an abode of stones.

#### **12.3.6.5.3 Reactions of Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo to Lucky’s speech**

In a detailed stage direction, Beckett for the first time gives us the reactions of the three onlookers. (35-36) Vladimir and Estragon move from being attentive to protesting violently. Pozzo moves from being dejected and disgusted to getting more agitated and groaning in protest. All “three throw themselves on Lucky who struggles and shouts his text.”(36) Finally Lucky can only be stopped from talking when his hat is seized from him. The three see themselves as “victors”, Estragon cries triumphantly, “Avenged!” and Pozzo stamps Lucky’s hat violently, saying, “There’s an end to his thinking.”(38) This gesture of Pozzo, according to Jeffrey Nealon, is an intellectual violence that “mirrors the physical violence that Lucky is subjected to throughout the play.”(Nealon 1992:49). Lucky’s speech defies logic and rational thinking and therefore triggers an extreme reaction on the part of the three onlookers who see it, as a threat to their way of thinking.

#### **12.3.6.5.4 Beckett’s use of language in Lucky’s Speech**

Lucky’s use of language, at one level, shows the breakup of syntax and rational thought. We are only able to isolate a few word clusters, as shown in the use of repetition and the final fading out of words which have a poetic overtones, “the stones...so calm...Cunard ...unfinished”(38), and also echo the exhaustion of the speaker.

Lucky’s speech is a stark contrast to the pompous eloquence of Pozzo and the endless chatter and give-and take of Estragon and Vladimir. Lucky’s speech seems to be a pouring out with no control over language or syntax and therefore seems meaningless and chaotic.

This echoes Ionesco’s definition of the absurd, “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost: all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless.” (cited Esslin 2004:23) The breakdown of language is in keeping with this characteristic of absurd theatre.

#### **12.3.6.5.5 Lucky’s Speech and Post-Modernism**

Jeffrey Nealon sees this speech as an example of post-modernism. Post-modernism rejects the idea of universal values, objective knowledge or a singular identity. It depends on multiple meanings which are dependent on particular contexts or audiences. It rejects the idea of certainties in meaning. If one applied this to Lucky’s speech, then Nealon argues that it is a “speech of liberation set against the metaphysical tyranny of limitations on thought imposed by limitations on language.” Lucky’s speech, Nealon continues, moves “beyond the limitations that have been placed on language” and opens up “the field of what can be thought.” (Nealon 1992:47-48)

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**12.4 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACT II OF WAITING FOR GODOT**

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**12.4.1. The Opening of Act II**

Act two opens with the stage direction, "Next day. Same time. Same place." It indicates that time has passed but that passage of time is calculated by the characters in different ways. More on that later.

The only change is that the tree has four or five leaves. The sprouting of leaves should suggest optimism. It also echoes the lines from the fourteenth century Italian poet Dante's *Purgatorio XXXII 59-60* "The tree renewed itself, which before had its boughs so naked." Here Dante sees the leaves on the tree as a sign of optimism, suggesting the possibility of renewal for mankind through God's grace.

Beckett however does not indicate that he sees this as a sign of hope and renewal. If one takes this image in the context of the whole play, the leaves are seen as an isolated phenomenon, as deceptive as the two tramps waiting for Godot. Ironically the tree is never seen as fulfilling any important function even for hanging.

Act Two opens with Vladimir entering on to the stage, while in the first act Estragon was on the stage. Here only the boots of Estragon are shown on the stage.

**Vladimir's song**

Vladimir sings a round song. The round song is circular and goes back to the beginning. The theme of the dog beaten to death by the cook indicates death and the cruelty of man.

**Entry of Estragon**

Estragon enters and makes the same complaint that he had made earlier in the first act that he was beaten up by some unknown people. Vladimir and he hug each other as if they are long lost friends though the stage directions earlier states that it is only the next day. As in the First Act Vladimir seems more in control of the situation than Estragon. Vladimir insists that Estragon admit he is happy even if he is not.

**12.4.1.1 Loss of Memory**

Another important element that emerges in this scene is Estragon's apparent loss of memory. He does not remember the tree or Pozzo and Lucky, nor does he recognize the place. (52) Estragon reacts furiously when Vladimir insists on recalling the past.

"Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (Looking wildly about him.) Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!" (52)

Estragon's frustration and his sense of being imprisoned are obvious in these lines. Time seems to have stood still for him. This is in obvious contrast to his earlier statement that everything changes from moment to moment. Even the events that occurred the day before have been forgotten. A moment later Estragon exclaims in disgust that, "I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you!"(53) As Worth says, "Estragon is always nearer to despair than Vladimir." (Worth 2010:239)

Vladimir cannot wipe the past so easily. He gently reminds Estragon "But we were there together, I could swear to it!" (53)

#### **12.4.1.2 Dead Voices**

Estragon calms down and suggests that they should converse calmly. This leads to one of the most poetic passages in the play.

Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.

Estragon: It's so we won't think.

Vladimir: We have that excuse.

Estragon: It's so we won't hear.

Vladimir: We have our reasons.

Estragon: All the dead voices.

Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like sand.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence.

Vladimir: They all speak at once.

Estragon: Each one to itself.

Silence.

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Vladimir: They murmur.

Estragon: They rustle.

Silence.

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: They have to talk about it.

Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.

Estragon: It is not sufficient.

Silence.

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves. (53-54)

Most critics have pointed out the significance of these lines. Esslin states:

This passage, in which the cross-talk of Irish music-hall comedians is miraculously transmuted into poetry contains the key to much of Beckett's work. Surely these rustling, murmuring voices of the past ...are the voices that explore the mysteries of being and the self to the limits of anguish and suffering. Vladimir and Estragon are trying to escape hearing them. (Esslin 2004:61)

Worth goes even further when she states:

"Heaven may be harder to dramatize than hell, but it is brought very near in Act 11 when Vladimir and Estragon move into a poetic rhythm of great beauty, conjuring up for us the mysterious presence of 'All the dead voices.' "(Worth 2010:239)

It is appropriate that these lines are followed by a long silence, until they return once again to their chatter to pass the time as they endlessly wait for Godot.

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.

Estragon: Ah! (54)

### 12.4.1.3 Passing the time

The sheer boredom that the two feel is brought out by the episode of the boots and the hat. Vladimir suggests that Estragon should try the boots found on the stage, which he had discarded earlier as they were too tight to “pass the time”, as a recreation. (60) Estragon reluctantly tries them on even though he protests that they are not his. Both are surprised that the boots not only fit but are too big for him. They are unable to explain this. The reader could surmise that there is a possibility that Estragon’s feet have shrunk, just as Pozzo and Lucky also show signs of deterioration and echoes Lucky’s warning of wasting and dwindling.

The episode of the hat is also significant. Just as Vladimir suggests that the boots belong to someone else, so also he states that the hat he finds is Lucky’s hat. Then comes the famous scene of the juggling of the three hats, in a detailed stage direction, a well-known music-hall routine. (63-64)

The sheer boredom of their lives is shown. They spend their time imitating Lucky and Pozzo, (64-65), by abusing each other (67), trying to do exercises (68), and Vladimir imitates the Yoga pose, by standing on one leg. (68)

Estragon suggests a deeper meaning when he unsuccessfully tries to imitate Vladimir’s pose and says, “Do you think God sees me? “(69)But there is a deep bond between the two. Estragon goes to sleep in the “foetal posture” as if he wishes to retreat into the safety of the womb and Vladimir sings a lullaby and covers him with his coat. (62)

### Self-Assessment Questions 2

1. How would you interpret the Pozzo- Lucky relationship in Act 1
2. What are the reactions of Vladimir and Estragon to Pozzo and Lucky in Act 1.
3. Give a brief character sketch of Pozzo in Act 1.
4. Discuss some of the issues that Lucky’s speech seems to bring out.
5. What are the responses of Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo to Lucky’s speech?  
Why is the hat so important?
6. Discuss Beckett’s use of language and syntax in Lucky’s speech.
7. Discuss the opening of the second act
8. Discuss Estragon’s confusion about time and Vladimir’s reaction to it.
9. How do Vladimir and Estragon pass the time?

### 12.4.2. Entry of Pozzo and Lucky

The entry of Pozzo and Lucky in Act 11 is very different from that of Act 1. Pozzo is blind and Lucky guides him with a much shorter rope, so that Pozzo, as the stage direction states, can follow more easily. When Lucky falls, he brings down Pozzo with him. They lie helplessly waiting for help. (69) The state of Pozzo raises a lot of questions. How could he have become blind in one day? Beckett is working outside the realistic

frame. The power equation between Pozzo and Lucky has also changed. Pozzo, the master, is now totally dependent on Lucky to guide him.

### Tragi-comedy

Even in a situation like this, Beckett retains the comic perspective. The natural human instinct is to help Pozzo and Lucky who are lying in a heap. But instead Vladimir sees this diversion as helping him “to see the evening out.” “We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for...waiting.”(69) Both the tramps continue with their conversation while Pozzo cries for help. They discuss in detail how Pozzo can be helped back to his feet, and discuss whether Estragon should once again ask for a bone (70) or for some tangible return. (71)

#### 12.4.3. Vladimir’s First speech

Vladimir dominates the scene and in the first of his many outbursts angrily tells Estragon, “Let us not waste our time in idle discourse.”(71) Let us not forget he is wearing Lucky’s hat. He reminds him almost in Pozzo’s rhetorical style that “To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time all mankind is us whether we like it or not.”(72) While Vladimir’s words that Pozzo’s cries for help were addressed to all seems highly exaggerated, he also attempts to give a larger dimension to the episode by saying that he represents all of mankind. But Vladimir’s statement cannot be taken at face value. It seems he wants to impress his listeners. Soon his speech digresses as, in a moment of self-reflection, he asks, “What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come-” (72)

The speech clearly shows the fragmentary nature of his thoughts as he cannot reasonably work out any one line of thought. He starts by considering Pozzo’s cry for help and ends with his repeating that he is waiting for Godot. Further Vladimir emphasizes that while they might have been inconsistent and contradictory on several things, the one consistent element in them has been that they have kept their “appointment, and that’s an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?” (72) The reference to saints also has Biblical echoes.

Vladimir admits that both Estragon and he have tried to “beguile” the time in order to “prevent our reason from foundering.” But he feels they have not fully succeeded and in a metaphoric turn of phrase he says they have strayed into a “night” of “abyssal depths.”(72) Estragon replies succinctly, “We all are born mad. Some remain so.” (73)

### The Serious and the Comic

The intertwining of the serious and the comic is seen in the farcical scene where both Vladimir and Estragon fall into a heap while trying to help Pozzo to get up. This is a visual expression of their situation where everything seems to be falling and is further

emphasized when Estragon and Vladimir try to hold Pozzo up. The stage direction reads “(They get him up again. Pozzo sags between them, his arms round their necks)” (77) Does this recall the several paintings we have seen of the crucified Christ between two thieves? But the parallel is only visual. By no means can Pozzo be compared to Christ. It takes quite a while before they can stand up. During that period several important exchanges occur, the significance of which is not entirely gauged by the characters themselves.

As Vladimir and Estragon debate whether they should help Pozzo to get up, Vladimir exclaims, “Come, let’s get to work!...In an instant all will vanish and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!” (73) Vladimir is once again repeating the theme of nothingness which expresses the state of the two tramps.

At one point the blind Pozzo asks Vladimir: “Who are you?” Vladimir replies “We are men.” (74) This is an echo of Vladimir’s earlier statement that “all mankind is us.”

A little later Didi and Gogo are alarmed when Pozzo, lying on the ground, does not respond to them. Estragon suggests that they should try calling him by other names. Vladimir is not too responsive.

Estragon: To try him with other names, one after the other. It'd pass the time.  
And we'd be bound to hit on the right one sooner or later.

Vladimir: I tell you his name is Pozzo.

.....

Estragon: He's all humanity. (Silence.). (76)

Once again, the universality of their condition is emphasized.

The ensuing exchanges between Pozzo and the tramps revolve around the reality of their situation and their varying interpretations of time. There is confusion for a brief moment when Pozzo responds to the names of Abel and Cain, just as Vladimir responds to the name of Albert. Beckett uses this for emphasizing the sense of uncertainty that surrounds even one’s own identity.

But later Pozzo clarifies, much to the relief of Vladimir, that indeed he is Pozzo and he is accompanied by Lucky. (81) Yet this still does not clear the confusion. Like Estragon, Pozzo does not remember meeting them, “I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won’t remember having met anyone today. So don’t count on me to enlighten you.” (81) Memory is uncertain and unreliable.

### The References to Time

The problem of time recurs in this scene. Vladimir speaks of the long hours before them when they have tried to pass the time. (72) But time is also seen in terms of the hands of the clock. Estragon is confused whether it is morning or evening-whether the sun is rising or setting. Vladimir is more certain of it. (78) Though he emphasizes the unreality of the situation by saying, “But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day and I can

assure you it is very near the end of its repertory.”(78) This is a clear reference to life being compared to the stage.

For Pozzo the watch was very important in Act 1. But now in Act 2, linear time has no meaning. When Vladimir questions him as to when he became blind, Pozzo reacts “violently” by saying that “The blind have no notion of time... The things of time are hidden from them too.”(79) But the change in Pozzo’s attitude is brought out clearly in his furious response to Vladimir’s persistent questioning about Lucky becoming dumb.

Pozzo: [Suddenly furious] Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (82)

Pozzo had lost his watch in the First Act and has lost his sight in the Second Act. Pozzo’s sense of time has moved from the finite (the watch), to the infinite.

#### 12.4.4. Vladimir’s Soliloquy

It is this outburst of Pozzo that triggers Vladimir’s famous soliloquy:

“Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?” (83)

The speech shows the degree of self-questioning and uncertainty of one’s experience - a characteristic of modernism. Truth is relative. This uncertainty and ambiguity is central to the play.

Vladimir realizes that the experiences he undergoes are endlessly repetitive. He looks at Estragon and continues,” He’ll know nothing. He’ll tell me about the blows he received and I’ll give him a carrot.”

In the next part of the speech he echoes the key words in Pozzo’s outburst- astride, grave, birth. “Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries... But habit is a great deadener.” Vladimir is pointing to the inevitability of birth and death. But time moves at a slower pace, as evident in the words “lingeringly”, and in the line “We have time to grow old.” The reference to habit points to one of the central themes of the play. It recalls Beckett’s views on habit as elaborated in his monograph on Proust and discussed in an earlier unit.

Vladimir then looks at Estragon sleeping and says, "At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on." Here Beckett seems to be echoing the words of the eighteenth century Anglo-Irish philosopher Berkeley who argued that "to be is to be perceived." (Russell 1959:288). God perceives everything and thus ensures its existence.

Vladimir concludes by crying out "I can't go on." (83) Like much of the language in the play, the line is ambiguous. Is it a cry of anguish that he can't go on with the present state of things or is it a simple statement that he can't continue with his speech?

#### **12.4.5. Entry of the Boy**

The entry of the boy at the end of the second act recalls his entry at the end of the first act. Predictably he more or less gives the same message that he gave in the first act, that Godot won't come "this evening ", but when Vladimir asks anxiously whether he (Godot) will come tomorrow, the boy merely replies, "Yes, sir." (84)

There are several intriguing aspects to this scene. The boy denies he was the same boy who came the day before, nor does he claim to have seen two men (Pozzo and Lucky). When Vladimir questions as to what Godot does, the boy replies, "He does nothing, sir." The word 'nothing' echoes one of the main themes of the play. But just as in the last act, the boy claimed that Godot used to beat his brother who minded the sheep, so too the boy describes Godot as a man with a white beard, recalling Lucky's description of God with a white beard. The reader is also reminded of the description of Lucky in the first act as having long white hair. (26) Vladimir repeats his anxiety of the first act when he tells the boy to inform Godot that "you saw me. ..You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!" (85)

#### **12.4.6. Ending of the Play**

Vladimir is overcome with a feeling of pointlessness. The stage instruction states "As in Act One .Vladimir stands motionless and bowed" (85) Both Vladimir and Estragon want to leave but are tied to the spot waiting for Godot. Estragon asks Vladimir what would happen if they dropped Godot. Vladimir says Godot would punish "us. (86) But later he tells Estragon that if Godot comes, "We'll be saved." (87) Here Godot is almost given a God-like status.

But in keeping with the tragi-comic form, we have the farcical scene of Vladimir and Estragon trying to hang themselves. Camus' absurd man wants to commit suicide because life has lost all meaning. Beckett's tramps are also afflicted by a sense of nothingness. But what stops the play from becoming a tragedy is the futile attempts of both of them to hang from the branches of the tree. Estragon uses the cord which holds up

his trousers, but it is not strong enough and snaps in two. Estragon does not notice that his trousers fall to his ankles and Vladimir has to remind him to pull on his trousers. Now they are free to go, but are unable to take that decision. They are tied to the spot. The play ends with Vladimir saying, “Well? Shall we go?”

Estragon replies, “Yes, let’s go.”

The stage direction reads, [They do not move.] (87)

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## 12.5. CONCEPTUALIZING THE PLAY

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### 12.5.1 *Waiting for Godot* as a Modernist/Postmodernist play

*Waiting for Godot* marks an important landmark in the transition of modern drama from the naturalistic-realistic plays to a new kind of play.

Critics like Esslin, Cohn and Worton have discussed this aspect. *Waiting for Godot* has been seen as a transition from “Modernism with its preoccupation with self –reflection to Post-Modernism with its insistence on pastiche, parody and fragmentation.”(Worton1994:69) Modernism, along with self-conscious reflection and a belief in universal values, also emphasised a form that was structured and unified, though it rejected any kind of fixity in ideas. In contrast post-modernism emphasised that meaning was always multiple and dependent on particular contexts.

H. Porter Abbott calls Beckett a “late modernist” and agrees with Irving Howe that Beckett was the “last modernist” in his “fidelity to the modernist spirit of opposition and his consistent refusal to decline into one or another mode of intellectual or aesthetic fixity ...”(cited Abbott1990:74) Abbott argues that Beckett’s experimentation with form,(Abbott 1990:75) , his obliterating the plot and ridding the plot of “linear causality” is in keeping with the spirit of late modernism.(Abbott 1990 :84) Another important aspect of Beckett is his “intense earnestness” which distinguishes him from the post modernists. (Abbott 1990:91) One can therefore emphasise the point that *Waiting for Godot* marks a transition from modernism to late modernism.

### 12.5.2. *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurd Play

Esslin states that “things happen in *Waiting for Godot*, but these happenings do not constitute a plot or story; they are an image of Beckett’s situation that *nothing really ever happens* in man’s existence.” (Esslin2004:403)

Let us list some of the characteristics that Esslin gives us as a definition of the absurd theatre.

Esslin states that absurd theatre expresses the “tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties” and makes man to confront the “ultimate reality of his condition.”

(Esslin2004:400) This is what Camus also discusses in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Refer to unit 2.3.2.

Beckett certainly makes his two tramps –Vladimir and Estragon –aware of the emptiness of their situation, but we are not certain whether they are fully able to understand their sense of loss. In fact, as we have seen, the play moves in circles with the two tramps ending where they began.

Esslin explains that in absurd theatre man is “stripped of the accidental circumstances of social position or historical context, confronted with the basic situations of his existence: man faced with time and therefore waiting, in Beckett’s plays...waiting between birth and death.” The Theatre of the Absurd makes its audience “aware of man’s precarious and mysterious position in the universe” (Esslin2004:401-402)

This is true to some extent of the condition of Vladimir and Estragon, but we are also aware that Beckett connects the process of waiting in *Waiting for Godot* to habit and Beckett is highly critical of habit. The repetition of the lines “waiting for Godot” is to remind them that they are waiting. Again the ambiguity surrounding the figure of Godot underlines the confusion of the two tramps. Though Vladimir and Estragon get glimpses of their condition they do not present a sustained self awareness. This is more in keeping with their modern/post-modernist condition.

Esslin also argues that the Theatre of the Absurd “lacks objectively valid characters.”(Esslin 2004:403) This is not true as far as the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are concerned. As H. Porter Abbott has rightly argued while Beckett moved away from the conventional form of drama as far as plot was concerned, he never did away with characters. The leading characters are portrayed in detail in *Waiting for Godot*. As Abbott says, that it is strange that “our leading exponent of the disintegration of the self should have produced some of our most memorable characters.” (Abbott: 1990:85) Beckett successfully used the theatre as a “medium” in which through the use of “voice and image” he brings out individual personalities (Abbott1990:89). There is no doubt that Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo have distinct personalities. Even Lucky in his one great outburst and his otherwise perpetual silence is a memorable character.

Another very important aspect of the play is Beckett’s use of language. As already discussed in Unit two. Esslin points to the” devaluation and disintegration of language in The Theatre of the Absurd. “(Esslin2004:406)

Worton says the most significant aspect is that it is “no longer presented as a vehicle for direct communication or as a screen through which one can see darkly the psychic movements of a character. Rather it is used in all its grammatical, syntactic and-especially- intertextual force to make the reader /spectator aware of how much we depend on language and of how much we need to be wary of the codifications that language imposes upon us.” (Worton1994:68) Language moves away from logic as we see in Lucky’s speech which we have discussed in great length in Unit 4.

Absurd theatre draws from several non-verbal traditions like the circus, mime etc. where language is not foregrounded. The disintegration of language also reflects, according to Esslin, the breakdown between human beings. (Esslin2004:408)

We can argue that though there are several elements of absurd theatre in *Waiting for Godot*, it does not neatly fit into that category.

### 12.5.3. Existentialism and *Waiting for Godot*

Though Beckett was attracted to existentialist philosophy, as Esslin states, he never “consciously expressed Existentialist views.” Like Sartre, Beckett realised that man should face the reality of his condition, the sense of nothingness and the recognition that he has to make choices. But in *Waiting for Godot*, the two tramps eagerly wait for Godot to appear. Vladimir looks at that promised meeting with some hope. Often Vladimir and Estragon avoid facing the reality of their situation. Thus they seem to avoid the existentialist crisis they are facing. (Esslin 2004:61)

*Waiting for Godot* also differs from the form of the existentialist play. The plays of existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus are presented in a conventional form with a great deal of emphasis on logic and reason. (Esslin 2004:24) As we have already pointed out, the plays of Beckett move away from a conventional form and experiment with language and characters.

### 12.5.4. Language in *Waiting for Godot*

Though Beckett's language is simple it has a rich texture of meaning. We have already discussed the several references to the Bible which add a larger dimension to the play though he rejected a strictly Christian interpretation of the play. One of the crucial debates in the play is Vladimir's anxiety and a search for an answer to the episode of the thief who was saved. Refer to Unit Three. Though Beckett was fascinated by the idea that the four Gospels have differing versions, he was also attracted to this episode for another reason. In a widely quoted statement he made to Harold Hobson in 1956, Beckett said

“I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. ‘Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.’ That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.” (cited Worton 1994:75)

This quotation gives several insights into Beckett's use of language and form. While on the one hand he believed in the breakdown of language which could no longer be a means of communication, on the other hand he attempted to express that breakdown in a form that had symmetry and harmony. He says in 1961, “To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist.” (cited Worton 1994:74)

Another important image is that of the tree which has so many different meanings attached to it.

The use of pauses, silences and repetition are crucial to Beckett's use of language. I have already discussed the use of repetition which creates its own layers of meaning. Ruby Cohn analyses Beckett's use of repetition in this play in great detail. . Act Two "duplicates" Act One: "one friend often echoes the other: gestures are repetitive .... above all, words are repetitive...." (Cohn 1980:97) Cohn states that Beckett repeats "sound, word, phrase, sentence or dialogue" for "varied effects" ranging from despair, threat, horror or just for emphasis. (Cohn 1980:96-98)

Cohn also includes the refrain as part of the technique of repetition. She defines it as "A meaningful word or words often repeated during the course of a play, so that the audience grows aware of that repetition." (Cohn 1980:102) The best example of this, as Cohn states, is the famous exchange:

Estragon: Let's go.  
Vladimir: We can't.  
Estragon: Why not?  
Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.  
Estragon: Ah!

This refrain is repeated two times in Act1 and four times in Act 11. (Cohn 1980:102)

*Waiting for Godot* is famous for its use of pauses and silences. Worton states that the pauses are used when the characters are searching for the right word, "when they are struck dumb by the attitude of their interlocutor or by the sense that they might be breaking a social taboo...and...when they await the response of the other...such pauses leave the reader –spectator space and time to explore the blank spaces between the words...pauses or gaps ...fragments the text, making it a series of discrete speeches and episodes rather than the seamless presentation of a dominant idea."

### **Conclusion**

*Waiting for Godot* was a path-breaking play which even today appeals to the reader/spectator. As Enoch Brater rightly stated Beckett was one of the "more significant players in the whole reshaping of Western drama that was taking place all over Europe and America...it was to change forever our notions of what might be made to happen in a performance space, as well as to challenge any preconceptions we might still have concerning what constitutes a performance itself."

### **Self-Assessment Questions 3**

1. Discuss the first speech of Vladimir in the second act and point out its importance.

2. Discuss Pozzo's speech on time. Show how it is different from his attitude to time in the first act
3. Critically analyse Vladimir's soliloquy and point out its significance
4. Analyse the episode of the boy in the second act.
5. Discuss the ending of the play.
6. Give examples of meta theatre in the play..
7. Give a brief character sketch of Vladimir and Estragon in the second act.
8. How far do you think is Waiting for Godot is an absurd and an existentialist play?
9. Discuss Beckett's use of language in the play.

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### **12.6. SUMMARY**

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In this unit we have discussed the coming of Pozzo and Lucky and analysed their significance in the first act. We have looked in great detail at Lucky's speech and discussed its significance. We have also analysed the opening of the second act and examined the exchange of conversation between Vladimir and Estragon which includes the scenes of the 'dead voices' and passing the time.

In the next section we have discussed the coming of Pozzo and Lucky in the Second Act, the speeches of Vladimir and Pozzo and the episode of the boy.

We have also summed up some of the main characteristics of the play –like the existentialist and absurd elements in the play, and the use of language.

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### **12.7 GLOSSARY**

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**Aphasia**-speechlessness. Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines it as "inability to understand thought as expressed in the spoken or written words of others, by reason of some brain disease."

**Athambia**-amazement. (Esslin)

**Codification**-present rules in a clear and ordered way.

**Closure**- the final ending tying up all the knots

**Denouement**-the final outcome and conclusion of a series of events.

**Discrete** –consisting of separate parts.

**Digression** –to move away from the main point.

**Episode**-an incident which can be detached from the main narrative.

Foregrounded- to give importance over everything else.

Farcical- from the word farce. A humorous play with exaggerated situations.

Fragmentation- a part that is broken from the whole.

Inter textual- references to other texts.

Irony – using words that actually convey an opposite meaning-often as a joke or sarcastically.

Metaphor- a figure of speech that describes something by referring to something else that it resembles. A popular example is describing the camel as the ship of the desert.

Meta theatre- a term used when a play comments on itself –for example, role playing, comments on the audience, and a play within a play. It is anti-realistic but it also highlights the theatricality of life.

Monologue- a speech spoken by one person

Music-hall- It was a popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It consisted of comedians, singers and dancers.

Pantomime – a dumb show

Parody- a humorous piece of writing which imitates the style of a well known person or represents a familiar style in an exaggerated way.

Pastiche-a mixture of styles.

Rhetorical – using exaggerated or eloquent style to make a statement.

Soliloquy- talking to oneself.

Syntactic-the adjective of syntax. Syntax is the grammatical structure of sentences.

Vaudeville-theatrical entertainment consisting of either individual performances, or mixed numbers by comedians, singers, dancers, acrobats, and magicians.

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**12.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss the opening scene of the play.
2. Analyse the significance of the episode of the boy.
3. What important themes of the play are brought out by the characters of Vladimir and Estragon?
4. What is the importance of the religious references in the play?
5. Discuss the significance of Lucky's speech.
6. Critically comment on the opening scene of Act Two.
7. Analyse the scenes of passing the time and comment on their comic effect.
8. Discuss the elements of Absurd and Existentialist philosophy in *Waiting for Godot*.
9. Discuss the characters of Vladimir and Estragon.
10. Examine the importance of Pozzo and Lucky in the play.
11. With close reference to the text, give examples of repetition, silences and pauses in the play. Point out the significance of the examples you give.
12. What, in your opinion, are the central themes of *Waiting for Godot*?

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**UNIT 13                      JOHN OSBORNE:    *LOOK BACK IN***  
***ANGER*    PART 1**

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- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives
- 13.3 John Osborne: His life and plays
- 13.4 The first staging of *Look Back in Anger* and its Impact
- 13.5 Political, economic and social contexts of *Look Back in Anger*
  - 13.5.1 The Labour Party and the Welfare State
  - 13.5.2. The Education Act of 1944
  - 13.5.3. England in the 1950's
  - 13.5.4. The Suez Crisis
- 13.6 Background to the Play
  - 13.6.1. A brief summary of British drama in the 1940's and 1950's
  - 13.6.2. The form of *Look Back in Anger*
  - 13.6.3 The influence of the well-made play
  - 13.6.4. *Look Back in Anger*, Naturalism, Realism and the Problem play
  - 13.6.5. The “Angry young men” and *Look Back in Anger*
- 13.7 A critical summary of Act I
- 13.8 Summary
- 13.9 Glossary
- 13.10 References
- 13.11 Terminal Questions

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**13.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit you will be introduced to a brief account of John Osborne life and works. The unit will then discuss some of the central political, economic and social contexts within which *Look Back In Anger* was written. It will give you a brief background to British drama and a summary of Act 1 of the text with appropriate critical comments.

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**13.2 OBJECTIVES**

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After reading this unit you will understand the context of Osborne's play. The summary of the First Act will help you to read the text in its original.

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**13.3 JOHN OSBORNE: HIS LIFE AND PLAYS**

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John Osborne, born in London, on December 12, 1929, was the son of a barmaid and his father was a commercial artist and copywriter. He went to school in Devon but left school after striking the head master. He began working as a journalist from 1946 and became an actor in 1948. He started writing plays from the 1950s. His first major play; *Look Back in Anger* was presented at the Royal Court Theatre, London on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1956. This made him famous and was followed by other plays like *The Entertainer* (1957), *Luther* (1961) and *A Sense of Detachment* (1972). He also wrote musicals, adaptations of well known plays like the Norwegian playwright Ibsen's late nineteenth century play *Hedda Gabler* in 1972 and also adapted the British playwright, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1975.

John Osborne also wrote for television and the screen play for films like *Tom Jones* for which he got an Oscar.

He also won honors like The Evening Standard Drama Award, as most promising Playwright of the Year for his play *Look Back In Anger* and the Tony Award in New York for Best Play for *Luther*. In 1993 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writers 'Guild of Great Britain.

He died on 24 December, 1994.

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**13.4 THE FIRST STAGING OF *LOOK BACK IN ANGER* AND ITS IMPACT**

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In 1995 The English Stage Company was established in London and took on lease a small theatrical building called the Royal Court Theatre. Its first director was George Devine and its aim, as the critic Oliver Neville states, was to "encourage new English plays..." (Neville 1983:253). According to Neville when John Osborne submitted his play script, Devine recognised the appeal that the theme and language would have on the audience. (Neville: 252).

The play was staged in the Royal Court theatre in London on 8 May 1956. The initial audience response was not overwhelming and it was only after it was televised in mid-October that it became popular. (Prasad 2006: ix-x). However there is no doubt that the play made a tremendous impact and critics saw it as a turning point in British drama as it seemed to give voice to the frustrations and anger of the younger generation of the 1950's. Kenneth Tynan was to call it "the best young play of its decade." (Quoted in Prasad:ix)

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### 13.5 POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*

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It is necessary to understand the political and social context of the play. Today, in 2012, situated in India, we are not able to fully grasp the reasons for the hero, Jimmy Porter's intense anger. A close look at the political, economic and social contexts might give us some answers

#### 13.5.1 The Labour Party and the Welfare State

The Labour Party came to power in England after the Second World War and the most important step they took was to establish a socialist state. The concept of a welfare state was central to the idea of a socialist state. After 1945, and the tremendous suffering that the common man had undergone during the World War, the intervention of the state in the economy and in education were welcomed by large sections of the British population.

Krishna Kumar in his essay, "The Social and Cultural Setting", explains the nature of this intervention. "The significant thing was the acceptance by all parties of permanent and continuous state intervention in the economy whether through ownership, control, or regulation." (Kumar 1983:19) Equality of opportunity and social justice were key elements in the welfare state. Kumar points out that trade unions, businessmen, scientists and economists were brought directly into the government, (Kumar:17).

The Conservative Party continued with these policies when it came back to power in 1951. This was a period of political consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties on the need to follow the concept of a welfare state. Extreme political positions of Left and Right were avoided. The differences between the middle class and working class was blurred-for e.g., in the play, *Look Back in Anger*, the university educated Jimmy Porter runs a sweet stall financed by his friend Hugh's mother who belongs to the working class. The 1950's saw rising affluence in the middle class and economic prosperity.

#### 13.5.2. The Education Act of 1944

The Education Act of 1944 was another important piece of legislation. It meant free and compulsory secondary education for everyone and it meant that the working class could get equal opportunity to education. However as Neeraj Malik has pointed out it was not as positive as it seemed. The class system had not disappeared but social tensions had

increased as many of the educated middle and lower classes found that economic and social success was denied to them. (Malik 1956: xii) Much of the anger in *Look Back in Anger* could be traced to the frustration and disillusionment that an educated middle and lower class felt as they believed their potential was not fully recognized, many attractive avenues were available but not accessible to them.

In 1957, John Osborne gave expression to this frustration when he responded to a questionnaire by the London Magazine:

It wasn't so difficult to make up your mind about which side of the barricades you were voting for, when men were standing about on street corners all over England, and nobody was doing anything about it. People were being thrown on the economic ashcan all around you....Now the ashcan is very different, so different that its difficult to recognize. Now that the man on the street corner is taking home twelve or fifteen pounds a week, his family get "free" medical treatment, "free" school meals (paid for principally by the working classes themselves in taxes),he seems to have become a pretty contemptible creature. (Quoted in Malik:xv)

I have given this quotation in full as it sums up clearly Osborne's feelings and views on the state of England in the 1950's.He is comparing England's economic situation immediately after Second World War when people were facing a tough economic situation to his own times. The establishment of a welfare state gave free medical benefits and free school meals but it made the upper class look with contempt at the lower classes. Osborne is emphasizing the lack of dignity and self respect which were some of the negative aspects of the welfare system. This hatred of the class system is clearly brought out in the character of Jimmy Porter, the hero of *Look Back in Anger*.

### 13.5.3. England in the 1950's

It is important to understand the changed political situation in the 1950's. The Conservative Party came back to power in 1951 led by Harold Macmillan. It adopted the same economic policies as the Labour Party-mainly the economic policies of a welfare state. But the nature of British power and its dominance in the world had changed. The great era of British Empire was over. This is seen clearly in the character of Alison's father, Colonel Redfern who has returned to England after India got independence. The hero of *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter also speaks with regret of England's great past. The United States of America was establishing itself as a super power and was beginning to exercise a great deal of influence. These aspects will be discussed in greater detail in the next unit when we discuss some of the central themes of the play.

### 13.5.4. The Suez Crisis

The play clearly brought out the contrast between the past of England, both pre-war and post-war and the England of the 1950's. A few months after the staging of *Look Back in*

*Anger*, the Suez crisis occurred. Historically, the Suez crisis was seen as a turning point in Britain's status as a world power as after this Britain foreign policy was seen to be in tune with that of United States of America whose growing influence could no longer be ignored. As the critic Stephen Lacey states, "There is no escaping the fact, however, that after Suez it is a narrative of *loss*-loss of British influence in the world, with a consequent, and inevitable, decline in prestige." (Stephen Lacey 2010:166) *Look Back in Anger* in many ways prophesies this sense of loss.

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### 13.6 BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

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#### 13.6.1. A brief summary of British drama in the 1940's and 1950's

What were the kinds of plays written a decade before John Osborne wrote his plays? In his book *English Drama since 1940* the well known critic David Ian Rabey states that after the World War II, English drama largely catered to the middle class tastes and tried not to alienate or upset their tastes. (Rabey 2003:7). However the contribution of British playwrights like T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry of the 1940's and 1950's cannot be ignored. T.S. Eliot wrote inverse his famous play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1933), and a series of plays like *The Family Reunion* 1939 and *The Cocktail Party* 1949 which were commercially successful and yet raised serious issues. John Whiting's plays written during 1948 to 1961 stress the themes of loneliness and isolation.

This was also the period when American plays like Tennessee Williams *A Street Car Named Desire* (1949), and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1950) were staged in London. This gave some idea to the London audience that theatre could also be a vehicle for raising important issues. In Ireland W.B. Yeats was using symbolism and the tradition of Japanese Noh drama in his plays, *Like The Words upon the Windowpane* (1930). In the mid-1950's, European dramatists like Bertolt Brecht, Jean Genet and Eugene Ionesco were popular as also the plays of the Irish dramatist Samuel Beckett, settled in France. These plays were moving away from entertainment and raising serious political, economic and philosophical issues. There were also revivals of English dramatists like Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw.

However in England the plays of Terence Rattington and Noel Coward only reflected the interests of the upper class.

The first year of the 1950's saw the introduction of television in England. In fact it is a well-known fact that *Look Back in Anger* became popular after a part of it was televised in mid October 1956.

#### 13.6.2. The form of *Look Back in Anger*

*Look back in Anger* clearly follows a very conventional form. It has a clear cut beginning, middle and end and follows a chronological sequence of events-i.e. the events flow naturally in sequence.

Act 1 opens with Jimmy living in one room with his wife Alison and friend Cliff. By the end of Act 11 Alison has left Jimmy and gone back to her parents' house. In the beginning of Act three, Helena, a friend of Alison is living with Jimmy. By the end of Act 11, Helena leaves and Alison comes back and is reconciled to Jimmy. So as you can see there is a beginning, middle and end with several developments in the story and plot line. Osborne himself called it a "formal, rather old-fashioned play "which was "redeemed by its use of language." (Quoted in Prasad XXVI)

### 13.6.3 The influence of the well-made play. .

In the early part of the nineteenth century, a French playwright, Eugene Scribe set out the main characteristics of a well-made play.

The critic John Elsom states that the well-made play had three major characteristics: a crisis, the hero and the unities of time, place and action. Elsom further defines crisis as that point in the play when the audience can "guess where the outcome will be." (John Elsom 1979:37). *Look Back in Anger* has a clear crisis when Alison leaves Jimmy in Act 11, Scene 11. That event unfolds a series of events leading to the conclusion.

The hero was supposed to be an ordinary person with whom the audience could identify. However, though Jimmy belongs to the working class, and John Osborne shows him with all his flaws, we are not sure whether we fully identify with him, as quite often his anger and hatred alienates the reader and the audience. This will be discussed in greater detail when we discuss the character of Jimmy in Unit 11.

The unities of time, place and action were supposed to give a tight structure to the play. The unity of time was defined as the period of time that was covered in the play. It was not supposed to cover too large a span of time. *Look Back in Anger* also covers a few months and therefore keeps in mind the unity of time concept.

The unity of place meant that the play should be set in one place. John Osborne uses the famous setting of a one-room attic in which the whole action of the play takes place.

The unity of action, according to Elsom, "simply meant that all the events, characters and main sequences of dialogue should contribute to the central theme and lead eventually to the crisis." (Elsom: 39) *Look Back in Anger* keeps a tight hold on the events, so much so that each event is closely linked to the furthering of the action of the play.

The other characteristics of the well-made play were suspense and melodrama, which John Osborne rejects.

However though the play has several characteristics of a well- made play it moves well beyond it.

#### **13.6.4. *Look Back in Anger*: Naturalism, Realism and the Problem play**

The well- made play did not satisfy playwrights who wished to see drama as also depicting serious issues. The famous Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, explored social problems in his early plays like *A Doll's House* (1879). These plays were also known as problem plays and were influenced by the ideas of naturalism and realism. Naturalism stressed the forces of heredity and environment as important factors in the shaping of character. While the environment plays an important factor in the play, Osborne stresses the realistic nature of the play. Realism, as Prasad states, gives a "simple and un- beautified depiction of contemporary life." (Prasad: xxv ii) .In his description of the setting, in the details given to his characters and the kind of language they use Osborne shows his realistic style of writing.

#### **13.6.5. The "Angry young men "and *Look Back in Anger***

John Elsom points out that John Osborne was closely associated with a group of writers known as angry young men. Elsom states that "Osborne, through Jimmy Porter, was voicing the natural uncertainties of the young, their frustrations at being denied power, their eventual expectations of power and their fears of abusing it , either in running a country or a family." (Elsom: 76) However Elsom rightly points out, Osborne also criticises Jimmy Porter's anger as he represents the "social alienation "that he dislikes so much. (77)

It is in the context of the aspects discussed above that we will now look at the play.

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### **13.7. A CRITICAL SUMMARY OF ACT I**

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(Here the word plot is used as meaning the series of events that lead to the conclusion in the play.)

The play has a clear beginning, middle and end.

The play opens with the central character Jimmy Porter and his friend Cliff Lewis sitting in two armchairs reading newspapers. We learn during the course of the first Act that

Jimmy runs a sweet shop and his friend Cliff helps him to run it.(12)<sup>1</sup> Jimmy's wife Alison is wearing Jimmy's shirt and ironing clothes.

Jimmy appears as an angry young man who deliberately tries to provoke his friend and his wife. He insults them and his language is often very crude. He also attacks the "posh" newspaper that they are reading. (p.5. Please note that all page numbers are from the Dorling Kindersley edition. More details of the text are given at the beginning of the unit.)) A newspaper article makes him critical of the educational system and he also lashes out at what he considers to be the hypocrisy of the Christian religion. He sarcastically points out that the Bishop of Bromley denies he supports the rich and not the poor.(6)When Alison refuses to react ,Jimmy starts getting more and more personal in his attack.

He tells Cliff and Alison that they "will drive me round the bend" and how he longs "for a little ordinary enthusiasm." (8) He hits out at their silence by exclaiming that "Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive." (9)

Jimmy specifically shows his great contempt for Alison's parents. He describes Alison's father as "well-fed" (a hit at people who are comfortably off) and looking back with nostalgia to the "Edwardian twilight". (9) Here he is referring to the reign of King Edward VII from 1901 -1910 which was seen as a period of peace before the beginning of World War I. So he sees Alison's parents as living in a past when they were the dominant class. We learn that Alison's father Colonel Redfern served in the British Army in India, before India got its Independence. Porter says

...I can understand how her Daddy must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade does make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture....(11)

Jimmy is showing his contempt for the life style and values of the upper class but, as in other parts of the play, he also seems to have mixed feelings about this period that he is condemning. "Still, even I regret it somehow, phoney or not. If you've no world of your own, it's rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's..." (11)

In the same breath he also attacks the growing American influence "it's pretty dreary living in the American Age..." and the fact that it was getting more and more difficult to come across anything that was truly English-"Somebody said -what was it-we get our

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<sup>1</sup>John Osborne, *Look Back In Anger*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by G.J.V. Prasad (India: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2006). *All quotations from text are taken from this edition*

cooking from Paris ...,our politics from Moscow, and our morals from Port Said.”(11) Once again one feels that Jimmy in spite of trying to project himself as a rebel often shows a colonial judgmental attitude in his reference to what he feels are the low morals of the East.

Another target of Jimmy is Alison’s mother and brother and her friends. In another outburst of abuse he describes her friends as “militant like her Mummy and Daddy. Militant, arrogant and full of malice. Or vague.” (14)

Nigel, Alison’s brother, is seen by Jimmy, as one who is not intelligent ,but knows how to say the right things at the right place and whose “knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy” because he is so vague about everything. So Jimmy feels he is the right material to become a successful politician-“He’ll end up in the Cabinet one day, make no mistake.”A more serious accusation is that he and his class have exploited the common man-“he and his pals have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations” and “may have been selling out his countryman all these years...” (15)

Having shown his dislike for all members of Alison’s family, whom he calls “the little woman’s family,” (15) he now turns all his anger on Alison. Jimmy shows his anger at his inability to provoke a reaction from Alison by describing her as a “monument to non-attachment” and says that the best word to describe her is the adjective “pusillanimous.”The dictionary meaning of the word according to him is “Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind.”(16-17)Alison almost breaks down but controls herself. As the stage instructions state, “She is used to these carefully rehearsed attacks, and it doesn’t look as though he will get his triumph tonight.”(17) I would like to draw your attention to this stage instruction. There is a definite criticism of Jimmy by the dramatist John Osborne as seen in the phrase “well rehearsed attacks” which suggests that Jimmy’s anger is not spontaneous and one is able to also understand why Alison refuses to get provoked .It is almost as if there is a battle of words going on between them. It would be Jimmy’s “triumph”, a victory if Alison reacts to his abuse. She refuses to give him that pleasure.

Jimmy now attacks all women in general, “Have you ever noticed how noisy women are?” and a little later he says provocatively,

When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realize what a refined sort of a butcher she is. (turns in) Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle? (19)

Here it is also important to note that Jimmy connect his prejudice against women with prejudice against the East.

He recalls how in his bachelor days he had a couple of girls staying above his flat and they were so noisy that the “most simple, everyday actions were a sort of assault course

on your sensibilities.”(20) In simple terms he means that their noisy style of living was a constant irritant leaving him very disturbed.

At this point the church bells start ringing and Jimmy angry outburst, “Now the bloody bells have started!”(20) seems to connect with the “eternal flaming racket of the female.”(20)

It is interesting at this stage to see that Cliff tries to unsuccessfully protect Alison from the verbal onslaught. The scene between Alison and Cliff shows that they are very close and understand each other. One suspects that Cliff seems in love with her. However Alison’s reactions make it clear that though she can be more frank with Cliff than with her own husband she considers him only as a very close friend and nothing more. When Jimmy and Cliff have a friendly wrestling match, Alison gets hurt and burns her arm on the iron.(21-22) Both Jimmy and Cliff are very upset that Alison has got hurt. While Jimmy leaves the room because Alison asks him to, Cliff attends to her hurt and is very tender towards her. He tells Alison, “I’m wondering how much longer I can go on watching you two tearing the insides out of each other. It looks pretty ugly sometimes”.(24)

In fact, it is at this stage that Alison confesses to Cliff that she is pregnant. It is significant that she can share the news with Cliff but hesitates to tell Jimmy about it. She feels Jimmy will feel cheated “as if I were trying to kill him in the worst way of all.”(26). It is at this point that Cliff talks about his relationship with Jimmy and Alison talks about Jimmy to Cliff. Alison seems to understand Jimmy. She says he has his own “private morality”.(26) Cliff also says he understands Jimmy because we both come “from working people.”(27)

Jimmy returns and seems to be in a more relaxed mood. There are some relaxed playful moments between all three of them (29). Jimmy is tender towards Alison after Cliff leaves and he is alone with them. For the first time we see a close relationship between them. Jimmy says:

There’s hardly a moment when I’M not –watching and wanting you. I’ve got to hit out somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, night and day, and I still can’t stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing –something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board. (30-31)

We see a little later that they have special words of endearment for each other Jimmy calls her a “beautiful, great-eyed squirrel” and Alison calls him a “jolly super bear.”(32) The use of small and big animal imagery is significant as it reflects the relationship between the two and also Jimmy’s attempts to dominate Alison.

Jimmy is in a confessional mood. He tells Alison that Cliff is the only friend he has. (31)

He is also very close to the mother of his other friend Hugh with whom Alison could not get along. Jimmy is full of emotion when he talks of Hugh’s mother. He says the old lady

is a good friend. For the first time we learn that Hugh's mother had bought the sweet stall for him and will eventually when, he can afford it, buy it from her. He feels a sense of regret that Alison is not close to her.

Just when Jimmy and Alison for the first time in the First Act, seem close to each other, Cliff enters the room and tells Alison that her friend Helena Charles is on the phone. Immediately there is a tremendous tension and Jimmy is back to his abusive mood. He calls Helena one of his "natural enemies".(34)

Jimmy feels the world of homosexuality would be better to a world of women. He refers to the French novelist, Andre Gide who defended homosexuality; the famous Renaissance artist Michelangelo who was supposed to have been a homosexual and the Greek civilization known for its acceptance of homosexuality.(34)

To Cliff's astonishment, Jimmy looks through Alison's bag without feeling guilty about it. He confesses he is suspicious. At this point Alison comes and breaks the news that Helena wants to spend a day with them and stay with them. Helena is a stage actress. Jimmy is furious and lets out a stream of abuse against Helena and Alison. Of Alison he says: She'll go on sleeping and devouring until there's nothing left of me.(36)

#### Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Explain the characteristics of the welfare state established by the Labour Party.
2. Explain the importance of The Education Act of 1944; what were the negative consequences of it?
3. Why does Jimmy Porter criticize the education system?
4. Why does Jimmy Porter attack Christianity?
5. What are the reasons for Jimmy Porter's anger against Alison's parents and her brother?
6. List some of the reasons that Jimmy Porter gives for his irritation with his wife Alison.
7. What is Jimmy Porter's attitude towards women in general?
8. Does Alison understand Jimmy? Do they have affection for each other?
9. Explain the friendship between Cliff and Jimmy.

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### 13.8 SUMMARY

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This Unit gives a brief account of John Osborne's Life and Plays. It also focuses on the political economic, and social context of the Play *Look Back In Anger*. It gives a short

history of British Drama in the period before 1950s and explains the various forms that influenced the Plays. A detailed critical and textual analysis of Act I of the Play is given.

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**13.9 GLOSSARY<sup>1</sup>**

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**Class system** refers to the division of people according to their social status.

**Colonial-** from the word ‘colonialism’. Colonialism is when one powerful country controls the resources and people of a less powerful country and uses it for its own end.

**Socialism-** Equal opportunity to benefit from a country’s wealth. Often the main industries is owned by the states.

**Super power-** A powerful and influential country which is economically successful and is a nuclear power.

**Welfare State-** In England it means free health and educational services and it also gives money to the unemployed, old and sick people.

**Working Class-** People who have low social status, who do jobs using physical skills and own less property.

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<sup>1</sup>Source for Glossary: *Collins CoBuild English Dictionary*

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**13.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. What is Jimmy Porter angry about? Give examples from Act One of the text. Do you think his anger is justified?
2. Analyze the relationship between Alison and Jimmy Porter in Act 1.
3. What is the nature of the relationship between Alison and Cliff in Act 1?

**UNIT 14****JOHN OSBORNE: *LOOK BACK IN ANGER* PART 2**

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- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objective
- 14.3. Critical Analysis of Act II, Scene I
  - 14.3.1 Opening Scene of Act II Scene I
  - 14.3.2. Cliff Lewis
  - 14.3.3 The entry of Jimmy
  - 14.3.4. Hugh Tanner
  - 14.3.5. Helena's influence over Alison
- 14.4. Critical Analysis of Act II, Scene II
  - 14.4.1 Colonel Redfern, father of Alison, and his conversation with her
  - 14.4.2 Alison packs up her things and leaves with her father
- 14.5. Critical Analysis of Act III, Scene I
  - 14.5.1 Act III, Scene I
  - 14.5.2. Cliff's reaction
  - 14.5.3. Jimmy's attack on women
- 14.6. Critical Analysis of Act III, Scene II
  - 14.6.1. Act III, Scene II
  - 14.6.2 Helena and Alison's comments on Jimmy
  - 14.6.3 Final reconciliation of Jimmy and Alison
- 14.7. Central themes of the play
  - 14.7.1. Jimmy's Anger
  - 14.7 2. Title of the Play.
- 14.8. Summary
- 14.9. Glossary
- 14.10. References
- 14.11. Terminal Questions

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**14.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we will continue to discuss the text of the play. We will critically analyse Act II and Act III and highlight the major developments in the plot in relation to the characters. We will also analyse the central themes of the play.

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**14.2. OBJECTIVE**

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After reading this unit along with Unit I you will be encouraged to read the play and analyse it.

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**14.3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACT II, SCENE I**

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At the end of Act I we see that Jimmy is very upset on hearing that Alison's friend Helena is to come on a visit and is to stay with them.

**14.3.1 Opening Scene of Act II Scene I**

The play opens two weeks later. At the opening of Act II, we see that there is a slight change in the atmosphere. Alison is not wearing Jimmy's shirt and we learn that Helena is staying here much longer than she intended.

**Description of Helena**

There is a detailed description of Helena in the stage directions. (37) **Read it carefully.** Helena is well off and a confident middle class woman. She evokes "respect and admiration" and tries to maintain her dignity in the face of Jimmy's attacks. (37)

We also gather, in the conversation that follows that she is quite at home in Alison's house, helping in the housework. Alison also seems more relaxed. Both Alison and Helena discuss Jimmy, his friends and Alison's relationship with Jimmy. Some of the main points are given here:

Helena is quite frank about her opinion regarding Jimmy. She tells Alison "I've never seen such hatred in someone's eyes before. It's slightly horrifying." (39)

Alison tries to explain Jimmy's personality to Helena. Jimmy, according to Alison, believes in being loyal to all "the things he believes in, his present and his future, but his past as well." (40) He would therefore expect Alison to be a good friend of Cliff. **This part of the Act is very important for us since it gives us a detailed analysis by Alison of her relationship with Jimmy.**

Alison attempts to explain to Helena as to why she married Jimmy. After her parents returned from India, she found her father detached and irritable and as always she could not communicate with her mother.

She describes her first meeting with Jimmy. She was twenty-one and she met him at a party. He looked different from all the others present and came on a bicycle with oil on his jacket. He looked young and vulnerable. Alison was attracted to him because he was so different and as a sign of rebellion they both decided to get married, especially Jimmy.

“Well the howl of outrage and astonishment went up from the family and that did it. Whether or not he was in love with me that did it. He made up his mind to marry me.” (44)

Alison also discloses to Helena that they had no money and Jimmy had no job, though he had gone to a university which however was not an elitist one. According to him, “it’s not even red brick, but white tile.” (41)

Alison explains the emotions of loneliness she felt after her marriage. “For the first time in my life, I was cut off from the kind of people I’d always known, my family, my friends, everybody.”(40)

Alison also speaks of the games that Jimmy and she played with each other pretending he was a bear and she a squirrel. It was a way of escaping from the harsh reality of their existence.

“We could become little furry creatures with little furry brains. Full of dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other. Playful, careless creatures in their own cozy zoo for two. A silly symphony for people who couldn’t bear the pain of being human beings any longer.”(46)

Note the words “uncomplicated” and “silly”. Also note the symbolism of the play. By making Jimmy the image of a larger and more aggressive animal-the bear- Alison is indicating that he is the more aggressive animal.

Alison makes the important point that even that feeling of “dumb, uncomplicated affection” is dead now.

#### **14.3.2. Cliff Lewis**

Helena asks Alison what her true feelings for Cliff are. She feels that there is something “strange” in their behaviour when they are together. Alison clarifies that they are only “fond of each other.” (40) She accepts the fact that she feels relaxed and comfortable with Cliff. (40) Alison says Cliff is kind and lovable (41)and therefore it was easy for her to be friends with him.

However Jimmy often uses Cliff to take out his feelings of anger and frustration. For example he tells him that he has “no intellect, no curiosity” and is “black hearted, evil

mindful and vicious.”(48-49) It is important to note the context of these lines. He is saying this when he is having tea with Helena and Alison and in fact it is an oblique attack on Alison and Helena.

In the concluding scenes of Act II, Scene I, Helena asks Cliff how he can remain silent when he sees the manner in which Alison is being abused by Jimmy. Cliff protests, but he also points out that his presence has helped the two from staying together. “I’ve been a no-man’s land between them. Sometimes, it’s been still and peaceful, no incidents and we’ve all been reasonably happy. But most of the time, It’s simply a very narrow strip of plain hell.”(61-62) As Cliff sums up in a straightforward sincere manner, “I love these two people very much... And I pity all of us”.

#### 14.3.3. Hugh Tanner

Hugh is another close friend of Jimmy. He and his mother never appear on the stage but they still play a very important part in the play, as they have an important influence on Jimmy.

Alison confesses that she could never be friendly with Hugh. Mrs Tanner, Hugh’s mother, had given Jimmy a sweet stall. But Alison says that Hugh and she disliked each other from the very beginning. Alison says that Hugh is even more ruthless than Alison. When the two were together, Alison felt she was “in a jungle” as she had never seen two educated people who were so “savage and so-so uncompromising.” They both considered the upper class as their enemy. “They both came to regard me as a sort of hostage from those sections of society they had declared war on.” (42) She describes the manner in which Hugh and Jimmy would invite themselves to all the parties that were held at by Alison’s family and friends. They enjoyed themselves at the expense of those very people they held in contempt. “It was just enemy territory to them, and, ...they used me as a hostage.”(42)

Finally Hugh decides to go to China as he is terribly disillusioned. The return of the Conservative Party in 1951- “All the old gang was back-Dame Alison’s Mob”(45) made him feel that “England was finished” and “The only real hope was to get out, and try somewhere else.”

Jimmy and Hugh disagree and after a bitter quarrel Hugh leaves much to the disappointment of Jimmy and Mrs Tanner. Alison describes him as a “Barbarian invader” (43) and Helena describes him as “savage.” (44)

Helena listens to Alison describing her mixed feelings for Jimmy and urges her to tell him that she is having a baby. She feels strongly that Alison should decide whether she wants to stay in “this mad-house” or not, as, according to Helena, “He doesn’t seem to know what love or anything else means.”(46) She warns Helena, “You’ve got to fight him. Fight or get out. Otherwise, he will kill you.”(46)

#### 14.3.4. The entry of Jimmy.

Jimmy's entry in the room immediately creates a tension in the air. There is a sharp exchange of words between Helena and him as they dislike each other and do not hide the fact. (50) Jimmy is taken aback when he learns that Alison is going to church with Helena.

**Jimmy's outburst against Alison's mother**

The fact that Alison is going to church when she knows Jimmy does not approve of it shocks him. He feels Helena is instigating her. He reminds Alison that the last time she went to church was when she was getting married. In order to provoke Alison and also as an expression of his frustration and anger, he starts hurling insults at Alison's mother. (52-53) He narrates how Alison's mother tried every trick in order to prevent his marriage with Alison since she saw Jimmy as a "young man without money, background or even looks..." She even hired detectives to see if she could find out something about him that would get him into trouble as she felt a young man with long hair could not be trusted! The class difference is brought out vividly in this episode.

Even Cliff and Helena are taken aback at his outburst and protest at his deliberately insulting Alison's mother.

It is at this point that both Alison and Helena give very perceptive comments on Jimmy's character.

Helena says, "You think the world's treated you pretty badly, don't you?" (54)

Alison says, "Oh, don't try and take his suffering away from him he'd be lost without it." (54)

Both these comments have to be looked at very closely. Helena's comment shows that Jimmy has a sense of loss and a strong feeling that society has been unfair to him. Alison's statement stresses that Jimmy takes a perverse kind of pleasure in his suffering. Both of these comments also help us to understand Jimmy's anger and makes us question whether it is really genuine.

**Jimmy's outburst against Helena**

Jimmy's attack on Helena is also because he feels she is having an undue influence on his wife. He sarcastically calls Helena a "saint in Dior's clothing." (56) The reference to 'saint' is to the fact that she wants to go to church while the reference to "Dior" is to the famous fashion designer – a hit at Helena's fashionable clothes. He sees Helena as clinging to conventional values and traditions and old beliefs. "They spend their time mostly looking forward to the past." (57) He feels the church propagates a sense of guilt and supernatural.

Jimmy's anger against Helena and Alison also seems to be based on his belief that they have not experienced suffering and seen others suffer.

**Jimmy speaks of his childhood.**

Act II, Scene I is important because it gives us an insight into Jimmy's feelings. For the first time he talks of his parents. His father had gone to Spain and fought in the Spanish Civil War of 1935. He had come back seriously wounded. Jimmy's mother looked after him, out of what Jimmy said was a "sense of pity." The only company the dying father had was ten-year-old Jimmy. Jimmy says:

"All he could feel was the despair and the bitterness, the sweet, sickly smell of a dying man.... You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry-angry and helpless. And I can never forget it...I knew more about- love ...betrayal...and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life".  
(59)

This is one time in the play when you feel that Jimmy is being sincere and one is surprised that it does not seem to have any impact on Helena and Alison. In fact Jimmy is shocked that in spite of his objections Alison decides to go to church. He calls Alison 'Judas', which is ironical. Judas betrayed Christ while according to Jimmy, Alison betrays him by going to church! .

**Jimmy's anger at Alison**

Jimmy's anger at Alison's decision to go to church is also because he feels he can no longer control her decisions. "But that girl there can twist your arm off with her silence."(60)

Alison seems to completely break down as she throws her teacup on to the floor.

This is further aggravated by the news of Hugh's mother being seriously ill.

Jimmy makes a direct appeal to Alison that "You're coming with me, aren't you? She (he shrugs) hasn't got anyone else now. I need you ...to come with me. (64)

Alison, the stage instruction states, "turns away, and stands up."

This is an important decision of Alison, as she seems to move further and further away from Jimmy.

**14.3.5. Helena's influence over Alison**

At the end of Act II, SceneI, one also realizes that Helena seems to be replacing Jimmy's dominance over Alison. We are surprised that Helena has taken the liberty to send Alison's father a telegram asking him to come and take Alison home. Alison's reaction also surprises us. She meekly agrees to Helena's suggestions that she should go and stay

with her parents, so that “after you’ve gone-Jimmy will come to his senses, and face up to things.”(65)

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#### **14.4. ACT II SCENE II**

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##### **14.4.1 Colonel Redfern, father of Alison, and his conversation with her**

The introduction of Colonel Redfern is crucial to the plot of the play. We have already heard about him several times. It is rather surprising that John Osborne, the playwright, is not critical of him though he represent the colonial attitude that the play often criticises. He is described as a large handsome man, about sixty, and who is essentially gentle and kindly. (Stage instructions, 65) He has come to pick up Alison on the instructions of Helena. He behaves in a discreet manner.

##### **His observations on Jimmy and Alison**

He is keen to know from Alison about Jimmy and expresses surprise that an educated man should be running a sweet stall. Alison says, “he seems to have been as happy, doing this as anything else.”(66)

Both father and daughter speak frankly to each other. Colonel Redfern points out that Jimmy hates him and his wife. Alison replies. “He hates all of us.” (67)

However Redfern makes an interesting admission. He says that looking back, he and his wife were also to blame for the total breakdown of relations between them and Jimmy. He says that he can understand Jimmy’s hatred for them “I’m afraid I can’t help feeling that he must have had a certain amount of right on his side.”(67)

Redfern even goes to the extent of saying that Alison’s mother’s actions were also not fully justified. “She seemed to have made up her mind that if he was going to marry you, he must be a criminal...”(68) He continues, “looking back on it, I think it would have been better, for all concerned, if we had never attempted to interfere.”(68)

Redfern shows his ability to look at his own actions and that of his wife in an objective and critical manner.

Redfern does not spare his daughter. He feels that both of them might have been responsible for the present state of affairs.

“I think you may take after me a little, my dear. You like to sit on the fence because it’s comfortable and more peaceful.”(68)

Alison strongly protests and reminds him that she did take the decision to marry Jimmy inspite of opposition from her father.

**Alison on her marriage**

Colonel Redfern is quite puzzled as to why Jimmy and Alison decided to marry when they came from such different backgrounds. Alison gives her own interpretation. She feels that Jimmy married her for revenge. "Some people do actually marry for revenge." (69) She says it is as if Jimmy had thrown a challenge to her to defy all conventions and marry him, and she had accepted that challenge. "Well, for twenty years, I'd lived a happy, uncomplicated life, and suddenly, this-this spiritual barbarian-throws down the gauntlet at me." (69)

Her father is puzzled. He says, "I always believed that people married each other because they were in love. That always seemed a good enough reason to me. But apparently, that's too simple for young people nowadays. They have to talk about challenges and revenge. I just can't believe that love between men and women is really like that." (70)

An interesting aspect of the introduction of Redfern at this point in the play is that he gives a more balanced assessment of the situation. It also helps the reader to see the events and the characters in a larger perspective.

**Colonel Redfern and colonialism**

Colonel Redfern also represents the period in British history when it was a great imperialist power and also ruled India. In his conversation with Alison he accepts Jimmy's criticism of him as belonging to a glorious past when England was at the height of its political power.

"The England I remembered was the one I left in 1914, and I was happy to go on remembering it that way. Besides I had the Maharajah's army to command.... When I think of it now, it seems like a dream. If only it could have gone on forever.... Your mother and I were so happy then. It seemed as though we had everything we could ever want." (70)

Redfern is nostalgic about his stay in India where he was in a position of power when he was the master.

But this perfect situation could not last. He had to come back to England in 1947. India had got her freedom and the British Empire was on the wane.

"I think the last day the sun shone was when that dirty little train steamed out of that crowded, suffocating Indian station, and the battalion band playing for all it was worth. I knew in my heart it was all over then. Everything." (70)

This again shows the attitude of Colonel Redfern to the East. While he says he spent his best days in India, it was in the closed community of the white man. As far as the Indians go, he only remembers the dirty trains and the suffocating crowds. Nandi Bhatia rightly points out that the playwright John Osborne does not sufficiently address the issue of

colonialism. “Yet the relative neglect of the issues of empire, race and immigration has prevented rigorous critiques of the imperial dimension in the play.” In fact, Nandi Bhatia continues to argue that inspite of Osborne’s anti-establishment stance and championing the cause of the exploited, he permits “allusions to Britain’s lost glory and imperial past as epitomized in Colonel Redfern.” (Bhatia 1999:393)

Alison realizes that her father can’t accept the changes just as Jimmy can’t.(70)

#### **14.4.2. Alison packs up her things and leaves with her father**

The reader notes with some surprise that Helena decides to stay back for another night. Cliff, who is upset by the turn of events also decides to go out as he feels he can’t face Jimmy when he comes back home and sees that Alison has gone. Jimmy returns and reads Alison’s note. She is apologetic, stating she needs “peace so desperately, and at the moment, I am willing to sacrifice everything just for that...I shall always have a deep loving need of you.”(76)

*This is the central crisis in the play-a turning point which will affect the plot and the characters.*

Helena informs Jimmy that Alison is pregnant. Jimmy is taken aback by the news but he is also struggling with the grief of Hugh’s mother’s death. He accuses Alison of having no feelings for Hugh’s mother. “She made the great mistake of all her kind. She thought that because Hugh’s mother was a deprived and ignorant old woman, who said all the wrong things in all the wrong places, she couldn’t be taken seriously.” (77) Jimmy’s hatred of the class system overcomes his sense of loss on Alison walking out on him.

The reader needs to ask the question: Is Jimmy being fair in his assessment of Alison and her actions? Do we sympathise with Alison? In Act I and Act II we see the manner in which Alison is the target of Jimmy’s anger and frustrations. She has the sympathy of the other characters in the play. As she says in her letter to Jimmy, she needs peace at all costs in her present condition.

We also ask ourselves the question: Would Alison have left Jimmy if Helena had not persuaded her to do so?

The last scene is indeed startling. Helena slaps Jimmy as he abuses her and then, instead of walking out, “kisses him passionately.”(77) A new relationship has started.

### **14.5. Critical Analysis of Act III, Scene I**

#### **14.5.1 Act III, Scene I**

#### **Differences between openings of Act I and Act III Scene I.**

The opening of Act III, Scene I, reminds us of the opening of Act I but with important differences.

The stage instructions give details of how Alison's belongings on the dressing table have been replaced by Helena's. Helena is staying in the house. Like Alison, she is wearing Jimmy's shirt and ironing clothes but she looks relaxed. In fact as the Act unfolds, we feel that Jimmy is also more relaxed than before. He does not seem to miss Alison. Cliff is still staying with them. He is the only one who seems to miss Alison.

As in Act I Jimmy attacks the church for its hypocrisy. He talks sarcastically of witchcraft and cynically sees the women who regularly attend church as indulging in cult worship to the "Coptic Goddess of fertility"(79) –a reference to a primitive goddess of ancient Egypt. This also shows his negative attitude to the East. Helen tells him "can we have one day, without tumbling over religion and politics?"(82) One feels that Alison would never have given such a retort.

Jimmy and Cliff also indulge in clowning and an imitation of the famous music hall comic pair, Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen as in Act I. But unlike Alison, Helena does not get hurt when the ironing board falls. Moreover, Helena can laugh at Jimmy and with him. She says to Cliff, "I'm only beginning to get used to him. I never ...used to be sure when he was being serious, or when he wasn't.(81).

Jimmy also gives expression to his intellectual interests when he refers to the Anglo-American modern poet T.S.Eliot.

#### **14.5.2. Cliff's reaction**

Cliff is not as relaxed with Helena as he was with Alison. Jimmy realizes this. "You don't care for Helena, do you?"(88)

Cliff informs Jimmy that he has decided to leave and find another job. It is obvious that he is not happy with the new situation though he doesn't express this.

#### **Jimmy and Cliff**

Jimmy accepts Cliff's decision, but he is upset about it. "You've been loyal, generous and a good friend.... You're worth a half a dozen Helen as to me or to anyone."(89)

Later he tells Helena that Cliff might be a "sloppy, irritating bastard" but "he's got a big heart."(91)

#### **14.5.3. Jimmy's attack on women**

Jimmy confesses that the relationship between him and Cliff has changed because of Helena. This gives him an opportunity to attack women in general: "why do we let these women bleed us to death?" Jimmy feels a sense of loss he has as far as the prevailing circumstances of England are concerned. "There aren't any good, brave causes left."

Hence, as he tells Cliff, since there are no causes to die for, there is no option but “to let yourself be butchered by the women.”(89) Jimmy’s attack on women is an important theme in the play.

### **Jimmy and Helena**

Jimmy and Helena have a few quiet moments to themselves. Jimmy sounds tired. He sees himself as a general “who is heartily sick of the whole campaign.”(91) This echoes his earlier words to Cliff that there are no causes left to fight for.

Helena and Jimmy have a few tender moments for themselves. The reader has not seen Jimmy in this vulnerable mood. He pleads with Helena, “Don’t let anything go wrong.”(91)

He even suggests that he will close the sweet stall and start something else.

Just as both of them think of starting a new life together, there is a new twist in the plot. Alison reappears.

## **14.6. Critical Analysis of Act III, Scene II**

### **14.6.1 Act III, Scene II**

Act III, Scene II, is the final scene of the play. The playwright will bring all the various threads of the plot together and give us a conclusion. As John Osborne is following the conventional form of the well-made play (see Unit 14) he gives a definite closure to the play.

Jimmy has retired to Cliff’s room, as he does not want to face Alison. Alison feels embarrassed at having come back and apologises to Helena for doing so. She is overcome with a sense of guilt. She tells Helena she has no intention of trying to break up Helena and Jimmy’s relationship. She came out of “hysteria or macabre curiosity.”(94)

Helena is also feeling guilty. She feels she has done something wrong by living with Jimmy. She tells Alison,

At least, I still believe in right and wrong! Not even the months in this madhouse have stopped me doing that. Even though everything I have done is wrong, at least I have known it was wrong.”(95)

*This section of the play is dominated by Helena’s sense of guilt.* She says that the coming back of Alison has made her realize that she cannot continue living with Jimmy. “And, by everything I have ever believed in or wanted, what I have been doing is wrong and evil.”(96)

She tells a surprised Jimmy of her decision. “It’s just that suddenly, tonight I see what I have really known all along. That you can’t be happy when what you’re doing is wrong,

or is hurting someone else...I shall never love anyone as I have loved you...But I can't go on...I can't take part in all this suffering. I can't!"(99)

How does one view Helena's decision? Alison's coming back as a catalyst for her deciding to leave. Moreover, it was Helena who had persuaded Alison to leave Jimmy. By her own admission, Helena feels her act has not been morally right and she should leave. This is a moment of self-revelation to Helena. No other character seems to undergo this process of self-discovery.

But Jimmy is highly critical of her decision. He tells her that love is very demanding and "if you can't bear the thought ...of messing up your nice, clean soul...you'd better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint..."(100)

#### 14.6.2 Helena and Alison's comments on Jimmy

Helena says that Jimmy is a misfit. "He was born out of his time. He should have been born during the French Revolution. There's no place for people like that any longer in sex, or politics, or anything...He doesn't know where he is, or where he's going. He'll never do anything, and he will never amount to anything."(96)

This is an accurate, even brutal assessment by Helena of Jimmy.

#### 14.6.3 Final reconciliation of Jimmy and Alison

Alison is broken down. She has lost her child and is willing to accept Jimmy as he is. Jimmy confesses that he had misunderstood Alison's character before marriage. He felt that Alison had not really experienced the harsh reality of life. "And as far as you were concerned, you'd never had a hair out of place, or a bead of sweat anywhere."(101) Alison's reaction shows that Jimmy is wrong. Alison has suffered the loss of her child:

All I wanted was to die. I never knew what it was like... I thought: if only-if only he could see me now, so stupid, and ugly and ridiculous...I'm in the fire, and I'm burning, and all I want is to die! It's cost him his child, and any others I might have had! But what does it matter-this is what he wanted from me! (102)

Alison feels the most important thing in her life is to win back Jimmy's love.

Jimmy is moved and they revert back to the bear and squirrel imagery and end where they began.(102-103)

Is the reader satisfied with this ending? Not really. Both Alison and Jimmy once again create a comfortable world, cut off from the everyday world around them. "We'll be together in our bear's cave, and our squirrel's drey..."(102)

For Alison, Jimmy is her world and she is willing to face anything to be with him. Jimmy continues with his anger and frustrations. There is no satisfactory closure in the play.

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**14.7. CENTRAL THEMES OF THE PLAY**

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We have so far made a close critical study of the text with reference to the plot and the characters. We can now connect all the threads and highlight the main themes of the play.

**14.7.1. Jimmy's Anger**

The play revolves around the central character, Jimmy Porter, and his deep-rooted anger against everything and everyone around him.

This anger has both a personal and larger social and political dimension to it. As Osborne himself explained;

Anger is not about... It is mourning the unknown, the loss of what went before without you, it's the love another time but not this might have sprung on you, and greatest loss of all, the deprivation of what, even as a child, seemed irrevocably your own, your country your birthplace, that, at least is as tangible as death. (Osborne 1999 b in Prasad 2006: Xiii)

Jimmy's anger is against the snobbish upper class and upper middle class especially represented by his wife Alison, her parents and her friend Helena. He attacks the upper class for their lack of feeling, lack of culture and hypocrisy. He feels he is equal to them intellectually even though he has been educated at an ordinary university. He also criticises the religious and educational institutions, which he feels represent the privileged class. His anger stems from the fact that he is excluded from any kind of power and has been forced to manage a sweet stall in a small midland town outside London. He feels trapped in his situation and expresses his feelings in his tirade against Alison and her family.

Jimmy identifies with the working class especially with his friend Hugh Tanner and his mother. Critics like Elsom and Neville have noted that Jimmy's anger is an expression of the mood of loss, uncertainty, emptiness and alienation that was prevalent in England in the 1950's and is also linked to the movement of angry young men.

This anger was a reflection of the decline of post-war British power and its loss of colonial status. The "heroes and anti-heroes of British drama in the mid-1950's were both disguises to conceal a national uncertainty." (Elsom 1976:73) This, as Elsom continues, was "the period of de-colonisation, of slowly re- building and re-directing British industry after the war..." (Elsom: 73)

In the process Jimmy Porter opts out of the system and becomes an anti-hero. At the end, his rebellion seems to be meaningless and often without a purpose. As Elsom points out, Jimmy was "not just a critic of his society but an object for criticism. He was the chief example of the social malaise which he was attacking...Osborne's ambivalence towards Jimmy is apparent even from his descriptions of him in the script: Jimmy is a

‘disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty’.”(Elsom: 77)

Jimmy’s benign criticism of Colonel Redfern’s attitude to India which is that of a colonial master shows that he is not fully critical of Redfern or of England’s colonial past.

It has to be pointed out that John Osborne does not really probe the problems of the working class. Raymond Williams says that this genre of working class drama is not “documentaries of youth and poverty, but are intensely personal cries in the dark.”(Williams (1968: 319-320)

The search for social identity is also closely linked to masculine identity. Micheline Wandor says, “It is Jimmy’s search for a social/class identity, and an individual male identity which is the central subject matter of the piece.”(Wandor: 1987 in Malik 2008: 151)

Jimmy’s search for his own masculinity leads him to an assertion of power and domination over Alison. Hence the importance of the symbols of the ironing board, the bear and the squirrel. The ironing board is a symbol of Alison being trapped in a domesticity from which she cannot escape. Later Helena is also shown as ironing Jimmy’s shirt. The symbol of the bear again projects Jimmy as dominating Alison, the squirrel. Thus, Christopher Cairns and Shaun Richards argue that in the Jimmy-Alison relationship, Jimmy is the coloniser and Alison the colonised. “Women are a threatening ‘other’ in the face of which the male must, to guarantee his own security, exercise the ultimate sanctions of repression and the denial of the independent female subject.” (Cairns and Richards 1988 in Malik 2008: 185)

Women are seen as a threat and marriage is seen as a search for domination by Jimmy. Alison capitulates to this demand at the end. Alison says at the end,” I’m in the mud at last! I’m grovelling! I’m crawling!...”and she collapses at his feet. (102)The play raises several serious questions about the position of women in the 1950’s in England.

#### **14.7.2. Title of the Play**

The significance of the title of the play is clear in the context of the above analysis. If you refer to Osborne’s quotation given in the previous section, Jimmy’s looking back in anger is for the loss of a world that had some meaning for him. The uncertainty of the 1950’s makes him look at the past with nostalgia. It is a “lament for a lost empire.”(Prasad 2004:3)But the word ‘anger’ in the title is also important .The significance of anger of Jimmy to the play has already been discussed in great detail in the previous section.

#### **Self-Assessment Questions**

1. What are the reasons that Alison gives Helena for marrying Jimmy?

2. What is Alison's description of her life after marriage?
3. What is Cliff Lewis' role in Act II?
4. What is the importance of Hugh Tanner in the play?
5. Why is Jimmy Porter angry with Alison's mother?
6. What does Jimmy say of his childhood? How does it affect him?
7. Why is Colonel Redfern important to the play?
8. What is the turning point in the play?
9. What changes do you notice at the opening of Act III, Scene I?
10. What does Jimmy say about women to Cliff?
11. How do Alison and Helena sum up Jimmy's character?
12. Why does Helena decide to leave Jimmy?
13. Discuss the reconciliation scene between Alison and Jimmy.

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**14.8. SUMMARY**

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A detailed critical analysis of Act II and Act III are given. The plot of the play and the characters are also discussed. The main theme of the play and the relevance of the title is also analysed.

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**14.9. GLOSSARY**

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**Anti-hero** is the main character who behaves differently from the way that people expect a hero to behave.

**Free Booting**-free plunder

**Kitchen sink drama**-a term given to plays in post-war Britain dealing with realistic domestic settings.

**Music-hall**-a hall used for variety entertainment in which characters cross talk with each other.

**Oblique**- indirect

**Sado-masochism**- obtaining pleasure by inflicting pain on oneself or another.

**Sit on the fence**-to avoid supporting a particular side in a discussion or argument

**Symbolic** that which represents something else

**Symphony**- harmony, especially of sound

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#### **14.10 REFERENCES**

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#### **14.11. TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Critically analyse Jimmy Porter's anger and comment on its significance.
2. Discuss the appropriateness of the title of the play.
3. Analyse the role of the women characters in the play.