

**B.A. Second Year**  
**English Literature, Paper - I**

**DRAMA**



**मध्यप्रदेश भोज (मुक्त) विश्वविद्यालय – भोपाल**  
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## INTRODUCTION

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Drama has been in existence since times immemorial when it was integral to religious rites and rituals. Drama is an organic form and a genre of art that comes closest to the human need for expression. Whenever there is birth, marriage or death, there is drama in all places, all times. From the elaboration of ceremony in worship to the solemnity of ritual in death, there is drama. Drama is the only form of art that engages the body as well as the mind. It explores all the potential of the human condition in expression.

Drama was introduced to England from Europe by the Romans, and auditoriums were constructed across the country for this purpose. By the medieval period, the mummers' plays had developed, a form of early street theatre associated with the Morris dance, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin Hood. These were folk tales retelling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these for their audiences in return for money and hospitality. The medieval mystery plays and morality plays, which dealt with Christian themes, were performed at religious festivals.

Perhaps the most famous playwright in the world, William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon, wrote plays that are still performed in theatres across the world to this day.

This book, *Drama* is written in a self-instructional format and is divided into five units. Each unit begins with an Introduction to the topic followed by an outline of the Unit objectives. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to test the reader's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions is also provided at the end of each unit and includes short-answer as well as long-answer questions. The Summary and Key Terms section are useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

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# UNIT 1 DRAMA AND ITS FORMS

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Drama is defined as a literary form which showcases a fictional representation with the help of dialogue and performance. It is considered as an imitation of an action and it tells the story through dialogues. The word drama is derived from the Greek word which means 'action'.

There are basically two forms of drama which are tragedy and comedy. Drama is unlike poetry or prose. It is an art dependent on many other tools unlike a written text which has to do with words only.

In this unit, the development of drama as a literary form has been discussed in detail. The various forms of drama and the contribution of various authors in developing drama as a major literary form has been analysed.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the development of drama as one of the major literary forms
- Differentiate between a drama and a play
- Analyse the changes which took place in drama as a literary genre

- Discuss the themes of various dramas by renowned dramatists
- Explain the various forms of drama

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### 1.2 DRAMA: AN OVERVIEW

Drama is an ancient form of art written in prose or verse accompanied by various tools and techniques meant to be staged.

Plays, on the contrary, involve ‘multiple art, using words, scenic effects, music, the gestures of the actors, and the organizing talents of a producer’. It is written with the purpose of presenting a fiction or reality in front of people. Its main objective is successful representation of a plot to be viewed by audience. Therefore, the textual portion in a drama is always dependent on love and acceptance of the viewers.

An essential quality of drama is its objectivity. A play whether divided into acts or not, has plot, characters, background, theme, dramatic unities, and techniques and so on. Beside them all, it must aim to please its audience and has to be acted by people in public. Its duration is short and everything has to produce an exemplary effect within the few hours on stage in a play: drama is ‘a composite art, in which the author, the actor, and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect’.

A play must seek perfect economy in choice of words, actions, deliverers of those actions, time, and place, so that all may synthesize into bringing the desired end or effect. The novelist’s art is leisurely, but the dramatist’s art is too strategic to escape his limitations. He or she is always handicapped. His is a weaver’s hand because a play is shaped by both internal and external agencies.

A playwright cannot speak his emotions directly; he or she has to use his characters to express them. The action has to be divided into the share of some characters and every character must act the intended way to achieve the expected end. Then only a drama would be successful. The dramatist’s identity, behaviour, character and feelings need not be seeking direct expression. He has to maintain complete objectivity and impersonality.

In England, as a form of literary art, drama began in the Middle Ages. However, it is difficult to trace the exact period of its beginning in the English scene. When the Romans came to England, they set up huge amphitheatres and certainly, plays were being acted in those times. As the Romans left, the culture too came to a standstill. In the Middle Ages minstrels, clowns and tumblers used to sing long heroic poems or epics or ballads in praise of the court. Even their costumes were motley ones and were easily recognised as those welcomed figures at ceremonies, public places, the King’s court, or anywhere. They used to boost the morale and passionately moved all those who heard them: it could be also traced as the inception of drama, yet it was not an organized establishment.

Undoubtedly, there has been an intricate relation between Christianity and plays when it comes to trace the origin or genesis of drama in England. In medieval England, the minstrels at church used to act stories from the Bible after the sessions

of sermons would be over. It was done in order to entertain and impart on people the religious sentiments. Drama at this stage was acted and managed by the minstrels and clerics. The common cult of drama was not accepted by the then church and court because it exuded the message of too much freedom in the society, hence the Roman theatres were closed and condemned. Later on this style of acting by a person or two from church developed into a group of people consisting of priests and choir-boys acting biblical themes enthusiastically with words and chorus. These 'liturgical dramas' based on the birth of Christ developed as supporting church and the church promoted them on several festive occasions beside its normal proceedings. Liturgical plays used religious spectacles as their themes. Although church has been the authority to reestablish drama, soon it was felt that the interest in plays were larger than being restricted merely under the precincts of church, or considering it a mere religious activity. Dramatic enterprise proliferated. It also entailed the element of comic and variegated attires.

In England, if we go by the chronology, such religious plays have been valued as the greatest part of the national tradition and culture. They also became precursors of 'morality' and 'mystery plays'. In the morality plays, people acted as virtues and vices. These plays were written by religious authors or church clerics. 'Everyman' is regarded as the most popular morality play till the late 15th century. The morality plays were based on religious lessons and they developed naturally. They mirrored genuine truth and realism and evoked pathos. In style and treatment, they were direct and sincere.

Between the proceedings of the church, a new birth of short and direct play was acknowledged, called the 'Interludes'. These interludes were also based on the popular themes like the morality plays, but they were not allegorical in nature. Most of the times these interludes were enacted to entertain the gentries of the period. These interludes often slipped into depicting a theme, which was not a biblical narrative. *Fulgens and Lucretia* is an example of such an interlude, but it is quite developed in its plot-construction. An interlude had more entertaining dialogues, less number of characters, small plot and interesting stories to woo its audience. Especially, meant for the Tudor families, these interludes were the combination of rough humour, complicated action, little instruction where happenings were mostly 'sudden and unexpected.'

At the same time, the English soil was witnessing the production of a new type of drama called 'miracle plays,' the newest in growth of its kind. It was a forceful say which paved way for the modern drama that culminated into the productions contributed by the University Wits and Shakespeare. It is surprising and strange how native English drama, that started from the clerics acting in the outer precincts of a church, developed into morality, interludes and mystery plays gaining the beauty as well as gaiety of essence, theme, structure, the dramatic unities, the various kinds, pathos, irony, humour and the art of sublimation in the hands of Marlowe and Shakespeare.

Probably the development of drama owed its growth to new scholars from the universities in England and the Renaissance, which forcefully pushed the active and ambitious minds to explore and inculcate the classical literature. The University

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Wits enunciated the art of drama in the forms of tragedy and comedy both with innovation and tradition in the Elizabethan Age. Then Shakespeare's Age followed together with Ben Jonson's 'comedy of humours'. The Restoration comedy of manners followed next, which tended to be on the verge of obscene, vulgar and socially disreputable that raised brows of common men, especially the Puritans.

Again drama developed its pace in the 18th century with Johnson's historical plays, but they were not that recognizable as their predecessors. In the 20th century, William Butler Yeats brought drama back in the Irish theatre exploring the medieval age with Celtic undercurrents, and many followed his trend.

George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Stearns Eliot were two major 20th century figures who used drama to convey their ideas, exploring different themes. Twentieth century theatre introduced many new styles and trends in modern drama from all over the world. In the 20th century English drama, trends dominated, which were subtle and thought-stimulating such as realism and myth introduced by the psychological studies inspired by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (his theory of collective unconscious). With the insight of psychology, they expressed myth and 'a poetic form of realism' based on the search conducted by these two psychologists. They mention and aim at truth common to all humans.

Yeats and Synge with Lady Gregory aimed to portray and develop poetic realism describing the Irish peasant life. The audience did not accept their themes with a pleasant nod and their concept of poetic realism was doubtfully questioned by the spectators.

Following the steps of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who created drama of ideas by using realism, George Bernard Shaw discovered the 'problem play' or 'drama of ideas' in England, where he picked up social issues or drawbacks and tried to give solution to them. It was Shaw who stressed on emancipation of women and promoted the thought of raising the importance of women in our lives rather than treating them as subordinate members of our society. Surprisingly, he himself preferred to stay single.

After the First World War, political theatre became a trend where social and political issues and propaganda became vehicles to reach the masses. The Women's Rights Movement of the 1930s was voiced by 'agitprop', which was a renowned political theatre. The Dada Movement was related to World War I. Ibsen's idea of 'realism' was related to representation of human behaviour as it was seen in real life: it mirrored the society that a human being observed, what we call the human nature. Such a play concentrated on the present and described every strata of population rather than idealizing or worshiping a hero. They picked up characters from normal life focusing on any gender, race or strata of the society.

Samuel Beckett's 'Theatre of the Absurd' introduced the existentialist theory that abstract existence played great role in life above everything in it. This type of drama in being was essentially poetic and full of imagination and exhibited the downplay of language. This theatre gave rise to many other types of drama like 'Symbolism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Drama of Cruelty, Expressionism, and so on'.

Dadaism was a protest against colonialism and the subsequent World War I in most of the European nations. It was a movement carried by those literary

artists who opposed nationalism. Dadaists were ‘anti-art’ or avant-garde who went against expressing too pleasing an art or value. There were mainly French, Swiss and German writers involved in this movement. Major dramatists like Yeats to Pinter were an inseparable part of the Symbolist or Aesthetic Movement in theatre. They used underlined symbolism as their plot or structure of a play. From plot to stage everything used to be stylised in a specific mood. The movement took surge in the beginning of the twentieth century to influence all the later generations which followed them.

Surrealist Movement was next to the Aesthetic Movement. Both these trends were founded in the mystic. Surrealist Movement changed the stage set up like the Symbolist Movement. In it, action sounded louder and words were downplayed. Such plays exhibited unsurmised happenings and surprise. Samuel Beckett was an outstanding surrealist. The aim of the ‘*Theatre of Cruelty*’ was to portray ‘representational medium’ and focussed on dealing with the current situations.

The art of ‘expressionism’ in theatre was the gift of the German playwrights. It either gave short, straight sentences, or long, and poetical speeches. Such play would not specify names for characters and dealt with current reality looking forward to a safe and happy future, rather it aimed to incorporate ‘spiritual awakening’ presenting plot in various episodes.

The modernist approach of Bertold Brecht came up with ‘epic theatre’ with rejection of realistic theatre. He took inspiration from the Greek form of epic poetry for epic theatre. Jacobus describes it as a dramatic vision arrayed with ‘stark, harsh lighting, black stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing music onstage, and long, discomfiting pauses’. Brecht applied that a play must signify to the audience as its own rather than alienating them to feel detached while watching it. He thought epic theatre plays would relate to people as their part, and be not just its silent spectators. Its theme would be theirs rather than a remote sense or relation to them. It often aimed at presenting a social issue.

### Check Your Progress

1. What is an essential quality of a drama?
2. State the main characteristic of Samuel Beckett’s *Theatre of the Absurd*?
3. What was Dadaism movement?
4. What was the aim of the ‘Theatre of Cruelty’?

## 1.3 MAJOR FORMS OF DRAMA

We will in this section discuss about the major forms of drama.

### Tragedy

The definition and genesis of tragedy goes back to the classical literature of Greece. Aristotle, the master-craftsmen, is held as the father and preceptor of ‘classical tragedy’. Tragedy is a form of drama. ‘Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is

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serious, and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself. . . with incidents arousing pity and terror, with which to accomplish its purgation of these emotions.’ (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6). The origin of drama looks back to the period between 600 and 400 BC. It was during this period that poetry and drama both blossomed: both being complex art forms: both carving enormity of brilliance ever after. The most important dramatists of this period were Aeschylus (525-456 BC), Sophocles (496-406 BC), Aristophanes (c.448-c.380 BC) and Euripides (484-406 BC). They are considered the pillars of Greek concept of art called drama. It is said the drama was conceived from the ‘songs and dances of ancient rites and religious festivals connected to the seasons.’

Tragedy sprouted in Athens many years ago and has its base in the choral poetry. It is a Greek concept that Dionysius, the god of nature, died and took rebirth in a cycle each year. Thus, they performed a chorus in the form of hymn to pay tribute to him, named ‘dithyramb’. Aristotle described that tragedy was born from this dithyramb, played by a solo actor called Thespis. The story goes that Thespis began to converse with dithyramb. The contextual meaning of the word tragedy is ‘goat-song.’ This goat was taken as a gift for that song.

Aeschylus, the great dramatist, was the one who initiated the art of tragedy in classical literature. He is considered as the original founder of European play. The subjects of his plays were man’s relations with God and man’s roles here on earth. His plays carried moral values and judgments profoundly. He produced around ninety plays among them seventy-nine are available in title and seven are expected to be existing too. His renowned drama is *Prometheus Bound* followed by a trilogy called *Oresteia*. Aeschylus’s gift to the drama was addition of a second actor and reduction in the size of chorus.

Sophocles wrote more than hundred dramas among which only seven are available under these names Ajax (c.450 BC), Antigone (c.442 BC), Oedipus Rex (c. 425 BC) and Electra (409 BC). Aeschylus was writing in the period of Greece’s Golden Age of democracy, and Sophocles was the product of its climax. Euripides was the youngest among this famous trio of tragic Greek playwrights. As Sophocles added cry over man’s fall, while exalting over the resumption of his spirit, Euripides portrayed common human beings with exceptional delineation and extraordinary sympathy, especially for the female.

Tragedy was chiefly concerned with men of importance and it voiced their downfall. But Euripides wrote tragedies and introduced ‘tragi-comedies’ varying into different types which can be aptly named romantic plays, melodrama or extreme comedies. His famous dramas are *Medea*, *Bacchae*, the *Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the *Phoenician Women* and *Andromache* beside other two portrayals of ghastliness and dementia called ‘Electra and Orestes’.

Apart from Greece, the gift of tragedy travels from the ancient Rome where the name of Seneca (Lucius Annaeus Seneca c. 4 BC-AD 65) finds the place of the first known tragedian. His plays displayed vigorous bloodshed and the element of horror containing a lot of aspects, which technically could not be staged. It was a combination of real life happenings or elements which a stage could not represent,



especially the facts related to murder, cutting into pieces, showing heavy things to be carried from one to another, and the likes.

Seneca had a multiple persona who wrote plays, poetry, satire, philosophy and was trained in rhetoric, besides being a politician. He was banished from the kingdom of Claudius in AD 41 for committing adultery with the emperor's niece, whereupon he trained Nero the strategies of statesmanship. When Nero took over as emperor, Seneca was appointed his advisor. Finding Nero not under his guidance, he preferred retirement. His students blamed him of conspiracy and forced him to commit suicide. The tragic life and death of Seneca arouse terror and pity, as they were part of his plays in abundance. The Senecan trend called 'stoicism': an approach to drama which was devised during 3rd century BC in Athens. It was a popularly applied trend in Rome from c. 100 BC to c. AD 200. Stoicism made its influence on the Christian way of thought.

Seneca derived his inspiration from those heroic playwrights of Greece like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. In England, all his available nine plays were translated during 1559-1581 during the Renaissance and Revival. His tragedies *Medea*, *Oedipus*, *Trojan Women*, *Phoenician Women*, *Agamemnon* and *Phaedra* were motivated by the Greek masters of the Golden Age of classical drama. The master dramatists of the Elizabethan Age have been said to have read and shown their impact on their thinking and delineation of plays. It was his structure which was massively used in the English tragedies. Seneca framed his tragedies in the following ways:

- He constructed his tragedies in five acts.
- The hero who meets tragic fall displays no sign of fear toward death, rather he bears death with a strong heart and dignified grace.
- A foreboding of death or a '*Cloud of Evil*' is vanquished by the 'defeat of *Reason of Evil*', which yields to '*Triumph of Evil*' and finally as seen in the '*the Trojan Women*'.
- The stage is full of corpses at the end of the play.

It was Seneca who became the role model for the Renaissance playwrights in the development of the plot. Thomas Kyd's the *Spanish Tragedy* (1582-92) and Christopher Marlowe's the *Jew of Malta* (1589/90) are specimen of Senecan tragedy. The standards of tragedy define that it would portray a hero of noble belonging whose tragic fall is developed through the structure of the play. The actions of the hero may have ruining consequences, which might not be their own making.

Tragedy states the sequence from high to low. In tragedy, a wrongdoing or vice might be punished. Tragic hero is often a mighty person who is warned through a tragic end that he must not abuse his power. Classical tragedies depict kings, Gods and demi-gods.

In contrast, comedy, which is the oldest form of drama, for it began almost as early as our existence, takes ordinary characters from life. When human society designed a structure where places were allocated or assigned to people of eminence,

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the emergence of tragedy is stated to have taken birth. Thus, tragedy is linked with the growth of hierarchical order when man began to fight for power and position. As a result of this, they wore the attire of the powerful, claiming themselves to be the powerful judges of humanity. They took providence into their hands and manipulated it into a wrong manner to decide who is right and who is wrong.

Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE) studies and evaluates Greek dramatic art and discusses tragedy in comparison to comedy or epic poetry. His estimation founded tragedy like all other types; telling that tragic poetry is a mimesis (mirror of life or imitation). He believes tragedy is a serious art which enwraps undeviated accomplishment to serve its purpose.

Poetic mimesis is an action copied as presenting it like a replica undermining universality of theme and ideals unlike history where facts are strewn on paper straightaway. Poetry is a superior art form that exalts human soul. The end of tragedy is to achieve 'catharsis' in its viewers or readers, which must create and stimulate emotions like pity and terror. This catharsis should effect on the audience so much that they come out of theatre with a heaving heart, elevated soul and purified conscience with a heightened cognizance towards the behaviour of God and man. Catharsis is the moment in which the hero of the tragedy would suffer some dramatic and damaging change into his fortune.

Although Aristotle himself differed from the idea of disastrous change that was how the tragic heroes would have shown as it is in the episode of *Oedipus at Colonus*. He divided tragedy into six main parts—fable or plot, characters, diction, thought, spectacle (scenic effect), and melody (music). The former two are the most essential characteristics of a tragic drama. He has explained and analysed these parts and their extent as well as appropriate use in his poetic at length citing instances from the classic tragic plays of the Greek masters of the Golden Era, especially Sophocles. *Poetics* also discusses the art of Aeschylus, Euripides and many other dramatists whose works of art are extinct now. The extract below shows translation from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. And life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is their action that makes them happy or wretched. The purpose of action in the tragedy, therefore, is not the representation of character: character comes in as contributing to the action. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of the tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be one without character. . . . The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: character holds the second place.

According to Aristotle, the plot of a tragic play is an abstract idea of 'an arrangement of incidents' (chapter-6). The story is made of the incidents which are termed raw material by him. The way these raw materials shape up into incidents, which construct a cogent and well organised whole, is called a plot. He asserts that 'the first principle, then, and to speak figuratively, the soul of tragedy is the plot; and second in importance is character'.

He believed that characters add into that dramatic destiny of a tragedy, so they are agents to support the action of the plot 'by character that element in

accordance with which we say that agents are of a certain type' (chapter-6). Further, he explained that 'poets do not, therefore, create action in order to imitate character; but character is included on account of the action' (chapter-6). Tragedy means an imitation of an action.

Aristotle paid special attention on explaining plot, which must have a beginning, middle and end. It must be a whole. The plot, therefore, should have 'exposition, conflicts, rising action, climax, falling action and catastrophe (dénouement)' in tragedy. A plot should contain single theme which must deal with the rise and fall of the hero's fortune and all the events should support in weaving that central idea. The hero is more or less a sufferer as things are beyond his control, or not the part of his nature. This is a major difference in the modern and the ancient concept of drama as in the classic tragedy, the plot and action are designed at the cost of the protagonist whereas the modern drama explores the psychological motivation of the hero. About the emotion that his suffering should arouse, Aristotle defines 'pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.' The central character should be endowed with goodness and characteristic flaws '... a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty; a personage like Oedipus.'

The hero should not hurt the moral sentiments of the audience besides maintaining truth, his character and of stable behaviour. His characteristic weakness is called 'hamartia' by Aristotle. The protagonist's series of actions expose him to his tragic fall. These actions might be an outcome of his thoughtlessness or ignorance or improper decision. Although a tragic hero would be of noble and high birth with greatness, his hamartia dilutes his image of perfection. He suggests the three dramatic unities: the unity of time, the unity of place and the unity of action. He also mentions various styles, techniques and dramatic devices like 'reversal' (peripeteia) and 'recognition' (anagnorisis). One by one he mentioned the other five parts of tragedy, but plot to him played the foremost role. His *Poetics* was a product of a century after the death of the classical tragedians of Greece. His time saw unexpected changes in the Greek society and art forms.

### 1.3.1 English Tragic Plays

The rise of tragedy in England goes back to the Elizabethan Age when *Gorboduc* (1561) by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton was acted. English tragedies receive inspiration from Seneca. *Gorboduc*, the protagonist, is a mythical emperor of ancient England. This play exhibits the use of blank verse for the first time in English drama, the art, which was later developed by Christopher Marlowe.

Drama saw its massive proliferation and development in the Elizabethan England during 1585 and 1642. The demand of drama was very much in the society and every seventeenth day a new play had to be staged. The Elizabethan tragedies follow the Senecan trend of construction and treatment. At this period, drama had just come out of its religious boundaries and saw a new birth of varieties. Therefore, the playwrights imitated the art of their classical masters and perfected

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it in order to develop their own style. The ten available plays of Seneca were translated. Of which these three Troas, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules Furens* were translated by Jasper Heywood.

Based on Senecan type, Thomas Kyd wrote the *Spanish Tragedy* in blank verse, which suited the stagecraft and used the theme of horror, crime and revenge motif which inspired Shakespeare's tragedies. Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) was the last dramatist among the University Wits from Cambridge whose short tragic life yet radical brilliance created and shaped English tragedy. His major tragedies include *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587), *Dr. Faustus* (1592), the *Jew of Malta* and *Edward II*. Marlowe was ambitious and his plays amply embody this trait.

His *Tamburlaine*, a 14th century herdsman, gains power by being victorious over all his enemies and his lust for power becomes the reason for his tragic fall. He thrives in power, challenging God and men combined with his 'mighty line':

...the ripest fruit of all,  
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,  
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

But contrary to the Christian ideals maintained in his *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe embarked on delineating a character, *Dr Faustus* by using a German traditional tale of a magician who sells his soul to the devil for attaining the universal knowledge. *Tamburlaine* depicts the power which is challenged by physical encounters whereas *Faustus* explores the inner, introspective and psychological depths of the theme of the lust of power. Marlowe's description of the dramatic devices such as pathos and irony at the climax of the play is considered matchless:

Ah! Faustus  
Now has thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually:  
Stand still you ever moving spheres of heaven,  
That time may cease, and midnight never come:  
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make  
Perpetual day, or let this hour be but  
A year; a month, a week, or natural day,  
That Faustus may repent, and save his soul  
O lentelentecurritenoctisequi.

(O, gently gently run you horses of the night.)

Shakespearean tragedy alone holds the foremost place in English letters of all ages as nothing surpasses it. The Elizabethan stage in the 16th century was studded with the oft-quoted dramas of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), an actor and shareholder in the theatre business. As a playwright, his success lay in his qualities which thematically encompassed 'loyalty and disloyalty, and their consequences on human life'. He beautifully paints human passions, and an

uncommon discord between reason and feeling where, at last, reason loses its direction and fails. He describes the understanding of his art:

*And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A locan habitation and a name.*

(Act V, I, A Midsummer Night's Dream)

He was an objective observer of human nature and his characters have free play of their own spirits with natural cadence of development. His characters never transcend human barriers of good and evil. They exist in a moral world. His plays were addressed to his audience and he manipulated the resources best to enrich stagecraft. His major tragedies are *Hamlet* (1603), *Macbeth* (1611), *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1606), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606), and *Coriolanus* (1609). They were all written between 1600 and 1606. His *Richard II* (1595), *Richard III* (1592), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and *Julius Caesar* (1599) are excellent historical or romantic tragic dramas. His period of tragedy is diluted with his other genres of plays. His tragedies have powerful diction, poetical outbursts, noble characters, each shows a serious conflict of a soul caught between reason and action, and each of his heroes exhibit a frailty, or prejudice of character. The hero's action is repentant at the dénouement section. The action of his heroes decides the destiny of their country too. His tragedies are deep studies of human psyche and his poetry. His tragic hero's central action and the portrayal of the world where he moves, affects the atmosphere. His plays please different levels of audience.

*Hamlet*, his early tragic drama, is a self-conscious scholar prince of renaissance who is bright, of sad temperament and contemplative. He sketches the character of a man caught between his actions and overdoing of thinking. Horatio's speech at the end is full of power of imagination:

*Now cracks a noble heart. Goodnight, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. (V, 2)*

Designed successfully for the stage, *Othello* is the story of a black moor who is too much suspicious of his wife: a white and very beautiful lady of noble being. This weakness of his is well exploited by the villain Iago, an iconic character in the history of English dramas, who manoeuvres this frailty of the hero in such a manner that he kills his wife culminating into his suicide too, at the end of the play. And speaks of his misunderstanding pining over which he ended his life:

*When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;  
Of one that not easily jealous, but being wrought  
Purplex'd in the extreme. (V, 2)*

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His poetry and artistry as a tragedian reaches the extreme of excellence and beauty in *Macbeth*. Macbeth is ambitious which makes him fall prey to avarice and subsequent murder of King Duncan provoked by his wife Lady Macbeth. He becomes the king according to the prophecies of the three witches. He kills many others to hide the secret of his first crime; while at last, he himself is slayed in the battle. His famous soliloquy is eloquent of his feeling of futility after achievements acquired by wrong manner:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing. (V, 5)*

*King Lear*, his late tragic play, is about a titular person who becomes insane after dividing his property into two parts for two of his three daughters on the basis of their flattery. His decision brings tragic end to all.

In the period that followed Shakespeare, George Chapman (1559-1634), Beaumont (1584-1616) and Fletcher (1579-1625) wrote tragedies. But the 17th century dramatists wrote tragedies of excesses and unreal world, which partly irritated a certain sect of audience. John Webster's *White Devil* and the *Duchess of Malfi* is considered tragedies of revenge motif and excess of bloodshed. The great restoration playwright John Dryden (1631-1700) wrote heroic tragedies among which *All for Love* is a repetition of Shakespeare's theme of *Antony and Cleopatra*. However, Dryden has an exclusive gift of mastery of poetry and that is evident in his plays too. In the early 20th century, John Masefield and J. M. Synge (1871-1909) were writing tragedies beside other genres of drama. The Irish National Movement was invoked by W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), J. M. Synge, Sir James Barrie (1860-1937), and Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), writers of great ability. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is a moving tragic play.

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen has been the most stupendous force behind the 20th century theatre. George Bernard Shaw composed a satirical tragedy which won the coveted Nobel Prize for literature *Saint Joan* (1923). Shaw was a writer of problem plays, and his *Saint Joan* is also a sequel to expose the odds of the society. However, the use of the theme of a fourteen years old 'maid' who is sacrificed on the blames of blasphemy or anti-God statements, is full of irony and pathos. The climax is terrifying and thought-provoking. Under the cover of verbal wit and raillery, Shaw dealt with a very serious theme here. His tragic play *Candida* is brilliant too. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) who wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), Edward Albee, Arthur Miller (USA), Eugene O'Neill, and August Strindberg (Sweden) are some of the major thinkers and tragic playwrights of the modern English drama.

### 1.3.2 English Comic Plays

The word 'comedy' has an ancient and classical background ahead of tragedy, which means an amusing spectacle. The word is a mixture of merry-making and

poet or singer. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, he discussed comedy as 'The passage on the nature of comedy in the *Poetics* of Aristotle is unfortunately lost, but if we can trust stray hints on the subject, his definition of comedy (which applied mainly to Menander) ran parallel to that of tragedy, and described the art as a purification of certain affections of our nature, not by terror and pity, but by laughter and ridicule.' (Rev. J. P. Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, London, 1895) Further, comedy refers to 'the classical sense of the word, then, was "amusing play or performance,"' which is similar to the modern one, but in the Middle Ages the word came to mean poems and stories generally (albeit ones with happy endings), and the earliest English sense is 'narrative poem' (such as Dante's *Commedia*). Generalized sense of 'quality of being amusing' dates from 1877.' The purpose of comedy is to 'entertain by the fidelity with which it presents life as we know it, farce at raising laughter by the outrageous absurdity of the situation or characters exhibited, and burlesque at tickling the fancy of the audience by caricaturing plays or actors with whose style it is familiar. (Fowler)' *Dionysos* (360-340 BC) is a famous classical Greek comedy.

Aristophanes and Menander were chief writers of comedy plays who laughed at the politicians, philosophers and their contemporary artists. The art of comedy too is based on its classical Greek structure like tragedy: the first part had chorus, music and dance in flashy costumes, which represented the characters in the play normally called 'parodos'; and, the next phase was 'agon' when the main plot was exposed to the audience through verbal wit or debate; the third phase of comedy play was 'parabasis' when the chorus communicated directly with the viewers, and even spoke on behalf of the playwright; and, the last phase was 'exodos' when the chorus finished the play with another and final song and dance. The performers were professional actors who displayed a vast array of characters ranging from human to non-human representations in motley costumes and painted or masked countenances. Only two or three main actors were there in which one was the protagonist, and the others were not much significant to the plot. Classic comedy did not allow many main actors, so the actors had to carry many roles at the same time. Facial gestures, dresses and make-up were important tools to evoke fun.

Dramas in Athens were performed in the open air theatres. The stage used to be designed particularly for a comedy. The actors could enter the stage from various sides, even from the public arena. During the 5th century BCE in Greece, on any festive occasion there would be a panel of ten judges to evaluate the performance of both tragedy and comedy dramas. The following is an extract from Aristophanes' renowned comedy:

*Oh would some god, with sudden stroke,  
Convert me to a cloud of smoke!  
Like politicians' words I'd rise  
In gaseous vapour to the skies.'*

*(50, Act One, Scene One, The Wasps by Aristophanes)*

The difference between tragedy and comedy is that tragedy depicts the moral or heroic struggle of the protagonist ending in death or destruction whereas

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comedy aims to amuse through wit, ridicule, farce, satire and ends happily. Comedy exposed vices or frailties of the people or society through humour. Its end is of correction through wit and humour.

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In England, Elizabethan dramatists tried their hands in the art of comedy of which the foremost name was that of poet, playwright and politician John Lyly (1553/4-1606) from Oxford. He had a natural gift for comedy which he exhibited best in his books *Euphues* or the *Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and *Euphues and His England* (1580). His style was named 'euphuism.' His chief plays include *Endymion* (1591), *Campaspe* (1584), *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Gallathea* (1592), *Midas* (1592) and *Mother Bombie* (1594). Most of these pioneer university wits tragedies and comedies served as inspiration to the later Elizabethans, and the writers of the following generations.

Tragedy and comedy complement each other as they blend together in life. And literature is but a just representation of human existence. Shakespearean comedies are often a blend of seriousness and fun. All his comedies indicate or wear a sober thread in its plot. They often tend to be ironical or satirical about elements of life and human nature. Shakespearean comedy has brilliant diction and songs. His dialogues are interspersed with metaphors, word play and clever phraseologies. Its major theme is love and pair romance. Often the characters are disguised or they change their outward appearance to achieve what they are looking for. There are obstacles in the path of these lovers which they overcome by their wit, wisdom and cleverness. His comedies have a more complex plot with multiple threads of sequences and finally untying into a harmonious whole. The characters prove the theme of moral uprightness and virtues at the end of the story, and the evil-minded characters are made to realise that they have been on a wrong path. But all these have a polite way of moulding incidents into a single whole.

His plots for comedies are more twisted and entangled than those of his history or tragic dramas. As it is in his tragedies that none resembles the other exactly in style or pattern, similar approach can be seen in his comedy plays which are all different. Variety of plot styles are intertwined with exuberant and copious flow of twirls in the structure to keep the audience excited and always in wait for the next moment. Usually, the climax of the drama takes place in its third act and the final scene makes the lovers accept or declare their love for each other. The characters, most of the times, hide their identities and feign some other name and role throughout the play cascading into different streams until they meet the final sea and reveal themselves to be what they are in reality. Virtue always leads the play and keeps a watch over cunning as well as deceitful characters. These tricks of false characters are played in order to avoid the schemes and plotting of the villains. For example, the plot of *As You Like It* drives all the important characters into the forest of Arden where they stay in disguised until the cloud of villainy is blown away by the auspicious wind and everything is fine.

Not only that, his female protagonists are specially clever in his comedies and tragi-comedies, who by their sheer wit, clever understanding of the facts, precaution, and wise manipulations of the situation at hand keeping an eye over future, turn the drama into perfect end. His chief comedies are *Twelfth Night*, *As*



*You Like It, Love's Labour's Lost, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Comedy of Errors, Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Tempest, Much Ado About Nothing and All's Well That Ends Well.* Shakespeare borrowed his themes frequently from history but shaped them with his original genius which makes his art unrivalled. All his plays of all the three genres use acts and scenes according to the demand of the structure. Shakespeare experimented with themes, stagecraft, dramatic devices, plot construction, diction, poetry, characters and at the same time, assorted tradition with such uniqueness that his dramatic art becomes unquestionable. He was a keen observer and critic of human nature in all his plays. Theseus in *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* says:

*Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name. (V, I)*

That is how he perceived and justified all poets. Most of his comedies are placed under the category of romantic comedies. Away from Shakespeare's romantic world of fancifully magnificent and entertaining tales, there was another dramatist in the same age who wrote comedy vigorously to evolve a new style of drama. Ben Jonson (1573-1637) was a robust and powerful moralist who aimed his best to reform the classical comedy in English literature in the 16th and 17th centuries. Thriving through professions unlikely to adorn him with the gift of knowledge that he possessed, Jonson received recognition from eminent universities of England when he began to act in plays.

In comedy, Jonson adhered strictly to depict his own age with realism, romance and maintain the dramatic action with the three dramatic unities of time, place and morally sound theme. He focused on the plot innovation that drama should have a single scene using a single span of a day. He was held as a person strict with the rules of dramatic art:

*The laws of time, place, persons, he observeth,  
From no needful rule he swerveth.*

Jonson did not portray the goodness like Shakespeare did: Shakespeare painted the charming *Belmont* or *Forest of Arden* or the playfulness of Puck, but

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Jonson acquainted his audience with scoundrels and Thieves in his play *Bartholomew Fayre*. He introduced comedy of humours and his first successful drama was *Every Man in His Humour* (1598). Jonson loved following classical methods and his characters were called ‘humours’ where they present aspect of moral nature throughout the play, which is subjected to mockery:

*whensome one peculiar quality*

*Doth so possess a man that it doth draw*

*All his affects, his spirits and his powers*

*In their confluxions all to run one way,*

This may be truly said to be a humour.’

(*Every Man Out of His Humour*, 1599, Quarto 1600)

Jonsonian ‘static’ characters or types potently gripped their audience through whom he ridiculed the frailty or weaknesses of the society and human nature. Later on, when corruption, with the rise of the bourgeois, affected social life, Jonson became bitter in his comedies. His outstanding comedies are *Volpone*, *Silent Woman*, *Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fayre*. The *Alchemist* presents three characters—Subtle, Face and Doll—who are rogues, whereas *Volpone*, or the *Fox* displays avarice on a grand scale.

The Restoration playwrights took him for their model and later on, the master of oratory, the 19th century novelist Charles Dickens revived Jonson’s gift to the English letters. Jonson was an original genius and extremely learned craftsman. Among his contemporaries were Philip Massinger (1583-1640) and John Ford (1586-1639) with whose work theatre came to be closed during the period of Civil Wars. Theatres opened again after 1660 when Charles II was restored on the English throne. In comedy, Restoration Era breathes its exuberance and excellence as a period apart from others. There were many types of styles tried by the writers of comedy in this age, but chief exponents of comic plays then were Sir George Etherege (1635–91), William Wycherley (1640–1716) and William Congreve (1670–1729).

Etherege’s the *Man of Mode* brought the concept that comedy would not obligate to sketch a moral world, it would often negate romance, but only portrays the gentry of the day. It would paint the contemporary ladies and gentlemen as they were their witty repartee and the city life full of ‘amorous intrigues.’

Wycherley explored Etherege’s style with keener interest and observation. To his immoral and obscene world he blended the dramatic devices of satire and mockery. He successfully exploited his study of Molière and Ben Jonson. His famous comedies are the *Country Wife* (1672-3) and the *Plain Dealer* (1674).

The most brilliant among these Restoration writers of comedy plays is William Congreve (1670-1729). He avoided the deep exposition of the society which Wycherley styled by going back to use of ‘surface gaiety’, as done by Etherege. Congreve’s sparkle was immediately recognized and valued by the audience. He never ended on being too boisterous as he was a very careful artiste. His major contribution is the *Old Bachelor* (1693), *Double Dealer* (1694), *Love for Love*

(1695) and *Way of the World* (1700). His specialities as an artist were his wholeness of vision of a narrow world with dexterous accuracy of its delineation of values. In his world, there was no fight between good and evil, but the elegant was victorious over the unsophisticated, wit surpassed the dull and dignity overcame roughness. He does not let sentiment, or morality penetrate his city drawing rooms or sitting parlours where witty conversations, fashionable ladies and gallant gentlemen flirted with each other exposing the vices of London men and manners reckoned as the foremost symbols of culture.

George Farquhar's the *Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) served the purpose of a link between the comedy of manners of his age and the upcoming 18th century novels. John Dryden, the greatest poet, critic and playwright of the period in his *Marriage à la Mode* (1672) gives his estimation of the Restoration comedy:

Why should a foolish Marriage Vow,  
Which long ago was made,  
Oblige us to each other now,  
When passion is decay'd.  
We lov'd, and we lov'd, as long as we could:  
'Till our love was lov'd out in us both:  
But, our Marriage is death when the Pleasure is fled:  
'Twas Pleasure first made it an Oath.

The noteworthy 18th century comedies were John Gay's the *Beggar's Opera* (1728), Richard Steele's *Tender Husband* (1705), George Lillo's *London Merchant* (1731), Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Richard Sheridan's *Rivals* (1775), *School for Scandal* (1777) and the *Critic* (1779). The art of comedy gradually saw decline in its values and style as it travelled from 16th to 17th and 18th centuries.

The 19th century is known for novel and poetry as theatre did not have any noteworthy participation in literature during that period. The style of probing into a social problem descended onto English drama through Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) and Sir A. W. Pinero (1855-1934) of which the later had a sustained and successful career as a playwright. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and George Bernard Shaw were the most prominent voices of the period during the first three decades of the 20th century. Wilde's famous comedies are *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and the *Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). The *Importance of Being Earnest* is a light humoured play where he has tried to revive the art of Congreve. Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) brought out a stark realism of his contemporary life dealing with issues of society. John Galsworthy (1867-1933) also tried his hand into writing drama; however, his novels are more perfect pieces of his art. His works are '*Man of Property* and the *Silver Box* (1906).

The Abbey Theatre in Dublin was thriving with swarms of viewers when Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats together tried to revive the traditional Celtic folklores combined with fertile imagination and mystical tinge of the Medieval

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Age in the dawn of the 20th century. Yeats' plays *Countess Cathleen* (1892) and the *Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) recalled mysticism and country tradition of his motherland. John Millington Synge (1871-1909) had a more profound approach towards theatrical artistry in comedy. He expressed his travel experiences through dramatic craftsmanship in comedies like the *Playboy of the Western World* (1907).

All the tragedians and comedy writers were part of promoting the Irish National Movement. George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was ahead of all these nationalist artistes who alone raised their voices against the flaws in social structure. He was a staunch moralist and although his plays are categorised as romantic in tradition, he maintained his form of drama to be a vehicle of his sparks that would reach each nook of the stubbed humanity. Shaw had a very successful career as a dramatist. He was an outspoken genius who never feared anyone in his lifetime. He laughed and ridiculed at the oddities of human nature and social behaviour 'in full-throated ease' and suggested possible amendments for the problems with which he dealt in his plays.

His dramas portray 'life force.' Shaw held the ideals of Socialist Fabians to his heart. He lived ideally and showcased ideals in his plays too. He was a lively, witty as well as a brilliant person who displayed these qualities in diction, form, art, themes, moral message and creative intelligence. His verbal wit is put parallel to Congreve's and Wilde's. He possessed an unusual clarity of vision of the social ills, which he mixed with comedy with the excellent touch of irony and command over language. For all his uniqueness, Shaw remains matchless an artist in the history of 20th century English drama. He began as a dramatic critic with his *Our Theatre in the Nineties*. His first play was *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and till 1949, his *Buoyant Billions* was being staged, when he was ninety-three.

Shaw voiced out contemporary themes in his plays mixed with realism and wit. His task was that of an observer and teacher in his plays. His plays are not the mechanical products of sapless age and straining realism, but were absolute entertainers. His gallery of characters does not escape a single profession or walk of life, which does not receive reproof or criticism. He created brilliant dramas incessantly one after another, more than sixty in number, of which the exceptionally charming ones are *Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1894), *You Never Can Tell* (1897), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), *Fanny's First Play* (1911), *Pygmalion* (1912), *Back to Methuselah* (1921), *Geneva* (1938), *Saint Joan* (1923), the *Apple Cart* (1929), *Too True to be Good* (1931), *On the Rocks* (1933), the *Millionairess* (1936) and *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* (1938-9).

Shaw fought for the ideas of equality of men and women besides being a democratic liberal and politically ideal mind. His dramas are like those musical shows which engage and leave us into a thoughtfully recharged world.

After Shaw, the major English comedy playwrights were Noël Coward (1899-1973) with his *Hey Fever* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930), *Design for*

*Living* (1932), *Present Laughter* (1942) and *Blithe Spirit* (1941); Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) with his absurdist comedy *Waiting for Godot* (1955); Harold Pinter (1930–2008) with his *Birthday Party* (1958); Tom Stoppard (1937–) with his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966). Many of these famous dramatists wrote short plays for radio and television in the latter half of the 20th century like Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard and John Mortimer.

### 1.3.3 English Tragi-Comedies

In literature, the term ‘tragi-comedy,’ means a play with serious conflict but happy resolution. There has been no specific definition assigned to the type, however, Aristotle defined this genre of play of serious action ending happily. The Roman dramatist of comedies, Plautus (254 BC to 184 BC) coined this term in his play *Amphitryon* where a character Mercury used ‘tragicomoedia.’ Plautus declared:

*I will make it a mixture: let it be a tragicomedy. I don't think it would be appropriate to make it consistently a comedy, when there are kings and gods in it. What do you think? Since a slave also has a part in the play, I'll make it a tragicomedy.*

In the context of England, the concept of tragi-comedy was a romantic play with no strict regulations to follow the classical unities of time, place and action. It blended all types of characters both high and low, and captured unbelievable or marvellous action. The plays encompassed shades of tragedy and comedy, the two elements we find in our everyday life. William Shakespeare used tragi-comedy with dexterity of graceful dramatic art. His *Merchant of Venice* (1605) is an excellent example of this art category where Antonio's life is saved by the clever Portia, or else it would have been a tragedy where he had to lose his life in the hands of Shylock. His other tragi-comedies include *Winter's Tale* (1611), *Cymbeline* (1623), *Pericles* (1619), *Tempest* (1611), *Two Noble Kinsmen* (in collaboration with John Fletcher 1634) and *Measure for Measure* (1604). The last one is labelled as ‘dark comedy’ because it depicts grim action. Shakespeare's contemporary Fletcher wrote *Faithful Shepherdess* (1608).

The style of tragi-comedy was that it presented moderate sentiments, moderate passions, moderate amusement, pretension of conflicts and happy conclusion. Together Beaumont and Fletcher composed *Phylaster* (1610) and *A King and No King* (1611).

The drama in the Jacobean Age was considered obscene. It was censured by the puritans and theatres showcasing the plays were closed in 1642 owing to the reaction from the people.

After the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660, theatres reopened but there were no immediate potent tragi-comedies. In the 18th century, Sir Richard Steele wrote the *Conscious Lovers* (1722). Later, George Lillo's *London Merchant* (1731) and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) became the famous vehicles of this genre. They called it *Sentimental Comedies*. The 20th century plays by Shaw and Wilde are excellent specimen of tragi-comedies. Shaw explained in his preface to *Major Barbara* (1905) how ‘the

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tragi-comic irony of the conflict between real life and romantic imagination' was essential to the completion of the dramatic art.

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *Wild Duck* (1884) is a famous tragi-comedy. Anton Chekhov of Russia was skilled in the art of tragi-comic dramas. In 1962, Edward Albee wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Thomas Stearns Eliot's dramas in the first half of the 20th century are great proponents of this genre. His *Cocktail Party* (1949) and the *Family Reunion* (1939) extend the style of tragi-comedy.

### 1.3.4 Farce

The English word farce has its roots in Latin 'farcire' which means 'to stuff' or Old French farce meaning 'to show'. In contemporary times, any play which relies on buffoonery, crude funny situations and such low brow devices to create comedy is labelled as 'farce'. One major difference between comedy and farce is that comedy is more positive in approach whereas farce is more pessimistic. In Farce, laughter is aroused through mannerisms, loud behaviour and contrived and highly improbable situations. It mostly turns into burlesque, apart from its tendency to point out larger human problems. It portrays the stupidity of man while picturing his troubles. Farce is a go-between the classical drama form and modern European form.

Farce gained appreciation and retained popularity in France till as late as the seventeenth century. John Heywood, the writer was highly influenced by the farce genre. In his early life Molière too acted in farce, before he became established as a writer.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries short, one-act farces gained popularity in England and America. They were staged along with, five-act tragedy. Many of these performances achieved great success mostly because of the acting of some particular actor in comedy role. In today's contemporary usage, the word farce is associated to any full-length play which deals with some absurd situations. They are mostly based on extra-marital themes, hence, they are also called as 'bedroom farce'. Pinero was one of the early exponents of modern farce in England. A full-length farce which is still popular is *Charley's Aunt* (1892) written by Brandon Thomas. In the 1920s and early 1930s Ben Travers produced many successful farces that were staged at the Aldwych Theatre.

### 1.3.5 Masque

It is the French word for the English 'mask'. It is a short form for masquerade. The word was first used by Ben Jonson and it appeared in print in *Hall's Chronicle* for 1512 in the context of a dance which had masked figures. The history of the 'masque' as a form of theatre goes back to Italy from where it travelled to England and got special patronage from Queen Elizabeth I and her two immediate successors James I and Charles I. Masque was a form of entertainment that was exclusive to the court. In fact, most of the actors were from nobility, some even from royalty. It was all about spectacle where both drama and action revolved around spectacle.

A masque dealt with characters from mythology or pastorals and was made ornate with songs, dances and extravagant costumes. It was a spectacular entertainment which had both music and poetry with vivid scenery and elaborate costumes. It dates back to primitive folk rituals featuring the arrival of guests, mostly in disguise, carrying gifts. It is part of the folk tradition. The presentation of gifts gave way to flattering speeches, and the wearing of outlandish costumes and masks followed dancing. Wearing disguises was the earliest and simplest form of the mask celebrations.

During Renaissance Italy, Lorenzo de' Medici was responsible for popularising song, dance and scenery in the performances. The French Court saw the rise of *ballet de Cour*; the colourful *mascarade* (from which the word 'masquerade' comes), and the *comédie ballet*.

In the sixteenth century the 'masque' became popular and this form got the patronage of the Tudor rulers of England. People in masks and elaborate dresses performed before the king, with all the essential requirements like scenery, machinery and ornate speech. During the Elizabethan period, masques were popular sources of entertainment even for the Queen and these were staged either in the palace or outside. In *Love's Labour Lost* Shakespeare pokes fun at the simple country masque, and uses the element of disguise in *The Tempest*.

By the time court masques were staged for James I and Charles I many innovations and changes had taken place. Ben Jonson was appointed Court Poet in 1603. One of Jonson's notable contributions was the anti-masque, also known as the ante-masque which incorporated the earlier elements of antic or grotesque dancing. First introduced in 1609, the anti-masque was in stark contrast to the main theme. The simplicity of the early masque gave way to the double masque, which employed two different groups of characters. With the passage of time, the literary quality of the masque declined, and the spectacular aspect, like the dancing, in which Charles I and Henrietta Maria became performers, became fashionable. Jonson's last masque was performed in 1634.

The Civil War rang the death knell of the masque tradition and it could never be revived. But Restoration theatre borrowed many of its spectacular effects. It should be mentioned here that Milton's *Comus* (1634) is described as 'a masque' but it is actually a pastoral.

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### Check Your Progress

5. What was the main subject of Aeschylus plays?
6. Name some of the famous dramas of Euripides.
7. How did Aristotle regard tragedy as a form of drama?
8. What was the style of tragi-comedy?
9. State any one characteristic of William Shakespeare's tragedy.
10. What is the basic difference between tragedy and comedy?

## 1.4 PROMINENT DRAMATISTS OF THE WORLD

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In this book, you will study about the significant works of dramatists such as William Shakespeare, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Sheridan, John Galsworthy, G. B. Shaw, J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats. However, in this section, we will focus on the life and works of other prominent dramatists of the world in addition to those mentioned above.

### 1.4.1 Henry Ibsen: Life and Works

Henrik Johan Ibsen (20 March 1828–23 May 1906) was an important and influential Norwegian playwright who is rightly considered the father of modern realistic drama.

His plays were declared sacrilegious at the time when Victorian bourgeois principles of family, marriage and respectability were still the custom, and to defy them was immediately considered wrong and shameful. Ibsen's work critiqued and questioned the realities that lay behind the façade which the society of that time lacked the courage to confront.

On the modern stage, Ibsen's contribution lies in introducing a critical eye and free inquiry into the conditions of life and issues of morality. Prior to him, plays were generally considered to be moral dramas with noble protagonists pitted against vice darker forces, and characters appeared as mere black or white coloured cutouts. The shade of grey was missing, and in E.M. Forster's terms, characters were 'flat' and not 'round'. Ibsen did a total turnaround to the accepted endings where goodness lead to contentment and joy and sin paved the way to pain, by testing the beliefs of the times and crushing the illusions of his audiences.

Ibsen was born into a comparatively affluent family in the small port town of Skein, Norway, which was famous for shipping timber. Soon after he was born, his family's financial situation deteriorated drastically. His parents were badly affected by this unexpected turn of events. His mother sought the comfort of religion while his father became severely depressed. Therefore, with personal influence, the characters in his plays often mirror his parents, and his themes are seen to often deal with issues of financial difficulty.

Ibsen left home and became an apprentice druggist at fifteen, and began writing plays. His first play, *Catiline* (1848), was published when he was only 20, but was not performed. His first play to be performed was *The Burial Mound* (1850), but this play was unable to gather a great deal of interest. This did not in any way diminish his desire to be a playwright though for some years following, he did not write again. The next few years were spent at the Norwegian Theatre where Ibsen's role as writer, director and producer saw his involvement in the production of more than 145 plays. He did not, however, publish any new plays of his own. Even though as a playwright recognition and achievement eluded him, the time spent at the Norwegian Theatre was valuable as it gave Ibsen a lot of



practical experience of drama. This was to later prove very beneficial to Ibsen when he took to writing again.

Ibsen returned to Oslo in 1857, where he lived in very poor financial circumstances. He was married in 1859. He became very disenchanted with his life in Norway, and left for Italy in 1864. He did not return to his native land for the next 27 years, and when he did, he had already become a noted playwright, controversial but highly influential.

His next play was *Brand* (1865) which brought him the critical acclaim he sought, along with a measure of financial success, and was followed with a similar response with his next play, *Peer Gynt* (1867).

With success on the stage, Ibsen gained confidence and began to introduce more of his own beliefs and judgments into the drama, exploring what he termed the “drama of ideas”. His next series of plays are often considered his Golden Age, when he established himself as a playwright with a cause and reached the centre of dramatic controversy across Europe.

Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) was a strong indictment of the conventional roles imposed on men and women in the institution of Victorian marriage. In the play, the protagonist Nora in the end leaves her husband in search of the inner meaning to her life, realizing that she has been confined to a ‘doll’s house’ all her life. In a life dependent on her husband who refers to her as his ‘squirrel’, Nora is given a role much subservient to the man of the house. She is not even entrusted with a key to the mailbox. When she is threatened due to an apparently inappropriate folly she committed in order to save her husband’s life by forging her father’s name on a note, her husband takes a moral high ground oblivious of the fact that his life is due to her. He is only concerned with his own reputation, despite her love for him which prompted her to risk her marriage for his sake.

Finally, the blackmailer recants, but instead of presenting a happy resolution to the audience, Ibsen, presents a situation which has been an eye opener for Nora for whom it is too late to go back to the way things were. Her illusions shattered, she decides she must leave her husband and their children, and leave her Doll’s House to discover her true self and her worth. To the Victorian morality, this decision to step out of marriage was scandalous as nothing was considered more sacrosanct than the covenant of marriage, and to portray it in such a way was completely objectionable. The play did not find favour with some theater houses who refused to stage it forcing Ibsen to write an alternate ending more appropriate to the moral values of the society. The role of Nora too had no takers as no actress would did not like to play the role of a modern woman who puts her interests higher than those of her husband and children.

This distressed Ibsen considerably, and he actually on one occasion at the last minute submitted a “correction” to the actors on opening night.

Ibsen followed *A Doll’s House* with *Ghosts* (1881), another scathing commentary on Victorian morality. In it, a widow reveals to her pastor that she has hidden the evils of her marriage only in order to preserve it. The hypocrisy of the institution of marriage and the complexities involved in it are brought out in the

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play. Going with the wishes of the pastor, she had married her then fiancé (now dead husband) despite his philandering hoping that her love would change him for the better.

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Love does rather have the capability to exert a powerful and constructive sway over a person but not so in the case of this widow. Her wishes were all in vain as her husband continued with his ways right up to his death. As a result of his notorious behaviour, his son inherited syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease. During those days, even the mere mention of venereal disease was taboo and Ibsen had been bold enough to bring this subject up in a play that was performed for the public. On top of that, to show that even a person who followed the society's ideals of morality could not escape it was totally unacceptable as it upset the audience's balance of morality and judgment completely.

Society was very critical of Ibsen but among them were people who were daring enough to realize that what was presented was indeed a mirror of society. They saw their own ugly reflections in that mirror and were not averse to seeing Ibsen's plays because they believed that he only presented what was real. Ibsen's situation can, in a way, be compared to that of Sadat Hasan Manto, the Urdu writer who sought to fight against and expose the unyielding morality of a hypocritical modern India. Manto, like Ibsen, was criticized by society and not accepted and notwithstanding his genius, had to lead the life of a loner. These are the creative artists one must look up to and seek to be inspired by their zeal and commitment to truth, qualities rare in today's consumerist world.

Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) was another controversial play where the entire community was portrayed as the antagonist. The play was pro-individual and supported the view that an individual who stands alone can also be right as against the entire community who can be wrong. The power of a lone person should not be taken as negligible. Ibsen out rightly challenged the Victorian view that the community, a noble establishment, can never be wrong.

The protagonist of this play, a doctor, is a well-respected member of the community of a town which, being a vacation town, has as its main attraction a public bath. The doctor discovers that the water which is being used gets contaminated as it seeps through the grounds of a local tannery. Instead of recognizing his efforts to save the townsfolk of diseases that may occur due to this, he is made out to be a villain who is opposing the community needs. He is tormented by the locals who turn against him and even stone his window.

At the end of the play he is shown to be totally disliked and unaccepted by society. Single handedly he stands against corruption and malpractice but his voice is crushed under the thunder of collective righteousness.

Ibsen's next play, *The Wild Duck* (1884) is considered by many to be his most excellent work, and it is certainly the most intricate. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after being deported for a long time and is reunited with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. As the plot opens, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' apparently happy home are revealed to

Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the ‘Summons of the Ideal’. These truths are: Gregers’ father impregnated his servant Gina, and then got her married to Hjalmar to legitimize the child. Another man has been dishonoured and is behind bars for a crime the elder Werle committed. Hjalmar’s days are spent working on some imaginary discovery while his wife is the bread winner for the family.

Ibsen’s use of irony is brilliant regardless of his persistence of truth. The audience only gets to know what Gregers thinks not by actual words spoken by him but by insinuations. He is never understood till the end of the play.

Gregers hammers away at Hjalmar through innuendo and coded phrases until he realizes the truth; Gina’s daughter, Hedvig, is not his child. Blinded by Gregers’ persistence on complete truth, he disavows the child. Seeing the harm he has created, Gregers determines to patch up things, and suggests to Hedvig that she sacrifice the wild duck, her wounded pet, to prove her love for Hjalmar. Hedvig is the only one who recognizes that Gregers always speaks in code, and looks for the deeper meaning in the first important statement Gregers makes which does not contain one. She kills herself rather than the duck in order to prove her love for him in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Only too late do Hjalmar and Gregers realize that the absolute truth of the “ideal” is sometimes too much for the human heart to bear.

A widely performed play by Ibsen is *Hedda Gabler* (1890), the leading female role is considered as one of the most challenging and rewarding for an actress till date. As far as the characters are concerned, one can notice many similarities between Hedda and Nora in *A Doll’s House*.

Ibsen was successful in completely rewriting the rules of drama with a realism which was to be practiced by Chekhov and others, and which we see in socially committed theater to this day. In India, an Ibsen festival is celebrated every year in New Delhi showcasing adaptations of Ibsen’s plays across languages and cultures. From Ibsen onwards, challenging assumptions and directly interrogating issues has been considered one of the factors that make a play art rather than entertainment, and that add meaning to drama in general.

Finally, Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, but the Norway he had left had changed considerably. Ibsen passed away in Oslo, leaving a style, movement and ethos in world drama behind him.

### Important Works of Ibsen

- *Ghosts* (1881)
- *An Enemy of the People* (1882)
- *The Wild Duck* (1884)
- *Hedda Gabler* (1890)
- *When We Dead Awaken* (1899)
- *A Doll’s House*

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### 1.4.2 Samuel Beckett: Life and Works

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‘The farther he goes the more good it does me. I don’t want philosophies, tracts, dogmas, creeds, ways out, truths, answers, nothing from the bargain basement. He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and the more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him.

He’s not f—ing me about, he’s not leading me up any garden path, he’s not slipping me a wink, he’s not flogging me a remedy or a path or a revelation or a basinful of breadcrumbs, he’s not selling me anything I don’t want to buy — he doesn’t give a bollock whether I buy or not — he hasn’t got his hand over his heart. Well, I’ll buy his goods, hook, line and sinker, because he leaves no stone unturned and no maggot lonely. He brings forth a body of beauty.

His work is beautiful.’

(Harold Pinter on Beckett)

Samuel Barclay Beckett was an Irish playwright, and an important figure of Absurdist theatre. He had his education at Trinity College, Dublin (1923 to 1927) where the subjects he studied were French, English and Italian. Soon after college, he left for Paris to take up a teaching position. Whilst in Paris, he met James Joyce, a leading modernist writer and intellectual of the twentieth century. Joyce became a good friend and influenced Beckett in many ways. Beckett did some secretarial work for Joyce whilst pursuing his writing career. In 1929 he published his first work, a critical essay defending Joyce’s work. His first short story, ‘Assumption’, was published the same year in the periodical ‘Transition’. In 1930 Beckett won a small literary prize with his poem *Whoroscope*. This poem was mainly about René Descartes, another writer who exerted a chief literary and philosophical influence on him.

In 1930, Beckett came back to his old college, Trinity College, as a lecturer. Dissatisfied, he left after less than two years. He now embarked upon his European travels. He spent some time in London where he published his critical study of Proust in 1931. Two years later, upon his father’s death in 1933, Beckett had to undergo two years of Jungian psychotherapy with Dr. Wilfred Bion, who in 1935 took him to hear Jung’s third Tavistock lecture, an event which he would still bring to mind many years later.

In 1932 Beckett worked on his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. This did not find any publishers so he decided to split it into many smaller parts. It was re-titled *More Pricks Than Kicks* and was published under this name in 1933. That Beckett was largely influenced by Joyce can be seen in his next novel, *Murphy*, written in 1935. Beckett’s next travels in 1936 took him extensively around Germany. He was fascinated with all the art work he had seen there and filled several notebooks with accounts of these. The Nazi savagery the country was being subjected to filled him with disgust and he also wrote about this. He returned to Ireland in 1937 for a very short time during which he had some misunderstanding with his mother. This made him decide to make Paris his permanent place of residence. In December, while refusing the solicitations of a pimp, he was stabbed and nearly killed, and during recuperation he met the woman

who would be his lifelong companion, Suzanne Descheveaux-Dumesnil. In 1938, *Murphy* was published. Beckett translated it into French in 1939. When World War II erupted, he stayed on in France and following the 1940 occupation by Germany, Beckett joined the French Resistance, working as a courier. On many occasions in the following two years, Beckett was almost caught by the Gestapo. In 1942 his unit was betrayed by a former Catholic priest causing Suzanne and him to hastily withdraw south on foot to the security of the small village of Roussillon, in the Vaucluse département on the Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur region. His war time activities were something Samuel hardly ever spoke about. However, during the two years he stayed in Roussillon, he helped the Maquis sabotage the German army in the Vaucluse Mountains. Beckett commenced writing his novel *Watt* during the time he was in hiding and completed it in 1945. The French government awarded him the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Résistance for his efforts in fighting the German occupation.

Beckett's finest works are the series of three novels written in French (often referred to, against Beckett's explicit wishes, as 'the Trilogy'): *Molloy* (1947; published in French in 1951; in English, partly translated by Patrick Bowles, in 1953), *Malone Dies* (1947-48; published in French 1951; in English, translated by the author, in 1956) and *The Unnamable* (1949-50; published in French 1953; in English, by the author, in 1957). *The Unnamable* opens in the following manner, which has come to be regarded as typical of Beckett's mature style:

'Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on.'

Beckett is best known for the play *Waiting for Godot* (published 1952, English translation published 1955). This play initially opened to mainly bad reviews but slowly became very popular and remains a modern classic till today.

Beckett is therefore considered one of the great 'absurdist' playwrights of the twentieth century, along with Ionesco and Jean Genet. He translated his works into the English language himself, with the exception of some sections of *Molloy*.

Another well-known play from the same period is *Endgame*. Beckett mostly wrote full length plays like *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*. Apart from these he also wrote short plays and sketches like *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, *That Time* and some radio and television plays.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

### Important works of Beckett

- *Eleutheria* (1940s, first published 1995)
- *Waiting for Godot* (first published 1952)
- *Endgame* (published 1957)
- *Happy Days* (published 1960)
- *All That Fall* (radio play, 1956)
- *Act Without Words I* (1956)

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- *Act Without Words II* (1956)
- *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)
- *Rough for Theatre I* (late 1950s)
- *Rough for Theatre II* (late 1950s)
- *Embers* (1959)
- *Rough for Radio I* (radio play, never broadcast, 1961, rewritten as *Cascando*)
- *Rough for Radio II* (radio play, early 1960s)
- *Words and Music* (radio play, 1961)
- *Cascando* (radio play, 1962)
- *Play* (1963)
- *Film* (film, 1963)
- *The Old Tune* (radio play, adaptation of Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle*, published 1963)
- *Come and Go* (1965)
- *Eh Joe* (television play, 1965)
- *Breath* (1969)
- *Not I* (1972)
- *That Time* (1975)
- *Footfalls* (1975)
- *Ghost Trio* (television play, 1975)

### 1.4.3 T.S. Eliot: Life and Works

Thomas Stearns Eliot (26 September 1888–4 January 1965) was an American-born English poet, playwright and literary critic, noted as the most important English language poet and critic of the 20th century. The poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*—started in 1910 and published in Chicago in 1915—is regarded as a modern classic and established T.S. Eliot as a formidable figure of the modernist movement. This poem was followed by other masterpieces such as *Gerontion* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also known for his seven dramatic works, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was written in 1935. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot went to Harvard. After graduation, he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne for a year, and then won a scholarship to Oxford in 1914. He became a British citizen at the age of thirty-nine. '[M]y poetry has obviously more in common with my distinguished contemporaries in America than with anything written in my generation in England,' he said of his nationality and its role in his work. 'It wouldn't be what it is, and I imagine it wouldn't be so good ... if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in

America. It's a combination of things. But in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America.' Eliot renounced his citizenship to the United States and said: 'My mind may be American but my heart is British'.

Eliot was born into the Eliot family, a bourgeois New England family who had moved to St. Louis, Missouri. His father, Henry Ware Eliot (1843–1919), was a successful businessman, president and treasurer of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis. Eliot credits his hometown with seeding his literary vision: 'It is self-evident that St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has ever done. I feel that there is something in having passed one's childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those people who have not. I consider myself fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London'. His mother was Charlotte Champe Stearns (1843–1929) who wrote poetry and was a social worker, which was a new profession in the early 20th century. Among six surviving children, Eliot was the last; when he was born, both his parents were forty-four years old. He was known as Tom to his family and friends, and was the namesake of his maternal grandfather Thomas Stearns.

Eliot attended Smith Academy from 1898 to 1905. Here, he studied French, Ancient Greek, German and Latin. At the age of fourteen only, Eliot started writing poetry under the influence of Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a translation of the original poetry of Omar Khayyam. However, he destroyed them as he asserted that the results were depressing and disparaging. His oldest surviving poem, an untitled lyric, dates from January 1905. The first poem that he showed anyone was '*A Fable for Feasters*', which was written by him at the age of fifteen as a school exercise. It was published in the *Smith Academy Record*, and later in *The Harvard Advocate*, Harvard University's student magazine.

After completing his graduation, Eliot attended Milton Academy in Massachusetts for a preparatory year. Here, he met Scofield Thayer, an American poet and publisher, who later published the magnum opus *The Waste Land*. From 1906–09, Eliot studied philosophy at Harvard, earning his bachelor's degree in three years, instead of the four that was the norm. According to Frank Kermode, the most significant moment of Eliot's undergraduate career was in 1908, when he discovered Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). With this, he was introduced to Arthur Rimbaud (French poet), Jules Laforgue (Franco-Uruguayan poet) and Paul Verlaine (French poet). These poets were to have long lasting effects in literary and intellectual life of Eliot. Eliot wrote that without Verlaine, he might never have heard of Tristan Corbière and his book *Les amours jaunes*, a work that affected the course of Eliot's life. Some of his poems were published by the *Harvard Advocate*, and he became lifelong friends with Conrad Aiken, the American novelist.

From 1909 to 1910, Eliot worked as a philosophy assistant at Harvard. After this, he moved to Paris, where he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1910 to 1911. He attended lectures by Henri Bergson, a major French philosopher, and read poetry with Alain-Fournier (the pseudonym of Henri Alban-Fournier), a French author and soldier. From 1911 to 1914, he studied Indian philosophy and

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Sanskrit in Harvard. These influences are apparent in *The Wasteland*. In 1914, a scholarship was awarded to Eliot to Merton College, Oxford. He first visited Marburg, Germany, where he planned to take a summer programme. However, he chose to go to Oxford in its place, when the First World War broke out.

Eliot did not settle at Merton, and left after a year. On New Year's Eve 1914, he wrote to Conrad Aiken: 'I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books and hideous pictures on the walls ... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead'. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T.\\_S.\\_Eliot\\_-\\_cite\\_note-SeymourJones1-12](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._S._Eliot_-_cite_note-SeymourJones1-12) By 1916, he had completed a Ph.D dissertation for Harvard on *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*, about F.H. Bradley. However, he failed to return for the *viva voce* exam.

In 1914, Eliot, at the age of twenty-six, wrote a letter to Aiken, saying, 'I am very dependent upon women (I mean female society)'. Less than four months later, Thayer introduced Eliot to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, a Cambridge governess. On 26 June 1915, they got married at Hampstead Register Office.

For a short while, Eliot visited his family in the United States, after which he returned to London and took up several teaching jobs, like lecturing at Birkbeck College, University of London. According to some scholars, the philosopher Bertrand Russell and Vivienne had an affair, but the allegations were never confirmed. In his sixties, Eliot confessed in a private paper: 'I came to persuade myself that I was in love with Vivienne simply because I wanted to burn my boats and commit myself to staying in England. And she persuaded herself (also under the influence of [Ezra] Pound) that she would save the poet by keeping him in England. To her, the marriage brought no happiness. To me, it brought the state of mind out of which came *The Waste Land*.' Eliot worked as a schoolteacher after leaving Merton, most remarkably at Highgate School, a private school in London, where he taught French and Latin. His students included the young John Betjeman, an English poet, writer and broadcaster. Later, he took up teaching at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, a state school in Buckinghamshire. He also started writing book reviews and lecturing at evening extension courses in order to earn some extra money. In 1917, he was appointed at Lloyds Bank in London to work on foreign accounts. On a trip to Paris in August 1920, he met the modernist icon James Joyce and the artist Wyndham Lewis. According to Eliot, initially he found Joyce egotistical. Besides, it is learnt that Joyce doubted Eliot's ability as a poet at the time. However, both the masterminds became friends soon, and Eliot would visit Joyce whenever he was in Paris.

In 1925, Eliot joined the publishing firm Faber and Gwyer (which later became Faber and Faber in 1929). Here, Eliot remained for the rest of his career, and in due course, became a director. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis, an English painter and author, became close friends, a friendship which resulted in Lewis's well-known painting of Eliot in 1938.

On 29 June 1927, Eliot converted himself from Unitarianism to Anglicanism, and this became an important landmark in his life. Later, in November 1927, he took British citizenship. He became a warden of his parish church, Saint Stephen's,



Gloucester Road, London, and a life member of the Society of King Charles the Martyr. He specifically called himself an Anglo-Catholic, asserting himself 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-catholic [sic] in religion'. About thirty years later, Eliot commented on his religious views that he combined 'a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinist heritage and a Puritanical temperament'.

By 1932, Eliot had been thinking of a separation from Vivienne for some time. After receiving an offer from Harvard for the Charles Eliot Norton professorship for the 1932-1933 academic years, he left his wife in England. After returning, he formally took a separation from her, avoiding all but one meeting with her between his leaving for America in 1932 and her death in 1947. Vivienne was committed to the Northumberland House mental hospital, Stoke Newington, in 1938, and remained there until she died. Although Eliot continued as her legal husband, he never paid a visit to her.

From 1946 to 1957, Eliot shared a flat with his friend John Davy Hayward, an English editor, critic, anthologist and bibliophile. He gathered and archived Eliot's papers, styling himself '*Keeper of the Eliot Archive*.' Hayward also collected Eliot's pre-Prufrock verse, which was commercially published as *Poems Written in Early Youth* after Eliot's death. In 1957, Eliot and Hayward separated their household, after which Hayward preserved his collection of Eliot's papers, which he donated to King's College, Cambridge in 1965.

At the age of sixty-eight, Eliot married thirty-two year old Esmé Valerie Fletcher on 10 January 1957. In contrast to his first marriage, Eliot was more compatible with Fletcher whom he knew well as she had been his secretary at Faber and Faber since August 1949. Since Eliot's death, Valerie has dedicated her time to preserving his legacy. She has edited and annotated *The Letters of T.S. Eliot* and a reproduction of the draft of *The Waste Land*. In the early 1960s, Eliot's health had started deteriorating. However, he worked as an editor for the Wesleyan University Press, seeking new poets in Europe for publication.

On 4 January 1965, Eliot died of emphysema in London. He suffered health problems for several years, due to his heavy smoking, and had often been severely affected by bronchitis or tachycardia. He was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. As per Eliot's desire, his ashes were taken to St. Michael's Church in East Coker, the village from which his ancestors had immigrated to America.

### Important Works:

- *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917)
- *Portrait of a Lady* (1917)
- *Gerontion* (1920)
- *The Waste Land* (1922)
- *The Hollow Men* (1925)
- *Sweeney Agonistes* (published in 1926, first performed in 1934)
- *Ash Wednesday*

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- *The Rock* (1934)
- *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935)
- *The Family Reunion* (1939)
- *Four Quartets* (1943)
- *The Cocktail Party* (1949)
- *The Confidential Clerk* (1953)
- *The Elder Statesman* (1959)

#### 1.4.4 Harold Pinter: Life and Works

Harold Pinter (10 October 1930 – 24 December 2008) was a playwright, screenwriter, actor and theatre director. He was also left-wing political activist and a poet. He is considered to be one of the most dominant British playwrights of modern times. In 2005, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his significant contribution in the British drama. Pinter's writing career spanned over fifty years in which he produced twenty-nine original stage plays, twenty-seven screenplays, several dramatic sketches, radio and TV plays, poetry, one novel, short fiction, essays, speeches and letters. His best-known plays include *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Homecoming* (1964) and *Betrayal* (1978), each of which he adapted to film. His screenplay adaptations of others' works include *The Servant* (1963), *The Go-Between* (1970), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *The Trial* (1993) and *Sleuth* (2007). He directed almost fifty stage, TV and film productions, and acted extensively in radio, stage, TV, and film productions of his own and others' works.

Pinter's dramas frequently comprise of strong conflicts between ambivalent characters who struggle for verbal and territorial dominance, and for their own versions of the past. In form and style, his works include theatrical pauses and silences, and irony and menace. Thematically ambiguous, they produce complex issues of individual identity oppressed by social forces, language and vicissitudes of memory. In 1981, Pinter stated that he was not interested to write plays overtly about political subjects; yet in the mid-1980s, he started writing explicitly political plays. This 'new direction' in his work and his left-wing political activism inspired additional critical debate. Pinter, his work and his politics have attracted voluminous critical commentary.

Pinter has received several awards, some of which include the Tony Award for Best Play in 1967 for *The Homecoming*, the BAFTA awards, the French Légion d'honneur and twenty honorary degrees.

Pinter was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in December 2001. Despite his weak health, Pinter continued to act on stage and screen. His last performance was the title role of Samuel Beckett's one-act monologue *Krapp's Last Tape*, for the 50th anniversary season of the Royal Court Theatre, in October 2006. On 24 December 2008, Pinter died from liver cancer. The following week, he was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery in North West London.

Pinter's acting career extended over fifty years. Although he often played villains, his career included a wide range of roles on stage and in radio, film, and television. In addition to this, early in his screenwriting career, he played several cameo roles in films based on his own screenplays. Some of these are as a society man in *The Servant* (1963) and as Mr. Bell in *Accident* (1967), both directed by Joseph Losey; and as a bookshop customer in his later film *Turtle Diary* (1985), starring Michael Gambon, Glenda Jackson and Ben Kingsley.

Pinter started getting involved with direction more regularly during the 1970s, becoming an associate director of the National Theatre (NT) in 1973. He directed almost fifty productions of his own and others' plays for stage, film and television, including ten productions of works by Simon Gray.

Several of those productions starred Alan Bates (1934–2003), who originated the stage and screen roles of not only Butley but also Mick in Pinter's first major commercial success, *The Caretaker* (stage, 1960; film, 1964). In Pinter's double-bill produced at the Lyric Hammersmith in 1984, he played Nicolas in *One for the Road* and the cab driver in *Victoria Station*. Among over thirty-five plays that Pinter directed were:

- *Next of Kin* (1974), by John Hopkins
- *Blithe Spirit* (1976), by Noël Coward
- *Circe and Bravo* (1986), by Donald Freed
- *Taking Sides* (1995), by Ronald Harwood
- *Twelve Angry Men* (1996), by Reginald Rose

In the field of drama, Pinter wrote twenty-nine plays and fifteen dramatic sketches, and co-authored two works for stage and radio. Along with the 1967 Tony Award for Best Play for *The Homecoming* and several other American awards and award nominations, he and his plays received many awards in the U.K. and elsewhere throughout the world. His panache has entered the English language as an adjective, '*Pinteresque*', even though Pinter himself disliked the term and found it meaningless.

An early play was *The Dumbwaiter* (1959), which was premiered in Germany, and then in 1960, it was produced in a double bill with *The Room* at the Hampstead Theatre Club, in London. Until the 1980s, it was not produced very often thereafter. However, it has been revived more frequently since 2000, including the West End Trafalgar Studios production in 2007. The first production of Pinter's *The Caretaker* took place at the Arts Theatre Club, in London, in 1960, which established Pinter's theatrical reputation. Large radio and television audiences for his one-act play *A Night Out*, along with the popularity of his revue sketches, impelled him to further critical attention. In 1964, four years after the success of *The Caretaker*, *The Birthday Party* was revived both on television (with Pinter himself in the role of Goldberg) and on stage (directed by Pinter at the Aldwych Theatre) and was well-received.

By the time Peter Hall's London production of *The Homecoming* (1964) reached Broadway in 1967, Pinter had become a renowned playwright, and the

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play acquired four Tony Awards, among other awards. During this period, Pinter also wrote the radio play *A Slight Ache*, which was first broadcasted on BBC Radio 3 in 1959. It was then adapted to the stage and performed at the Arts Theatre Club in 1961. *A Night Out* (1960) was broadcast to a large audience on Associated British Corporation's television show *Armchair Theatre*, after being transmitted on BBC Radio 3, also in 1960. In 1960, his play *Night School* was first televised on Associated Rediffusion. *The Collection* was premièred at the Aldwych Theatre in 1962, and *The Dwarfs*, adapted from Pinter's then unpublished novel of the same title was first broadcast on radio in 1960. It was later adapted for the stage (also at the Arts Theatre Club) in a double bill with *The Lover*, which was then televised on Associated Rediffusion in 1963. His play *Tea Party*, a play that Pinter developed from his 1963 short story, was first broadcasted in 1965 on BBC TV.

Pinter also composed a script called *The Compartment* (1966) for a trilogy of films to be contributed by Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Pinter, of which only Beckett's film, entitled *Film*, was actually produced. Then Pinter turned his unfilmed script into a television play, which was produced as *The Basement*, in 1968, both on BBC 2 and also on stage.

The last stage play produced by Pinter was *Celebration* (2000). It is a social satire, set in an magnificent restaurant, which ridicules *The Ivy*, a gathering place for the theatre crowd near Covent Garden in London's West End theatre district, and its patrons who 'have just come from performances of either the ballet or the opera. Not that they can remember a darn thing about what they saw, including the titles. [These] gilded, foul-mouthed souls are just as myopic when it comes to their own table mates (and for that matter, their food), with conversations that usually connect only on the surface, if there'.

Almost during the same time, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Pinter's adaptation of his unpublished screenplay, and the revival of *The Caretaker* directed by Patrick Marber and starring Michael Gambon, Rupert Graves and Douglas Hodge, was simultaneously played in West End, London.

Like *Celebration*, Pinter's next-to-last sketch, *Press Conference* (2002), 'invokes both torture and the fragile, circumscribed existence of dissent'. Despite undergoing chemotherapy at the time, Pinter played the ruthless Minister willing to murder little children for the benefit of *The State*, for its première in the National Theatre's two-part production of *Sketches*.

In 2005, Pinter announced that he would stop writing plays to dedicate himself to his political activism and writing poetry: 'I think I've written twenty-nine plays. I think it's enough for me.... My energies are going in different directions—over the last few years I've made a number of political speeches at various locations and ceremonies ... I'm using a lot of energy more specifically about political states of affairs, which I think are very, very worrying as things stand.' Some of this later poetry included *The Special Relationship*, *Laughter* and *The Watcher*.

### Important works of Pinter

- *The Birthday Party* (1957)
- *The Dumbwaiter* (1957)
- *The Caretaker* (1959)
- *The Homecoming* (1964)
- *The Go-Between* (1970)
- *Old Times* (1970)
- *Betrayal* (1978)
- *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981)
- *The Trial* (1993)
- *Moonlight* (1993)
- *Celebration* (2000)
- *Sleuth* (2007).

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#### 1.4.5 John Osborne: Life and Works

John James Osborne was a distinguished English playwright, screenwriter, actor and a vocal critic of the Establishment- the 'Angry Young Man' of British theatre. His play *Look Back in Anger* brought about a revolution in transforming English theatre and enthusing new dynamism in English drama.

Osborne, in his literary life of more than forty years, dealt with several themes and genres, and wrote for stage, film and TV. His personal life was extravagant and iconoclastic. He used aggressive language to portray his feeling not only on behalf of the political causes he supported but also against his own family, including his wives and children. This made him highly disreputable.

Osborne was one of the first writers who questioned and criticized Britain's position in the post-imperial age. He was also the first who questioned the point of the monarchy on an important public stage. Osborne's most productive years were from 1956 to 1966, during which he was successful in making contempt an acceptable and now even clichéd onstage emotion. He also argued for the cleansing wisdom of bad behaviour and bad taste, and combined generous truthfulness with devastating humour. Because of these reasons, his works are considered to be modern emblems and therefore post-War British theatre history owes much to them.

Osborne was born on 12 December 1929 in London. His parents were Thomas Godfrey Osborne, a commercial artist and advertising copywriter of South Welsh extraction, and Nellie Beatrice, a Cockney barmaid. Osborne loved his father but despised his mother, who he later wrote taught him, 'The fatality of hatred ... She is my disease, an invitation to my sick room'. He described her as 'hypocritical, self-absorbed, calculating and indifferent'. When his father died in 1941, he left his young son an insurance settlement, which was utilized by him to finance a private education at Belmont College, a minor public school in Devon. In

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1943, Osborne entered the school but was expelled in the summer term of 1945 as he had whacked the headmaster, who had struck him for listening to an illegal broadcast by Frank Sinatra, the 20th century American singer and actor.

After completing his school, Osborne went back to London to his mother where he took up trade journalism for some time. He was introduced to the world of theatre when he was tutoring a touring company of junior actors. Soon he got involved in theatre as a stage manager and started acting after joining Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company. Osborne, along with his mentor Stella Linden, started off with writing plays, co-writing his first, *The Devil Inside Him*, which was then directed by Linden in 1950 at the Theatre Royal in Huddersfield. During this time, he tied his knot with Pamela Lane. Along with Anthony Creighton, a 20th century British actor and writer, he wrote his second play *Personal Enemy*, which was staged in regional theatres before he submitted his most famous work *Look Back in Anger*. With Creighton, he also later wrote *Epitaph* for George Dillon, which staged at the Royal Court in 1958.

Osborne greatly admired Max Miller and saw parallels between them.

"I love him, (Max Miller) because he embodied a kind of theatre I admire most. 'Mary from the Dairy' was an overture to the danger that (Max) might go too far. Whenever anyone tells me that a scene or a line in a play of mine goes too far in some way then I know my instinct has been functioning as it should. When such people tell you that a particular passage makes the audience uneasy or restless, then they seem (to me) as cautious and absurd as landladies and girls-who-won't."

Osborne made a significant contribution to the revival of British theatre by making it more challenging, audacious and experimental. He helped throw off the formal constraints of the previous generation, and turned the attention to language, theatrical rhetoric and emotional intensity. He saw theatre as a weapon, which would enable the ordinary people to break down the class barriers. He wanted his plays to be a remembrance of actual pleasures and pains. Osborne also brought about a significant change in the world of theatre, influencing playwrights such as Edward Albee and Mike Leigh. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Writer's Guild of Great Britain.

In 1959, he joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. However, he drifted to the libertarian, unorganized right, considering himself 'a radical who hates change'.

In his personal life, Osborne was equally rebellious and daring like he had been in his theatre. He had several affairs and was known as one who often ill-treated his wives and lovers. He got married five times, out of which four were unhappy unions, while the fifth is supposed to be his final happy marriage.

In Volume 1 of his autobiography *A Better Class of Person*, Osborne depicts his feeling of an immediate and intense attraction towards his first wife, Pamela Lane. Both of them were members of an acting troupe in Bridgwater. Although Alison Porter, the female protagonist in *Look Back in Anger* was based on Pamela, Osborne described her parents as 'much coarser'.

Osborne and Pamela got married secretly in nearby Wells and then left Bridgwater amidst an uneasy truce with Lane's parents (Osborne's hated mother was not aware of the union until the couple were divorcing), spending their first night as a married couple together in the Cromwell Road in London.

Initially, they had a happy married life. While Pamela's acting career flourished in Derby, Osborne's deteriorated. Later on, she started having an affair with a rich dentist. This was during 1955, and Osborne optimistically spent most of time in the next two years waiting for the possibility of reconciliation before their divorce. In 1956, after *Look Back in Anger* had opened, Osborne met her at the railway station in York. During this meeting, she told Osborne of her recent abortion and enquired after his relationship with Mary Ure, of which she was aware. In April 1957, Pamela granted a divorce to Osborne, on the grounds of his adultery.

Osborne started having a relationship with Mary Ure shortly after meeting her in 1956 when she was cast as Alison in *Look Back in Anger*. The affair progressed swiftly and the two moved in together in Woodfall Road, Chelsea. According to Osborne, contentment began to be replaced with jealousy and slight contempt for Ure's stable family background, the trivialities of her communication with them and a somewhat withering regard for her acting abilities. Both of them were not loyal to each other, and following the beginning of an affair with Robert Webber, Mary Ure left Osborne finally.

After Mary Ure, Osborne met his third wife to be - writer Penelope Gilliatt - initially through social connections. Osborne and Gilliatt were married for five years, in which time she gave birth to his only natural daughter, Nolan. However, Osborne had an offensive relationship with his daughter; he expelled her of his house when she was seventeen; they never spoke again. According to Osborne, his marriage with Gilliatt suffered because of her unnecessary obsession with her work, writing film reviews for *The Observer*.

The strains in their marriage were further exacerbated by Gilliatt's alcoholism and the malignant behaviour, deeply felt by Osborne. This resulted in Osborne having an affair with Jill Bennett, which was swiftly followed by a marriage. Their marriage lasted in a turbulent form for nine long years, which was reduced to mutual abuse and insult with Bennett provoking Osborne, calling him 'impotent' and 'homosexual' in public as early as 1971. This was cruelty which Osborne reciprocated, turning his feelings of bitterness and resentment about his declining career onto his wife. Bennett's suicide in 1990 is generally believed to have been a result of Osborne's rejection of her. He said of Bennett: 'She was the most evil woman I have come across', and showed open contempt for her suicide.

His fourth marriage was with Helen Dawson who was a former arts journalist and critic for *The Observer*. This final marriage of Osborne's lasted until his death and seems to have been Osborne's first happy union. Until her death in 2004, Dawson worked diligently to preserve and promote Osborne's legacy. Osborne died deeply in debt, his final word to Dawson was: Sorry. After her death in 2004, Dawson was buried next to Osborne.

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These details of Osborne's disturbing personal life are important as they are strongly reflected in his writings, particularly in the play *Look Back in Anger*. In this play, the character of Jimmy Porter seems autobiographically inspired with ranting, suspicion and general contempt for all.

Osborne suffered from a serious liver crisis in 1987, after which he became a diabetic, needing injection twice a day. Due to complications from his diabetes, he died in 1994 at the age of sixty-five at his home in Clunton, near Craven Arms, Shropshire. He is buried in St. George's churchyard, Clun, Shropshire, alongside his last wife, the critic Helen Dawson, who died in 2004.

*Dejavu* is the sequel to *Look Back in Anger* and was published in 1991. This was Osborne's last play. In it, Osborne visits the life of the Porters twenty years later. Jimmy's anger is still there, but like Osborne's own zeal that seems to have cooled off with age, Jimmy's anger is at best powerful in its nostalgic appeal.

**Important works:**

- *Look Back in Anger* (1956)
- *The Entertainer* (1957)
- *The World of Paul Slickey* (1959)
- *A Subject of Scandal and Concern* (1960)
- *Luther* (1961)
- *Plays for England* (1962)
- *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964)
- *A Patriot for Me* (1965)
- *The Hotel in Amsterdam* (1968)
- *Dejavu* (1992)

**1.4.6 Arthur Miller: Life and Works**

Arthur Asher Miller was born on 17 October 1915, in New York City, to Isidore and Augusta Miller, who were Polish-Jewish immigrants. His father was an illiterate but wealthy owner of women's clothing store. In the famous Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Miller family lost almost everything and moved to Gravesend, Brooklyn. In a struggling young life, Arthur, as a teenager delivered bread every morning before school to help the family make ends meet. He graduated in 1932 from Abraham Lincoln High School, following which he worked at several menial jobs to pay for his college tuition.

At the University of Michigan, Miller took his degree in journalism first and worked as a reporter and night editor for the student paper, the *Michigan Daily*. During this time, he wrote his first work, *No Villain*. Miller switched his major to English, and consequently received the Avery Hopwood Award for *No Villain*. Professor Kenneth Rowe was his mentor, who instructed him in his early forays into playwriting. Miller retained strong ties to his alma mater throughout the rest of his life, establishing the University's Arthur Miller Award in 1985 and Arthur Miller



Award for Dramatic Writing in 1999, and lending his name to the Arthur Miller Theatre in 2000. Miller wrote *Honors at Dawn* in 1937, which also received the Avery Hopwood Award.

Miller graduated with a BA in English in 1938, following which he joined the Federal Theatre Project, a New Deal agency established to provide jobs in the theatre. He gave up the offer to work as a scriptwriter for 20th Century Fox and chose his calling in theatre. However, during that time, the Congress was worried about possible Communist infiltration, and decided to close the project in 1939. Miller started working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard while continuing to write radio plays, some of which were broadcast on CBS.

On 5 August 1940, he married his college love, Mary Slattery, who was the Catholic daughter of an insurance salesman. The couple had two children, Jane and Robert.

Miller wrote *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in 1940; it was produced in New Jersey the same year and won the Theatre Guild's National Award. However, the play closed after four performances and devastating reviews. *All My Sons* came out in 1946 and was a success on Broadway and also contributed to Miller's literary career by earning him his first Tony Award for Best Author.

In 1948, Miller wrote the *Death of a Salesman* which premiered on Broadway on 10 February 1949 at the Morosco Theatre, directed by Elia Kazan, and starring Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman, Mildred Dunnock as Linda, Arthur Kennedy as Biff and Cameron Mitchell as Happy. The play was commercially successful and critically acclaimed. It won Miller a Tony Award for Best Author again, the New York Drama Circle Critics' Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was the first play to win all three of these major awards. The play was performed as many as 742 times.

In 1952, Kazan appeared before the HUAC (House of Un-American Activities Committee); fearful of being blacklisted from Hollywood, Kazan named eight members of the Group Theatre, who had been fellow members of the Communist Party. After a discussion with Kazan about his testimony, Miller travelled to Salem, Massachusetts to research the witch trials of 1692. Miller's play *The Crucible* in which he compared the situation with the HUAC to the witch hunt in Salem. On 22 January 1953, this play opened and was only somewhat successful at the time of its initial release. However, today *The Crucible* is Miller's most frequently produced work throughout the world and was adapted into an opera by Robert Ward which won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1962. Miller and Kazan's friendship came to an end after Kazan's testimony to the HUAC, and they did not speak to each other for the next ten years. The HUAC took an interest in Miller post *The Crucible* opened, and denied him a passport to attend the play's London opening in 1954. Miller's experience with the HUAC was to affect him throughout his life.

In June 1956, a one-act version of Miller's verse drama, *A View from the Bridge*, opened on Broadway in a joint bill with one of Miller's lesser-known plays, *A Memory of Two Mondays*. In 1957, Miller returned to *A View from the*

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*Bridge*, revising it into a two-act prose version, which Peter Brook produced in London.

In June 1956, Miller divorced from his first wife Mary Slattery, and in the same year on 25 June, he married the popular and beautiful actress Marilyn Monroe. Miller and Monroe had first met in April 1951, when they had a brief affair, and had remained in touch with each other since then.

When Miller applied in 1956 for a routine renewal of his passport, the HUAC used this opportunity to subpoena him to appear before the committee. Despite Miller's request, the committee asked Miller to reveal the names of friends and colleagues who had participated in similar activities and he refused. Accordingly, a judge found Miller guilty of contempt of Congress in May 1957. Miller was fined \$500, sentenced to thirty days in prison, blacklisted and disallowed a U.S. passport. In 1958, his conviction was turned over by the court of appeals, which ruled that Miller had been misled by the chairman of the HUAC.

After his conviction was overturned, Miller started working on his next play titled *The Misfits*, starring his wife. Miller said that the filming was one of the lowest points in his life, and shortly before the film's premiere in 1961, the pair divorced.

Miller married photographer Inge Morath on 17 February 1962, and they had two children. The first of their two children, Rebecca, was born in September 1962, while their son Daniel was born with Down syndrome in November 1966. At Arthur's insistence, Daniel was consequently institutionalized and excluded from the Millers' personal life. Until Inge's death in 2002, the couple remained together. It is learnt that Arthur Miller's son-in-law, actor Daniel Day-Lewis used to visit Daniel frequently, and also persuaded Arthur Miller to reunite with his adult son.

In 1964, Miller's next play *After the Fall* was produced. The play is a deeply personal view of Miller's experiences of marriage with Monroe. It reunited Miller with his former friend Kazan: they collaborated on both the script and the direction. *After the Fall* opened on 23 January 1964 at the ANTA Theatre in Washington Square Park amid an indignation outbreak of publicity and outrage for placing a Monroe-like character, called Maggie, on stage. In 1964, Miller produced another play called *Incident at Vichy*. In 1965, Miller was elected as the first American president of International PEN, a position which he held for four years. During this period, Miller scripted the play *The Price*, which was produced in 1968. Since *Death of a Salesman*, this play became Miller's most successful play.

In 1969, Miller's works were banned in the Soviet Union after he campaigned for the freedom of nonconformist writers. Throughout the 1970s, Miller spent much of his time experimenting with the theatre, producing one-act plays such as *Fame* and *The Reason Why*, and travelling with his wife, producing *In The Country* and *Chinese Encounters* with her. Both his 1972 comedy *The Creation of the World* and *Other Business* and its musical adaptation, *Up from Paradise*, were critical and commercial failures.

In 1983, Miller travelled to the People's Republic of China to produce and direct *Death of a Salesman* at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing, China, where the play was a success. In 1984, *Salesman in Beijing*, a book about Miller's experiences in Beijing, was published. Around the same time, *Death of a Salesman* was made into a TV movie, starring Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman. In late 1987, Miller's autobiographical work, *Timebends*, was published, in which Miller discusses about his experiences with Monroe in detail. During the early 1990s, Miller wrote three new plays, *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (1991), *The Last Yankee* (1992) and *Broken Glass* (1994). In 1996, a film of *The Crucible* opened, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder. Miller spent much of 1996 working on the screenplay to the film. In 1998, *Mr. Peters' Connections* was staged off-Broadway, and *Death of a Salesman* was revived on Broadway in 1999 to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Once again, the play was a large critical success, winning a Tony Award for best revival of a play.

In 1993, Miller won the National Medal of Arts. In 2001, Miller was selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. federal government's highest honour for achievement in the humanities.

In 1999, Miller won The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, one of the richest prizes in the arts, given annually to 'a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life'. On 1 May 2002, Miller won Spain's Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature as 'the undisputed master of modern drama'. Later in 2002, Ingeborg Morath died of lymphatic cancer at the age of seventy-eight. The following year Miller was awarded the Jerusalem Prize.

In December 2004, the eighty-nine-year-old Miller announced that he had been in love with thirty-four-year-old minimalist painter Agnes Barley and had been living with her at his Connecticut farm since 2002, and that they were looking forward to marry. In the fall of 2004, Miller's final play, *Finishing the Picture*, was performed at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, with one character said to be based on Barley. Miller said that the work was based on the experience of filming *The Misfits*.

When interviewed by BBC4 for The Atheism Tapes, he stated that he had been an atheist since his teens.

Miller died at the age of eighty-nine on the evening of 10 February 2005 due to heart failure after fighting against cancer, pneumonia and congestive heart disease at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut. He had been taken care of at his sister's apartment in New York since his release from hospital. Moreover, 10 February 2005 was also the 56th anniversary of the Broadway debut of *Death of a Salesman*.

### Important Works:

- *All My Sons* (1947)
- *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
- *The Crucible* (1953)

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- *A View from the Bridge* (1955)
- *After the Fall* (1964)
- *The Price* (1968)
- *Fame* (television play, 1970)
- *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972)
- *The American Clock* (1980)
- *The Last Yankee* (1991)
- *Broken Glass* (1994)

### 1.4.7 Bertolt Brecht: Life and Works

Bertolt Brecht was born on 10 February 1898 as Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht. He was a 20th century German playwright and theatre director as well as a poet. Brecht's contribution to world drama cannot be overstated as he was solely responsible for reinventing the language of theatre. Along with his wife, the actress Helene Weigel, Brecht ran the Berliner Ensemble—the post-war theatre company that actively toured the world.

Brechtian theatre dealt with popular themes and forms with avant-garde formal experimentation to create a spontaneous, alive and flexible theatrical mode that disturbed as it entertained. 'Brecht's work is the most important and original in European drama since Ibsen and Strindberg,' Raymond Williams argues, while Peter Bürger dubs him 'the most important materialist writer of our time'.

Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria to a conventionally- religious Protestant mother and a Catholic father (who had been persuaded to have a Protestant wedding). His father worked for a papermill and became its managing director in 1914. With his mother's influence, Brecht knew the Bible, a familiarity that had an impact on his writing throughout his life. At school in Augsburg he met Caspar Neher, an Austrian-German scenographer, with whom Brecht formed a life-long creative partnership. Neher designed several sets for Brecht's dramas and helped to build the distinctive visual iconography of their epic theatre.

When the First World War broke out, Brecht was only sixteen years old. Notwithstanding his initial enthusiasm as a teenager, Brecht soon changed his mind on seeing his classmates 'swallowed by the army'. On his father's advice, Brecht registered for an additional medical course at Munich University enrolling in 1917. There he studied drama with Arthur Kutscher, a German historian of literature and researcher in drama, who inspired in the young Brecht an admiration for the iconoclastic dramatist and cabaret-star Wedekind.

From July 1916, Brecht's newspaper articles started getting published under the new name 'Bert Brecht' (his first theatre criticism for the *Augsburger Volkswille* appeared in October 1919). In the autumn of 1918, Brecht was drafted into military service, only to be posted back to Augsburg as a medical orderly in a military VD clinic.

In July 1919, a son, named Frank, was born to Brecht and Paula Banholzer, with whom he had begun a relationship in 1917. In 1920, Brecht's mother died.

Sometime in either 1920 or 1921, Brecht took a small part in the political cabaret of the Munich comedian Karl Valentin. Brecht's diaries for the next few years record several visits to see Valentin perform. Brecht compared Valentin to Chaplin, for his 'virtually complete rejection of mimicry and cheap psychology'. Years later in his writing in *Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht identified Valentin, along with Wedekind and Büchner, as his 'chief influences' at that time.

Brecht's first full-length play, *Baal* was written in 1918. The play was written in response to an argument in one of Kutscher's drama seminars, which initiated a trend that persisted throughout his career of creative activity that was generated by a desire to counter another work (both others' and his own, as his many adaptations and re-writes attest). Brecht completed his second major play, *Drums in the Night*, in February 1919.

Brecht had been awarded the prestigious Kleist Prize (intended for unestablished writers and probably Germany's most significant literary award, until it was abolished in 1932) for his first three plays, namely *Baal*, *Drums in the Night* and *In the Jungle*; although at that point only *Drums in the Night* had been produced.

In 1922, he married the Viennese opera-singer Marianne Zoff. In 1923, Brecht wrote a scenario for what was to become a short slapstick film, *Mysteries of a Barbershop*, which was directed by Erich Engel and starring Karl Valentin. Although it did not receive success initially, its experimental inventiveness and the subsequent success of many of its contributors have made it one of the most important films in German film history. In May 1923, Brecht's *In the Jungle* premiered in Munich, which was also directed by Engel. Opening night of the play proved to be a 'scandal'—a phenomenon that would characterize many of his later productions during the Weimar Republic—in which Nazis blew whistles and threw stink bombs at the actors on the stage.

In 1919, Brecht had met the novelist and playwright Lion Feuchtwanger with whom he was to work in 1924. Together, they worked on an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* that proved to be a landmark in Brecht's early theatrical and dramaturgical development. Brecht's *Edward II* constituted his first attempt at collaborative writing and was the first of many classic texts he was to adapt. As his first solo directorial debut, he later acknowledged it as the origin of his conception of 'epic theatre'. In September 1919, Brecht was offered a job as assistant dramaturge at Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theatre. From 1923, Brecht's marriage to Zoff started deteriorating, which was followed by a divorce in 1927. Brecht had relationships with both Elisabeth Hauptmann, a German writer, and Helene Weigel. Brecht and Weigel's son, Stefan, was born in October 1924.

A new version of Brecht's third play, now entitled *Jungle: Decline of a Family*, opened at the Deutsches Theatre in October 1924, but was not a success.

During this time, Brecht revised his important 'transitional poem' '*Of Poor BB*'. In 1925, he was supported by Elisabeth Hauptmann as an assistant for completing his collection of poems, *Devotions for the Home* (Hauspostille, eventually published in January 1927).

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In 1925 in Mannheim, the artistic exhibition *Neue Sachlichkeit* ('new objectivity') had given its name to the new post-Expressionist movement in the German arts. Brecht started developing his *Man Equals Man* project, which was to become the first product of 'the "Brecht collective"—that shifting group of friends and collaborators on whom he henceforward depended'. This new and collaborative approach to artistic production, along with other important aspects of Brecht's writing and style of drama, identifies Brecht's work from this period as part of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement.

In 1925, Brecht saw two films that had a major impact on him: Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* and Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. Brecht had compared Valentin to Chaplin, and the two of them provided models for Galy Gay in *Man Equals Man*. Brecht later wrote that Chaplin 'would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements'. They met several times during Brecht's time in the U.S., and discussed Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* project on which Brecht's influence is a possibility.

After the production of *Man Equals Man* in Darmstadt in 1925, Brecht started studying Marxism and socialism under the supervision of Hauptmann. A note by Brecht reveals, 'When I read Marx's *Capital*, I understood my plays'. Marx was, it continues, 'the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across'.

In 1927, Brecht became part of the 'dramaturgical collective' of Erwin Piscator's first company, which was designed to deal with the problem of finding new plays for its 'epic, political, confrontational, documentary theatre'. Brecht worked together with Piscator during the period of the latter's landmark productions, *Hoppla, We're Alive!* by Toller, *Rasputin*, *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*, and *Konjunktur* by Lania. Brecht's significantly contributed to the adaptation of the unfinished episodic comic novel *Schweik*, which he later described as a 'montage from the novel'. Brecht's ideas were very much influenced by the Piscator productions about staging and design. It also warned him to the radical potentials offered to the 'epic' playwright by the development of stage technology (particularly projections).

At the time, Brecht was trying to deal with the issue of how to dramatize the complex economic relationships of modern capitalism in his unfinished project *Joe P. Fleischhacker* (which Piscator's theatre announced in its programme for the 1927–28 season). He could solve it only after his *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, which was written during 1929–1931. In 1928, he discussed his plans to stage Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and his own *Drums in the Night* with Piscator; however, the productions did not materialize.

In 1927, Brecht and the young composer Kurt Weill worked together on developing Brecht's *Mahagonny* project, along thematic lines of the biblical *Cities of the Plain* but rendered in terms of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*'s *Amerikanismus*, which had informed Brecht's previous work. In July 1927, they produced *The Little Mahagonny* for a music festival, as what Weill called a 'stylistic exercise' in preparation for the large-scale piece. From that time, Caspar Neher became an integral part of the collaborative effort with words, music and visuals conceived in relation to one another from the beginning. The model for their mutual articulation

was in Brecht's newly-formulated principle of the 'separation of the elements', which he first outlined in *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre* (1930). In this principle, Brecht suggested by-passing the 'great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production' by showing each as self-contained, independent works of art that adopt attitudes towards one another.

In 1930, Brecht tied the knot with Weigel; their daughter Barbara Brecht was born soon after the wedding. She also became an actress and currently holds the copyrights to all of Brecht's work.

Along with writers Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Emil Burri, Ruth Berlau and others, a writing collective was created by Brecht that produced first rate and significant writing. The collective also produced the multiple teaching plays, which attempted to create a new dramaturgy for participants rather than passive audiences. These addressed themselves to the massive worker arts organization that existed in Germany and Austria in the 1920s. Brecht's first great work *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, attempted to depict the drama in financial transactions.

This collective adapted John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, with Brecht's lyrics set to music by Kurt Weill. It was retitled as *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*), and was highly successful in Berlin of the 1920s and a renewing influence on the musical worldwide. The success of *The Threepenny Opera* was followed by *Happy End*, which was a personal and a commercial failure. During that time, this book was claimed to be by the mysterious Dorothy Lane (now known to be Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht's secretary and close collaborator). Brecht only claimed authorship of the song texts. Brecht later wanted to use elements of *Happy End* as the origin for his *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, a play that was never performed in Brecht's lifetime. *Happy End*'s score by Weill produced several Brecht/Weill hits such as 'Der Bilbao-Song' and 'Surabaya-Jonny'.

When the masterpiece of the Brecht/Weill collaborations, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, was premiered in 1930 in Leipzig, it caused a stir, with Nazis in the audience protesting. The *Mahagonny* opera was premiered later in 1931 in Berlin as a victorious sensation.

Brecht spent his last years in the Weimar-era Berlin (1930-1933) working with his 'collective' on the *Lehrstücke*. These were a group of plays driven by morals, music and Brecht's burgeoning epic theatre. The *Lehrstücke* often aimed at educating workers on Socialist issues. The *Measures Taken* (*Die Massnahme*) was scored by Hanns Eisler. Moreover, Brecht worked on a script for a semi-documentary feature film about the human impact of mass unemployment, *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), which was directed by Slatan Dudow. This film was a success and is famous for its dissident humour, exceptional cinematography by Günther Krampf, and Hanns Eisler's vivacious musical contribution. It still provides a vibrant insight into Berlin during the last years of the Weimar Republic.

By February 1933, Nazi rule had taken over Germany. This was a setback and challenge to Brecht's work. Later in life, Brecht also had his work challenged again by the U.S. HUAC, which believed he was under the influence of communism.

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Fearing persecution, Brecht left Germany in February 1933, when Hitler came to power. He went to Denmark, but when war seemed imminent in April 1939, he moved to Stockholm, Sweden, where he remained for a year. Then Hitler invaded Norway and Denmark, and Brecht was forced to leave Sweden for Finland where he waited for his visa for the United States until 3 May 1941.

During the war years, Brecht became a prominent writer of the *Exilliteratur*. He expressed his opposition to the National Socialist and Fascist movements in his most famous plays: the play under detailed study - *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, and many others.

Brecht also wrote the screenplay, the only script written by him for a Hollywood film, for the Fritz Lang-directed film *Hangmen Also Die!* which was somewhat based on the 1942 assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi Reich Protector of German-occupied Prague, number-two man in the SS, and a chief architect of the Holocaust, who was known as 'The Hangman of Prague'. The money he earned from the project enabled him to write *The Visions of Simone Machard*, *Schweik in the Second World War* and an adaptation of the Jacobean dramatist Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

In the years of the Cold War and 'Red Scare', Brecht was blacklisted by movie studio bosses and interrogated by the HUAC. In September 1947, along with about forty-one other Hollywood writers, directors, actors and producers, he was subpoenaed to appear before the HUAC. Although he was one of nineteen witnesses who declared that they would refuse to appear, Brecht eventually decided to be a witness. He later explained that he had followed the advice of attorneys and had not wanted to delay a planned trip to Europe. On 30 October 1947, Brecht testified that he had never been a member of the Communist Party. Brecht was highly criticised for appearing before the committee, including accusations of betrayal. On 31 October 1947, the day after his testimony, Brecht returned to Europe.

In Chur in Switzerland, Brecht staged an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, based on a translation by Hölderlin. It was published under the title *Antigonemodell* 1948, which was accompanied by an essay on the importance of creating a 'non-Aristotelian' form of theatre. Brecht returned to Berlin in 1949 after getting an offer of his own theatre (completed in 1954) and theatre company (the Berliner Ensemble). He retained his Austrian nationality (granted in 1950) and overseas bank accounts from which he received valuable hard currency remittances. The copyrights on his writings were held by a Swiss company.

Though he was never a member of the Communist Party, Brecht had been strongly educated in Marxism by the rebellious communist Karl Korsch. Brecht was greatly influenced by Korsch's version of the Marxist dialectic, both his aesthetic theory and theatrical practice. Brecht was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954.



In his final years in East Berlin, Brecht wrote very few plays, none of which were as famous as his previous works. He dedicated himself to directing plays and developing the talents of the next generation of young directors and dramaturges, such as Manfred Wekwerth, Benno Besson and Carl Weber. At this time, some of his most famous poems, including the *Buckow Elegies*, were written.

At first Brecht supported the measures taken by the East German government against the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany, which included the use of Soviet military force. However, Brecht's subsequent commentary on those events offered a different assessment.

Brecht died on 14 August 1956 at the age of fifty-eight due to a heart attack. He is buried in the Dorotheenstädtischer cemetery on Chausseestraße in the Mitte neighbourhood of Berlin, overlooked by the residence he shared with Helene Weigel.

Brecht (along with Piscator) is acknowledged for developing an alternative theory of theatre - 'epic theatre', which proposed that a play should not ideally enable the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead bring about rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Brecht developed this effect of distancing and recognized the effect of self-satisfaction created by 'catharsis' (Dario Fo as mentioned earlier in this book also opposed these effects of catharsis). Instead, Brecht wanted his audiences to have a critical perspective that would allow them to recognize social injustice and exploitation, which would further motivate them to go out from the theatre with the vigour to bring about an effective change in the world outside. For this purpose, Brecht used theatrical techniques which reminded the spectators that the play was just a representation of reality and not reality itself. By underscoring the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Brecht hoped to communicate that the audience's reality was equally constructed and, as such, was changeable.

The 'distancing effect' mentioned earlier was originally called *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated as 'defamiliarization effect', 'distancing effect', or 'estrangement effect', sometimes also referred to as 'alienation effect'). Brecht wrote that this involved, 'stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them'. To this end, Brecht used techniques such as the actor's direct address to the audience, glaring and bright stage lighting, the use of songs to interrupt the action, explanatory placards, and, in rehearsals, the transposition of text to the third person or past tense, and speaking the stage directions in a loud manner.

### Important Works:

- *Drums in the Night* (1918–20)
- *The Life of Edward II of England* (1924)
- *The Threepenny Opera* (1928)
- *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927–29)
- *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938)

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- *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941)
- *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943)
- *The Life of Galileo* (1943)
- *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948),
- *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1958)
- *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1959)

### Check Your Progress

11. Who is recognized as the father of modern realistic drama?
12. Mention the important plays of Samuel Beckett.
13. When and where was John Osborne born?
14. Mention the prestigious prizes won by Arthur Miller during his lifetime.

## 1.5 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. An essential quality of drama is its objectivity. Drama is a composite art, in which the author, the actor, and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect.
2. Samuel Beckett’s *Theatre of the Absurd* introduced the existentialist theory that abstract existence played great role in life above everything in it. This type of drama in being was essentially poetic and full of imagination and exhibited the downplay of language.
3. The Dadaism movement was a protest against colonialism and the subsequent World War I in most of the European nations. It was a movement carried by those literary artists who opposed nationalism.
4. The aim of the ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ was to portray ‘representational medium’ and focused on dealing with the current situations. They took the responsibility of ‘presenting’ and ‘representing’ both.
5. The main subjects of Aeschylus plays were man’s relations with God and man’s roles here on earth. His plays carried moral values and judgments profoundly
6. Euripides’s famous dramas are *Medea*, *Bacchae*, the *Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the *Phoenician Women* and *Andromache* beside other two portrayals of ghastliness and dementia called ‘Electra and Orestes’.
7. Aristotle believed that tragedy is a serious art which enwraps undeviated accomplishment to serve its purpose.
8. The style of tragi-comedy was that it presented moderate sentiments, moderate passions, moderate amusement, pretension of conflicts and happy conclusion.

9. William Shakespeare's tragedies have powerful diction, poetical outbursts, noble characters, each show a serious conflict of a soul caught between reason and action, and each of his heroes exhibit a frailty, or prejudice of character.
10. The basic difference between tragedy and comedy is that tragedy depicts the moral or heroic struggle of the protagonist ending in death or destruction whereas comedy aims to amuse through wit, ridicule, farce, satire and ends happily.
11. Henrik Johan Ibsen is recognized as the father of modern realistic drama.
12. The important plays of Samuel Beckett are as follows:
  - *Waiting for Godot* (first published 1952)
  - *Endgame* (published 1957)
  - *Happy Days* (published 1960)
  - *Waiting for Godot*
  - *Krapp's Last Tape*
13. John Osborne was born on 12 December 1929 in London.
14. Arthur Miller won numerous prestigious prizes during his lifetime. Miller wrote *Honors at Dawn* in 1937, which also received the Avery Hopwood Award. In 1993, Miller won the National Medal of Arts. In 1999, Miller won The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, one of the richest prizes in the arts, given annually to 'a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life'. On 1 May 2002, Miller won Spain's Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature as 'the undisputed master of modern drama'.

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## 1.6 SUMMARY

- Drama is an ancient form of art written in prose or verse accompanied by various tools and techniques meant to be staged.
- Plays, on the contrary, involve 'multiple art, using words, scenic effects, music, the gestures of the actors, and the organizing talents of a producer'.
- An essential quality of drama is its objectivity. A play whether divided into acts or not, has plot, characters, background, theme, dramatic unities, and techniques and so on.
- A play must seek perfect economy in choice of words, actions, deliverers of those actions, time, and place, so that all may synthesize into bringing the desired end or effect.
- The common cult of drama was not accepted by the then church and court because it exuded the message of too much freedom in the society, hence the Roman theatres were closed and condemned.
- In the morality plays, people acted as virtues and vices. These plays were written by religious authors or church clerics.

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- Probably the development of drama owed its growth to new scholars from the universities in England and the Renaissance, which forcefully pushed the active and ambitious minds to explore and inculcate the classical literature.
- Again drama developed its pace in the 18th century with Johnson's historical plays, but they were not that recognizable as their predecessors.
- George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Stearns Eliot were two major 20th century figures who used drama to convey their ideas, exploring different themes.
- Yeats and Synge with Lady Gregory aimed to portray and develop poetic realism describing the Irish peasant life.
- After the First World War, political theatre became a trend where social and political issues and propaganda became vehicles to reach the masses.
- Samuel Beckett's *Theatre of the Absurd* introduced the existentialist theory that abstract existence played great role in life above everything in it.
- Dadaism was a protest against colonialism and the subsequent World War I in most of the European nations.
- The modernist approach of Bertold Brecht came up with 'epic theatre' with rejection of realistic theatre.
- The definition and genesis of tragedy goes back to the classical literature of Greece. Aristotle, the master-craftsmen, is held as the father and preceptor of 'classical tragedy'.
- Tragedy sprouted in Athens many years ago and has its base in the choral poetry. It is a Greek concept that Dionysius, the god of nature, died and took rebirth in a cycle each year.
- Aeschylus, the great dramatist, was the one who initiated the art of tragedy in classical literature. He is considered as the original founder of European play.
- Euripides wrote tragedies and introduced 'tragi-comedies' varying into different types which can be aptly named romantic plays, melodrama or extreme comedies.
- Seneca had a multiple persona who wrote plays, poetry, satire, philosophy and was trained in rhetoric, besides being a politician.
- Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE) studies and evaluates Greek dramatic art and discusses tragedy in comparison to comedy or epic poetry.
- The rise of tragedy in England goes back to the Elizabethan Age when *Gorboduc* (1561) by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton was acted.
- Drama saw its massive proliferation and development in the Elizabethan England during 1585 and 1642.
- Shakespearean tragedy alone holds the foremost place in English letters of all ages as nothing surpasses it.

- The Irish National Movement was invoked by W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), J. M. Synge, Sir James Barrie (1860-1937), and Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), writers of great ability. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is a moving tragic play.
- The word 'comedy' has an ancient and classical background ahead of tragedy, which means an amusing spectacle.
- Aristophanes and Menander were chief writers of comedy plays who laughed at the politicians, philosophers and their contemporary artists.
- Dramas in Athens were performed in the open air theatres. The stage used to be designed particularly for a comedy.
- Tragedy and comedy complement each other as they blend together in life. And literature is but a just representation of human existence.
- In comedy, Jonson adhered strictly to depict his own age with realism, romance and maintain the dramatic action with the three dramatic unities of time, place and morally sound theme.
- In literature, the term 'tragi-comedy,' means a play with serious conflict but happy resolution. There has been no specific definition assigned to the type, however, Aristotle defined this genre of play of serious action ending happily.
- In contemporary times, any play which relies on buffoonery, crude funny situations and such low brow devices to create comedy is labelled as 'farce'.
- Farce gained appreciation and retained popularity in France till as late as the seventeenth century.
- A masque dealt with characters from mythology or pastorals and was made ornate with songs, dances and extravagant costumes.
- One of Jonson's notable contributions was the anti-masque, also known as the ante-masque which incorporated the earlier elements of antic or grotesque dancing.
- Henrik Johan Ibsen (20 March 1828–23 May 1906) was an important and influential Norwegian playwright who is rightly considered the father of modern realistic drama.
- Ibsen was born into a comparatively affluent family in the small port town of Skein, Norway, which was famous for shipping timber. Soon after he was born, his family's financial situation deteriorated drastically.
- Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) was a strong indictment of the conventional roles imposed on men and women in the institution of Victorian marriage.
- Samuel Barclay Beckett was an Irish playwright, and an important figure of Absurdist theatre. He had his education at Trinity College, Dublin (1923 to 1927) where the subjects he studied were French, English and Italian.
- Beckett's finest works are the series of three novels written in French (often referred to, against Beckett's explicit wishes, as 'the Trilogy'): *Molloy* (1947; published in French in 1951; in English, partly translated by Patrick Bowles, in 1953), *Malone Dies* (1947-48; published in French 1951; in English,

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- translated by the author, in 1956) and *The Unnamable* (1949-50; published in French 1953; in English, by the author, in 1957).
- Thomas Stearns Eliot (26 September 1888–4 January 1965) was an American-born English poet, playwright and literary critic, noted as the most important English language poet and critic of the 20th century.
  - Harold Pinter (10 October 1930 – 24 December 2008) was a playwright, screenwriter, actor and theatre director. He was also left-wing political activist and a poet.
  - Pinter's dramas frequently comprise of strong conflicts between ambivalent characters who struggle for verbal and territorial dominance, and for their own versions of the past. In form and style, his works include theatrical pauses and silences, and irony and menace.
  - John James Osborne was a distinguished English playwright, screenwriter, actor and a vocal critic of the Establishment- the 'Angry Young Man' of British theatre. His play *Look Back in Anger* brought about a revolution in transforming English theatre and enthusing new dynamism in English drama.
  - Osborne started having a relationship with Mary Ure shortly after meeting her in 1956 when she was cast as Alison in *Look Back in Anger*. The affair progressed swiftly and the two moved in together in Woodfall Road, Chelsea.
  - Arthur Asher Miller was born on 17 October 1915, in New York City, to Isidore and Augusta Miller, who were Polish-Jewish immigrants. His father was an illiterate but wealthy owner of women's clothing store. In the famous Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Miller family lost almost everything and moved to Gravesend, Brooklyn.
  - In 1993, Miller won the National Medal of Arts. In 2001, Miller was selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the Jefferson Lecture, the U.S. federal government's highest honour for achievement in the humanities.
  - Bertolt Brecht was born on 10 February 1898 as Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht. He was a 20th century German playwright and theatre director as well as a poet. Brecht's contribution to world drama cannot be overstated as he was solely responsible for reinventing the language of theatre.
  - Brecht (along with Piscator) is acknowledged for developing an alternative theory of theatre - 'epic theatre', which proposed that a play should not ideally enable the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead bring about rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage.

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## 1.7 KEY TERMS

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- **Catharsis:** It comes from a Greek word, first used by Aristotle, as a literary tool referring to the purification or purgation of the emotions (such as pity and fear) primarily through art (especially drama).

- **Drama:** It refers to an ancient form of art written in prose or verse accompanied by various tools and techniques meant to be staged.
- **Interludes:** It refers to the proceedings of the church, a new berth of short and direct play.
- **Poetic Mimesis:** It refers to an action copied as presenting it like a replica undermining universality of theme and ideals unlike history where facts are strewn on paper straightaway.

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## 1.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What are miracle plays?
2. How is drama different from a play?
3. What was Bertold Brecht opinion on epic theatre?
4. How does tragedy and comedy complement each other?
5. Write a short note on the Surrealist Movement.
6. How is farce different from comedy?
7. What were the different types of styles used in the 20th century theatre?
8. How did Seneca frame his tragedies?
9. Briefly mention the impact of Henrik Ibsen on modern realistic drama.
10. Prepare a brief biographical sketch of John Osborne.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyses the intricate relation between Christianity and plays.
2. Discuss the importance of political theatre after the First World War.
3. Describe the role of George Bernard Shaw in developing drama as a major literary form.
4. Explain the development of tragedy as a form of drama.
5. Discuss the importance of catharsis in a tragedy.
6. Critically analyse the significant works of T. S. Eliot which recognize him as a significant playwright of the 20th century.
7. Discuss the significant events of the life of Arthur Miller.
8. What is Epic theatre? Prepare a list of significant plays of Bertolt Brecht.

## 1.9 FURTHER READING

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## UNIT 2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 About the Author: William Shakespeare
- 2.3 Shakespearean Comedy and its Features
- 2.4 Shakespearean Tragedy and its Features
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- 2.6 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: An Overview
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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The biography of Shakespeare available to us, without a doubt reaffirms that, just like Chaucer, Shakespeare was a self-made man. He was extremely hard working and did not leave anything for fate. When he arrived in London he was without any friend and money. But by the time he left London he was both rich as well as respected. And the fortune that he had saved for himself was a result of his hard work as well as his talent. His writings are a treasure house of creative imagination, understanding of deep reality, familiarity with his surroundings, a general understanding of the world and a firm expression of common sense. Time and again, the world view of Shakespeare has been discussed by critics. The knowledge and worldview that Shakespeare focuses on in his writings is very different from the one that Bacon or Ben Johnson would talk about. They are not the visions or perceptions of a scholar. On the contrary, they belonged to the mind of a great scholar who was familiar with the human world around him and had gathered nuances of individuals through his extreme social interaction.

In this unit, you will get to study about the life and works of William Shakespeare and critically analyse his plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Prepare a brief note on the life and works of William Shakespeare
  - List the prominent comedies written by Shakespeare
  - State the significant features of Shakespeare's comedies
  - Define Shakespearean tragedy
  - Summarize the play *The Merchant of Venice*
  - Analyse the title of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
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## 2.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience. There is not much information available. Scholars rely on existing records and documents to outline and sketch the life of William Shakespeare. It is now generally accepted that William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stanford).

William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession. Mary Arden had inherited a good amount of property in the form of land in Wilmcote (near Stanford) from her father. The Shakespeare family was blessed with four daughters and four sons. William Shakespeare was the eldest of the four boys. It is believed that out of the four girls only one survived.

Documents suggest that in 1556, John Shakespeare bought the house which is situated in Henley Street, that which we identify today as the birthplace of Shakespeare. The primary job of John Shakespeare was of producing gloves, but we know that he also worked as a merchant of wool and corn. By the year 1570, it is believed that John Shakespeare had started lending money to other people as well. John Shakespeare was considered to be an affluent businessman who was successful in a number of businesses that he undertook. He was a man who owned his own property in Stanford. Being a man of repute and influence he played a significant role in shaping the municipal life of the town he was part of. John Shakespeare attained a number of significant positions in the Government of Stanford and eventually occupied the position of Mayor in the year 1569.

But soon, financial struggle started haunting the Shakespeare family. And by the year 1576, John Shakespeare was steeped into financial difficulties to such a great extent that he had mortgaged Mary Arden's property to bail the family out of the situation.

We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook. But scholars agree that William Shakespeare must have attended the grammar school in Stratford where he undertook subjects such as the Classics, grammar as well as literature. It is usually assumed that William Shakespeare had to give up formal schooling by the age of 13 so that he could financially support his father.

William Shakespeare almost certainly went to one of Stratford's 'petty' or junior schools where he would have learnt his letters with the help of a hornbook. From the age of seven or thereabouts, he would have progressed to the King's New School where the emphasis would have been on Latin, it still being the international language of Europe in the 1500s. Shakespeare probably left school at the age of 14 or 15. The plays written by William Shakespeare highlight his knowledge of Latin language. As we all know some of the classical writers like Ovid, Terence, Plautus et al influenced his writings - both poetry and plays. We also come across significant display of Roman history in his writings. All this might have reached him through his school curriculum, as teaching Latin in school was most common during those days.

Along with Latin he was also taught arithmetic in his classes. Even though his education did not earn him the reputation of a 'learned man' yet it was sufficient enough to provide him with a sound education. It is well understood that due to financial difficulties he was asked to leave the school and take up a job so that his family could be supported through some income. But as far as the nature of his employment goes no one is sure about it. When he was 19, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 then. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery. It is believed that this marriage took place in extreme urgency and was not a successful one. The couple had three children- Susannah, Judith and Hamnet, the last two were twins. Stories suggest that by this point William Shakespeare had got himself embroiled in bad company. Soon he was part of a deer stealing episode which made him run away from his home town. One cannot be very sure about the authenticity of this episode. There are number of stories concerning the 'lost years' of William Shakespeare. Over the years there has been hardly any information concerning his life during this phase. But needless, it is believed that a few years after his marriage, around 1587 he left his native place and moved to London to explore better avenues.

This was a period when drama was gaining popularity in London due to the influence of the University Wits. Shakespeare discovered his interest in the stage. He started the stage career as an actor and then he turned his attention towards play writing. But of course, running his attention towards writing did not stop him from continue his acting. By the year 1592, Shakespeare was already an established name in the field of literature. A pamphlet written by Graham Greene, in the same year, had an oblique reference to him in an inappropriate manner suggesting his elevation to a significant status.

During Shakespeare's younger years, travelling groups of professional actors visited Stratford. It is possible that these performers were responsible for making Shakespeare interested in the stage. Some critics also suggest that Shakespeare's

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entry into the world of theatre in London city could have been made possible by the contact he had built for himself through these travelling groups.

In the year 1593, due to a plague, most of the theatres in London were shut down and Shakespeare turned towards poetry. *Venus and Adonis*, an erotic poem by him was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, who was a young courtier and Queen Elizabeth held him in high affection. In the year 1594, Shakespeare became the founding member, shareholder for Lord Chamberlain's Men (later named King's men) and later on he also joined the Globe and the Blackfriars. Sometimes between the years 1610 to 1612, William Shakespeare moved to Stratford. By 1616, Shakespeare's health had completely dwindled and in that year itself on 23rd April his soul departed.

Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity Church at Stratford. Seven years after Shakespeare's death, in the year 1623, two actors from the King's company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published the plays of Shakespeare. This was the first folio. It contains 36 plays and it was sold for 1 pound. Anne Hathaway, the widow of Shakespeare, died in the year 1623.

In the modern times it is accepted that Shakespeare wrote around 37 plays. But scholars insisted that some of these materials are probably collaborative by him and few others are actually by him rewriting existing or older materials. But what is sure is that as a dramatist his most productive periods were from 1588 to 1612. And that is why we can say without any hesitation that Shakespeare dominated the last phase of the 16th century and early phase of 17th century.

William Shakespeare's works can be divided into four different stages:

1. **1588 to 1593:** This was the beginning of Shakespearean experiments. As an apprentice he learnt the art of improvising and revising the existing pieces. He revised the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*. It was during this period that he composed his early comedies (under the influence of Lyly). Shakespeare composed *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Comedy of Errors* during this phase. Under the influence of Marlowe, he tried to experiment with the historical play *Richard III*. Showcasing his versatility, Shakespeare wrote the young tragedy-*Romeo and Juliet*. The works composed during this period lacks the typical Shakespearean finesse, the characterizations are definitely shallow and overall, they appear to be extremely immature. Moreover, one can definitely witness regular use of puns, a stiff use of blank verse, and rhyming dialogues in the works which were composed during this period.
2. **1594 to 1600:** This was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies. The chronicle plays that came around this time were: *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV* (Part 1 & II), *King John*, and *Henry V*. The comedies of the period were: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In these works, Shakespeare shows his craftsmanship as an original composer. None of these plays have any kind of influence from his predecessor. All these works highlight Shakespeare's command

over the power of development in technique. There is an intense and detailed exploration of human motives and passions. The use of prose and blank verse increases gradually while discarding the use of rhymes in dialogues. In fact, the stiffness of blank verse paves way to more lucid and flexible use of the form.

William Shakespeare

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3. **1601 to 1608:** This was a period when Shakespeare composed the best of his tragedies. This was also a phase which witnessed some of the serious comedies of Shakespeare. This was the most successful phase of Shakespeare as a playwright. His competency as a dramatist, his intellectual abilities as well as his power of expression has bestowed the literary world with some of the most memorable compositions. But more than creative talent, what is most amusing is to see the way the spirit of Shakespearean work changed. He now seemed to be more interested in the darker side of human experiences. He was solely focused on challenging the existing social moral order. By doing so he manages to show how destructive passion can ruin the lives of both the guilty as well as the innocent together. Most of the plots of Shakespeare's plays composed during this period take a deep insight into the power of good and evil where the powers of evil are finally questioned upon. He composed *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon Of Athens* during this period.
4. **1608 to 1612:** This was the period of later comedies or as we call it dramatic romances. The shifting period is very obvious during this period. It is almost as if the terrible phase of his life has now given way to a more beautiful sunny phase of his life. Unlike the previous period where everything in his fictional world was dark and somber this was a phase which brought in happiness and hope. Even though there is the element of traffic aspect in each of these later plays, one cannot deny that in this place good always prevails over the evil. Even the tone and manner are more tender and optimistic in comparison to the previous works. But needless to say, this is also the period which clearly marks the decline of the great playwright that Shakespeare was. The construction is definitely unsatisfactory, the character development is careless, and the style has no resemblance to the powerful impact that the preceding years of his creative talent ahead recorded. Critics now agree that, of the various plays that are credited to Shakespeare during this period, only three of them are solely authored by him: *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. And he has definitely co-authored more plays: *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*.

If we take into account all the works composed by Shakespeare, it will not be wrong to mention that he probably has contributed the most to the body of literature as a single author. And what makes the most amazing and time immemorial popular writer is his variety. Of course, there have been numerous other authors who have been better than him at some point or other but without a doubt no one has ever been close to him in terms of the vast body of work that he has composed

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and versatility that he has displayed. Even though slightly imbalanced, there is no denial that he was good with both tragedy as well as comedy. Ingenious spread not only to the stage plays but also in the area of poetry. He was comfortable in imagination as well as delicate fancy. Of course, he was never an original thinker. But he had the power to recreate magic from the material that was available to him in a manner which supported the original writing and managed to attach with it a time immemorial quality.

One of his major strong points was the ability to characterize. It can be safely mentioned that no other author has managed to create so many varieties of characters - both men and women- who never at any point of time felt like a figment of imagination from the authors mind but were probably true and alive. Many scholars admire the range of vocabulary that Shakespeare places in his works. It is believed that his vocabulary had more than 15000 words whereas even Milton fell short in his comparison.

As of now, all the manuscript plays of Shakespeare are lost. Since Shakespeare himself did not print any of the text we rely on the first print. Even though it must be mentioned here that 16 of his plays were published in quarter version during his lifetime itself. But we cannot take it as authentic version because they were all unauthorized editions. As already mentioned the first edition of 1623, (*Pericles* was omitted in this) is considered to be the first folio edition that came out in print. This one is kind of considered to be the standard and universally accepted version of Shakespearian works. But one of the biggest drawbacks of this Folio edition is that they are neither arranged in chronological order nor the date of the original composition is mentioned in it.

**Important Works:**

- *Romeo and Juliet* (1595)
- *The Merchant of Venice* (1595-96)
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96)
- *Julius Caesar* (1599)
- *Hamlet* (1601)
- *Othello* (1603-04)
- *King Lear* (1605-06)
- *Macbeth* (1606)
- *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606)

**Check Your Progress**

1. When and where was William Shakespeare baptized?
2. Who was Anne Hathaway?
3. Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* has been dedicated to whom?
4. What is the significance of the period 1594 to 1600 in Shakespeare's literary life?

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## 2.3 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY AND ITS FEATURES

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William Shakespeare

Aristotle's understanding of comedy as discussed above is undoubtedly short and appears to be only something mentioned in passing. Most of the major critics from the antiquity have spent their energy in trying to study tragedy. The reason was very simple. Tragedy after all dealt with problems which were deeper in nature while comedy dealt with things which were superficial in life. Of course, this is only a limited understanding of the genre of comedy. Over the ages, comedy has always attained its meaning in context to the place and time in which it is produced. At times comedies are produced to provide entertainment while at other times through comedies wisdom is celebrated. If we consider the writings of Aristophanes, we realize that most of his compositions were meant to satirize the contemporary society. Even Plautus and Terence too composed comedies to highlight the follies and vices of the people around them. On the other hand, we have George Bernard Shaw whose comedies were all about ideas and reading them makes one feel wiser and better.

In the context of literary creation, Polonius had once mentioned: 'neither a lender nor a borrower be'. But Shakespeare did not believe in this worldview. Shakespeare generally borrowed as well as allowed others to lend from his creativity. About the comic ideas of his contemporaries as well as producers depended on how one wanted his ideas to get shared with the contemporary audience. His uniqueness of style made Dr. Johnson mention in his work that Shakespeare's 'tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct.'

Shakespeare never portrayed ugly or ridiculous as the major plot of his comedy. He denounced the classical parameters of comedy and introduced new elements. Both Moliere and Ben Johnson incorporated folly into their comedy. They were interested in reforming the society while pointing out the mistakes. For them comedy was a platform to convey the world that bad things must not be valued much. George Meredith, who is the popular believer in the power of comedy as social sanitizer finds it amusing that Shakespeare's comedies cannot be easily brought down to a single formula.

According to him, 'Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we call lifeblood than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare: and they are of this world, but they are of this world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination.' As we read Shakespeare, we understand that Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare. It must be mentioned that, Shakespeare was not being extremely original. He was to a great extent influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge, Peele and others. Many critics have pointed out how the world of Shakespeare has a striking resemblance to the comedy settings of Lyly. Of course, Shakespeare would have been a path breaker or a trend setter, had Lyly not been his predecessor. Apart from being generally

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influenced by Lyly, scholars have pointed out more than 50 instances where Shakespeare has borrowed from Lyly. Again, even though Lyly's influence on Shakespeare was obvious, there is no denial that Greene had a greater influence on him as a writer. The adorable women who appear in Greene's writings also find a way in the idealized women that Shakespeare mentioned about in his plays.

Going through his earlier comedies, one can identify the distinct classical influence. Even though he was briefly acquainted with Latin and Greek, yet he was definitely familiar with the works of Plautus and Terence. These two authors were extremely popular during the Elizabethan England.

One of the most distinct features of Shakespeare's comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing. By now we all know that the *Comedy of Errors* was influenced by *Amphitruo*. Shakespeare managed to change the Latin works into something more exciting through his power of imagination. Without a doubt ' *The Taming of the Shrew* is much better than its original influence. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is one of the best examples of Shakespeare's craftsmanship as a playwright. It was through this play that Shakespeare for the first time entered into the world of romance and make-believe. H. B. Charlton believes that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is not a comedy but a romance. And that is precisely why the characters in the play do not resemble the people from the real world. Again, if we consider a play like *Love's Labour's Lost* we realise that it is import of wit and has nothing to do with romance at all. The characters who appear in the play are extremely sophisticated and witty; something that the readers can come across in the plays of Sheraton and Congreve.

One of the salient aspects of Shakespearean comedies is that William Shakespeare's comedies more often than not end in marriages. In a general scenario, marriages symbolize the assimilation of happiness, prospect of a beautiful future and the consolidation of the blood line. For Shakespeare the symbol of marriage is so integral and significant that at times we witness more than one marriage taking place by the end of the play. A quick recap of *Twelfth Night* will show that there were three marriages by the end of the play. And the same happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the final segments (Act V) of *As You Like It* we come across 'High wedlock' celebrating four marriages. In each of the play, the couples find happiness after going through a series of misunderstandings. Of course, critics cite examples from *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Measure for Measure* to suggest that some marriages are designed to suit the purpose and doesn't appear to be a natural extension of love.

As already mentioned, misconception plays a pivotal role in Shakespearean comedies. Numerous confusing and complicated situations appear in the lives of the lovers paving way for numerous funny and humorous situations. The friends of Benedick who seemed to play the devil between Beatrice and Benedick are finally the ones who bring the lovers together. Their trick helps the audience as well as Benedick to realize that Beatrice's rudeness was actually her concealed affection. In a similar fashion, Beatrice's friends also make fun of her feelings, but this only brings both the characters closer and helps them grow on the path of love. But this interplay of confusion feels amusing because we (audience) are aware of the fact that the ending will be a happy one.



Shakespeare's comedies usually rely on simple misunderstandings as well as harmless deceptions. The dramatic irony that penetrates into the text because of these confusions gives an extra edge to the audience to identify the real nature of the characters. One of the most striking examples is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The endless magic that the love portion creates is not just humorous through the series of problems it creates but is also crucial in finding true love. The forest which turned into the encomium of chaos and transgression eventually turns into the refuge where the lovers reunite, and their love is solemnized through marriage.

Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative. *Twelfth Night* had Viola disguised as Cesario, had Olivia falling for her which creates ripples of confusion. But with each mistake committed the characters come on their own and learn something new about life and living. In *As You Like It* we have Orlando's staged wooing of Rosalind. But what made all these cross-dressing episodes even believable and interesting was that during Shakespeare's time women characters were played by young men, thus switching of sexualities was both acceptable for the actors as well as audience.

The vague settings too help in building the momentum for a harmless commotion and then making people fall in love. When the story unfolds in an uncertain date in Illyria people are puzzled. What makes this vagueness even more pronounced is the Italian looking Orsino's court being juxtaposed to English appearance of Olivia's household. Many of the Shakespearean comedies display his fondness for imaginary settings. One can witness the magical woods of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* while enjoying the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* without any distraction is set in England itself but this one was created only to exploit the unprecedented success of Falstaff. Shakespeare somehow managed to include an indefinite space for comedies. During his time, it was common place to see the comedy taking place in London while the tragedy is taking place in Italy or France or Spain. Comedies were always closer to the English-speaking nations. We all know how Ben Johnson, had originally set *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) in Italy. But it soon changes the settings to London to incorporate the demands of the contemporary times. Later on, he made London, the centre of his works as reflected in *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew fair*. This obsession with setting London as the city of the many adventures created an entire genre of literature called 'city comedy'.

Historical comedy has always been considered to be of lesser significance than tragedy or history. That is why many of Shakespeare's contemporaries tried to incorporate satire in their plays. Satire has always enjoyed a better command in terms of literary acceptance than comedies. Even classical authors approved of satires than that of comedies. The whole genre paucity comedies had a purpose to them. They were meant to highlight the follies and vices that the contemporary world was involved in. Shakespeare was not interested in the typical form of satire. But given that even comedy did not have too restricted an approach in his time he had the liberty of experimenting with his comedies. For example, let us consider the quarto edition of *Love's Labour's Lost*. The play is identified as 'A Pleasant Conceited Comedy'. Again, the quarto edition of the *Taming of the Shrew* calls it a witty and pleasant comedy'. While if we take a note of the title

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page of *The Merchant of Venice* we get to see that it is called as 'The most excellent Histories of the Merchant of Venice'. It is believed that this title page was actually composed by the bookseller and not by the playwrights themselves. This was probably intended more as a marketing trick to help audience identify or make the bookseller sell the book to a specific audience by playing around with the words. In today's time, we consider *The Taming of the Shrew* as a text about sexual politics. On the other hand, the title page of the first quarto clearly seems to acknowledge that the play was wittier and probably had nothing to do with sexual politics.

The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*. Even though each of these plays ends with a marriage yet we all know that they are not the best examples where one gets the opportunity to laugh. Each of these plays highlights other forms of emotions like anger, bitterness, jealousy and violence. We also come across some deaths which is not expected to get reflected in a comedy. Critics insist on identifying them as 'romances' and not as comedies per se. But again, if we take a closer look at some of the earlier comedies by Shakespeare like *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *All is Well that Ends Well* etc., we can see a distinct sense of dark material looming and this in turn challenges our general notion of comedy.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other. The various pairs of lovers that we come across fall in love because of mistaken identity while Puck plays the mischief monger.

During the period of earlier comedies Shakespeare was working as an apprentice. This was a time when he was still struggling to find his own voice and create an identity for himself. He was experimenting with the idea of love as we see in the *Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The heroes and heroines of the romantic comedies that were written by Shakespeare invariably met in a place that was definitely away from the real-life struggles and disturbance. It probably was a make-believe world that was 'a mixture of old England and Utopia'. Probably the *Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice* are the only exceptions where the audience is exposed to the harsh realities of life.

Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author. By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make-believe where logic can be tweaked based on the requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance to the audience. This also helped Shakespeare to remove the audience from the realities of life. His romantic comedies without a doubt managed to blend realism and imagination.

Both the characters as well as the scenes in the play can be viewed as magic which has the ability to transform reality. The setting is definitely imaginative and has no historical element to it. Each one of them seems to be carved out of a

beautiful fancy. Yet, at the same time, they are relatable despite their remoteness. One can identify the contemporary figures and uses of contemporary fashion sense in a play like *Love's Labour's Lost*. Thus, despite its fairy tale element the audience finds enough reason to feel associated with the performance that s/he is watching.

In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who take the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought. In the comedies, the hero usually turns out to be subordinate to the heroine. Ruskin believes that Shakespearean plays are devoid of any heroes. It is all about the female protagonists. *The Merchant of Venice* would be of no fun without Portia and *As You Like It* would have felt incomplete without Rosalind.

Many scholars insist that Shakespeare has emerged successfully from the school of life. He had a passion for observation and he laughed chronicling life as it was. According to him, women probably felt a little out of place especially in tragedies. But without a doubt he also understood that in everyday life a woman was the epicentre of the daily affairs. Joys and happiness always revolved around the women and she was someone whose right cannot be challenged.

The woman about whom Shakespeare writes, irrespective of whether they are the Queen or the kitchen maid, both possess an intense womanliness about them. They all have achieved success in their lives and they worked hard to conquer their beloved for the sake of love. In the comedies the heroines are the balance characters. They are blessed with the power of imagination, intelligence, emotion and enterprise. They are inspiring figure and they are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of love. Some scholars believe that in a female character Shakespeare's love story unites heart and brain in such a manner that they provide an unexpected equilibrium in the world of disturbance that we are part of.

If we compare the heroine from the tragedies with the heroines of the comedies, we can get to know that the female protagonist of the comedies is more powerful, enterprising and mature. Any representative heroine of the romantic comedy commands our respect and admiration because she loves to read the other characters from the fore front. These women are attractive and witty and rely on their actions to change the course of fate. Every time a situation of crisis emerges the heroes are found to be struggling with the situation the woman slowly and steadily creates a positive situation which is built around hope and happiness.

Romantic comedy is a happy mixture of romance and comedy. This is a world where problems and issues are not very intense, and the male and female protagonist usually lead a happy life. But in contrast to this romantic world, the world of tragedy is about the harshness of life. It is a pastiche of high world of romance and low world of comedy. It is difficult to reduce or define a comedy by Shakespeare as per some formula. It has been pointed out by many critics that the plots of Shakespearean comedies are defined by a number of things. His comedies are created from tragedy, comedy and satire. But his satires are not bitter. He does not criticize the society or the individual. He does not laugh at the characters instead he laughs along with them. Unlike Ben Jonson, his contemporary, Shakespeare's satires were not intolerant. It was devoid of any kind of irony or bitterness or even cynicism. Shakespeare was filled with sympathy and humanity.

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He uses the clowns and fools of his plays to achieve his purpose. The female protagonist and the fools work together to provide happiness in his make-believe world. We come across the professional fools like Touchstone, Feste and Moth. They are witty and sophisticated. They are aware of how to make fun of the world around them. Again, on the other hand, we have fools who are not so cultured like Dull, Gobbo, Bottom and so forth. They are absolutely ignorant and this becomes the epicentre of amusement for the audience. The audience is left to wonder as to what extent can someone be stupid enough; Touchstone is wise while Feste is vulgar. On the other hand, Dogberry is full of life.

*Much Ado About Nothing* borders on tragedy. The lady, for no fault turns into a victim. On the other hand, the presence of Dogberry and his witticism manages to marry comedy with realism. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the main plot revolves around signing of a bond. While we come across a number of subplots including three love stories. *The Merchant of Venice* many a times has been identified as a text which talks about tolerance. During the Elizabethan period Jews were extremely hated and were persecuted without reason. In this play, Shylock is represented as a character who is dignified and represents suffering and injustice meted out at the Jewish community. In *The Merchant of Venice* we see Venice and Belmont represent two different ideas. Venice becomes the symbol of reality and commerce, while Belmont is all about love and romance. The play is a perfect mixture of seriousness and happiness while keeping a balance between reality and romance. In *As You Like It* romance is incarnate. It is a play of adventure, romance and restoration of moral order. Love is the leitmotif in the play. The play starts off on a note of bitterness, hatred and discord. But the play comes to an end with good overpowering evil and beauty nobility and love being brought back to life.

*The Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the play. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a satire on romantic comedy. The only element of romance that one can find in the play is through Anne page.

On the other hand, we have the dark comedies on the problem like *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* etc., where the world of happy comedies is questioned. These are not identified by love tolerance or sympathy which is the general characteristics of Shakespearean comedy. The plays identify that Shakespeare was no longer in love with the idea of love. *Troilus and Cressida* is about love and war. *All's Well That Ends Well* does not engage in a heroine who is saint like and *Measure for Measure* suggests that love can turn into lust especially in dark comedies.

### Check Your Progress

5. State the features of Shakespearean comedy.
6. Name some of Shakespeare's influencers from whom he drew inspiration for his writings.
7. How are the men and women portrayed in Shakespeare's comedy?
8. What is the plot of *The Twelfth Night*?

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## 2.4 SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY AND ITS FEATURES

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William Shakespeare

Aristotle defines tragedy as, 'the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion.' Scholars insisted that this definition had influenced the neo classical dramatists of Europe to a great extent. Shakespearean tragedies are usually divided into four different segments: early tragedies, historical tragedies, major tragedies and Roman tragedies.

The early tragedies would comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. After the publication of Seneca's *Ten Tragedies* in the year 1581, it greatly influenced playwrights of the Elizabethan period. Critics argue that if there were no Seneca the Elizabethan tragedies would have never have shaped up. The theme of blood and revenge, supernaturalism and madness became so popular that almost every other dramatist tried incorporating these themes into their writings. *Titus Andronicus* one of the earliest tragedies written by Shakespeare looks almost like a replica of a work composed by Seneca. Titus was the Roman general who lost most of his children in the battle that he fought against the Goths. He decides to avenge everything that has gone wrong with him. Even though in the first glance Titus looks like someone inspired by Seneca because of the celebration of blood and death yet at the same time there is no denial that Titus is one of those earlier characters of Shakespeare who distinctly displays an element of intense tragedy that is reflected in the later tragedies of Shakespeare. If we consider *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a very little strain of Seneca. In fact, one of the most distinguishable features of *Romeo and Juliet* is that they do not possess any tragic flaw. They are the victims of the faith they are not victims of their own doing. The famous author Chaucer in his Monk's Tale suggests that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness. Analysed from this perspective, Richard definitely fits into the bill of a tragic king. He was somebody from an extremely influential position and later he was imprisoned and killed. He is one of those heroes from the major tragedies who are responsible for their own downfall. Richard is someone who is made to handle hostile circumstances. He is someone whose tragic flaw is that he is a sentimental fellow. Yet at the same time there is no tragic conflict.

If we consider *Richard III*, we realise that Shakespeare was definitely under the influence of his contemporaries and predecessors like Marlowe and Machiavelli. This is probably the only text which has been off and on compared with *Macbeth*. But of course, *Macbeth* stands in a more superior position because he is a poet and he is caught by his ambition which is regulated by morality. Even when he is ready to occupy the throne after causing such unrest and feeling glad we cannot but admire him through the conflicting imagination that he was struggling with. Richard, on the other hand, is not a tragic hero like that of Macbeth. But at the same time, in the battle of Bosworth, his sufferings come out clearly through the

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tricks of conference that we come across. We see how the ghosts of the victims come to curse him. Interestingly, Richard is an antagonist who shows the distinct side of humanity.

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Shakespearean tragedies albeit are not regulated by rules. In fact, Shakespeare has never won any inclination towards adherence of rules. His tragedies identify the evolution of a new form of tragedy. The tragedies produced by the Greeks were highly rhetorical as well as political. While for Shakespeare tragedy is mostly a mental conflict. It is more layered more complicated and along with the divine intervention it also talks about the human aspect. Greek tragedy also had a strong streak of religious undertone to it. But Shakespearean tragedies are more flesh and blood and secular. In *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in *Antony and Cleopatra* we find that both the male and female protagonists are of equal significance. The protagonists in *Antony and Cleopatra* are equally more active and on the other hand the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* are equally powerless. Even if we consider *Macbeth*, we realise that the heroine who has surfaced as a powerful figure, who has managed to suppress her womanhood is finally pushed into insanity and eventually death. It more often than not highlights the plight of the main character and the woman protagonist is invariably sidelined.

We cannot deny that in certain aspects, Shakespeare's tragedies resemble Greek tragedies. Aristotle in his *Poetics* talks about certain characteristics that a good tragic hero should possess. According to him, hero should be of greater magnitude than an ordinary man, but he should not be a man of complete virtues; yet he must possess elements of greatness. The hero must be someone of higher stature and his fate would somewhere impact the welfare of the entire nation. It is essential that the hero must enjoy a reputation and prosperity of such greatness that when fortune strikes him the world around him definitely gets affected. A situation like this will be responsible for evoking our pity and sympathy for this person. Even though at the broader level he has to resemble an ordinary man yet he is of noble attitude and patience should make him larger than life only then would the audience idealize him.

If we consider Shakespeare's heroes from this light, we realise that most of his tragic heroes are of noble stature. After all Romeo is an aristocrat, Antony is an emperor, Coriolanus is a general, Brutus is a man of high position, Richard II is the king, Titus is a general and so forth. The heroes of Shakespearean tragedies are of such significance that they hold special place in the public domain. *Macbeth* is initially a general and elevates himself to the position of the king. Hamlet is a prince who has been deprived of his throne. King Lear is a king whose wrong decision collapses the functioning of the kingdom. They are all great people who suffer from fatal flaws.

All the heroes of the major tragedies are people who have lost any hope in life or are at the brink of leaving this worldly existence. Macbeth is someone who degenerated himself over the years, King Lear is someone who is extremely elderly, and Ortho has seen decline in his existence. Even though Hamlet is still in his 20s he is someone who is completely sick of life. It is this profound melancholy as well as bloom that surrounds these four heroes which makes them the best tragic

example. The inherent weakness that is ingrained in every Shakespearean tragic hero makes them even a great character while making them appear as quintessential human.

William Shakespeare

In Shakespeare, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom. Each of the tragedies is actually a sequence of errors which finally culminates into something extremely tragic. The Shakespearean tragic hero is without fail responsible for his own actions, but fate plays a major role, even though insignificant. That is why we can really say that Oedipus is different than Hamlet, Macbeth or Othello and Lear because his life was regulated by fate. Of course, there are critics who believe that Oedipus who was consumed by pride and that was his fatal flaw. Being someone who was part of the renaissance, Shakespeare undoubtedly believed that a man is a free agent and he has the right to make independent choices. However, possessing the mind which is of utmost power and significant that at times he becomes blind to certain things which are crystal clear to the readers or audience. Othello falls into the trap played by Iago because he is unable to judge the situation properly. Lear's problem was also a problem of judgement. He was unable to identify the sincere Cordelia from the scheming and plotting daughters that he trusted. Shakespeare's idea of tragedy has evolved over the years and is not confined just to his characters. The actions revolve around the powers of mankind which are more often than not difficult to be dealt with and they fall prey to it.

Shakespeare was someone who knew how to keep the balance between destiny and free will. Shakespeare weighs faith and responsibility in equal measure and realises that both are equally important aspects of creating a great tragedy maintaining a certain balance between them and projecting faith and responsibility as complementary to one another. Of course, there are other critics who believed that most of Shakespearean plays are based on chance and accident and less on fate. For example, if we consider Othello, we come across numerous instances that are invented by Iago to trap him and he willingly falls into it. Many critics believe that 'villains' in Shakespeare's plots do not hold much significance because the heroes eventually become victims of their own flaws and meet their end.

A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflicts. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says no conflict no drama—we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare. The soul of the tragic hero is constantly struggling with its own self. If we take Macbeth, we see that the external conflict is between Macbeth himself and while the internal conflict is in his conscience. In a similar fashion, the conflict that takes place in Hamlet in the external space is with his relation to his uncle Polonius and also with Laertes. At the same time, the inner conflict takes place inside his own mind where he is trying to handle desire for revenge, passion, ambition everything at the same time. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is subjected to conflict between his democratic ideals as well as his personal loyalty that he owes to his friend. Taking a look at *Antony and Cleopatra*, we will see that Antony is torn apart between Egypt and Rome which symbolises love and duty.

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The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are invariably solitary and lonely figures. They are usually devoid of friends; their near and dear ones cannot help them. No one usually has access to the conflict that goes on inside their minds. They suffer without being able to express and die, but at the same time despite their deaths, one never feels dejected or rejected in life because with that comes a bold affirmation that all the positive values will be restored again. In Shakespearean tragedy, the hero is not the only person who always dies. There are other people who die along with him. Romeo and Juliet, they both die. Othello and Desdemona leave this world. Hamlet and Ophelia, Brutus and Portia, Antony and Cleopatra, they all die. Death is inevitable in a Shakespearean tragedy. But the moral order is also being stored in a Shakespearean tragedy. The antagonist pays the penalty. Edmund, Goneril, Regan perish away, Iago dies. Cordelia's death is Lear's punishment. In Shakespearean tragedy the evil triumph's over the good for a short duration. In the end, one can see the restoration of the moral order. That is why Shakespearean tragedy is never pessimistic.

**Check Your Progress**

9. Define tragedy.
10. Name any two early tragedies of Shakespeare.
11. How does Chaucer define tragedy?
12. State one feature of a Shakespearean tragedy.

## **2.5 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE: AN OVERVIEW**

Antonio, a wealthy and respected merchant of Venice, is sad without knowing why. Among his friends is a young man named Bassanio who owes him a good deal of money. Bassanio confides in Antonio, saying that he wants to marry a rich heiress of Belmont, the beautiful Portia; but he is short of the money to enable him to make the sea voyage to her palace and try his luck to win her hand in marriage. Antonio tells his friend that he would gladly lend him whatever money he needs; but at the present time, he himself is short of cash. All his money is tied up in his merchant ships, which are still at sea. However, he tells Bassanio, that he will stand surety for a loan from Shylock, a moneylender.

Antonio and Shylock personally dislike each other. Shylock hates Antonio because (a) he is a Christian, (b) Shylock has suffered racial insults from him and (c) the merchant, unlike Shylock, lends money free of interest, thus undercutting the Jew's business. Shylock agrees to lend money without interest but on a special agreement — a bond. If Antonio cannot repay his debt within three months, Shylock will remove exactly a pound, in weight, of Antonio's flesh. Antonio, confident that his ships with goods will safely return to Venice before three months, agrees to abide by the terms of the bond in spite of Bassanio's protests.



In the meantime, Portia, at Belmont, discusses with her maid Nerissa, the plight she is in. Portia's future is to be determined by a chance choice. Under the terms of her father's will, whoever chooses the correct casket from a choice of three caskets, wins her hand in marriage. Against this background, Portia faces her suitors, who include a pompous Moroccan prince, and later, a vain Aragonese prince. They enter the lottery, flatter their own self-images, choose gold and silver caskets respectively, and being rejected, quickly depart.

In Venice, Bassanio prepares for his journey to Belmont. Launcelot leaves Shylock's service bidding a tearful farewell to Jessica, Shylocks' daughter, who is planning to elope with Lorenzo. Preparations are underway for Bassanio's farewell party. Jessica dressed as a page, acts as Lorenzo's torch-bearer, elopes with Lorenzo taking with her Shylock's ducats and jewels. Bassanio leaves for Belmont. In course of time, it is rumoured that Antonio has lost all his ships and will not be able to repay the loan in time. Obsessed by hate and revenge, Shylock has him arrested for debt.

In Belmont, Bassanio makes a good impression on Portia and chooses the lead casket which turns out to be the correct casket. Thus, he marries Portia and acquires her wealth. Gratiano declares his love for Nerissa; and Jessica arrives with Lorenzo in Belmont. Jessica announces that Shylock is insisting upon repayment of his bond. Portia agrees to pay the debt and suggests that immediately after their marriage, Bassanio returns to Venice to settle the matter. Portia makes a plan to assist Antonio. Leaving her house in the custody of Lorenzo and Jessica, Portia and Nerissa pretend to live in a monastery until their husbands return. In fact, Portia goes to Venice disguised as a young lawyer, with Nerissa disguised as her clerk.

The Duke of Venice presides at the trial to determine Antonio's contract with Shylock. Portia, unrecognised in her judicial robes, arrives to defend Antonio, pleading with Shylock to show mercy to the merchant; but the Jew is adamant and gets ready to cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh. Portia warns him that he is entitled to cut off exactly a pound of Antonio's flesh and not to a single drop of his blood; besides, Shylock is guilty of plotting to kill a Venetian citizen, which is a capital offence. The court rules that the Jew should lose all his assets but Antonio intercedes and asks for a lesser fine to be imposed on condition that Shylock is converted to Christianity and wills his estate to Lorenzo and Jessica. Overwhelmed and shocked, Shylock agrees and leaves the court. By way of legal fees Portia asks for the ring from Bassanio which he had sworn never to part with and Nerissa follows suit by asking Gratiano to give her his ring. Bassanio and Gratiano, not recognising their wives in disguise, reluctantly hand over the rings.

Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont; and on the arrival of their husbands Bassanio and Gratiano, accuse them of unfaithfulness. After sometime, Portia reveals the truth about their disguise and their activities in Venice. Antonio then comes to know that three of his missing ships are safe. Lorenzo and Jessica are presented with Shylock's deed of gift. The merry company goes into the house for feasting and the romance ends in happiness and harmony.

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**Plot Structure:** The structure of the play consists in the skillful weaving together of four stories two major and two minor, and all in the same way interconnected as shown below:

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### Two Main Plots

1. The bond story involving Shylock and Antonio.
2. The lottery of the casket revolving around Portia and her suitors.

The two plots are closely intertwined because:

- (a) Bassanio needs money in order to win Portia by participating in the casket choice.
- (b) In order to obtain the necessary provisions to go to Belmont, Bassanio places Antonio in debt. Antonio, in order to please Bassanio, enters into a bond with Shylock whom he hates.
- (c) Portia disguised as a male lawyer defeats Shylock.
- (d) The caskets themselves point to the moral that appearances are deceptive. Bassanio chooses lead casket and wins Portia. Shylock chooses revenge, gains nothing, and is defeated.

### Two Sub-plots

1. The Lorenzo-Jessica story centering on Jessica's elopement.
2. The ring plot involving Portia and Nerissa (in disguise) and Bassanio and Gratiano.

Also involved is Antonio, who urges Bassanio to give the young 'lawyer' the ring.

Both are inter-related to each other and the main plot since:

- (a) Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo and her removal of valuables from her father's house furthers Shylock's lust for revenge.
- (b) Jessica's elopement unites different Venetian communities — the Jewish and the Christian.
- (c) The rings given by Bassanio and Gratiano to Portia and Nerissa, when they are disguised, stress the theme of deception, disguise and loyalty.
- (d) The rings represent wealth and emotional values — remember that the loss of his wife's ring causes Shylock enormous distress. This relationship between financial and emotional values echoes throughout *The Merchant of Venice*.

### 2.5.1 *The Merchant of Venice*: A Romantic Comedy

A comedy is generally defined as a play which has a happy ending and which aims at entertaining its audience by providing laughter. A comedy has other aims also. It aims at correcting human follies and at reforming human society. The corrective aims and methods differ in a classical comedy and in a romantic comedy.

## Classical Comedy

William Shakespeare

A classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans: its models are the classical dramatists like Plautus, Terence and Aristophanes. Salient points of a classical comedy are:

1. Observance of the three unities of time, place and action. The unity of time demands that the whole action of the play should extend over not more than twenty-four hours. The unity of place demands that the entire action of the play should take place at the same place. The unity of action demands that the play should develop a single plot or a single story.
2. The classical comedy deals with realism. It deals with the everyday familiar life of ordinary people.
3. It strictly separates the comic and tragic elements, so that both these aspects are not intermingled in a single play.
4. Its aim is corrective and satiric. Some human weakness or social vice is exposed and ridiculed. The play laughs at people and not with them. The most noted exponent of the classical comedy in England was Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare.

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## Romantic Comedy

A romantic comedy is a play in which the romantic elements are mingled with comic elements. While the romantic elements delight, thrill, and enchant us, the comic elements make us laugh. Such a comedy appeals to our emotions, our imagination, as well as to our fancy; and it also makes us laugh. The romantic elements take us to a new world, which is more pleasing than the actual world in which we live. Shakespeare wrote romantic comedies. However, he did not observe the rules of the classical comedies in his plays.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare does not observe any of the three dramatic unities.

1. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the action covers not less than three months and it is not completed in a day as the classical unity of time demands. The unity of place is violated because the scenes shift from Venice to Belmont and from Belmont to Venice. The unity of action is not found in the play as it has multiple plots. All the plots are harmoniously woven together.
2. Shakespeare writes according to the dictates of his fancy without being preoccupied with classical literary rules regarding the everyday familiar life of ordinary people. In *The Merchant of Venice*, he deals with nobility as well as with ordinary people.
3. Shakespeare does not hesitate to introduce tragic situations and pathetic characters in his comedies. *The Merchant of Venice* is not a pure comedy, but is a tragi-comedy, that is a play with double-ending — happy for the romantic couples, but tragic for Shylock. The general

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atmosphere is more tense, serious and tragic than in other comedies. However, the play in its total effect is a comedy which provides amusement.

4. The aim of the classical comedy was corrective as well as satirical; but the objective of Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* is to entertain his audience. Follies are exposed and ridiculed; but on the whole, the laughter is gentle and sympathetic.

*The Merchant of Venice* has great romantic appeal to the audience. It keeps up their curiosity by making use of suspense. It is a drama of averted threat, beginning in trouble and ending in joy. It appeals to the romantic sense of adventure and of wonder, and to complain that some of the situations are improbable is not in order because the improbability or the marvellousness, is a part of the pleasure. The play dramatises incidents of romantic love, accompanied by love-doctrine. It is a play in two tones — comic as well as romantic.

### 2.5.2 *The Merchant of Venice: Title of the Play*

Shakespeare was careful in the selection of his titles. He named his tragedies and history plays after the central figures who appear strong and powerful. In comedies, however, he named his plays in a rather fanciful manner or after a character who is passive and weak. *The Merchant of Venice* is named after a weak character, Antonio; but then, Shakespeare has taken care to ensure that the action of the play originates in the weakness of Antonio.

There has been a lot of controversy as to whether the ‘merchant’ in the title refers to Shylock or Antonio. Shylock, taken as an individual, is an important and dominant character. Like Milton’s Satan, he may be an embodiment of evil, but he cannot be regarded as the hero in the play. He is rather the villain who plots against the life of the hero and is frustrated and defeated in the end.

In the play itself, Antonio is referred to as the ‘merchant’ and Shylock as the ‘Jew’ or the money-lender. In the opening scene we are told of Antonio’s wealth and his rich ventures ‘tossing on the ocean.’ He is a rich merchant with a worldwide trade. In the trial scene Portia asks, ‘Which is the merchant and which is the Jew?’ thus indicating that Shakespeare clearly meant Antonio to be the ‘merchant’ in the play.

Shakespeare is justified in naming the play after Antonio who has the essential qualities of a hero. He is noble, generous, and kind-hearted. He is the ‘Royal Merchant’ and ‘good Antonio’. He is widely respected in Venice and is surrounded by a number of noble friends. Above all, Antonio is the dramatic and structural centre in the play. The play opens by examining the causes of his melancholy, with an account of his ships at sea; and the play ends with the good news that all his ships have finally returned safely to the harbour. Throughout the story, our attention is drawn to Antonio’s fortunes and misfortunes.

Antonio’s friendship and love for Bassanio are all beyond measure. He borrows money from Shylock to enable Bassanio to woo Portia. Eventually, Antonio

becomes the victim of Shylock's hatred and revenge. At the end, he is saved from the clutches of the Jew by a clever manipulation of the bond by Portia. Thus, he is closely linked to the main plot and the subplot in the play.

William Shakespeare

Antonio, as the hero of the play, is too weak and passive. He suffers from a nameless melancholy. Even in the trial scene, while others struggle to save his life, he is resigned to his fate. Normally, a hero is a man of action. Here, one must remember that Antonio is depicted as a weak hero because his colourless personality is most necessary to the plot. Because of his weakness, he borrows money from Shylock, his enemy, thinking that he will be able to repay the loan in time. He forgets that all his ships are at the mercy of the high seas. Furthermore, he gives the money to Bassanio who is a 'prodigal' and who wants to try his luck on borrowed money. If Antonio were a strong man, he would not have committed such errors; consequently, there would not have been a plot for the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

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### 2.5.3 *The Merchant of Venice*: Characters

#### The Duke of Venice

<b>Antonio</b>	<i>a merchant of Venice</i>
<b>Bassanio</b>	<i>his best friend, suitor to Portia</i>
<b>Gratiano</b>	<i>another friend, in love with Nerissa</i>
<b>Lorenzo</b>	<i>another friend, in love with Jessica</i>
<b>Salarino</b>	
<b>Salanio</b>	<i>Other friends</i>
<b>Salario</b>	
<b>Leonardo</b>	<i>servant to Bassanio</i>
<b>Shylock</b>	<i>a rich Jew, and a money-lender</i>
<b>Jessica</b>	<i>his daughter</i>
<b>Tubal</b>	<i>another Jew, Shylock's friend</i>
<b>Launcelot Gobbo</b>	<i>A clown, servant to Shylock</i>
<b>Old Gobbo</b>	<i>Launcelot's father</i>
<b>Portia</b>	<i>an heiress of Belmont</i>
<b>Nerissa</b>	<i>her lady-in-waiting</i>
<b>Prince of Marocco</b>	<i>Suitors to Portia</i>
<b>Prince of Arragon</b>	
<b>Balthazar</b>	<i>servants to Portia</i>
<b>Stephano</b>	Merchants, Officers of the Court of Justice, Gaoler, Musicians, Servants to Portia and other attendants.

## Important Characters in the Play

Let us now discuss the important characters in the play.

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#### Antonio

Theoretically, Antonio is the central character of the play because all the action is directly or indirectly centred around him. He is the main actor in the bond story which unifies all the elements in the play. The finest quality in him is his love for Bassanio which seems the strongest force in his life. Their friendships survive Antonio's state of bankruptcy. In discussing Antonio's ill-luck, Salarino says, 'A kinder gentleman treads not the earth.' Antonio is a philanthropist, doing good to others. He lends money, without charging interest because of which he becomes an object of Shylock's hatred. He, in his generosity, promises to pay Shylock the money borrowed by Bassanio; or else, will allow Shylock to cut off a pound of his flesh.

Antonio is introduced to us as a merchant of power and influence. His ships travel far and wide. His wealth is dispersed and he is esteemed for his reliability. However, he is a gambler who stakes all on fair weather at sea. He puts his fair flesh at risk in order to satisfy the wishes of the man he loves. In the trial scene he is willing to meet his death, not caring for life. His friends struggle to save his life; he urges that the court give its judgement. His inactivity is a flaw in his character. The action of the play has its origin in his passive attitude.

Antonio has strong prejudice against the Jews which was widespread in the Elizabethan age. The Jews were hated for being Jews and lending money at high rates of interest. Antonio, though a thorough gentleman, fails to rise above racial and religious prejudices against Shylock. In this context it is noteworthy that Shakespeare does not give us a monster of goodness, but a credible human being with some human weakness.

#### Bassanio

Bassanio is a young and the most attractive man in the play. He is fond of splendid living; and in the beginning of the play he strikes us as being a spendthrift. He hopes to restore his fortunes by marrying a rich heiress. It becomes necessary for him to borrow money so that he can appear rich when he courts Portia. Antonio for his sake enters into a bond with Shylock. The attitude of Bassanio is to be judged in the Elizabethan context in which dashing noblemen, frequently in debt, led a life of extravagance on pomp and show.

Bassanio's love for Antonio is profound and sincere. He dissuades Antonio from the cruel bond, saying:

*You shall not seal to such a bond for me,*

*I'll rather dwell in my necessity.*

He responds to Antonio's written request and decides in the court to settle his benefactor's debt. He even promises to sacrifice his own 'flesh, blood, bones and all.'

Bassanio is a self-confessed fortune-hunter. In the beginning, he appears to be a young adventurer who wishes to marry a 'lady richly left in Belmont' so that he may inherit her wealth, improve his financial prospects and repay his debts. He plans to borrow money for a blind adventure. However, he is not merely a fair weather friend to Antonio. As we come to know later in the play that his friendship for Antonio has depth and reality.

In his choice of the caskets, Bassanio sees the dangers of judging by appearances. He says, 'The world is still deceived with ornament' and chooses the dull lead casket. Bassanio is an intelligent judge of character; he urges Antonio not to accept Shylock's terms. He tells his friend, 'I like not fair terms, and a villain's mind.' Besides, money does enter into his calculations, as his love for Portia is genuine. It is for her sake he is prepared to 'give and hazard' all. His choice of the correct casket is the result of his inborn heroism and nobility.

Bassanio seems to be a contradiction, as motives are honest but questionable; his actions nearly cost the life of his best friend. He is prepared to spend large sums of money and run up debts when neither money nor the credit is his. He is a carefree Elizabethan nobleman, apparently frivolous, but in reality noble and generous, capable of profound love and heroism.

### Portia

Portia is the romantic heroine of the play and she is presented on the stage with beauty and intelligence. She is the lady of Belmont, richly left by her father. Bassanio describes her to Antonio as a lady as rare and unattainable as the Golden Fleece. The fame of her beauty has spread far and wide, and a number of lovers are eager to marry her. Besides her beauty, she is one of the intellectual heroines of Shakespeare. Her intelligence is shown when she chooses to marry Bassanio as soon as he makes his choice. She then counsels him to leave at once for Venice to help his friend Antonio. So she is able to think and act quickly when the situation demands it. She shows her presence of mind when she is dressed up in male costumes, to act out the role of a learned lawyer. Her conduct during the trial scene reveals rhetorical brilliance and a court-room alertness which could only come with years of experience or inherited ability.

Portia's intellect is seen in her wit and humour. The humorous touches with which she hits off her various suitors, display not merely a genuine wit and intelligence, but a sharp tongue. When Morocco makes his choice, and takes his leave, Portia says:

*A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go,*

*Let all of his complexion choose me so.*

Though in the trial scene, Portia conducts herself with a rare masculine self-confidence, she is essentially feminine in nature. She loves Bassanio so deeply that she sends 'speechless messages of love' to him. In spite of being passionately in love, she is restrained and modest. Earlier, she has shown that as a dutiful daughter, she is determined to obey her dead father, and act according to his will in every respect. However, after the correct choice of the casket by Bassanio, her feminine

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nature is best seen in her absolute self-surrender to him. She wishes she had more of everything to give to Bassanio:

*This house, these servants and this same myself*

Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring.

Portia is truly well-bred and so she does not have an exaggerated sense of her own importance. She does not make her subordinates feel her superiority. She shrinks from discussing her own good deeds because:

*This comes too near the praising of myself;*

Therefore no more of it.

She does not praise her own generosity in providing money to save Antonio and sending Bassanio off. She wittily suggests that she will get her money's worth later:

Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear.

Shakespeare depicts Portia as a typical Renaissance heroine. She is well-versed in classical mythology and literature. She is cultured and refined; she is fond of music and arts. She, indeed, is 'the beauty of the play, as Shylock is its strength.'

### Shylock

Shylock is an important and dynamic character who arouses interest and a variety of conflicting criticisms. Shakespeare meant him to be humiliated and defeated. In order to achieve this objective it was necessary first to arouse interest in him before making it appear that his punishment was well-deserved. Shylock is a blood-thirsty Jew of medieval tradition; he is also a credible human being.

Shylock's function in this play is to be the obstacle, the man who stands in the way of the love stories; such a man is a traditional figure in romantic comedies. Something or someone must impede young, romantic love; here, it is Shylock who stands as an obstacle against the lovers. The fact that he is a Jew is by and large accidental. Shakespeare wanted to contrast generosity and kindness against selfishness and greed in terms of money and in terms of love.

Actions of Shylock originate from his passion for revenge, passion for money and his passion for race and religion. Shylock is revengeful; he wants to have his revenge on Antonio whom he hates. He nurses grievance; he is cunning and crafty, ever looking for an opportunity for harming Antonio. When Antonio comes for a loan of three thousand ducats, Shylock sees a golden opportunity for satisfying his passion:

*If I catch him once upon the hip,*

I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

Shylock's actions can be justified to a certain extent by the fact that centuries of oppression and ill-treatment have made him what he is. He is a foreigner and he has not been accepted in the Christian society in which he lives. Antonio has called him a dog and has spat upon him. All this hatred has embittered his soul.



Shylock loves money more than anything else. When Antonio turns to Shylock to borrow money, the points of emphasis of Shylock is money, interest and Antonio's credit rating — i.e., can Antonio repay his debt? For Shylock, the creation of money is creative. He is proud to make money 'breed as fast' as rams and ewes. He considers 'well-won thrift' what Antonio refers to negatively as 'interest'. Shylock appears to be a calculating, ruthless businessman. When Jessica elopes with Lorenzo taking away much of her father's wealth, Shylock wishes that his daughter were dead at his feet and his ducats in her coffin. However, he refuses to take 'ten times over' the borrowed money in the trial scene. Thus, his passion for revenge overrides his passion for money.

Though Shylock is miserly, he is also a devout practitioner of his religion. As far as his attachment to his religion is concerned, he calls his people as 'sacred' and in his imagination he is constantly back in Palestine with the folk of the Old Testament. He quotes Jacob, thinks of Launcelot as the offspring of Hagar, and sees in Antonio a resemblance of the 'publicans'. His oaths 'by Jacob's staff', 'by our holy Sabbath,' 'cursed by my tribe' speak of Shylock's people and his faith.

In short, Shylock is an example of racial sufferings and racial sympathies. He becomes an object of bitter insult, being surrounded by enemies whom he is too proud to appease and too weak to oppose. He can have no life among them but money; no hold on them but interest; no feeling towards them but hate. By standing up for the letter of the law against all the appeals for mercy, he has strengthened his enemies' hands and sharpened their weapons against himself. Revenge and obduracy take possession of him until at the height of his wickedness he falls into the pit he had dug.

### Nerissa

Nerissa is a foil to Portia, just as Gratiano is to Bassanio. Though she is Portia's lady-in-waiting, she is more like a confidential companion. She assists her mistress in all her plans. Like her mistress, she is young and possesses great common sense. Nerissa, in her matter-of-fact attitude, points out to Portia that the man who will choose the casket intelligently will be the man who will love her rightly.

Nerissa's character is drawn as a passive supporter of Portia. She merely echoes a sentiment or imitates an action. Thus, when Portia expresses satisfaction after Arragon has failed, Nerissa echoes the sentiment by saying,

*The ancient saying is no heresy*

Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.

Furthermore, Portia, while giving the ring to Bassanio, tells him to take care of the ring, Nerissa also gives the ring to Gratiano and tells him to take care of it.

Nerissa is not merely a passive character. She also has a distinct personality of her own. She rejects Portia's melancholy pose just as Gratiano rejects Antonio's. She takes the opportunity of grabbing Gratiano for a husband, since he falls in love with her romantically at first sight. She agrees to marry him, not before she has made Bassanio's success a condition of her betrothal. It is misleading to call her a 'maid' in the modern sense; 'lady-in-waiting' is a more accurate description of Nerissa.

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**Jessica**

Jessica, the only daughter of Shylock, plays an important role in the play. She links Shylock's world with that of Venice; and Venice with Belmont. For Lorenzo, Jessica is 'wise, fair, and true'. But in reality, Jessica is deceitful, extravagant, and disloyal to her father as well as to her religion. Most of her actions take place from her hatred of her father and her love for Lorenzo. The hatred for her father is intense:

*But though I am a daughter to his blood*

I am not to his manners.

Jessica is extravagant in spending 'fourscore ducats at a sitting' and exchanging a turquoise ring for a monkey. Her hatred for her father originates from the fact that she is bored at home, and she is opposed to Shylock as far as his attitudes are concerned.

Jessica is basically intelligent and cunning. She must have been clever to have arranged many secret meetings with Lorenzo in order to plan their elopement. She takes the lead in the plan for elopement. When Lorenzo comes for her, she confirms at once Lorenzo's identity before she opens the window. Her natural sensitivity suggests an artistic temperament.

Jessica is an ambiguous character open to several interpretations. She is a rebel but her rebellion is domestic — against her father. She is fickle, pleasure-loving and childish. Shylock has to tell her not to rush to the window when the masquerade passes. Her lack of affection for her father, her lack of moral principles indicate her unprincipled nature. The only time she reveals an awareness of her crimes is before she commits them:

*Alas! What heinous crime it is in me*

To be ashamed to be my father's child!

Jessica's character is difficult to evaluate. The audiences of Shakespeare's play would find her more justified in her actions than we do, simply because her father was a Jew.

**2.5.4 The Merchant of Venice: Themes and Issues**

Let us briefly study the major themes and issues of this play.

**Theme of Love, Friendship and Loyalty:** *The Merchant of Venice* is a romantic comedy; and consequently, has love as one of its main themes. Portia and Bassanio are in the centre of the love theme; they are flanked by two other couples, Jessica and Lorenzo, as well as Nerissa and Gratiano.

The action in the play takes place abroad in Venice or in Belmont. The remoteness of these places gives the play a romantic colouring. While Venice is certainly a reality, existing on the world map, Belmont is entirely a creation of Shakespeare's mind. Belmont, which means 'the hill beautiful', is a poetic and romantic world, a world of love, friendship, music and song. Here the scenes are set in the moonlit gardens. It is in contrast to the harsh realities of the world of

Venice. Belmont is the world of wealth and luxury where Portia is 'richly left' to be wooed and wedded through the lottery of the caskets. It is here that lovers unite, and the play ends happily with the ringing of the wedding bells.

Friendship and loyalty is another theme highlighted in the play. Antonio is loyal to Bassanio and disregards Bassanio's shortcomings when the latter asks for a loan. Bassanio returns this trust when he journeys to Venice immediately after his marriage, in response to Antonio's letter of distress. Portia's loyalty to Bassanio is also extended to his friend Antonio, whom she has never met. In pursuing his revenge, Shylock is loyal to his traditions and Old Testament principles.

On the contrary, we have disloyalty on the part of Jessica, who turns her back on her family and religion. Besides, Bassanio and Gratiano, in spite of their solemn promise, give away their rings thus showing their disloyalty to Portia and Nerissa. Shylock is isolated; he receives no human love and loyalty. His treatment of Jessica is without love and she repays him with disloyalty. Shylock has a friend, Tubal; but Tubal carries bad news so gleefully making one doubt if their friendship can be much more than a business association based on mutual self-interest.

**Theme of Money and Wealth:** Love of money, wealth, and possessions forms another important theme in the play. Shylock is a usurer; he values money for its own sake, as an end in itself. Living in an alien country amidst hostile society, his money and possessions are his only security. His obsession for money is so strong that he considers everything, even human beings, as commercial objects. According to Shylock, Antonio's life 'Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it' (Act IV: 1). Even Jessica, his daughter is a material object to him. When he loses her and some money, Shylocks' loss of his daughter is indistinguishable from the loss of his money. He says: 'My daughter! O my ducats ... my ducats and my daughter!' (Act II: 8).

Money is not an end in itself but only a means to achieve something as far as Antonio, Bassanio and Portia are concerned. Bassanio needs money to travel to Belmont to win his bride, but it is his love for Portia which has final value. Similarly, Portia, a wealthy heiress, offers all she has to Bassanio to enable him to save Antonio, who has risked his life to stand surety for a loan from Shylock. Antonio did this for his love for Bassanio. The money-theme is best represented in Bassanio's choice of the casket. He rejects the gold and silver caskets, which suggest wealth and riches. Instead, he chooses the poor lead casket, with the motto 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' His choice involves 'giving' rather than taking or gaining. Furthermore, he takes a risk in order to win the love of Portia - something more important than wealth.

The Venetians are portrayed like contemporary Elizabethans. Adventurous merchants like Antonio were highly honoured in Elizabethan age, an age known for travel and discovery. Such rich merchants had their own hangers-on as Antonio has Salarino, Salanio and Gratiano. Noblemen, in this period, lead a splendid and extravagant life much beyond their means. This led them to live on borrowed money. Bassanio represents such young spendthrifts. In a predominant Christian society, Jews were considered to be aliens-victims of isolation. In this society,

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money-lending was forbidden to Christians by the church in the Middle Ages, and as a consequence, money-lending was controlled by the Jews. It was usually the only occupation the law allowed them. Shylock is a traditional figure of the Jewish moneylender. He is not merely a Jew, but a Jew in the Christian society oppressed and hated.

**Theme of Justice and Mercy:** The play brings out clearly the theme of justice and mercy. Shylock demands strict justice; he comes to court to demand his pound of flesh from Antonio. Portia, on the contrary, requests him to show mercy. She extols the quality of mercy:

*It is twice blest;*

It blesses him that gives and him that takes.

Shylock has the power and the force of the law to demand strict justice; but he rejects mercy in favour of justice. 'I stand here for law', he says. Later on he demands absolute justice saying, 'My deeds upon my head! I crave the law.' The crowning irony of the scene follows. Portia finds him guilty of intended murder, and also puts such conditions which prevent him from taking a pound of flesh.

**Theme of Appearance and Reality:** According to Portia's father, judgement by appearances is not a true index to the character of a person. He devised the lottery of caskets. This was necessary to ensure that a deserving person weds Portia. In fact the casket-device is not a lottery but threefold test of character. In the first place, a suitor who is not sincere in his love is not likely to make the choice, for the penalties of failure are quite severe. The unsuccessful candidate must take a vow of celibacy and depart at once from Belmont.

Successful suitors who pass the test of sincerity, must choose the casket, after examining its appearance and the motto inscribed on it. The Prince of Morocco is carried away by the outward appearance of the golden casket. The proud Prince of Arragon is moved by the inscription on the silver casket. The motto on the silver casket is meant to entrap and mislead such vain people as the Prince of Arragon. Bassanio rejects the gold casket almost on the same grounds as the Prince of Arragon. He also rejects the silver casket with humility for the same reasons. Finally, he chooses the lead casket which threatens more than it promises because Bassanio is a true lover, chivalrous and discriminating. Bassanio voices Shakespeare's moral that we must not judge anything by external appearance:

*So may the outward shows be least themselves:*

The world is still deceived with ornament.

Another appearance and reality is seen through cross-dressing, twice in *The Merchant of Venice*, daring deeds are done with the help of cross-dressing. Jessica escapes from Shylock's house by dressing as a page, while Portia and Nerissa rescue Antonio by posing as legal officers at the Venetian court. Shakespeare uses cross-dressing as a comic device in the play, but it has other implications. It is a structural necessity, as without cross-dressing Antonio could not be saved as females were not allowed to enter the court room which was primarily a male domain. Portia reveals that the donning of men's clothes is more

than mere comedy. She says that she has studied a ‘thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks,’ suggesting that authority is not something that is an arena of the males:

*I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,*

And wear my dagger with the braver grace (Act III. iv. 64–65).

In other words, it can be said that by cross-dressing Portia enables herself to assume the power and position denied to her as a woman. Cross-dressing may question patriarchal standards in terms of showing that female needs to dress as a male in order to find her true manifestation of virtues, but it also reaffirms patriarchy as the female becomes powerless the moment she sheds her male attire. The heroines disguise themselves as men in order to facilitate the fulfillment of the love-theme.

### Check Your Progress

13. Why does Shylock hate Antonio?
14. Who was Jessica and with whom did she elope?
15. What is a classical comedy?
16. Is *The Merchant of Venice* a pure comedy?

## 2.6 *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM: AN OVERVIEW*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first printed in 1600. One edition was published by Fisher and the other by Roberts. The play was quite a good success. The text of the play in the first folio was printed from Robert's Quarto, with slight alternations. The play was composed before 1598 for it is mentioned in Mere's Pladis Tamin, which was published almost the same year. This is the only external evidence available. So far as the internal evidence is concerned, it can well be ascertained from the style, temper, urge, nature and characteristics of the age it represents.

The play abounds with rhymes, puns, concepts and rhetorical devices, which characterize Shakespeare's earlier comedies; the blank verse is regular, even and monotonous. The frequency of the pause at the end of the line on the couplet goes to indicate that the play pertains to the first period of Shakespeare's dramatic apprenticeship and authorship.

The character, temper and the general spirit of the play have given rise to the speculation that it was written in honour of some great wedding. It was a fashion of the time to have a play performed at the wedding festivities of great noble man. The dramatic pieces, generally composed for such occasion were mosques. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a considerable resemblance to a Mosque and again it gives prominence to the theme of marriage.

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**Dramatic Personnel of the Play**

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Theseus                    | - Duke of Athens                                |
| 2. Egeus                      | - Father of Hermia                              |
| 3. Lysander                   |   |
| 4. Demetrius                  | - In love with Hermia                           |
| 5. Philostrate                | - Master of the Revels to Theseus               |
| 6. Hippolyta                  | - Queen of the Amazons, Betrothed to Theseus    |
| 7. Hermia                     | - Daughter to Egeus, in love with Lysander      |
| 8. Helena                     | - In love with Demetrius                        |
| 9. Oberon                     | - Kind of the Fairies                           |
| 10. Titania                   | - Queen of the Fairies                          |
| 11. Puck or Robin Good Fellow | - Lieutenant of the Oberon, the King of Fairies |
| 12. Peaseblossom              |   |
| 13. Cobweb                    |   |
| 14. Moth                      |   |
| 15. Mustardseed               | - Fairies                                       |
| 16. Quince                    | - A carpenter                                   |
| 17. Snug                      | - A joiner                                      |
| 18. Bottom                    | - A weaver                                      |
| 19. Flute                     | - A Bellowz mender                              |
| 20. Snout                     | - A Tinker                                      |
| 21. Starveling                | - A tailor                                      |

Other fairies attending their King and Queen attendants on Theseus and Hippolyta Scene: - Athens and wood near it.

**Summary of the Play**

*Duke Theseus is set to marry Hippolyta, Queen of Amazon*— In the opening scene preparations are being made for the marriage of Theseus Duke of Athens, with Amazonian queen, Hippolyta, to be solemnized four days later. Egeus, an Athenian citizen, enters to make a complaint against his daughter, Hermia, who had been betrothed to Demetrius, but whose heart has been won by Lysander. Egeus asks of Duke Theseus that the law of Athens gives to parents the right of disposal of their daughters in marriage or permission to put them to death in case of disobedience, may be enforced in his behalf. Hermia when told by Theseus that should she refuse to marry Demetrius, the only alternatives are death or seclusion in nunnery; prefers the latter alternative. Lysander, however, on being left with Hermia, persuades her to another course, that of escaping with him to a place

‘remote seven leagues’ from Athens, where they would be beyond the reach of law and might be safely married. Hermia confides to her bosom friend, Helena, about this play, who in turn reveals it to Demetrius whom she loves.

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*The Lovers (Hermia and Lysander) Flight to the Wood*— The flight of Hermia with Lysander takes them through a wood in the neighbourhood of Athens, where certain ‘rude mechanicals’ have met together to rehearse a play to be enacted before Theseus and Hippolyta on their wedding night. This wood happens to be one of the haunts of Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of the fairies respectively. At the present moment, their elfin majesties have fallen out about the ‘changeling boy’ stolen by the fairies from the household of an Indian king whom Titania wants to keep with herself, while Oberon wants the handsome boy because he would like this boy to serve him as a page of honour. Determined to carry his point, Oberon resorts to a stratagem, and commissions Puck, a mischievous spirit in his service, to smear the eyes of the sleeping Titania with the juice of a certain flower, which will compel her to fall in love with the next thing she, on walking, would look upon, and so counteracts her affection for the ‘little changeling boy.’

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*Puck’s Mistake Brings Complications in the Play*— While Puck is away seeking for this potent flower, Helena and Demetrius come to the spot. Oberon overhearing Demetrius’s churlish rejection of love determines to use the juice for the purpose of compelling the ‘disdainful youth’ to return to his allegiance to the ‘Sweet Athenian Lady.’ On the return of Puck, Oberon squeezes the flower on Titania’s eyelids, and Puck goes off on the same errand to Demetrius. Meanwhile, however, Hermia and Lysander come upon the scene, and wandering about the wood, lay themselves down to sleep upon grass. Puck enters and seeing the pair, takes Lysander to be the Athenian of whom Oberon had spoken, and promptly anoints his eyes with the magic juice. A moment or two later Demetrius and Helena reappear and Lysander awaking, pours forth protestations of love for Helena, abandoning her sake the sleeping Hermia, as she (Helena) was ‘the first thing’ whom he saw when he woke up.

*Athenian Artisans’ Rehearsal of a play and Titania’s Infatuation for Bottom*— At this point six Athenian artisans are rehearsing in wood the play *pyramus and Thisbe*. Puck is angry at their daring to intrude upon the haunt of the fairies and, by his magic powers, fixes the head of an ass upon the shoulder of Bottom, the principal actor, and with whom the fairy Queen Titania, as she wakes up, immediately falls in love. The rest of the actors, frightened by Bottoms’ transformation, scatter in all directions; and he, when left alone with Titania, is being wooed by her when Oberon re-enters and is told by Puck of the success of his stratagem. While they are in conversation, Hermia and Demetrius appear, the former accusing the latter having slain his rival Lysander, who, in reality, had left her sleeping in order to follow Helena for whom he had picked up fondness in first glance after he was awake. Oberon now discovers that Puck has mistaken the one Athenian for the other i.e., he took Lysander to be Demetrius. He orders Puck to bring Helena to the spot, and smears the eyes of Demetrius with the love-juice in preparation for her coming. On her appearance with Lysander, Demetrius awakes and bursts out with vows of passionate love for Helena. Helena, feeling

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bewildered by his protest of love, as she had been a while before by those of Lysander's imagines that Demetrius, Lysander and Hermia have all entered into a plot to mock her. A bitter vocal quarrel between Helena and Hermia is the result. At the same time, Demetrius and Lysander assert their claim to Helena's love, and challenge each other to a combat to settle the issue.

*Resolving of complications by Oberon* – To prevent more mischief, Oberon directs Puck to overcast the night, and by imitating by turn, the voices of Lysander and Demetrius to lead each far away from the other. This done, Puck is ordered to use another herb to remove the charm from Lysander's eyes so that, on awaking, he may forget his sudden passion for Helena and renew his vows of love to Hermia. Puck carries out Oberon's instructions regarding the Athenian rivals, who wander about the wood until feeling extremely weary they as well as Hermia and Helena, lie down and fall asleep. Puck then anoints Lysander's eyes with the counter charm. While they are thus asleep, Titania, still engrossed in her love for Bottom, reappears, and shortly afterwards Oberon, having obtained the 'changeling child' proceeds to remove the spell he had laid upon senses.

*All the pairs of Lovers Joined the Marriage* – This being done, and the fairie, reappearing, Theseus accompanied by Hippolyta and Egeus, comes in the early morning to hunt in the wood. At the sound of huntsmen's horns, Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia and Helena awake from their slumber. Demetrius relates to Theseus the occurrences of the night and resigns all claim to Hermia. Egeus, enraged by the flight of his daughter Hermia with Lysander, claims enforcement of law, but is overruled by Theseus, who sanctions the marriage of Hermia with Lysander and of Helena with Demetrius. At the same time, he takes Hippolyta as his wife.

*Performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' by Athenian Artisans* – The triple wedding having been solemnized in the temple, the play ends with the ludicrous performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' by the Athenian artisans. Oberon and Titania with all their fairies, sing and dance to bless the newlyweds. Puck's address to the audience brings the play to a happy end.

**Character Sketches****Theseus**

The central figure of the play is Theseus, the Duke of Athens. He reminds us of Henry V. He is Shakespeare's earlier conception of his ideal king. He is quite a magnificent and impressive personality. He shapes the destiny of the people of his State. His utterance is the rich-toned speech of one who is master of events. He represents Shakespeare's early ideal of a heroic warrior and man of action. He does little in the play but his very presence produces an impression of greatness and strength. He displays serenity of strength, calmness born of the consciousness of power. Every one bows to him and pays due reverence to his authority. He is not a tyrant but he simply compels obedience by his presence. Even the great scholars, who eulogized him, 'shivered and looked pale' with calmness and gravity in the presence of Theseus so famous a soldier. He is the born ruler of man. He may be said to be the very embodiment of power coupled with authority.



Theseus is a keen hunter, a chivalrous soldier and high-minded gentleman with a generous sympathy for the weak and the lowly. Hippolyta has objected to the play of the mechanism of Athens, for it is not the kind for these poor folk to hear them.

*The kinder we, ' says Theseus*

To give them thanks for nothing.

*Our sport shall be to take what they mistake.*

*And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect takes it in might not merit.*

This shows the good manners of a gentleman. Theseus is much more courteous and patient than his wife. Despite the play staged by poor artisans, who have hardly any knowledge of dramatic art and stagecraft, being crude and worthless, he never utters a word of disagreement and thanks the players at the end who feel highly delighted to think that they pleased their Duke. Throughout the performance he made witty remarks and in the end told Bottom and his party that the play 'is a very fine tragedy very notably discharged.' He, however, criticized the writer of the play with a sarcastic comment, 'if he writ it had played Pyramus, and hanged himself in Thisby's garter, it would have been a fine tragedy – and so it is truly.' To Hippolyta, the Interlude was simply 'the silliest stuff that ever I heard.' This bears out the generous disposition of Theseus and his desire to make everyone happy in his kingdom.

Theseus is pre-eminently a man of action. He depreciates imagination and puts the lunatic, the lover the poet in the same category. His love for Hippolyta is no romantic passion. He is certainly not unimaginative but he keeps his imagination well under control.

Theseus himself is a lover but his love has no fantasy. He has cast off all the romantic follies of youth. He has also in his youthful days sowed wild oats but now he is sober. He can look upon love with the cool light of reason, and can therefore see the absurdities of romantic passion. He can turn in a moment from Hippolyta to the business of government, more important to him than love. Thus, he stands now as the normal member of the society of man. He admits love because it is natural but he circumscribes (limits) its scope to lead to marriage.

Theseus stands for the common sense and sobriety. So according to the viewpoint of Theseus the lovers – not only the Athenian lovers but also Oberon and Titania and Pyramus and Thisbe – are driven to follies and absurdities by their romantic passion. 'Sanity, amity, sobriety, justice cool reason, common sense, love for law etc., are the key points in the character of Theseus, much against fancy and sentiment in human nature which enhance his reputation as a just Duke of Athens.'

He had rightly advised Hermia to obey the commands of her father in matters of marriage – a delicate issue – wherein legal power vested in her father even to disfigure her beauty and spoil her career. He warned her that in the event of her disobedience, the law of Athens would take its own course in penalizing her to execute her or compel her to a state of celibacy – a life of singleness to be confined

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in some nunnery throughout her life. He was simultaneously generous to give Hermia four days to reconsider her position. He was a ruler with a human approach to man and matters. In the end, we find that he overruled Eggs and allowed Hermia to marry Lysander, her lover and the mate of her choice.

### Lysander

Lysander is a sincere lover and 'a worthy gentleman' of good fortune who values the love of Hermia above his rank and wealth. He is prepared to sacrifice his wealth and position for the sake of love. He is prepared to bid good-bye to his native city and live in long banishment for the sake of Hermia. He is a frank and straight forward youth. It is the frank communication of his plan of elopement to Helena that lends him in trouble. The mistake of Puck brings about a temporary change in Lysander, but it is soon set right by Oberon. After he recovers from the spell of the love-juice, he makes a clean confession to Theseus of his intention to marry Hermia secretly at a place, which is beyond the range of Athenian law. Theseus is impressed by his frankness and steadfast love and gives his consent to his marriage with Hermia. Lysander is a true and faithful lover, and thought his love does not run a smooth course yet it triumphs in the end.

'In Lysander, the poet wishes to represent a noble magnanimous nature sensitive to the charms of the loveliness of soul and of spiritual beauty; but in Demetrius he has given us a nature fundamentally less noble.'

Lysander appears to be a true but licentious and passionate youth who does not enjoy the choice and favour of Egeus, father of Hermia Egeus alleges him saying

*Thou, thou Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,  
And interchang'd love tokens with my child.'  
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,  
With feigning voice, verses of feigning love,  
And stol'n the impression of her fantasy,  
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds,  
Conceits, knacks, trifles, sweatmeats....  
Turned her obedience (which is due to me)  
To stubborn harshness.*

Lysander claimed his love for Hermia before Egeus adding that he was well-born, well-possessed and his love for the maiden was more than that of Demetrius. His fortunes in every way were far above those of Demetrius. I am beloved of beauteous Hermia, why should not I then prosecute my right? He calls Demetrius as 'spotted and inconstant man.'

To Hermia he pitifully, standing deep love, says,  
*How, now my love? Why is your cheek so pale?*  
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

He fears that

*The course of true love never did run smooth;  
But either it was different in blood or misgrafted  
In respect of years or else it should upon the choice of friends.  
or,  
'if there were a sympathy in choice,'  
War, death or sickness did lay siege to it,  
Making it momentary as a sound,  
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,-*

Lysander suggest Hermia to fly away secretly seven leagues apart from the clutches of Athenian law to his aunt's place where he would marry her.

After he flees away, he fondly asks his sweet Hermia, 'Fair love you faint with wandering in the wood', shows his deep love and sympathy for her.

He says,

*One turf, shall serve as follow for us both,  
One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth'  
'Love takes the meaning in love's conference.  
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit.  
So that but one heart we can make of it.  
Two bosoms interchained with an oath.'  
'And then end life when I end loyalty.*

These lines truly express Lysander's fidelity for Hermia.

It was only under the influence of 'Cupid's flower' administrated by Puck, that Lysander did hate Hermia and expressed repentance to have spent his time and desired for Helena's love. But at last it was again restored to normality and resulted in his marriage with Hermia.

### 2.6.1 Important Passages for Explanation

(1) *What say you Hermia* ..... *Gentleman*

(Act I, Sc. I, p. 56)

**Context:** These lines cover the dialogue of Theseus in which he advises Hermia to abide by the wishes to her father to marry Demetrius. He also tries to impress upon Hermia the contribution of Egeus in shaping what she is today and the power he has in undoing it.

**Explanation:** On the complaint of Egeus lodged with Thesus, Duke of Athens, against the bold step, being taken by his daughter Hermia in disobeying her father and not to marry Demetrius, the match chosen by him. The Duke asks Hermia to speak out her opinion in the matter. But without waiting for her reply he begins to give his own advice in the matter. Theseus desires Hermia to think carefully and treat her father like a God – who had given her the charming physical features, life body and before

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whom she was yet nothing but a doll or a toy of wax, liable to be moulded, formed and destroyed as he pleased. It was in his power to destroy or disfigure her as he had shaped and stamped her in the present form, that is her father had absolute power of life and death over her. Further, Theseus tries to persuade the girl to fall in with her father's wish. She should have no objection to marrying Demetrius, who is a worthy man.

- (2) *So will I grow* ..... *sovereignty*.

(Act I, Sc. I, p. 58)

**Context:** These four lines cover the prompt reply of Hermia to the Duke after he had advised her of the worst consequence of disobeying her father, Egeus, in not marrying Demetrius.

**Explanation:** Hermia boldly and determinedly tells Theseus, the Duke of Venice, that she is fully prepared to live and die as a virgin, as the privilege of virginity was her sole and exclusive prerogative and possession which she cannot part with anyone except with whom she wishes to marry. Hence, before she would submit her virginity to the lordship of one i.e., Demetrius, to whose unwanted authority her soul refuses to submit, she would prefer to live alone and die unmarried.

- (3) *Helen to you* ..... *devised to steal*.

(Act I, Sc. I, p. 70)

**Context:** In Act I, Scene I when Lysander and Hermia had finalized their plan to escape stealthily from their houses and reach a specified point in a wood beyond the reach of Athenian law, Helena enters the scene. Lysander then discloses to her their plan to escape from Athens and marry elsewhere.

**Explanation:** Disclosing his secret plan to Helena, Lysander tells her that next night he was escaping from Athens with Hermia, daughter of Egeus. As they had already planned, it would be the best time for the lover to run away when the moon would be reflecting her white light on the surface of the water and grass blades would be shining with dew drops in the peace and silence of the midnight. In his view, this is a suitable time in which the flight of lovers has been kept concealed.

- (4) *Why are thou* ..... *prosperity*.

(Act II, Sc. I, p. 92)

**Explanation:** Titania blames Oberon for his attachment with some another blustering lady particularly Hippolyta, the Queen of Amazons, whom he had wooed earlier as a mistress.

She questioned him why he had come there after crossing the plains of India and wide Himalayan range. She was confident that his object in coming there was to bless the marriage of the warrior maiden Hippolyta wearing high heeled boots of hunters with whom he was in deep love and who was shortly going to be married to Theseus. He had come only to wish her well. There was no doubt that Oberon had come there to convey his feelings to her old beloved on her marriage with Theseus and bless her for the best of nuptial happiness.

## 2.6.2 Treatment of Love in the Play

William Shakespeare

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a fairy play in which all sorts of fantastic things happen. Fairies come and go; lovers now love one woman and then another, a man is translated into an ass-head and is loved by the queen of the fairies. But in the midst of all this fantastic medley there is a central theme, governing the play. It depicts the various facts of the lovers and beloveds in their love-making. All the four stories that make up the plot of the drama treat of love in its romantic aspect. It is Shakespeare's way to represent a theme from different points of view in his comedies; often we find a parody of the main theme in the sub-plot. This is exactly what we find in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Romantic love, which is the theme of the main plot, is parodied in the subordinate plot.

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#### The story of the young lovers

The main plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the story of the Athenian lovers. The story turns upon the love of two youths and two maids. It starts unhappily: a girl (Hermia) loves a young man (Lysander) but her father is determined to marry her to another youth (Demetrius). The course of true love does not run smooth. The father in his cruel obstinacy invokes the extreme penalty of law upon his daughter. In order to escape the harsh law of Athens on the subject, Hermia elopes with Lysander to woodland where the Athenian law is not in force and Demetrius when informed of their proposal to elope, by his beloved (Helena) follows them. Thus, a curious situation arises to which there could hardly be a happy solution except through comic humour. Here the dramatist turns to laugh at the folly of youthful love. He shows how it depends upon the juice of a flower love-in-idleness, and it were only a chance, as if it lay only in the eye, Lysander hates the woman he loved and Demetrius loves the woman he hated. After a nightmare of experiences, however, the lovers find themselves happily united. Thus, love in its romantic aspect, is the theme of the main story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Hermia remains constant in her affections and is prepared to suffer the extreme penalty of law for the sake of her love. Helena, deserted by Demetrius remains true to him, and is rewarded in the end for her constancy. The course of true love which was rough earlier runs smoothly in the end.

#### Parody of the main in the interlude

The theme of romantic love is parodied in the Interlude. Pyramus and Thisbe love each other, but the wall divides them: they, however, manage to converse, sign and even kiss through a chink in the wall. They also, like Lysander and Hermia, make an appointment to meet at night, but instead of the fairies, a lion waits for them and under a fatal mistake the ill-started lovers commit suicide. The story is the most tragic one, but the manner in which it is treated, moves only laughter. The Interlude is, thus, a burlesque presentment of the theme of romantic love.

#### Blind infatuation of Titania and Bottom

The infatuation of the fairy queen for the ass-headed Bottom illustrates in an interesting manner how romantic love may lead to most ludicrous absurdities. Here,

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however, we see the effect of Oberon's magic juice of a unique flower which maidens call 'Love-in-Idleness.'.

Titania, with her eyes anointed with love-juice, is made to dot upon the translated Bottom. But the episode represents symbolically the folly of blind infatuation. Love is blind; it may see in the ass-headed Bottom the grace of Apollo, just as it sees Helen's beauty in the brow of Egypt; but then it is grotesque infatuation and becomes a source of fun as in this Titania-Bottom episode.

### **Theseus and Hippolyta—Romance passion turns into mature love**

Now in human life, romantic love-making is only a passing phase. The fever and madness of fancied love pass off and the lovers accept the obligations and responsibilities of real life. This is shown in the story of Theseus and Hippolyta. Theseus has had his wilder days; he had his affairs with Perigour, Aegles, Ariadne and Antiopa. But the fever has worked itself out of his blood. Nevertheless, his conquest of Hippolyta's heart is a romance in itself; he wounded her with his sword and won her love through her injuries. But now he (Theseus) has laid aside romantic extravagance; the lover is a mad man in his eyes now – of imagination all compact. 'He stands forth as the law abiding king, no less than the still and tender husband'. Thus, the story of Theseus and Hippolyta not only holds together the plot but provides us with the key to the real significant of the comedy. It shows that romantic love is only incidental and a part of life – and should give place to its larger interests and responsibilities.

### **Sober love of Theseus and Hippolyta**

The play, written for a marriage, is naturally, concerned with love. Theseus and Hippolyta represent the sober love for middle age with a touch of passion they have no difficulties, no trouble. The tragedies of love, except those arising from jealousy, belong for the most part, to youth and the beginning of old age. In middle age the great outside interests of the world modify into a quiet and sober passion. Theseus turns at once from Hippolyta to the business of the state. Hippolyta can philosophize with ease the vagaries of love. And both, not caring for the loveliness of one another which youthful love desires, are delighted with the pleasures of the chase. They rise early in the morning to follow the hounds. Their talk is not of love, but of by-gone hunting, of their dogs, their breed and their musical cry.

### **Cupid a Cruel Capricious God to young lovers**

With the young lovers, it is different. Cupid is a cruel capricious god to them. Even Puck disapproves of his conduct:

*Cupid is a knavish*

Thus to make poor females mad.

Lysander loves Hermia, and Demetrius Helena, but Demetrius forsakes Helena for Hermia, and hence are born jealousies, furies, quarrels, dissolutions of friendship, death or single life in a convent to Hermia. Under love's cruel driving, Helena betrays Lysander and Hermia Demetrius and it is a trait to the honour of each of them. Under it the friendship of Helena and Hermia is dissolved, and Demetrius and Lysander each seek the other's death. Love sets them into madness.

Shakespeare turns to laugh at the folly of youthful love. He makes it depend on the juice of a flower (lover-in-idleness), as if it were only a chance, as if it lay only in the eye. Lysander hates the woman he loved, Demetrius loves the woman he hated, and Helena and Hermia are driven wild with pain. Titania herself is a victim and falls in love with Bottom, the rustic artisan playing Pyramus and crowned with an ass's head. All the lovers make a mockery of their passionate love. Finally the play, the rude mechanics play, is a love tragedy as deep as that of Romeo and Juliet. But it turns into laughter and makes the sorrows of love the tragical mirth of an hour. The note of this peculiar treatment of the subject of love is struck in the first Act of the play by Lysander's phrase –

The course of true love never did run smooth.

### Lyrical elements in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

It is not in the dramatic elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that we recognize the master hand, but rather in the rich and incomparable lyric poetry with which Shakespeare embroiders his dramatic canvas. It is idle to dwell upon the slightness of characterization for the poet's effort is not after characterization; and the poem as a whole is one of the tenderest, most original, and most perfect Shakespeare ever produced. It is Spenser's fairy poetry developed and condensed; it is Shelley's spirits *Poetry* anticipated by more than two centuries, and the airy dream innate with whimsical parody. —(Brandes)

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a poem – a dream, rather than a play. It is a fairy poem – one of the loveliest ever conceived by Human brain. Allan Poe once said, when I am asked for a definition of poetry, 'I think of Titania and Oberon of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The fairy king and queen with their attendants, dancing and playing upon banks of flowers in silvery moonlight, open before us wonderful vistas of romance and beauty. And then there are Puck and Peaseblossom, Cobweb and Mustardseed; Pygmeis, who hunt the worms in a rose-bud, tease bats, chase spiders, and laud it over nightingales, twilight moonlight, dew and spring – perfumes are the elements of these tender spirits. They assist Nature in embroidering her carpet with green leaves, many coloured flowers and dazzling insects. The play, where each creature moves and acts, is more a poem than a drama; it is an elfin play, a fairy carnival of inimitable mirth and melody, steeped in a midsummer atmosphere.'

To read this play is like wandering in a grove by moonlight: its descriptions breathe a sweetness like the odours of a violet-red.

The world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a wonder-land of beauty and romance. Here are banks –

..... where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quit over canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

The woodlands are carpeted with thick primrose beds and the fields are aglow with the dewdrop's liquid pearl. Every wood is decked with the very spring of romance where lovers meet and whisper to each other the secret of their souls.

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Such a lovely land can well be the haunt of fairies, who flit about in the moonlight and enter for a time into the human world, straightening out things that had gone awry. Here in the play, we have a feast of the mind in the beautiful play of fancy. 'We have here no pathos. The hurricane of passion does not as yet sweet through Shakespeare's work. No; it is only the romantic and imaginative side of love that is here displayed.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a lyrical fantasy replete with the loveliest poetry and romance.

### 2.6.3 Union of the Classical, Romantic and Realistic Elements

Shakespeare made a plentiful use of the Supernatural in his dramas because his audiences demanded it. The people of the Elizabethan age were inclined to superstition, and widely believed in various kinds of supernatural manifestations. They believed in ghosts and witches and Shakespeare gives them ghosts and witches in his tragedies. They believed in the mischievous pranks of the fairies. Shakespeare gave them fairies and spirits in his comedies. He was of course born in their age, but probably with growing age and wisdom he rose above crude superstitious beliefs. Besides, he had an enquiring mind and possessed that gift of penetrating which could see beyond finite forms:

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,*

*Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

At any rate, whatever his personal belief might be, he gave his audience what they wanted. The supernatural in Shakespeare is brought into harmony with the theme of the play and is an organic part of it. The ghost in the *Hamlet* is an essential part of the machinery of the play. It is the revelation of the ghost that sets in motion the process of the tragedy. The witches in *Macbeth* are material to the plot – in fact; they provide the motive power of the drama. The fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are an essential part of the plot, for it is the fairies that resolve the love-tangle in the main story. The plays that deal prominently with the supernatural entities are *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594), *Hamlet* (1601), *Macbeth* (1606) and *The Tempest* (1611). 'In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the fairies are handled in the gay, buoyant, irrepressible spirit of youth. *Hamlet* shows a grave and serious attitude towards the Supernatural. *Macbeth* reveals the darkest and the most pessimistic phases of Shakespeare's life. In *The Tempest*, the last play where Shakespeare uses the Supernatural, he emerges from doubt, fear, and gloom which had burdened him, and returns to the freedom and happiness of his youthful fairy fantasy.'

#### The supernatural element in the play

The Supernatural in Shakespeare's dramas is not a mere spectacular device. It is an essential part of the plot and is fraught with a deep underlying significance. In a joyful comedy like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the supernatural represents the very quintessence of joy, and beauty in nature is called up by the very names of Oberon and Titania, and all is playful, wanton and merry, by the name of Puck, otherwise known as Robin Goodfellow. Here in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,



we are not placed with the terribly forms of the supernatural as in *Macbeth* nor with the unseen forces of Nature under the control and guidance of man, as in *The Tempest* but with gay beautiful fairies who play innocent tricks on mortals, and whose life is a continuous whirl of joy and merriment, music and dance.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was most probably written to be performed at a wedding. In Shakespeare's time fairies were generally associated with marriage. In Elizabethan poetry, there are constant references to fairies in connection with wedding: naturally therefore Shakespeare, writing a wedding-play, would bring in fairies. But they are not introduced merely for the sake of effect. They are essential to the plot of the drama. The fairies are the centre of the drama; the human characters are just the sport of their whims and fancies. The fairy king means well when he orders his attendant spirit Puck to reward the constancy of Helena by making Demetrius love her by the power of love-juice. But Puck creates confusion by his mistake; and this mistake gives rise to the funny episode in the play. In the end, however, through Oberon's good officers, all turns out well, the love-tangle is resolved and the three couples of lovers march happily towards Athens to be united formally by nuptial knots.

### **Pucks the mischievous spirit**

Though the lover-couples in the play are subjected to temporary vexation by the mischievous Puck, their affairs are bought to happy termination by the helpful intervention of the fairies. The fairies, thus, are essentially good, though they love fun and mischief. They are good, not because they have any moral sense but because they hate ugliness and evil is ugly. Puck represents the characteristic attributes of the fairy people. Though he is called (Robin) Good-fellow his power and aptitudes for mischief are quiet unchecked by any kind of fellow-feeling or sympathy; to tease and vex poor human sufferers and then to think 'what fools these mortals be' is nothing but fun to him. The wayward follies and the perplexities of the lovers are pure sport to him. And is it his love of fun that leads him to put the ass's head on the shoulders of Bottom. The face to the translated Bottom scares away all his fellows. All this is exceedingly funny, and it is mischievous Puck, who has provided this dish of fun to us.

Thus, the fairies occupy a large portion in the actual plot of the play. On the one hand, they make the lovers happy by their intervention; and on the other, they make fun funnier by making an ass of Bottom. Apart from the part they play in the plot of the drama, they give a unique character and colouring to the whole piece. 'The whole play' says Hudson 'is indeed a sort of ideal dream and it is from the fairy personages that its characters mainly proceed.' The confusion and strange happenings that occur in the play are conceivable only in a world where the fairies preside. And it is to give the fairies full scope that the dramatist quickly shifts the scene of action from the city of Athens to the magic woodland.

*Where the wild thyme blows.*

*Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows.*

*Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine.*

*With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.*

*William Shakespeare*

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The very spirit of woodland enters into the texture of the play. It is again the play of the moonlit night when the fairies appear and hold their dance in the village green. Here we have all the charm and magic of moonlight. There is a delicate spirit, a shimmer of fancy and elfin thought in the music and the charm of poetry Shakespeare puts into the speech of the fairies which seems made of silver of moonlight and to bring with it is the shadow of moonlight. (S.A. Brooke)

Thus, the introduction of the supernatural elements in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* not only produces fun and humour, but gives to the comedy all its charm and magic poetry.

### Check Your Progress

17. Write a brief note on Theseus, the central figure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
18. 'The kinder we,' says Theseus  
To give them thanks for nothing.  
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake.  
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect takes it in might not merit.'  
What do these lines say of Theseus's character?
19. What is the main aim of the interlude in the play?
20. Who says the line 'The course of true love never did run smooth.' And when?

## 2.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stanford).
2. Anne Hathaway was Shakespeare's wife. She was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery.
3. The poem *Venus and Adonis* was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton.
4. 1594 to 1600 was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies written by Shakespeare.
5. Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare.
6. Shakespeare was greatly influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge and Peele.
7. In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who take the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought.

8. *The Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the play.
9. Aristotle defines tragedy as, 'the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion.'
10. The early tragedies of Shakespeare comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
11. Chaucer in his Monk's Tale suggests that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness.
12. In Shakespearean tragedy, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall.
13. Shylock hates Antonio because Antonio is a Christian. Also, Shylock has suffered racial insults from Antonio. The other reason of his dislike for Antonio is that Antonio has rescued many people from their debts to Shylock as Shylock was a usurer who mercilessly exploits his victims.
14. Jessica is the only daughter of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. She eloped with Lorenzo, a penniless Christian, taking with her Shylock's ducats and jewels.
15. A classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Its models are the classical dramatists like Plautus, Terence, and Aristophanes. It primarily deals with realism and also with the everyday familiar life of ordinary people.
16. The Merchant of Venice is not a pure comedy, but is a tragi-comedy, that is a play with double-ending — happy for the romantic couples, but tragic for Shylock. The general atmosphere is more tense, serious and tragic than in other comedies. However, the play in its total effect is a comedy which provides amusement.
17. The central figure of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is Theseus, the Duke of Athens. He reminds us of Henry V. He is Shakespeare's earlier conception of his ideal king. He is quite a magnificent and impressive personality. He shapes the destiny of the people of his State. His utterance is the rich-toned speech of one who is master of events.
18. The passage in question shows the good manners of a gentleman. Theseus is much more courteous and patient than his wife. Despite the play staged by poor artisans, who have hardly any knowledge of dramatic art and stagecraft, being crude and worthless, he never utters a word of disagreement and thanks the players at the end who feel highly delighted to think that they pleased their Duke.

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19. The theme of romantic love is parodied in the Interlude. Pyramus and Thisbe love each other, but the wall divides them: they, however, manage to converse, sign and even kiss through a crack in the wall. They also, like Lysander and Hermia, make an appointment to meet at night, but instead of the fairies, a lion waits for them and under a fatal mistake the ill-started lovers commit suicide. The story is the most tragic one, but the manner in which it is treated, moves only laughter. The Interlude is, thus, a burlesque presentment of the theme of romantic love.
20. The line is stated by Lysander in the first act of the play.

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## 2.8 SUMMARY

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- William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience. There is not much information available.
- William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession.
- Documents suggest that in 1556, John Shakespeare bought the house which is situated in Henley Street, that which we identify today as the birthplace of Shakespeare.
- We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook.
- During Shakespeare's younger years, travelling groups of professional actors visited Stratford. It is possible that these performers were responsible for making Shakespeare interested in the stage.
- It is understood that Shakespeare remained in London for close to 20 years after this period. He worked hard and produced a few plays every year which helped them grow both in popularity as well as in wealth.
- Anne Hathaway, the widow of Shakespeare, died in the year 1623. She was buried beside him in Holy Trinity Church. It is believed that the family line of William Shakespeare came to an end after the death of his granddaughter in the year 1670.
- The audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays during the Elizabethan era was of an interesting mix. They were usually identified as both vulgar and refined.
- During the Elizabethan era theatre functioned as a medium of public amusement. That is why it instantly became popular. The first theater of London was created when Shakespeare was around a twelve years old boy.

- Under Elizabethan England the players were not allowed to perform political and religious subjects. There are documents suggesting that influential people from the country complaining about the growing number of actors and stage shows that were being performed.
- It is believed that sometimes the young noble man who came to watch the performance sat on the stage itself. After the first Globe Theatre was burnt down in the year 1613 it was rebuilt by King James with help of money from a nobleman.
- The Elizabethan theatre usually comprised of a large wooden platform which was used as a stage. It is believed that this platform was not permanent and could be moved from one place to another. The building usually had no roof.
- From today's perspective, we might feel that the Elizabethan audience probably consisted of mostly well off people. But that was not the case. Majority of the Elizabethan audience were common people even though a healthy number of rich people were found in the spectator group.
- Aristotle's understanding of comedy as discussed above is undoubtedly short and appears to be only something mentioned in passing. Most of the major critics from the antiquity have spent their energy in trying to study tragedy.
- Shakespeare never portrayed ugly or ridiculous as the major plot of his comedy. He denounced the classical parameters of comedy and introduced new elements. Both Moliere and Ben Johnson incorporated folly into their comedy.
- One of the most distinct features of Shakespeare's comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing.
- Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative. *Twelfth Night* had Viola disguised as Cesario, had Olivia falling for her which creates ripples of confusion.
- The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*.
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other.
- Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author. By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make-believe where logic can be tweaked based on the requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance to the audience.

William Shakespeare

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- If we compare the heroine from the tragedies with the heroines of the comedies, we can get to know that the female protagonist of the comedies is more powerful, enterprising and mature.
- Aristotle defines tragedy as, ‘the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion.’
- The early tragedies would comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. After the publication of Seneca’s *Ten Tragedies* in the year 1581, it greatly influenced playwrights of the Elizabethan period.
- We cannot deny that in certain aspects, Shakespeare’s tragedies resemble Greek tragedies. Aristotle in his *Poetics* talks about certain characteristics that a good tragic hero should possess.
- In Shakespeare, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom. Each of the tragedies is actually a sequence of errors which finally culminates into something extremely tragic.
- A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflicts. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says no conflict no drama— we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare.
- Antonio, a wealthy and respected merchant of Venice, is sad without knowing why. Among his friends is a young man named Bassanio who owes him a good deal of money.
- Antonio and Shylock personally dislike each other. Shylock hates Antonio because (a) he is a Christian, (b) Shylock has suffered racial insults from him and (c) the merchant, unlike Shylock, lends money free of interest, thus undercutting the Jew’s business.
- In the meantime, Portia, at Belmont, discusses with her maid Nerissa, the plight she is in. Portia’s future is to be determined by a chance choice. Under the terms of her father’s will, whoever chooses the correct casket from a choice of three caskets, wins her hand in marriage.
- A comedy is generally defined as a play which has a happy ending and which aims at entertaining its audience by providing laughter. A comedy has other aims also. It aims at correcting human follies and at reforming human society.
- A romantic comedy is a play in which the romantic elements are mingled with comic elements. While the romantic elements delight, thrill, and enchant us, the comic elements make us laugh.
- Shakespeare was careful in the selection of his titles. He named his tragedies and history plays after the central figures who appear strong and powerful. In comedies, however, he named his plays in a rather fanciful manner or after a character who is passive and weak.

- Antonio's friendship and love for Bassanio are all beyond measure. He borrows money from Shylock to enable Bassanio to woo Portia. Eventually, Antonio becomes the victim of Shylock's hatred and revenge.
- Theoretically, Antonio is the central character of the play because all the action is directly or indirectly centred around him. He is the main actor in the bond story which unifies all the elements in the play.
- Bassanio is a young and the most attractive man in the play. He is fond of splendid living; and in the beginning of the play he strikes us as being a spendthrift. He hopes to restore his fortunes by marrying a rich heiress.
- Portia is the romantic heroine of the play and she is presented on the stage with beauty and intelligence. She is the lady of Belmont, richly left by her father. Bassanio describes her to Antonio as a lady as rare and unattainable as the Golden Fleece.
- Shylock is an important and dynamic character who arouses interest and a variety of conflicting criticisms. Shakespeare meant him to be humiliated and defeated. In order to achieve this objective it was necessary first to arouse interest in him before making it appear that his punishment was well-deserved.
- Nerissa is a foil to Portia, just as Gratiano is to Bassanio. Though she is Portia's lady-in-waiting, she is more like a confidential companion. She assists her mistress in all her plans. Like her mistress, she is young and possesses great common sense.
- Jessica, the only daughter of Shylock, plays an important role in the play. She links Shylock's world with that of Venice; and Venice with Belmont. For Lorenzo, Jessica is 'wise, fair, and true'.
- *The Merchant of Venice* is a romantic comedy; and consequently, has love as one of its main themes. All drama depends upon some conflict. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the conflict is between the love on the one hand and some barrier to its fulfillment on the other.
- The action in the play takes place abroad in Venice or in Belmont. The remoteness of these places gives the play a romantic colouring. While Venice is certainly a reality, existing on the world map, Belmont is entirely a creation of Shakespeare's mind.
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first printed in 1600. One edition was published by Fisher and the other by Roberts. The play was quite a good success.
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a considerable resemblance to a Mosque and again it gives prominence to the theme of marriage.
- In the opening scene preparations are being made for the marriage of Theseus Duke of Athens, with Amazonian queen, Hippolyta, to be solemnized four days later. Egeus, an Athenian citizen, enters to make a complaint against his daughter, Hermia, who had been betrothed to Demetrius, but whose heart has been won by Lysander.

## NOTES

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- The central figure of the play is Theseus, the Duke of Athens. He reminds us of Henry V. He is Shakespeare's earlier conception of his ideal king. He is quite a magnificent and impressive personality.
- Lysander is a sincere lover and 'a worthy gentleman' of good fortune who values the love of Hermia above his rank and wealth. He is prepared to sacrifice his wealth and position for the sake of love.
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a fairy play in which all sorts of fantastic things happen. Fairies come and go; lovers now love one woman and then another, a man is translated into an ass-head and is loved by the queen of the fairies.
- It is not in the dramatic elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that we recognize the master hand, but rather in the rich and incomparable lyric poetry with which Shakespeare embroiders his dramatic canvas.
- Shakespeare made a plentiful use of the Supernatural in his dramas because his audiences demanded it. The people of the Elizabethan age were inclined to superstition, and widely believed in various kinds of supernatural manifestations.

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## 2.9 KEY TERMS

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- **Comedy:** A comedy is generally defined as a play which has a happy ending and which aims at entertaining its audience by providing laughter.
- **Blank verse:** It is a verse without rhyme, especially that which uses iambic pentameters.
- **Cross-dressing:** It is the practice of wearing clothes usually worn by a person of the opposite sex.
- **Lyric poetry:** It is a style of poetry that expresses intense personal emotion in a manner suggestive of a song.
- **Puritan:** It refers to a member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship.
- **Friar:** It refers to a member of any of certain religious orders of men, especially the four mendicant orders (Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans).
- **Amphitheater:** It is (especially in Greek and Roman architecture) an open circular or oval building with a central space surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators, for the presentation of dramatic or sporting events.



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## 2.10 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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William Shakespeare

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Prepare a short biographical sketch of William Shakespeare.
2. How were historical and political elements incorporated in the play? What was their significance?
3. What led to the close of theatre? What threatened its popularity during the Elizabethan era?
4. Write a character analysis of Shylock as we see him in the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
5. Do you think Portia is the main protagonist of the play *The Merchant of Venice*? Why do you think so? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Who do you think is the Merchant of Venice in the play *The Merchant of Venice*? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Write short notes on the following:
  - (a) Shylock
  - (b) Jessica
  - (c) Trial Scene
  - (d) Mercy as a theme
  - (e) Cross-dressing
8. Give a brief summary of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
9. What are the lyrical elements in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
10. Briefly mention the use of Supernatural element in the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically discuss *The Merchant of Venice* as a Romantic Comedy.
2. What is the significance of the casket episode in *The Merchant of Venice*?
3. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is Shylock justified in seeking revenge from Antonio?
4. Discuss Cross-dressing as a significant theme of the play *The Merchant of Venice*.
5. Critically comment on the title of *The Merchant of Venice*.
6. Justify the title of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
7. Critically analyse the treatment of love in the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### NOTES

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## 2.11 FURTHER READING

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### NOTES

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## UNIT 3 GOLDSMITH AND SHERIDAN

### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 About the Author: Oliver Goldsmith
- 3.3 *The Vicar of Wakefield*: Setting and Plot Construction
- 3.4 *The Vicar of Wakefield*: Summary and Critical Analysis
- 3.5 Recurrent Themes in *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- 3.6 Characterisation in *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- 3.7 About the Author: Richard Sheridan
- 3.8 R. B. Sheridan and Sentimental Comedy
- 3.9 *The Rivals* and Various Aspects of Comedy
- 3.10 *The Rivals* as a Picture of Contemporary Society
- 3.11 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.12 Summary
- 3.13 Key Terms
- 3.14 Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.15 Further Reading

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will discuss Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals*.

Oliver Goldsmith was an Irish playwright, poet and novelist. *The Vicar of Wakefield* was published in 1766. The novel delineates the story of the Primrose family. The novel is reckoned as an outstanding example of the sentimental novel which became popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and laid emphasis on the notions of sentiments and sensibility.

Richard Sheridan was an Irish playwright and writer like Goldsmith. *The Rivals* highlighted the Comedy of Manners and it outlines the spirit of the anti-sentimental comedy.

### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Prepare a brief biographical sketch of Oliver Goldsmith
- List the major works of Richard Sheridan
- Critically analyse the play *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- Evaluate *The Rivals* as a sentimental comedy

## 3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: OLIVER GOLDSMITH

### NOTES

*Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain,  
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;  
Teach him, that states of native strength possest,  
Tho' very poor, may still be very blest;*

*(The Deserted Village, Lines 423-426)*

The author of utter simplicity in style, good humour and satirical observation with native and rural touch, rendering to whatever rhythm of written art form that he attempted, and in which he promptly excelled, Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) was miles adrift from the Augustan Age's neoclassical trend of writing and focus. He was a noted novelist, playwright, poet, essayist and prose writer of the Augustan Age of English letters, who hailed from Ireland. It cannot be affirmed if Goldsmith was born on a particular date or year, however, 1728 or 1730 is assigned as the year of his birth. Born to an Irish Anglican curate who served the parish of Forgnay, with background of clergy and master grandfather, Goldsmith received his education in Dublin. He later fixed his attention to music, study of medicine at the University of Edinburgh (1752-55), and foreign tours to Italy, France and Switzerland. He decided to settle in the English capital in 1756. Eighteenth-century London was a hub of fashion and intellectuals in which Goldsmith made a place for himself worthy of respect.

London did not prove to be a facilitating platform for Goldsmith in the initial stages. He tried his hand at various vocations, but his perpetual gambling and squandering resulted in debts that obliged Goldsmith to slog as a literary hack for Grub Street. Later on he was associated with Dr. Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke and others that helped his career. He also became a founder-member of The Club: a renowned club of contemporary academicians, scholars, intellectuals, scientists and great artists. His short life was a rare combination of talent and dissolution where at points he produced quality literature, and at others he was often a staunch wastrel. This compelled Horace Walpole to adorn Goldsmith with the epithet 'inspired idiot.' Oliver Goldsmith gave himself a pseudonym James Willington for his translation of the autobiography of *Jean Marteilhe*.

Goldsmith was short and stout, blessed with wit, very simple-natured and devoid of a single streak of cunningness. If he had gambled in his life, he also never saved a penny that caused a sufferer a pretty smile. Hence, his financial stability was always in doubt. In short, his naiveté, love for children and goodness of heart were what God had gifted him. Dr. Johnson's patronage fruited Goldsmith's fame as a playwright and literary artist. His contemporaries held him as easily envious, soft-natured man with a lack of personal discipline, who had plans of immigrating to America. Fate prevented his migration. It was during this time Goldsmith was engaged at Thornhill Grammar School, which overtones biographical notes in the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Goldsmith had a large circle of intellectual men of letters, eminent scholars, elites, philosophers, painters, scientists who were fond

of him like the scientist Reverend John Mitchell. Thomas De Quincey aptly portrayed him as: ‘All the motion of Goldsmith’s nature moved in the direction of the true, the natural, the sweet, the gentle.’

Leaning on autobiographical roots, his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* which was completed in 1762, presents the picture of a rural life enthralling in the dews of sentimentalism, idealistic views, moralising and melodramatic occurrences trimmed with soft humour, pathos, vivacious gaiety and subtle irony. When Laurence Sterne’s novel *Life of Tristram Shandy*, (1759) attained fame, Goldsmith still struggling with his stature as a writer, authored *The Vicar of Wakefield* following Sterne as his model and achieved greater success.

He believed in heterodox religious principles, ‘as I take my shoes from the shoemaker, and my coat from the taylor, so I take my religion from the priest.’ His faith was dauntingly firm which made Thomas Hurst describe Goldsmith as a man who ‘recognised with joy the existence and perfections of a Deity’. For the Christian revelation also, he was always understood to have a profound respect knowing that it was the source of our best hopes and noblest expectations. The benevolent literary genius who spent his hard earned savings on the needy or his own excesses, through his characterization and background presented his interest in countryside and deep study of human nature. But his works are never as deep as those of the novelist Thomas Hardy. His literary productions are unlike his age and men of letters because Goldsmith voiced human sentiments and laughed at concurrent trends of the Augustan Age, known for its neoclassical precision and inflexibility of standards.

Oliver Goldsmith met with his demise prematurely at the age of forty-six [or forty-four] in 1774 and was buried in London. The monument at his death is inscribed by Dr. Samuel Johnson.

### Important Works

- Universal Dictionary (which remained unpublished)
- *The Hermit* (1765)
- *The Deserted Village* (1770)
- *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774)
- *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765)
- *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766)
- *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773)
- *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759)
- *The Citizens of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher* (1762)

### Check Your Progress

1. Mention the significant works of Oliver Goldsmith.
2. Why did Horace Walpole label Goldsmith an ‘inspired idiot’?

### NOTES

### 3.3 THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD: SETTING AND PLOT CONSTRUCTION

#### NOTES

*The Vicar of Wakefield*, published in 1766, written about 1761 or 1762, has a native English setting of two village parishes: the first one is named Wakefield, and the other is never mentioned, save hinting at a dominant family name: Thornhill. This reveals that the second village parish where most of the action of the novel takes place might be Thornhill. The novel is also subtitled 'A Tale, Supposed to be written by Himself.' It was published in two volumes. The novel is a first person narrative where the vicar, Dr. Charles Primrose is speaking about his family and difficult life conditions. Dr. Charles Primrose and his better-half, Mrs. Deborah Primrose, live in Wakefield with their six children- George, Olivia, Sophia, Moses, Dick and Bill. In the beginning of the novel, the hero, on the evening of his eldest son George's marriage with Miss Arabella Wilmot, the daughter of his fellow but elite and arrogant clergy Mr. Wilmot, loses his fortune and becomes bankrupt. As a result, the engagement is broken off as Mr. Wilmot does not want his daughter to marry a destitute. The vicar sends his son to find a job to London so that they can improve their life on his future success.

He gives priority to peaceful management of all troubles in life, and does not lose patience. Dr. Primrose settles on the farms of Squire Thornhill, a lewd, lusty man who is known for his promiscuity around the countryside. Dr. Primrose's family, which enjoyed wealth and space in life before their misfortune, has problems adjusting in that new atmosphere, which has no fashionable society like they enjoyed previously; however, they get to know two gentlemen: the Squire who is their landlord, and Mr. Burchell who is a poor man; and they happen to provide a new, agreeable circle to them beside their neighbours.

Incidentally, Sophia's life is saved by Mr. Burchell and attraction grows between them. Her father does not agree to their secret admiration as Mr. Burchell, although agreeable, is an indigent young man. Squire Thornhill has more sway on the vicar's family because he is rich despite being socially disregarded because of his characterlessness. Thornhill's advances to Olivia are entertained by the family for he is a man of well-cultivated manners and charming personality. Dr. Primrose's family, encouraged by their landlord, mixes up with his acquaintances to dignify their reputation, but they are treated in a condescending manner only resulting in their embarrassment.

In course of time, the vicar observes how the Squire has been taking advantage of their family, and has been only fooling them; but it only happens when Olivia elopes with him, like Wickham elopes with Lydia in *Pride and Prejudice*. However, there is a difference between the two comparisons as Wickham was set right by Mr. Darcy, and here, the Squire even though he is punished by his uncle at the end of the novel, does not change himself for his wife Olivia. Dr. Primrose goes after his daughter but he becomes sick on this job. Many incidents take place which render severe blows to his family and they only receive miseries, defamation and disrepute. But like a fairy-tale denouement, Mr.

Burchell unveils himself as their saviour from the entire sequence of vicissitudes that they face. He is discovered to be the hidden Sir William Thornhill, the Baronet.

The English village where the majority of the action is set reiterates Goldsmith's memories of his Irish home of childhood days in Lissoy. The hero of the novel is a virtuous man, who having left behind a lavish life and modern facilities in his previous job, appreciates his hard and close-to-nature life. But Squire Thornhill who helps him post-misfortune in the new settlement, is a man full of London's vices like excessive indulgence in pleasure, luxuries of rich life, elite society, lasciviousness, and so forth. The hero is punished unduly by his landlord and imprisoned; his daughters are abducted, and the eldest abused and left by him; and his son is also jailed by him in vengeance. The whole family is subjected to excessive mortification, loss of livelihood, health and fortune by his landlord. Suddenly, Mr. Burchell, their former associate who was looked down contemptuously by them and who happens to be the Baronet of the place, emerges as their protector, restoring them to happiness and prosperity.

The story is often held in esteem as Goldsmith's memoir represented in the first person but his experiences are shared by many characters here, not one. The novel encompasses multiple literary genres like fiction, poetry, prose, memoir, sermon, fable, letter and so forth. The novel is remembered for its complex plot, themes and incidents being one of the prominent literary works promoting sentimental fiction.

#### Check Your Progress

3. In which year was *The Vicar of Wakefield* published?
4. Why does Thornhill hold more sway on the vicars family?

### 3.4 THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD: SUMMARY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Let us now summarize and critically analyse the novel in detail.

#### Advertisement

The 'Advertisement' in the beginning of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is addressed to its readers. Oliver Goldsmith commences his much acclaimed fiction, *The Vicar of Wakefield* with a clarification which is rather philosophical but true to realism: 'There are an hundred faults in this Thing, and an hundred things might be said to prove them beauties. But it is needless. A book may be amusing with numerous errors, or it may be very dull without a single absurdity.' His literary manifesto as an advertisement of his oft-quoted novel is a strong platform of voicing ironically the textures and tapestries employed in this work of art. They counsel and impart the readers, the philosophy and style of Goldsmith himself.

Upon his word, his hero exhibits and embodies three most agreeable qualities of manhood, 'of a priest, an husbandman, and the father of a family.' The behaviour

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that the hero of this novel exudes is that of a mild man. Goldsmith, with a soft current of humour and irony, puts this epithet 'He is drawn as ready' to explain his inner qualities. The novelist wants to present a figure to the society which is ideal for him. His hero is warm-hearted, genteel, pleasure-loving, investing into business and shares, allowing freedom to his daughters, gambling, drinking, truthful, pious, righteous, honest, and so on. In the first half of the novel, he adorns a careless behaviour of a family yes-man; in the second, having tragedy befallen him, he becomes a pure Christian who never deviates into any other thing but uprightness.

He is a type Goldsmith considered as virtuous enough to command life in every given challenge, circumstance and manner. After describing his hero's goodness, Goldsmith turns to focus on his audience, age and state of a literary artist: 'In this age of opulence and refinement whom can such a character please? Such as are fond of high life, will turn with disdain from the simplicity of his country fire-side.' Goldsmith's digressions during his college and university days, his own dissipating lifestyle, his vision and outlook towards life, his principles of simplicity, humanity, dissoluteness embedded in his nature, disagreement with Augustan traits, his love for rural and native life, are apparent in his literary productions which feature and invoke these qualities, or even his shortcomings. They either flourish and serve in his dramatic personae, or engage his background.

Goldsmith's work emits shades of his personal philosophy and attitude towards his age. And that verges on the lightness of life, which he seemed to admire in the countryside, and less complex characters, in contrast to the pomp and polish of his age. But some of his characters are too complex. On the other hand, when Goldsmith created such characters like his hero in the novel, he wants to show the world the small foibles and absurdities which are darker sides of our lives. However, he does it in a humorous vein and an undercurrent of subtle irony dabbles over his pages by which he satirises English society of the time: 'Such as mistake ribaldry for humour, will find no wit in his harmless conversation; and such as have been taught to deride religion, will laugh at one whose chief stores of comfort are drawn from futurity.'

### Chapters 1 to 6

*Sperate miseri, cavete faelices* is the Latin phrase tagged on the top of the novel. It means 'Let the wretched live in hope and the happy be on their guard'. Oliver Goldsmith begins his story with the nature and description of the protagonist's family: the Vicar of Wakefield. The author presents oneness of views and similarities of characters among them. His hero is of virtuous character whose responsibility as a father sometimes overlaps his curacy and priesthood. They enjoyed an elite friend-circle with wine and visitors, but also spent time helping the needy. The hero's family condescended their poor relatives. His sons were hard and active, and his daughters, beautiful and blooming. He had six children whom he reckoned as 'very valuable present made' to his 'country, and consequently looked upon it as my debtor.'

The second chapter opens up a storm of ill fate. There are certain parts in the vicar's behaviour like his light-heartedness, tolerance to everything, humaneness



and politeness which remind us of the author himself. There are often some manifestations which are related to Augustan priesthood, 'it was unlawful for a priest of the church of England, after the death of his first wife, to take a second, or to express it in one word, I valued myself upon being a strict monogamist.' Even with his sons and daughters, the protagonist's affection sided with the favourable no matter what. This is reflected in George's love affair with Arabella Wilmot who was inheriting a large fortune by her clergy father. Mr. Wilmot does not object to this match as he knew that George's father was a rich cleric and lot of properties would be transferred to his son-in-law in the future. Here, Goldsmith has subtly conveyed that clergies of the Augustan parishes were rather interested in keeping sources by which they could ensure their wealth and live a gay life. The lifestyle of the vicar often verges on exposing reality of the holy men of England during Goldsmith's days in a mild manner.

The vicar was fond of inviting people, enjoying music with family and guests, cards, gambling and ale. Mr. Wilmot's character is contrasted with the vicar by Goldsmith. Although they were going to be relatives, the former disagreed to all that the latter said or proposed. While these two were in dispute, the vicar got the news that his wealth which he had invested in the town through a merchant was lost. The London merchant had announced his bankruptcy. The vicar being honest, admitted the truth of his situation to the bride's family. After the vicar's announcement, Mr. Wilmot does not show any interest in the match.

In the next chapter, the vicar's efforts to rescue his wealth goes in vain and he is forced to employ himself on fifteen pounds a year in a remote parish where he also had prospects of raising his income by managing farms of a certain Squire Thornhill, a rich and playboy kind of person: 'scarce a farmer's daughter within ten miles round but what had found him successful and faithless.' They are also introduced to Mr. Burchell, a poor but well-mannered gentleman (but a money-borrower) who accompanied them to their new parish. The vicar's daughters become happy to see a future match in the Squire, even so the vicar seemed to dislike and scorn him.

While his family was riding together to his new home, Mr. Burchell explains to them what kind of a man Sir William Thornhill is and during this Sophia falls in a stream and is saved by Burchell. The entire Primrose family are indebted to the young improvident man for his kindness. The story is navigating the principle of simplicity of life, but wealth and comforts of life are deemed greater than human qualities by the protagonist by now.

Now, in the fourth the narrator, the vicar himself, describes the village where fate led his family. Goldsmith's philosophy of life is well-reflected in Vicar's description of the village here: 'Remote from the polite, they still retained the primaeval simplicity of manners, and frugal by habit, they scarce knew that temperance was a virtue.' It was a kind of paradise where people 'wrought with cheerfulness on days of labour; but observed festivals as intervals of idleness and pleasure.' Their small abode was fixed in the midst of beautiful panorama that mother Nature graced. He had to look after twenty acres of 'excellent land' as his farm. The vicar bred good manners in his children and tried to remind them that

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family discipline was foremost of importance to him expecting them to carry his legacy of manners forward.

The fashionable daughters of Primrose family had not forgotten their former style, arrogance and indulgence to keep themselves in a beautiful way which gave their parents a strong sense of pride. Their life begins again with a smooth flow, except the realisation of their changed circumstances and penury.

Chapter 5 introduces us to the character of Thornhill. He comes visiting the vicar's family, after which there grows familiarity between him and Charles's family members, especially his daughters. Mrs. Primrose looks forward to gain the power of happiness from such a high association, and encourages his visits, and so does Olivia, who harbours private affection for him. The vicar is not happy with the interest that Thornhill shows his daughters, but his wife changes his mind. By the end of this chapter, they receive news from the Squire that he would come to dine with them in a few days. The news brings a wave of happiness to the entire household. But the closing lines of this chapter are harbinger for future which the vicar was suspicious of.

The next chapter is focussed on Mr. Burchell's visit to the household. Charles observes Burchell's interest in Sophia, however, the vicar is against this. When Burchell leaves them, the family discusses how Burchell is a complete waste, and no fruitful gain can be achieved out of him. As the discussion continues, the vicar acknowledges Sophia's opinion on not to blame Burchell given her belief that good people should be respected no matter their foolish past. The chapter ends with the family expecting the Squire to call on them.

**Chapters 7 to 12**

Olivia is the centre of interest for Squire Thornhill's proposed visit and familiarity. She also admires the man and his humour. His presence in the family had ushered a kind of stir which Charles is not been able to subside or control, 'Indeed, pappia...she does not: I have read a great deal of controversy. I have read the disputes between Thwackum and Square; the controversy between Robinson Crusoe and Friday the savage, and I am now employed in reading the controversy in Religious courtship...'. This chapter ends with a strong suggestion of the future that awaits Olivia.

In the eighth chapter, Goldsmith paints Burchell as a sharp contrast to the Squire, 'It is true his labour more than requited his entertainment; for he wrought among us with vigour, and either in the meadow or at the hay-rick put himself foremost. Besides, he had always something amusing to say that lessened our toil, and was at once so out of the way, and yet so sensible, that I loved, laughed at, and pitied him. My only dislike arose from an attachment he discovered to my daughter: he would, in a jesting manner, call her his little mistress, and when he bought each of the girls a set of ribbands, hers was the finest.' The father was protective of his daughter because Burchell had squandered his belongings.

Goldsmith's characters in the vicar's family often mention the names of famous literary writers and poets such as Dryden, Gay, etc. Mr. Burchell at one

occasion sings a ballad which he claims is free of defects he finds in other poets. It impresses Sophia, but suddenly they hear a gunshot. The gunshot was aimed at a blackbird by the Squire's chaplain who then apologises. He also informs that Squire has given a moonlight ball in honour of her young daughters and asks for Sophia's hand as his dance partner but she announces Mr. Burchell to be her partner. This astonishes the vicar as he does not expect his daughter to refuse a man of wealth and position for a man in want of all.

In the ninth chapter, the Squire, a lascivious man of ill manners, visits them with his men, and two ladies from London. The narrator gives his assessment of the guests and their behaviour which remind us of Austen's world where she throws ironical light upon such city-bred ladies and gentlemen who ooze pomp, and have a polluted life full of discontentment. In a discussion the two young Primrose ladies, Goldsmith informs his readers of the Squire's actual plans, 'And what pleasures do they not deserve to possess, who have so much in their power to bestow? As for my part, my fortune is pretty large, love, liberty and pleasure, are my maxims...' The tenant Charles Primrose objects to Thornhill's flirting and audacious approach towards Olivia reminding him that they respect honour greater than anything in the world.

The onset of the next day brings a 'gypsy' fortune-teller who portends that Olivia would be married to a Squire within a year, and Sophia would be the wife of a Lord after her elder sister's wedding. These apprise the readers about the novel's end when the girls' happy ending. The ladies from the Squire's side sent a note to Olivia and Sophia that they wished to be with them on the forthcoming Sunday congregation at the church. After the church, on his return, the Vicar meets his family and comes to know of the problems because of an imprudent decision to ride horses merely to ostentate false status and fan their former pride of being rich.

The twelfth chapter opens on the vicar's house where hustle and excitement are observed on the preferment of the Squire, and his town-bred women friends. In style, Goldsmith has chosen a bit of melodramatic tinge in his sequencing of incidents which steer the main action in the plot. Against the vicar's wish, as he seldom delighted in unnatural growth of anything, his family decides to send Moses to a village fair to sell their old colt, replacing him with a new horse to gain respect in the eyes of those who were rich. In between, the family received good news of commendation from the Squire through his butler. Meanwhile, Mr. Burchell visits them with gifts for their children. Deborah laughs at Moses' imprudence of spending money being so poor and tell Moses that bargain he received was a fraud.

### Chapters 13 to 18

The vicar Mr. Charles Primrose tells a moral fable to his family. The fable is symbolic of what the vicar's family was aspiring for: rich connections with the Squire and detesting the poor but good soul Mr. Burchell. The fable was about two friends: the giant and the dwarf who sought adventures in life. The story was intended for Dick and at its completion the vicar hears a verbal dispute between his dear wife and Mr. Burchell, who is against vicar's wife's decision of sending their daughters

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to visit London with women friends of Thornhill. Burchell perceived that he was openly hated by the Primroses and that he would make only one more visit to them as he knew that he was unwelcome there. All are happy except Sophia. And Burchell did not fit in their concepts of eligibility for their suitors who would give them high social rank with all the comforts of life. The discussion continues on their likely future link with Thornhill giving encouragement to their daughters for a lucrative and prosperous morrow.

The fourteenth chapter opens having a flutter of excitement where the young Primrose ladies are seen preparing for their London trip on which they might be invited by those two town-bred fashionable friends of the Squire. To meet the expenses of their styling and fineries, the vicar moved to the village fair to sell his one-eyed horse that was now almost useless to them. There are a number of biblical references made by Goldsmith to connote the vicar's situations in life. In the fair, buyers do not show inclination in purchasing his poor animal and thus, the vicar walks with his clergy friend to an alehouse for refreshment. Here, the vicar becomes the victim of fraud just like Moses. After he reaches home, he is informed that his daughters cannot go on their London trip and the family is in tears. Thornhill goes on to inform them that a suspicious person forced the London ladies to at once leave for London without vicar's daughters.

The fifteenth chapter opens on Charles's family who are busy searching for their enemy in the neighbourhood who are envious of Thornhill's attention towards Olivia. While playing outside, one of his younger sons finds a letter-case which divulges that Mr. Burchell was the man who was against them. All of them are shocked at the audacity, they plan to retaliate and give him a good lesson for his impudence and insincerity on his very next visit. And immediately upon such chance the family members take turn making fun of Mr. Burchell. And then the vicar shows them the letter that they have seen. The vicar accuses him of his baseness upon which Burchell retorts that he could equally hang them for opening his pocket-book. The vicar is shocked of his discourteous, insolent manner and proclaims, 'Ungrateful wretch, begone, and no longer pollute my dwelling with thy baseness. Begone, and never let me see thee again: go from my doors, and the only punishment I wish thee is an alarmed conscience, which will be a sufficient tormentor!' They find it astonishing that Burchell smiles as he collects his pocket-book before quitting their house for good. They are amazed to witness his pride even though he was a beggar.

In the sixteenth chapter, the narrator says that Mr. Thornhill became a regular presence at vicar's house after Burchell's final exit. The Squire visited them only when the men were out to the field and the ladies were in. The vicar's wife entreated him in many ways and tried to tempt, persuade him for her eldest daughter to which he never gave any inclination. The shrewd Squire did not leave a single way of flirting with Olivia which was all the more motivated by her family. While Squire Thornhill was their uninterrupted guest, the vicar's family was enthralled between mortification and vanity, honour and suspicion, scandal and gratification. Through the actions of the chapter, the author skillfully plaits many themes together, the chief of which is that for a woman the pursuance of rich suitors for the prospect of

matrimony is the most important task in life. In fact, matrimony and happiness in marriage are the foundation of the story here.

The seventeenth chapter unfolds the main action or problem which will lead to the resolution of the novel. The vicar and his family is happy with the prospective wedding of the Squire and their daughter Olivia. When the 'intended nuptials' was only four days away, the poor vicar's family discusses around the fireplace how that connection would raise their level of support to ease their lives. Bill sings an elegiac song taught to him by Mr. Williams: 'An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog.' After the song comes to an end, Dick came running in the midst of their joy to inform that Livy, his sister, has left them forever with two gentlemen who came in a post-chaise and one of them persuaded her to elope and kissed her. The vicar's family had been facing various blows of fate, of which this was the strongest. The villain had been calling her his 'angel' and Olivia was crying that she should not breach her father. The parents and family wailed in anger, suspicion and helplessness of fate being severe on them. The news would sure become a forest's fire the following day, and they were supposed to suffer this infamous consequences in society.

The eighteenth chapter opens on similar morose, bleak and chill family atmosphere. Dr. Primrose knew very well that his young landlord Squire Thornhill had taken his daughter away. He started for Thornhill-Castle, but one of his neighbours communicated to him that his daughter was seen with Mr. Burchell in a post-chaise. Regardless he goes to the castle who denies a connection and appears ignorant of the truth. After this meeting, moves from place to place in an attempt to find his daughter and soon falls sick. He has to linger at an ale-house for three long weeks as a result.

On his way back, he meets the strolling theatrical company where his daughter was witnessed performing. The chapter as well as the novel contains many digressions like many here where the vicar evaluates the English dramatists as well as the style of picaresque too as is seen in the flight of the vicar in search of his daughter with a pistol. Thinking his Olivia would be there in the company or he might get some news regarding her, he travels with them until in fear of being recognised when he was obliged to find shelter in an ale-house. He meets a gentleman who mistakes him for the owner of that company.

### Chapters 19 to 24

The gentleman, who was well-educated and sober, takes the two invitees to his house nearby on foot which is one of the 'most magnificent mansions'. The strange gentleman introduces some intelligent ladies and guests to them with great knowledge with whom he sat to discuss politics and English governance with their guests. A knock appears to rouse them from their actual level to an understanding that all of them were only servants, and the master and his wife were at the door.

The master and the lady of the house entered followed by Miss Arabella Wilmot. This pleasant surprise took her to cling in Dr. Primrose's arms at once, as though she had found her lost father back. The old gentleman and his lady requested him to grace their abode for a few days. In the morning while Arabella chose to

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walk with him, she asked if he knew where George would have been. He denied having any knowledge about George after they left Wakefield. It is here, we come to know that the name of his previous village parish was Wakefield. The name of the current village is still not disclosed by the author. And he explains that for three years he had had no news from George; and being humbled by time and poverty. She cried hearing his details. At dinner, he meets with the manager of that company who gave them tickets of a play named 'Fair Penitent' praises the actor playing Horatio who he discovers is his son George.

When George sees his father and Miss Wilmot in the audience, he cannot overcome his flood of tears which interrupts his performance. The vicar was taken home by good Arabella and her uncle. After discovering George's fate, he gets cordially invited to the house by Mrs. Arnold.

In the twentieth chapter, Mrs. Arnold urges George to share his experiences as she already knew some of it from her niece Arabella before he left for London after their engagement broke. George goes on to narrate his story. The story of George's way through his poverty and struggle as a writer is somewhat the author's own tale at the Grub-street of London. The market demands from an author, the popular choice, the genius, the mediocre and die-hard efforts of an original mind in the vocation of writing.

When he was at the university, he was friends with Ned Thornhill who was vicar's landlord, and Lady Arnold's family friend whose visit was expected there. Ned appointed him as helper and entertainer. But a captain, efficiently talented in flattery which best pleased Ned Thornhill and whose sister was ill used by Ned, took George's place. When Ned Thornhill was leaving London, he recommended his friend to his uncle Sir William Thornhill, who though a gentleman of high rank posted under the government and very decent, sternly queried him what reward should he receive for serving his idle and spoilt nephew. William Thornhill left his mansion seeing a card which ended their communication and George did not receive any of his replies regarding employment or help.

In the next chapter, Thornhill's visit to the Arnolds discloses that he was courting Miss Arabella. Squire Thornhill secretly conveys to the vicar to keep Olivia's elopement hidden from Arabella or his son before proceeding to dance with Arabella; she, on the other hand, had certain reservations of feelings as she still hesitated to be with anyone else; and perhaps, was secretively attentive to George. As Arabella was kind to George during his stay, so was Thornhill. He, having paid a hundred pounds to be returned by Charles Primrose later, sent his son to fight in the royal army. The vicar felt that Miss Arabella loved George more than Thornhill. When George was gone, Dr. Primrose, the Reverend, also bids adieu to his hosts commencing passage for his home.

Dr. Primrose takes shelter at night at a country inn twenty miles off his abode where he sits drinking with its landlord discussing Squire Thornhill. He is told by this inn owner, Mr. Symmonds that Squire Thornhill was hated by all unlike his uncle. It is a habitual conduct of the Squire to allure and possess daughters of people; keep them for some weeks; and return or leave them after having destroyed their modesty. Mr. Symmonds's wife interrupted their conversation and

joined them in drink to inform them about a young woman who is lodged at their inn without payment. While she is shouting at her to leave their inn, her father recognises the wailings of his daughter Olivia.

Both father and daughter unite to cry together. She reveals that the villain, shameful man gave her private proposals from the first day of their meeting. The father suspected Mr. Burchell to be the culprit of this criminal activity against Livy, but she tells him that Mr. Burchell always tried to convince her that Squire Thornhill was a fallen man who was ensnaring her and nothing else. Squire Thornhill employed two abandoned women or whores of the town to trap Olivia but this artificer's plan was defeated by Mr. Burchell's letter. Olivia did not know by what power could Burchell drive away those women and silence the Squire for a while from seducing her further. Squire Thornhill got married to her in a private way by a popish priest but his own name was kept secret. The squire welcomed his daughter as his legal wife but she disclosed that there were several like her to whom he was married and then abandoned.

She was afraid to let her secret out; but her father, the vicar insists on exposing and punishing the squire. In the morning following her nuptials, she was introduced to two more women whom he married and set into prostitution. Probably Olivia was taken into a brothel as Squire offered her to a Baron but she ran away. She took a stage-coach to reach this inn. Guilt and infamy were pressing hard on her conscience which she could not unburden even though she had accepted her fault to her father. The benevolent vicar alleviated his daughter's pain by consoling her and conveying that she was always loved by her dear family who had been impatiently waiting to welcome her.

The vicar leaves Olivia behind in a secured, comfortable situation at the inn for a better reception at home to come back with Sophia the next morning. He was very happy as he reached home at midnight when all were asleep and the house was 'bursting out in a blaze of fire, and every aperture red with conflagration.' He fainted at this dreadful sight which woke up his son; all the family assembled to bring the master back to senses; his family was in distress due to the prevalent situation. The fire destroys all their possessions save only a few tokens of wealth. The neighbours including the warm-hearted Mr. Solomon Flamborough sympathetically and caringly arranged for their night at one of their outhouses with utensils, clothes and other items. Dr. Primrose explained to his family what he had gone through during his absence from home and the discoveries of Olivia, George and Arabella. The following morning, Moses and Sophy were dispatched to bring their elder sister home. Despite losing his home in the fire, the vicar does not lose self-confidence even in adversity.

The twenty-third chapter opens on the vicar fostering courage into his loving family, who he calls his fortune and esteem of life. His neighbours take up the task of rebuilding his abode; the fellow farmers warmed up their friendship with his family; Mr. Williams also renewed his affection for his daughter, and family. However, Olivia rejected his advances with disenchantment for her miseries were greater in volume than playfulness which society demanded from her. Though the

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worried vicar gave her sermons about life and repentance, Livy shun the public eye and seemed to be losing her health.

Squire Thornhill's marriage was fixed with Ms. Wilmot. The vicar sent his son Moses to deliver a letter to Ms. Wilmot stating her future husband's bad conducts towards his family, and similar information was sent to Mr. Wilmot too. But Arabella could not get that letter as she was travelling. The wedding was nigh and the couple was seen celebrating with their families and surrounding. Sir William Thornhill, his uncle was the most regarded gentleman among all present there.

Dr. Primrose reminded his son Moses that he should not be carried away by the happiness of that vile man who abused the life of his sister and acted immorally against her. He looked at his family which even though was being supplied with all necessary nourishments by their kind neighbours, was yet trudging under the 'heavy weight of hours.' Whenever the vicar's family demanded divine aid, circumspection and animation, they looked ahead to a song, a tale, a fable or a poem to vitalise and invigorate them. Squire Thornhill visits them but displays no sense of remorse, rather greets them with the same candour and frivolity. The vicar, despite being incensed, keeps his composure while receiving his landlord. Mr. Thornhill shamelessly argues with him that his acts were no impudence. The vicar scolds and shouts at the culprit in anger directing him to leave at once for the dishonour he had brought on them undeservedly. The Squire tells him that he does not bother about who they are and what poor opinion they wish to form against him. His daughter could be married to any other man keeping the squire as her lover simultaneously to which he would always agree.

Mr. Thornhill's immoral, base proposal unbolts the indignation of Dr. Primrose upon his offender who in return threatens him to destroy more, '... what may be the consequences of my resentment. My attorney, to whom your late bond has been transferred, threatens hard, nor do I know to prevent the course of justice, except by paying the money myself, which, as I have been at some expenses lately, previous to my intended marriage, is not so easy to be done.' The Squire daringly warns him to turn his daughter into his mistress, while making her someone else's wife and both father-daughter should attend his marriage with smiles lest they would be thrown out of house and face serious legal consequences. The vicar retorts that he would not allow him to marry as he already had a marriage with his daughter, and he was free to settle his resentment the way he pleased. Thornhill having given his tenant an ultimatum of severity in revenge leaves his dwelling.

The following morning, the squire's steward demands annual rent from the vicar, failing to receive it, drives his cattle and sells them for an inferior price. The vicar is then arrested on the squire's orders by men of justice.. By the end of the twenty-fourth chapter, the hero, a kind family man whose moral leaning was so staunch that he could not be shaken by further tempest designed by the Providence stands firm even in this hour of distress when they had to partake all their honour, social capacity, family happiness, wealth, position and health. There was hardly a possession left to despoil.



## Chapters 25 to 30

Goldsmith and Sheridan

They are forced to leave the neighbourhood on foot as beggars. Almost fifty of the vicar's poor parishioners come behind their priest and start having verbal spats interceding with the judicial officers. Had the vicar not intervened, it would have been difficult for the men in charge to seize him as prisoner. But he told his parishioners that they should not take law into their hands and believe in God's service and truth. As they reached the jail, the family is set in a comfortable place and the vicar has to shift to the cell where debtors serve. The prison is full of wailers, rioters, 'prophaneness' and disorganised robbers.

The next chapter goes on to describe Dr. Primrose's time in prison. Through the trial and tribulations of the vicar and his family, Goldsmith suggests that all their misfortune is linked with both his and his wife's aspirations to join the elite class circle and marry their daughters to ranked men irrespective of prudently judging whether they were sincere and upright or vile and pretentious.

The twenty-seventh chapter begins with the Primrose family while still in jail being intimated of plans of prison reformed by its master to which they disagree unanimously. Their objection is that the idea of prison reform would further damage his image. Dr. Primrose deemed that 'the heart that is buried in a dungeon is as precious as that seated upon a throne.' 'Human soul' is the greatest gem on Earth and he would always protect it. Like politics, governance, education, authorship, unemployment, gentility towards life, and above all humanity, Goldsmith introduces another theme of prison reform in the novel, commenting on the prison reforms that took place during his lifetime by John Howard in England. Oliver Goldsmith has been delineating many themes here in his *The Vicar of Wakefield* which he thinks would be able to govern society better. Throughout his fiction, it has been his general disposition to be carried away in discussion, discourse on topics related to his interests and through his hero, or other characters, convey his thoughts or what he thought was apt for humanity. Dr. Primrose argued on natural laws which tame a man more efficiently than the constitutional laws. England's mismanagement has been discussed in many aspects here. Dr. Primrose states, 'I cannot tell whether it is from the number of our penal laws, or the licentiousness of our people, that this country should shew more convicts in a year, than half the dominions of Europe united.' Dr. Primrose's discourse on prison and law reform concerning human nature ends the twenty-seventh chapter.

Till now the story has developed having gust of problems one after another and no clue to the resolution has been hinted at: Dr. Charles Primrose loses his wealth, his job and is sentenced to prison. In addition, due to his pursuit of rich life and false pomp of manners, his eldest daughter loses her virginity to a criminal Squire Thornhill who even tries to sell her to a brothel; his Oxford-graduate son wandering like a destitute, is sent on debt of one hundred pounds to serve in the army; and the rest of his family is yet unsettled and deprived of all their belongings. The author till now has given no sign of an agent or character who will resolve the problems in the plot.

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The vicar Dr. Primrose does not see his daughter Olivia since the time he has been in prison. Almost dead with ailment for a fortnight now, Olivia visits her father being supported by her sister. He cheers her with his usual love and care to which she replies that he should comply with Thornhill's wish rather than suffer himself to death. This consolation would allow her easy death. But the vicar stubbornly protests further offence to his family from Thornhill saying he would never make his daughter a whore by surrendering her to the immoral, unfair, dishonourable snares of Thornhill. An unknown prisoner overhears and suggests that the vicar send a detailed letter to Sir William Thornhill, the uncle of Squire Thornhill. He assures him that the uncle is the most respected and just man in the whole country, who would sure make a decision against him in only three days.

No reply appeared to diminish the vicar's troubles; instead his health begins to fail because of confinement and previous wounds. The tormented family has to silently watch helplessly. On the fifth day after his letter is dispatched to the uncle, Dr. Primrose is surprised to know that his daughter was near death. The unknown fellow prisoner informs him that ill Olivia was free from earthly bondage. The vicar cannot even see his dead daughter. The number of problems was increasing when Jenkinson advises him to compromise with his landlord Squire Thornhill.

Mr. Jenkinson notes down the submission word by word as the vicar spoke and it meant that he had no objection to the squire's further marriage begging forgiveness for himself. Putting his signature, the letter is sent by Moses who returns in six hours informing him how Thornhill knew about Dr. Primrose sending a letter to his uncle, which was thrown away with contempt. He should stop pleading and trouble his attorney for further communication related to the Squire who was getting married in three days; and the vicar should rather depend on his daughters to plead to the Squire now. Dr. Primrose shares his emotions with at the prisoner who compels him to send another letter to his uncle conveying the schemes that his nephew was undertaking. Deborah then informs her husband that Sophia has been forcibly abducted by ruffians. Another prisoner's wife tells him that a post-chaise followed them when a handsome, rich stranger kidnapped her and drove off their sight quickly. Both parents wailed as their dignity was utterly ruined. The ray of hope peeped in as Moses delivered his brother George's letter to his father saying that he was going to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant by his colonel soon.

Deborah, in tears for Sophy, is not ready to accept if God is still kind to them and George was safe. The vicar is content that George could be a wise guardian to all in his absence. Suddenly, the jail-keeper drags inside a heavily fettered, badly-wounded, thrashed young man who is none other than George. The vicar hopelessly implores that God should give him death.

It was George's honesty that he went to punish Squire Thornhill after receiving his mother's letter. Thornhill protested his approach by sending four of his men to stop him. Since George wounded one of those four in a scuffle to save himself, Thornhill influenced the law to give death to his offender. This was the reason for his rigorous imprisonment. Goldsmith exposes a flaw in the English judicial system. There was hardly any plea accepted against the new law. As the vicar's death is

nearing like George, he requests all the prisoners to be called and stand in front of him whom he made an effort to reform. The vicar tells the prisoners that religion is the most efficient guide to an erred human soul. The biblical philosophy is then propitiated by the author that those who brook pain as their companion more than pleasure are closest to God. Till this part of the fiction, the author does not allow access to a happy resolution which convinces the reader that the novel is a tragic tale of an honest parson.

In the thirtieth chapter, the vicar is visited by Mr. Burchell, accompanied by Sophia who tells her parents that Burchell is her saviour and rescuer. The vicar apologises to the gentleman accepting Thornhill's machinations made him detest Burchell. Burchell being a benevolent soul with big heart does not raise previous issues.

Turning to Sophia he asks the name of the person who abducted her but Sophia says she doesn't know. She broke the window-canvas and saw Mr. Burchell on the road, who ran to her aid. He ran parallel to the chaise and controlled all by applying physical strength. Defeated, they were soon chased away. She was then driven in the same chaise to her father. Now the generous father offered his daughter's hand to Mr. Burchell if he wanted. The young man raises issue of how well his status was once despised, ridiculed by them all.

The young man becomes silent at his proposal, which was another insult to the poor vicar. George is greatly bewildered to behold Mr. Burchell. His son maintains a distance in hushed reverence with the gentleman while Sophy entreats her brother again to thank her deliverer.

George was yet silent until Mr. Burchell allowed him to disclose his identity by moving forward. Burchell is in fact Sir William Thornhill in disguise. The jailor's servant stepped in to pass the news that a person with distinction and wealth waited upon to see him. Burchell orders the jailor to wait and turns to George to state why he was in prison. After hearing George, Burchell tells him that George was no higher than a murderer who killed people for selfish ends. The vicar discloses that his wife wanted her son to take revenge upon Thornhill which pushed him to go there. Mr. Burchell shakes hands with George, cordially acknowledging that his father was a very honest and kind man. His nephew had been informed of his meeting them at that hour and was shortly to join his uncle Sir William Thornhill, 'the disguised spectator.'

Sir William Thornhill reminds George not to accuse Squire Thornhill until his blames were proved and he should believe in the justice of Sir William Thornhill who had been revered for his wisdom by all. Thorhill tells them that, 'The poor Mr. Burchell was in reality a man of large fortune and great interest, to whom senates listened with applause, and whom party heard with conviction; who was the friend of his country, but loyal to his king.' The vicar's wife stands in awe of her past familiarity and misconduct against the poor Burchell. Sophia begins to cry. Deborah Primrose apologises to him for her ill demeanour and overt, intended insults. Sir William Thornhill calmly clears those clouds and is concerned for the man who trapped Sophia and inquires if she recalled his features.

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She informed that he had ‘a large mark over one of his eye-brows.’ Jenkinson wants to know if that man had red coloured hair which she confirms. Jenkinson recognizes the man as Timothy Baxter, the greatest runner in England. Jenkinson is dispatched to catch the criminal. Sir William happens to have been a doctor as well and writes a prescription for the ailing vicar.

**Chapters 31 And 32**

In the second last chapter when the nephew Squire Thornhill bids his greeting but his uncle repels it. He opened the allegations against Ned, like seduction of Olivia, ruination with imprisonment of the vicar, his son’s punishment without reason, and so forth. Mr. Thornhill places his arguments very shrewdly. Sir William accuses him of insincerity. Thornhill convinces his uncle that he was innocent and that the vicar’s imprisonment was a natural outcome of his queued debts. The Squire instead blames Dr. Primrose for his meanness to have abused him by throwing baseless, motivated allegations upon him which as testimony could be sealed by the witness like some of his servants. He could easily free Dr. Primrose of other accusations but his letter to his uncle, and his son’s preparation to attack him determined him to pay them back legally.

It looked like Squire Thornhill was prevailing on his uncle’s will. Mrs. Primrose angrily protests his lies. Having arrived there, Jenkinson interrupts with the tall man who was fit for Tyburn, a place in London known for capital punishment. Thornhill’s altered frightened look was obvious enough of his guilt as he was a regular acquaintance with Jenkinson and Baxter. Jenkinson addresses the Squire audaciously exposing his evil deeds to Sir William: the man, referred to as overwounded was not so in truth. The Squire framed the entrapping by giving good clothes and post-chaise to Baxter who took Sophia by coercion, feigning himself as an abductor, where Thornhill would appear on the scene to rescue her to gain confidence over the young lady in order to exploit her. The Baronet recollected the coat belonging to his nephew. For the rest, the man caught accepted how Mr. Thornhill swore being in love with both the sisters at the same time with a wish to possess both, had manoeuvred this for obtaining her.

The Baronet uncle becomes aware of the wickedness and treachery of his nephew. Mr. Thornhill accuses the two criminals plotting against him, which his uncle should not believe and rather take evidences from his butler or other servants. The butler being presented admits the truth in front of his master that Squire was thick with Baxter who brought him new women. Then he declared he never liked young Mr. Thornhill by character or deeds. Jenkinson inquired from the butler if he knew him of which he returned that he remembered the night when Olivia was deceived being parcelled to Thornhill’s house, he was one of the party who committed that crime. Jenkinson, on being reproached indignantly by Sir William, disclosed that the Squire was blameworthy. Sir William asks George to be set free and demands Olivia’s presence to affix her seducer. Miss Arabella Wilmot accidentally approaches the jail. Having met him, she becomes aware of their misfortunes. She does not know that her future husband was at the centre of all tragic events befalling her beloved old acquaintance.

Though Mr. Wilmot prevented her to visit an unsuitable place like a prison, she still comes to see them. She thought Ned Thornhill to be their rescuer, but in reality he was the criminal contriver of the entire Primrose family's doom which his uncle discloses to her shock. She divulges that the Squire had told her how George was in America with his newlywed wife enjoying a holiday. Mrs. Primrose said that it was falsehood as George had vowed he would never marry anyone as he loved Miss Wilmot. Mrs. Primrose narrated the rivalries of Thornhill with her son and explained how he brought the whole family to where they were, in jail. Miss Arabella Wilmot exposed the dishonesty of Mr. Thornhill who fabricated hundred ways to achieve her acquiescence for their wedding only on the grounds that George, to whom she was betrothed and loved dearly, had no care of her and had married someone else. Since that breached their promise for each other, she could be free to be his wife. He did not leave a single effort to fan her hatred against George, a brave and honest man.

George was freed because the man who posed as nearly murdered by him was a fraud caught by the law now. He was prepared by Jenkinson to be presentable in a military uniform. Miss Wilmot begged his pardon for her betrayal in earnest tears which filled him with emotions because there was a mile's distance between their current social ranks. Moses rushed to that inn and narrated all particulars that had taken place to her father. Squire Thornhill's iniquities, sinfulness and misdemeanour were uncovered in public. He retaliated openly and warned Sir William that he did not need to obey him for 'anything' as he repulsed his wealth. His father-in-law, Mr. Wilmot would pass on him his wealth which he was sure about. Arabella was already in his custody having signed bonds under his control. He pursued her as his wife only for wealth sake and the rest could not escape him anyway. Sir William himself was party in that agreement, and hence knew of the legal consequences Ned Thornhill could impose.

Miss Wilmot applying a common sense seeing herself in the clutches of a rogue asked George if he would accept her hand without fortune. George proclaimed his love to be only for Ms. Wilmot. Mr. Wilmot joined them declining any nuptial promise to be fulfilled to the declared culprit but since his wealth was in his security, it was a great loss to him which he deplored in silent contemplation acknowledging what was going on. The Baronet having known his passion for wealth in disengaging his daughter from the vicar's son, reminded him of his uncompassionate past, simultaneously reminding him of his present when he could amend his former mistake by allowing his daughter to go back to that worthy man who deserved her.

Mr. Wilmot displays no objection to his daughter's wedding with George, however, Dr. Primrose is supposed to pass on six thousand pounds to Miss Wilmot whenever he would be rich again, if they wished to secure her as a match. The vicar readily consents to this agreement as all depends on his acquiescence. The couple unite in happiness throwing away all prospects for love for each other. As for Squire Thornhill's possession of her wealth as her husband prior to their marriage, it would be granted only if he married Arabella Wilmot. This he could

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not do as he was wedded to someone else as claimed by Jenkinson by introducing dead Olivia to them as alive, displaying their marriage certificate. Jenkinson shared that he was a great loyal friend to the Squire who married women with a fake priest and fake certificate; but when he had to bring a priest for Thornhill and Olivia's wedding, he prepared an original licence and an original priest; albeit his real marriage was accomplished by Jenkinson for extracting money from him in future by blackmailing. All were happy to see that gradually justice being finally done. Jenkinson, being inquired upon how he kept the elder Miss Primrose alive secretly, replied that he could not see any other way to get the vicar off prison but to comply with what Squire Thornhill demanded: the submission of both his daughters to him by letting them married to someone else. Since the eldest daughter was still alive the younger could not be sacrificed to the Squire. In this plan of Jenkinson, the vicar's wife was a partaker too.

The Squire fell over the feet of his uncle begging forgiveness. Though his penance was abated by Dr. Primrose's interference but his uncle deprived him of his wealth; gave its third part to Olivia; and ordered that he would be given any money only at the request of his wife. The Baronet neither accepted any of his pleading nor did he pardon him. He was made to leave the place and for his daily services, only one servant was granted to him. After his ordered departure, Sir William congratulated Olivia for becoming a member of his family. Miss Arabella and her father also did her the same honour. And so did her mother to Olivia because now her marriage was legal and respectable. Mr. Jenkinson, Moses and Sophy also congratulated her. Sir William happily looked around to observe their faces and remarked that there were one or two faces and they were not content who seemed agitated from within. Mr. Jenkinson was next to be thanked by Sir William and Dr. Primrose as he acted very kindly in procuring evidences and exposing real villains.

Sir William suggested that Sophia would be a good match for Jenkinson and announced to give five hundred pounds to both of them wishing them a happy married life. He called Sophia forward to give her consent or disagreement on this proposal which she denied, '...not have Mr. Jenkinson, your benefactor, a handsome young fellow, with five hundred pounds and good expectations!' The Baronet is astonished to see Sophia's ungratefulness who prefers death to such a match. But readers come to know that it was a jest. Then he unravels himself to be the one who wants to marry Sophia ardently. A man such as Sir William Thornhill who had been with the most ranked girls and families, praised Sophia for her great beauty, innocence and pragmatism which was all he wished in his future wife in whose search he was roaming like a vagabond in disguise for so many years. He felt sorry for Jenkinson. Jenkinson was promised to have five hundred pounds by him.

They leave 'those gloomy mansions of sorrow' for the inn that was prepared for their reception with Lady Thornhill, Miss Sophia Primrose. The convicts are given forty pounds as charity by the Baronet, and twenty pounds by Mr. Wilmot. By then all his villagers assemble outside jail to welcome their honest vicar and

partake in their joyous moments at the inn. But they are retuned with some gifts by their generous landlord, Sir William. The hero of this story being ill leaves the jolly crowd and comes back to retire with profound gratitude to God for both good and evil that had been his fate. At last, the resolution has taken place in which vicar's honesty, integrity and righteousness are rightly paid.

The last chapter of the fiction contains conclusion in which Dr. Primrose, the previous vicar of Wakefield, is bestowed unexpected happiness by the Almighty. George apprises his worthy father in the following morning that the merchant who dealt in the town with his wealth was taken into custody at Antwerp, Belgium and his creditors were to secure more amount of money than anticipated. George had done perfect duty of an obedient son to relieve Dr. Primrose of his settlement which he had to do for him and his wife. The vicar takes the opinion of the Baronet in this regard if he is permitted to do so without any legal offence. The Baronet confirms that there could be no legal implications as his son was already affluent by his marriage with Arabella Wilmot. He only expected his father to bless the ceremonies. The two couples were impatient to get married and all were sharing their joy. Funnily, the serious priest wanted them all to maintain the gravity of life while getting married but they were so full of merriment and light-heartedness that they did not pay heed to his moral preaching.

Sir William Thornhill and Sophia Primrose were the first to tie the knot. George followed next with Arabella, the most charming pupil of the vicar as he called her. Dr. Primrose had invited his kind neighbour Mr. Flamborough who reached the inn by the time when they came back from church having fulfilled rituals of marriage. The eldest Ms. Flamborough was offered a proposal from Mr. Jenkinson and Moses chose the youngest. The parishioners came to congratulate him screaming in joy. They were chiefly those who had rescued the parson previously. They first received censure from the Baronet for being there, and later some money for celebration. The entire party was then invited by Mrs. Olivia Thornhill to dine at her residence. The former Squire now dwelt with one of his relatives in a modest manner being carefully tended by them. Olivia could not but be hurt whenever she thought of him, yet she might forgive him would he rectify his mistakes. They sat eating, exchanging jokes, laughter, and jocoseness. The vicar relied on his old custom of removing table after food to have all together for a longer period of time for enjoying the fireside. Dr. Primrose happily beholds his whole family in front of him in mirth and comfort graced by God which was what he always meant life for. To say, all his ill luck was reversed with abundance of health and delight. And the fiction, full of justice of karma with the moral lesson of retaining morality in life ends in contentment with peace.

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5. Who is the advertisement in the beginning of the novel addressed to?
6. What is the real identity of Mr. Burchell?

### 3.5 RECURRENT THEMES IN *THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD*

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Oliver Goldsmith's in his masterpiece *The Vicar of Wakefield*, has carefully woven some important themes which he has tried to validate by his hero's life and those of others characters. Let us examine some of them here.

**Matrimony:** The overlapping wings of prospects in matrimony, harmony in matrimony and family balance cover the whole plot of Oliver Goldsmith's novel. Therefore, matrimony on the whole, remains its main theme. His hero, Dr. Charles Primrose, a priest, makes sure to publish and preach about the importance of peaceful married life to his parishioners: a doctrine practised diligently by himself. He believes that an happy marriage could keep a man contented in his family which would promote a healthy society. Both he and his wife make sure to teach their daughters and sons to think and act on choosing a proper match for their life-partners and making a comfortable life by adjusting with them. The theme of matrimony which is introduced in the very first chapter by the description of hero's family and house continues to flow in the same vein till the end of novel, as the story is principally linked with Olivia, Sophia and George's prospects in marriage. Likely so, the novel ends on the espousals and engagements of Olivia, Sophia, George, as well as both Miss Flamboroughs'.

**Family-Man and Husbandship:** Linked with the theme of matrimony in his *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the author introduces other significant aspects of life: family-man and husbandship. How and what a man should do to make his family and wife happy, satisfied are major purposes of life to the hero here. Dr. Charles Primrose, the parson protagonist, knew one principle of running his life peacefully: never object to his sweet but uneducated wife and restrict his children unnecessarily. From the onset of the novel, he proved himself a true family-man and greatly obliging husband. His family had always enthralled in comfort and gaiety of which he was the soul procurer. This aspect of the priest's demeanour has sundry effects on which the whole plot revolves: excessive liberty in application of any decision that his family members take, pursuit of following only rich people for the prospect of matrimony, maintenance of peace in every possible way to keep family members happy, commitment towards each-other in a strong bond of love, keeping the poor at bay so that nothing unranked could blemish their respectability, etc. They contain both negative and positive effects.

Having given freedom to his wife to handle family the way she thought best, the vicar loses control over the manners of his daughters who make sure to secure a rich suitor for themselves without judging his sincerity or character. It is because of this reason that tempests break on them followed by a series of misfortunes governed by men and fate both. The other side of commitment to family and husbandship pays the vicar well in the latter half of novel when Olivia returns after her undignified elopement with Squire Thornhill before her wedding with Mr. Williams. Then all of them unite and live in poverty brooking storms of destiny like the best family.



**Humanity, Prison Reform and Natural Law:** Dr. Charles Primrose, the vicar is shown as man of high moral character who conscientiously works on the correction of human vice by instituting morality and goodness in human hearts. When punished for not paying annual rent to his landlord Squire Thornhill, the parson Dr. Primrose is jailed where he is surprised to notice how his fellow inmates were rejoicing their state of wastage blindly being misled. Even though he was very ill, he reads to them as part of his service because he wants to bring in reform in their lives. Being godly in his efforts, the vicar receives productive outcome within six days of his readings to them. Consequently, he begins to inspire them to earn money by ‘cutting pegs for tobacconists and shoemakers, the proper wood being bought by the general subscription, and when manufactured, sold’ by the vicar’s appointment in the market. Though it could not add a huge amount of money to turn them wealthy, but it teaches them their existence and energy’s significance.

Dr. Primrose believed that human efforts in the right direction could sow the seeds of morality in society which would empower any nation. Even those who commit crime, savagery and kill others could be tamed by kindness and love. If negative energy could be turned into positive ways, those who enacted serious offence, violation, damage could be brought to a better state of life. In this way, by giving lessons of rectification by reading to such prisoners and driving their negative energy towards doing something constructive would certainly shape them as better and responsible human beings. The author strictly disagrees with the governance and constitutional laws that announce capital punishment for any sinner. The hero, a philosophical thinker, hold that a humane heart could create wonders: ‘Thus in less than a fortnight I had formed them into something social and humane, and had the pleasure of regarding myself as a legislator, who had brought men from their native ferocity into friendship and obedience.’ If the law could concentrate on reform rather than severity, follow natural law instead of capital punishment, change rather than cut, better ends could be achieved by any government. Advocating natural law against harshness, inflexibility and brutality, the hero reflects, ‘Natural law gives me no right to take away his life...’ Often, ‘the multitude of laws produce new vices, and new vices call for fresh restraints.’

**Mixing Literary Genres in the Fiction Form:** Oliver Goldsmith has given a complex design to his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* by amalgamating many literary genres in one form: fiction. It contains letters, a ballad, elegy, fable, story, discourse and songs. He has attempted to give a typical pastoral setting to his novel. Besides making it rich and interesting, he has also employed dramatic techniques such as use of emotionalism, sentimentalism and fine play of irony throughout the fiction.

**Love for Nature and Simplicity of Life:** The entire fiction dabbles into beauty of Nature as she is presented as a friendly figure here. Nature is painted uniquely in her serenity, picturesqueness, mildness in the form of a protector in Goldsmith’s novel. From the commencement of the novel till its end, the author has shown Nature in her most soothing complexion. The Primrose family has a life close to Nature when it shifts to the other place of work after the vicar’s loss of

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fortune. Away from artificiality of life, they enjoy sitting under honeysuckle: 'Our little habitation was situated at the foot of a sloping hill, sheltered with a beautiful underwood behind, and a prattling river before; on one side a meadow, on the other a green.' They reposed outside and enjoyed songs by their children with music: 'Our family dined in the field. . . . To heighten our satisfaction two blackbirds answered each other from opposite hedges, the familiar redbreast came and pecked the crumbs from our hands, and every sound seemed but the echo of tranquillity.' Even though when their house was set on fire, which is the angriest form of Nature here, whatever they are offered next by Nature as life, they accept it.

Another principle theme that runs throughout fiction is simplicity of life to which Dr. Primrose sticks to without compromise. He always seeks ways to pacify things and forgive his family members. Even with his neighbours and parishioners, he shares exceptional rapport and camaraderie. From the commencement of fiction, he controls his family's manners and behaviour by encouraging moral strength in them. Peace and love are the messages he spread in his family and acquaintances. Even though people have been merciless for him like Squire Thornhill, he minimises his chastisement by urging Sir William Thornhill to be considerate. Except for his grave mistake of giving a little too much liberty to his family, hating impoverished people, allowing freedom to strangers to have free play in his inner family circle and restraining himself against his family members decisions till the point of calamity, there have been no foibles in the character of Vicar Dr. Primrose. Not only that, he often preaches in his long discourses how simplicity of life and morality could be two major premises of human dignity and existence.

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### 3.6 CHARACTERISATION IN *THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD*

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Let us discuss the major characters in the novel.

**Dr. Charles Primrose:** The protagonist of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Dr. Charles Primrose is a righteous and kind gentleman who lives his life on the principles of simplicity. He is a stable character by demeanour who does not lose patience and wisdom even in his misfortunes. When the novel begins we soon witness that life and incidents begin to humble his pride down in a series of tempests but he endures all his difficulties and sorrows with forbearance and fortitude. He has a loving wife and well-bred children who try to maintain their father's principles of simplicity and morality. He is usually against pomp and show except for his wife's provocation of enticing Squire Thornhill and encouraging his daughters' over expectations from their position. He is the strongest character who narrates this story as well. The readers see each and every incident described by him learning his views towards life. He gives comments and opines about many topics which are sometimes not the immediate concern to the thread of the story like English literary figures, politics, governance, economy of Europe, etc. He is seventy-two and his name is introduced in the middle of the story.

**Mrs. Deborah Primrose:** Mrs. Primrose, the wife of Vicar Dr. Charles Primrose, is a poorly educated woman who is though simple and sweet by nature, yet runs behind superficial charms of life. She is an active agent in the story who brings in the main action to plot: the scandalous elopement of her eldest daughter Olivia prior to her marriage. It is she who quarrels with her husband when he wants to command his daughters' disgracing pursuit of unprincipled man Squire Thornhill, unnecessary running behind two fashionable ladies from London, insults to poor Mr. Burchell, etc. She is a simple woman of obstinate mentality but a loving, kind mother and wife too. She obeys her husband most of the times and where she does not obey, her actions propel some serious flaw like her plan to fix a false marriage of Olivia with Mr. Williams.

**Squire Thornhill:** Squire Ned Thornhill is a young, rich and villainous appearance in the novel. Due to his licentiousness and ill-repute, his uncle Sir William Thornhill had seized his rights over the property. When the vicar joined his village parish and farm as his tenant whom he had given his fields to look after, he allures the vicar's daughter Olivia, elopes with her for a secret wedding and tries to sell her as a prostitute after having used her. He was popular for his lewdness in the villages as he had done false marriages with many girls and sold them or forsook them after using. He contrived to torture the vicar and his family in various ways. It is at the end of the story that his vileness is discovered by his uncle, the Baronet through Jenkinson and Olivia is restored as his wife with punishments. But till the end of the novel, he had not accepted her.

**Sir William Thornhill:** The Baronet Sir William Thornhill appears only at the end of the novel as an angel to set everyone in his or her position and pass on justice to all characters in the novel. Humorously, he is a man in disguise called Mr. Burchell: an indigent, intelligent, handsome, bachelor vagabond not yet thirty in want of food and lodging who shared gifts and happiness with people in the village where the story is located. Burchell is reprimanded and cast off the Primrose house as the master and mistress thought he was loitering around Sophia, their youngest daughter to entrap her into a love-affair, and since he had no wealth or social distinction, he did not deserve to be an acquaintance to them.

He is seen occasionally visiting them. Notwithstanding being always condescended, he warns Olivia and Mrs. Deborah Primrose against Squire Thornhill's ill-intention, lustfulness, wantonness and indulgent character. When his letter to drive away the two London-based whores comes to be highlighted, they react to him with animosity and throw him out of the door with affront, humiliation and insolence, which is not their normal demeanour. But they are repaid for this shameless act when at the end it is discovered that he is the Baronet and is to decide who would receive what to conclude the story. He loves Sophia, the impoverished vicar's daughter and marries her by protecting them from all evils of the world. He fixes Olivia and Ned Thornhill as couple and arranges Miss Arabella Wilmot-George Primrose tie up. It was only he who stands as an icon of justice and penalises Ned Thornhill and his gang of pimps. He is always held in reverence and awe by his people as a righteous benefactor.

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**Check Your Progress**

7. What themes cover the whole plot of Goldsmith's novel?
8. Which character is the active agent in the story who brings in the main action to the plot?

**3.7 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: RICHARD SHERIDAN**

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was a well-known Irish playwright and poet. He is largely remembered for writing satires and plays highlighting the Comedy of Manners. Sheridan was born in Dublin in 1751 to Thomas and Frances Sheridan, the youngest of three children. Both his parents had a literary lineage; his father wrote treatises on education and his mother wrote plays and novels. Sheridan was educated near his place of residence till the age of 11. After which he was sent to Harrow School. His liking for educative works and literary bent of mind was well appreciated in this school. He left this school at the age of 17 years to receive individualized education in English. During this time, Sheridan desired to begin his literary career. Hence, he tried his hand in writing farce named *Jupiter*, which however, was not successful.

In the early 1770s, Sheridan became involved in a dispute over the hand of a young woman named Elizabeth Ann Linley, leading to public fights with a man named Thomas Mathews. After his fights, Sheridan was able to recover and was successful in marrying Miss Linley in 1772. After his marriage, Sheridan moved to London and focused his attention on writing plays. In the next thirty years, Sheridan published nine successful plays. Some of his distinguished plays include *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal* and so forth. Sheridan was also a Whig MP in the British House of Commons later in his life, from 1780-1812.

Sheridan is one of the greatest dramatists of his time. His success rests on two of his plays – *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. Following Goldsmith, Sheridan expressed a strong reaction against the Sentimental Comedy which was in vogue during the time. Sheridan attacked the Sentimental Comedy Muse in his Prologue to *The Rivals*:

*The Goddess of the woeful countenance –  
The sentimental Muse!.....  
She'll snatch the dagger from her sister's hand:  
And having made her vot'ries weep a flood,  
Good heaven! She'll end her comedies in blood -*

Through his plays, Sheridan attempted to destroy the taste for sentimental comedy. He did this by reviving the comedy of manners purged of its licentious and immoral tone.

Though Sheridan is a great dramatist, he invites a wide range of critical opinion. While some critics consider him second only to Shakespeare perhaps,

others have found weaknesses in his art. Sheridan, however, knew his limitations and worked carefully within his limited range. The plots of Sheridan are generally borrowed from other sources. But even great writers like Shakespeare borrowed their plots from elsewhere. Like Shakespeare, he gave the stamp of his genius to that material. No doubt the plots of Sheridan's plays are artificial but that is no demerit of his dramatic art. All comic art is based on artificiality and exaggeration which often leads to caricature. For this very reason, the plots of Ben Jonson and Congreve are artificial and the plots of Dickens are highly artificial and exaggerated to the point of caricature. If Sheridan's plots are too artificial, they are all the more attractive and entertaining.

Sheridan's characterization is based on the Jonsonian pattern in which every character represents a class or type rather than an individual. The Restoration Comedy of Manners which was the chief source of Sheridan's inspiration also followed the Jonsonian tradition. The characters of *The Rivals* are personified humours and no more. Their individual traits are accentuated by their names such as Mrs. Malaprop, Lydia Languish, Sir Anthony Absolute, Lucius O'Trigger and Bob Acres. These characters are flat and two dimensional. They are social types well known to us and they exist in every country and every age. We do not bother much about the depth of their heart and mind and its progress but judge them by their social manners or typical behaviour. This is equally true about the comic characters of some of the greatest artists like Shakespeare and Dickens. Shakespeare's Falstaff and Dickens's Micawber too do not develop or change. Comic characters are always typical and universal and provide an exhaustive picture of the society in which they move and which they represent. In *The Rivals*, all the characters are representative of their class and remarkable types. Mrs. Malaprop is a woman of little education trying to show off her knowledge, Fag, the faithful servant, Sir Absolute, the greatest of authoritarian fathers, Lydia, the woman of 'singular taste' and Faulkland, the 'man of sentiments'. They seem to represent these abstractions but they also possess their own individuality. Within the limited range of typicality, Sheridan created individuality in them.

Another method of characterization adopted by Sheridan is the method of contrast. In *The Rivals*, the characters of Lydia and Julia and Captain Absolute and Faulkland have been contrasted. This is quite succinctly brought out by Faulkland when he tells Captain Absolute:

*Ah! Jack, your heart and soul are not, like mine, fixed  
immutably on one only object. You throw for a large stake,  
but losing, you could stake and throw again:- but I have set  
my sum of happiness on this cast, and not to succeed were  
to be stripped of all.*

Sheridan's main objective of writing plays was to provide entertainment to the audience. So, he does not probe deep into the depths of human heart. Besides, he was not writing problem plays like Shaw or Galsworthy so, he does not propound any philosophy or moral in any of his plays. His attitude towards life has been thoroughly empirical because he dealt with only the superficial side of life –

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the manners of his fellow beings, their affectations, hypocrisy and good nature wherever it can be found.

Sheridan has followed the lead given by the Comedy of Manners by giving witty and brilliant dialogues to his characters. The dialogues chiefly account for the popularity of his plays. They also hide the weaknesses of his characterization. Not only the important characters but even the servants speak witty dialogue. *The Rivals* brims with the wit and humour of Sheridan. Mrs. Malaprop's dialogues are full of humour which comes out of her mispronunciation of words. While expressing her views on female education, she says:

*I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning; I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman .....she should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell, and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying.*

Sheridan, here, has actually directed his satire at Mrs. Malaprop who is guilty of all those characteristics that she would not wish in her daughter. About Sheridan's wit, Allardyce Nicoll remarks:

*The wit colours all the dialogue and....Never for a moment does the sparkle disappear, so that sometimes we are inclined to be surfeited with too much of these fireworks.*

Sheridan has often been criticized for his mild satire. Critics point out that his satire is not bitter enough as that of Ben Jonson. But Jonson's satire is bitter and pungent, for he is a self-proclaimed reformer and preacher. Sheridan's aim is entertainment and not preaching. Hence, his satire cannot be as bitter as Ben Jonson's. This does not, however, mean that there is no moral aim in Sheridan's satire. Dryden had written in one of his prefaces that 'there is a goodness in good verse which tickles even while it hurts'. This is true of *The Rivals* whose moral aim is unmistakably evident in spite of Sheridan's mild tone.

Critics find fault with Sheridan's theatricality and point out that his dramatic art is melodramatic. But theatricality is Sheridan's merit and makes his plays highly entertaining and immortal. Sheridan was not innovative. He did not anticipate the age which followed his own in exploring the recesses of the human personality. His characters lack subtlety of emotion and motivation. Yet he uses them with a superb sense of theatrical effect. Sheridan, like Jane Austen, had chosen a limited range and worked with great success within that range. If we judge merely by the test of stage popularity, Sheridan stands today in English drama as second only to Shakespeare. According to Sir Henry Irving: 'He is at once the heir to the best traditions of the Restoration Comedy and the most notable English dramatist of the eighteenth century.'

Thorndike has aptly summed up Sheridan as a dramatist in the following words: 'His powers as a dramatist are displayed in design, dialogue and in a most effective representation of comic character. His powers as a humorist are to be found in wit that is *unequalled in readiness and abundance*.'

Sheridan has no rivals and few followers. With his plays end the great tradition that began with Dryden and Etherege and nothing comes near them till we reach Wilde's works.

### Important Works

- *The Rivals* (1775)
- *The Duenna* (1775)
- St. Patrick's Day; Or the Scheming Lieutenant (first performed in 1775)
- *The School for Scandal* (1777)
- *The Critic* (1779)

### Check Your Progress

9. What is the technique of Sheridan's characterization?
10. What does Sir Henry Irving say about Sheridan?
11. State at least one weakness of Sheridan's art of characterization.

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## 3.8 R. B. SHERIDAN AND SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660 came the reopening of the theatres. In this age of 'energy and curiosity', as Bonamy Dobree points out, the playwrights wrote the Comedy of Manners so called, because of their concern with the polished personality of men and women – i.e., their manners amidst a galaxy of wit and fashion of the elitist ethos. In them we find, a reflection of the gay intrigues, and an echo of the cynical and fabulous conversation which was the reality of the dissolute Restoration worldlings. Some dramatists reacted against the immorality of the Comedy of Manners by writing sentimental comedies. These plays tended to be refined, sentimental and at times didactic, their authors striving to improve taste and standards of behaviour. As a result, little of the comedy produced has survived; it lacked the brilliant wit, the sparkle and effervescent energy and the contrast between appearance and reality which was an essential part of Restoration Comedies. The Sentimental Comedy, in fact, in its inception was not much different from the Comedy of Manners. Goldsmith and Sheridan reacted against the Sentimental Comedy of the age and denounced it effectively upon occasion, Goldsmith writing an essay on it and Sheridan mocking it in the new Prologue he wrote for the second production of *The Rivals* and parodying it in *The Critic*. Both of them saw the contrast between appearance and reality as a basic ingredient of comedy. But where Goldsmith reminds us of the Elizabethans in his emphasis on fun and farce, Sheridan's links are with the Comedy of Manners, suitably toned down for his audience. In the words of Allardyce Nicoll: 'If Goldsmith marks an attempt to return to Elizabethan Comed, Richard Brinsley Sheridan shows the movement back to the Restoration masters.'

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Sheridan produced five plays of which *The Critic*, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* are most popular. His sense of social situation, his satiric and witty way of treating his characters, of exposing folly and hypocrisy, his ability to create dramatic crises, his creation of sparkling dialogue, all combine to make these plays timeless and immortal. They are as fresh now as when they took their London audiences by storm in the late eighteenth century. How can one forget the social club with Lady Sneerwell as principal, the Surface brothers, Peter and Lady Teezle? The names like Benjamin Backbite and Snake have become proverbial, particularly when Peter speaks of ‘a man of sentiment – well, there is nothing in the world so notable as a man of sentiment.’ If Sheridan’s aim was to discredit sentimentalism, this retort should have accomplished it. About *The School for Scandal* A. C. Baugh has observed:

*‘We get the quintessence of a scandal-loving society, its brilliantly lacquered veneer; its less lovely basic substances. He can be serious but is not too serious, he keeps the comic aspects of the foibles of the day and enlivens the whole with incessant sparkling wit.’*

And, curiously enough, the same comic invention, the same satiric sense was to blossom in the nineteenth century in the work of two other dramatists, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, who brought life and the explosive energy of wit back on the London stage in the same way Goldsmith and Sheridan had virtually a century before.

*The Rivals* was first printed in 1775 after the second performance of the play had ensured its success. The excellence of *The Rivals* lies in its amusing situations, its sparkling witticisms, its lively reproductions of contemporary life and its clear and natural though somewhat superficial characterization. The play has always enjoyed a widespread popularity and it has never failed to entertain the audiences or the readers.

#### Check Your Progress

12. How does the writing style of the Restoration period reflect the dissolute Restoration worldlings?
13. Name the three most-acclaimed plays by R.B. Sheridan.
14. What are the characteristics that make *The Rivals* a comic masterpiece?

### 3.9 THE RIVALS AND VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COMEDY

In this section, you will learn about the comedic aspects of the Rivals.

#### Anti-sentimental Comedy

The second half of the eighteenth century sentimentalism had a very vitiating influence and marked a decline in the quality of dramatic writing. The powerful reaction



against the Sentimental Comedy came from Goldsmith and Sheridan who introduced the Anti-sentimental Comedy for the purpose of restoring the original comic spirit to the theatre which reached its height of excellence with *The Rivals*.

The theme of the play is built on a slight machination and turns upon the amusing mystification of one and the same person as his own rival. There is nothing serious here – rivalry in love is merely a matter of foolery than passion and pain. Captain Jack Absolute carries on a love-affair with Lydia Languish, a lady of a ‘singular taste’, in the guise of one poor Ensign Beverley, to satisfy her fascination for a romantic love episode. At the intervention of his father, Sir Anthony Absolute, a man of absolute decision, his marriage is settled with the very same lady, in his real identity, and as such, he becomes, quite amusingly, his own rival.

The other rivals include Bob Acres, a foolish fop, who challenges Ensign Beverley, without knowing who he is, and Sir Lucius O’Trigger, a silly, militant Irish Baronet, who carries on love correspondence with Lydia’s aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, under the assumption that she is the niece, his teenaged Delia. Ultimately, of course, the play ends happily to the satisfaction of all, save Mrs. Malaprop.

The theme of the play is, thus, extremely insignificant and rests on situations that are highly improbable but at the same time, highly theatrical. The effect of the scene where Captain Absolute befools Lydia and her aunt, where the real identity of Beverley is exposed, where Acres and Sir Lucius draft the letter of challenge, or where the rivals come out to fight a duel is really delightful, full of fun and farce, and thoroughly comic.

In the matter of characterization, the anti-sentimental comedy takes men and women from real life, with their humour and eccentricities and places them in diverting situations to create an atmosphere of natural fun and mirth. For example, the treatment of the love episode of Julia and Faulkland which is elegantly caricatured for its sentimentality. The true character of Faulkland is indicated to us by Absolute’s description of him as the ‘most teasing, capricious, incorrigible lover’. Absolute also points out that Faulkland carries in his head a ‘confounded farrago of doubts, fears, hopes, wishes’. The audience is bound to feel amused by this mocking comment on him. Faulkland’s own description of his state of mind with regard to his beloved Julia also makes him appear absurd:

*I fear for her spirits – her health – her life –  
My absence may fret her; her anxiety for my  
return, her fears for me, may oppress her gentle  
temper. And for her health, does not every hour  
bring me cause to be alarmed? if it rains, some shower  
may even then have chilled her delicate frame!  
If the wind be keen, some rude blast may have affected her!  
The heat of noon, the dews of the evening, may endanger  
the life of her, for whom only I value mine.*

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The audience is bound to laugh heartily at the absurdity of Faulkland's sentimentality. Julia's words at the end of the play, act as a pointed analysis of the absurd sentimental love of the age:

*When heart's deserving happiness would unite their fortunes,  
Virtue would crown them with an unfading garland of modest,  
hurtless flowers; but ill-judging Passion will force the gaudier  
rose into the wreath, whose thorn offends them, when its leaves  
are dropped.*

Further, in the portrait of Lydia, who has a dream of a sensational elopement with a poor lover, Sheridan has sharply ridiculed the characters of the sentimental comedies of his days:

*There, had I projected one of the most sentimental  
elopements! – so becoming a disguise! – so amiable  
a ladder of ropes! – conscious moon – four horses –  
Scotch parson – with such surprise to Mrs. Malaprop –  
And such paragraphs in the newspapers! – O,  
I shall die with disappointment!*

Some critics note that *The Rivals* is an incongruous mixture of Congreve with sentimental incompatibilities. The play is indeed a revival of the Restoration Comedy of Manners purged of its indecency but it has certain unmistakable traces of sentimentalism in its composition. As we find touches of romanticism in Shaw's anti-romantic comedy, so we find touches of sentiment in Sheridan's anti-sentimental comedy. We cannot but conclude that even anti-sentimental comedy, at its best, has to nourish itself on sentiments.

### Comedy of Manners

The Comedy of Manners is a phrase often used in literary history and criticism. It is particularly applied to the Restoration dramatists like Congreve and Wycherley but it is a type of comedy which can flourish in any civilized urban society and we see it in Sheridan in the eighteenth century and in Oscar Wilde in the nineteenth century.

The characters of the comedy of manners were stock humour characters whose names gave a hint of their traits. Except Captain Absolute, Julia and the servants, the play has a galaxy of funny, rather farcical, men and women – Sir Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop, Lydia Languish, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, Bob Acres and Faulkland. The comedy is made alive with the amazing oddities of these characters. However, as Balston suggests, the dramatic sketch here is, no doubt, slight and the characters look like the distortion of certain human traits or personified humours. They are truly types, though they remain thoroughly lively.

The comedy of manners is almost wholly a play of intellect. It is packed with highly enjoyable repartees of wit. The talk between master and servant – Captain Absolute and Fag – in Act II, Scene I sparkles with the play of wit that at once strikes and delights:

Fag: Sir, whenever I draw on my invention for a good current lie, I always forge endorsements, as well as the bill.

*Absolute: Well, take care you don't hurt your credit, by offering too much security....*

How delightfully witty is Sheridan's representation of the duel scene can be observed in the dialogue of the two ludicrous rivals – Acres and Sir Lucius – awaiting their opponents:

Acres: Sir Lucius – if I wa'n't with you, I should almost think I was afraid – if my valour should leave me! Valour will come and go.

Sir Lucius: Then, pray, keep it fast, while you have it.

*Acres: Sir Lucius – I doubt it is going – yes – My valour is certainly going! – it is sneaking off! – I feel it oozing out as it were at the palms of my hands!*

*The Rivals*, however, differs from the comedy of manners on one point. The Restoration Comedy of Manners was highly immoral as the characters were engaged even in illicit love-making. There is no instance of illicit love-making in *The Rivals*. The only character who can be blamed to a certain extent is Mrs. Malaprop but she carries on only a platonic love-affair, that too, through letters. Though Sheridan repeats the dramatic formulae of Restoration comedy, he does it in such a way as to make it seem original and novel. And as Legouis and Cazamian have observed, with Sheridan, comedy regains, besides the shining beauty of form, almost all the case of movement it had with Congreve. He thus revived the comedy of manners but without its immoral tone. It is this that makes *The Rivals* a masterpiece in the realms of eighteenth century literature.

### The Presence of Satire

According to Dryden, the true end of satire should be 'the amendment of vices through correction.' But the satires of Swift, Dryden and Pope – the masters of satire in the Age of Reason – were pungent and vitriolic in nature. They attacked the follies and vices latent in human nature and at times became so personal that their satires were reduced to the level of a lampoon. With the coming of Sheridan, satire reached new heights. Like the Restoration dramatists, his satire is mild and directed against the frailties and eccentricities of the aristocratic society of his age.

The Prologue of *The Rivals* proves that Sheridan's key purpose is to please his audience and not to teach them:

*Can our light scenes add strength to holy laws!*

*Such puny patronage but hurts the cause:*

*Fair virtue scorns our feeble aid to ask;*

*And moral Truth disdains the trickster's mask.*

*For here their fav'rite stands, whose brow, severe*

*And sad, claims Youth's respect and Pity's tear;*

*Who, when oppressed by foes her worth creates,*

*Can point a poniard at the Guild she hates.*

### NOTES

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Thus, Sheridan makes it very clear that the task of the comic writer is to provide entertainment and morality should be confined to tragedy. His 'light scenes' and 'gay inventions' are, according to him, not suited to teach. All that is felt, after the play has ended, is the pleasurable sensation, coming out of 'delightful absurdities' and 'of the quick embodiment of the ludicrous without malice'. In fact, what he has produced is not comedy, in the true sense of the term, but farce, full of liveliness and interest. And this farce is thoroughly amusing.

But behind this pleasurable sensation of Sheridan's play, there lies concealed the stroke of his mild satire. 'The Sentimental Muse', with her romantic scenes and pathetic sighs, is subjected to the hammer of Sheridan's fine mockery in the play. In the Prologue, added after the successful performance of the play, the dramatist attacks the sentimental comedy of the age – the comedy in which insipidity has taken the place of the licence of the Restoration comedy and the dialogue has degenerated into a string of sentiments. His satiric design is definitely clear here.

Satire has the objective of derision against the prevalent temper of the age with a clinical and curative design. This is what Sheridan seems to have attempted, but without venom or spite. In the treatment of the love episode between Julia and Faulkland, Sheridan's satiric objective is evident. Julia's words at the end of the play act as a pointed diagnosis of the fretful and sentimental love of the age. Faulkland is the dramatist's fine caricature of sentimental lovers. Through him, the dramatist ridicules such sentimental youth but his main aim is rectification of the sentimental temper and a happy union at the end.

Lydia's dream of a sensational elopement and fantastic ideas of a lover's duties, too, have some satirical touches. The play also contains a tirade against the circulating libraries since they feed Lydia's passion for sentimental novels. Mrs. Malaprop's notion about a girl's education and Sir Anthony's dogmatic view in the matter also contain some pleasant satiric strokes. In diverse ways, Sheridan is found to speak out satirically here and there in the play.

*But Sheridan is never serious in his business of chastisement. He laughs wildly while he lashes softly. The farce in The Rivals has an anti-sentimental approach. But this never overshadows the dramatist's power to amuse and attract. Sheridan nowhere appears to be Shaw. He is not a satirist but rather a great wit and his play is a farcical comedy rather than a preaching satiric comedy.*

### Check Your Progress

15. How is *The Rivals* different from other dramas that the comedy of manners?
16. What should be the true end of satire as per Dryden?
17. What is the purpose of Sheridan's satire?

### 3.10 THE RIVALS AS A PICTURE OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

An image of the times is exactly what Sheridan provides in his plays. The world which he presents before us is essentially an eighteenth century world in its habits, tastes and appearance. In *The Rivals*, Sheridan has given us a faithful picture of the social life of Bath, a fashionable resort in England in the eighteenth century. The action of the play centres round idle, easy-going life at Bath of the time. The town, with its long streets and pleasant walks, was notable in Sheridan's days for its natural beauties and mineral property in the water which could cure many diseases. According to Robert Herring, '*The Rivals*, has the greatest interest for the modern age for Sheridan's picture of Bath.' Of course, this is not the whole truth, for the representation of the town of Bath and town life is not exhaustive and the social aspect of the play does not depend solely on Bath life. Nevertheless, Bath and the fashionable life in Bath form the very environment, rather the social basis, of Sheridan's play of fun and mirth.

The purview of Sheridan's social life is confined to the fashionable section of the English community of his age. Like Goldsmith, he treated the English social life of the eighteenth century with a comical objective and a design of caricature. Like the typical comedy of manners, *The Rivals* depicts the life of the aristocrats in a very colourful manner. His criticism of life offers a vivid picture of the distorted outlook of the urban society of Bath in the eighteenth century. In the opening scene of the play, the dramatist gives us some clear account of Bath life:

*.....in the morning we go to the pump-room (though neither  
my master nor I drink the waters); after breakfast we saunter  
on the parades, or play a game at billiards; at night we dance;  
but damn the place, I'm tired of it: their regular hours stupefy  
me – not a fiddle nor a card after eleven!*

The general mode of living there, as related by Fag, was rather restrained but fashionable. The place was a good lounge for the people of leisure and fashion. In the morning, people gathered in the pump room to drink the mineral water. There were enough arrangements for some sort of sports and pastimes during the day time, while at night there were the balls. Of course, a strict injunction existed that every type of recreation or entertainment must end at eleven – 'not a fiddle nor a card after eleven.'

Sheridan also presents some other aspects of Bath life, such as the famous assembly rooms where gentlemen and ladies used to meet. A reference is also made to the poor sanitary condition of the abbey of Bath. Sheridan deftly hints at the hygienic hazards, caused by the burial of a large number of dead bodies inside the church yard and the frequent openings of those graves. Through Sir Lucius, this growing nuisance of that beautiful town of Bath is dramatically indicated.

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However, Bath life does not take up the entire social picture of Sheridan's play. *The Rivals* also contains some definite details of the fashionable English life of the eighteenth century. The play alludes to the existence of the circulating library in England during the time. These libraries were the happy haunts of young men and women like Lydia, with their brains charged with the romantic and idealistic notions of love. Lucy's words to her mistress indicate how there was a rush for books in such libraries, the popular books of the time being sentimental novels and cheap romances:

Lucy: Indeed, Ma'am, I traversed half the town in search of it: I don't believe there's a circulating library at Bath I hadn't been at.

Lydia: And could not you get *The Reward of Constancy*?

Lucy: No, indeed, ma'am.

Lydia: Nor *The Fatal Connection*?

Lucy: No, indeed, ma'am.

Lydia: Nor *The Mistakes of the Heart*?

*Lucy: Ma'am, as ill luck would have it, Mr. Bull and Miss Sukey Saunter had just fetched it away.*

Sheridan's picture of the age includes, through his caricature, the excessive sentimentality, found in many young people of the time. His representation of Lydia's 'singular taste' and Faulkland's 'silly sentimentality' well bears out the prevalent social temper of the time.

In the portrait of Mrs. Malaprop, Sheridan is found to have finely caricatured the tendency of the well-to-do country women of the time to imitate the fashions of the city and to show off the smartness as well as knowledge of city life. The ludicrous ignorance of such women is quite amusingly dramatized through Mrs. Malaprop's views and talk. Mrs. Malaprop also voices her views on female independence:

*You thought, miss! I don't know any business you have to think at all – thought does not become a young woman.*

*She thinks that girls should not have an opinion in matters of matrimony:*

*What business have you, miss, with preference and aversion?*

*They don't become a young woman; and you ought to know, that as both always wear off, 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion.*

Moreover, Sir Anthony represents the orthodox dogmatic, old views of the age with his bitter and specific prejudice against female education in particular. His talk with Mrs. Malaprop well indicates this aspect:

*It is not to be wondered at, ma'am, - all this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read. Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet!*

Sheridan had observed the upper surface of life closely and his first-hand knowledge of the aristocratic life of his time helped him in depicting it brilliantly. He is the master of social manners and is primarily concerned with the superficial manners of the civilized society, its frailties, follies and vices. His plays look inferior when compared with the comedies of Shakespeare but as a special class; it is the best kind of comedy which beautifully depicts the artificial life of the civilized society of towns and cities. The picture that Sheridan presents through his comedy is realistic and is attested by the works of Pope, Fielding, Addison, Steele and Jane Austen. He has caught in his characters both local and universal traits of mankind. The faithful depiction of this universality makes *The Rivals* a landmark in the English literary canon.

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

18. How does *The Rivals* depict the life of the aristocrats and Bath in the eighteenth century?
19. What does the character of Mrs. Malaprop portray?

## 3.11 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. The significant works of Oliver Goldsmith include *The Hermit* (1765), *The Deserted Village* (1770), *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774), *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759) and *The Citizens of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher* (1762).
2. Goldsmith's short life was a rare combination of talent and dissolution where at points he produced quality literature, and at others he was often a staunch wastrel. This compelled Horace Walpole to adorn Goldsmith with the epithet 'inspired idiot'.
3. *The Vicar of Wakefield* was published in 1766.
4. Thornhill has more sway on the vicar's family because he is rich despite being socially disregarded because of his characterlessness.
5. The 'Advertisement' in the beginning of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is addressed to its readers.
6. Burchell is in fact Sir William Thornhill in disguise.
7. The overlapping wings of prospects in matrimony, harmony in matrimony and family balance cover the whole plot of Oliver Goldsmith's novel.
8. Mrs. Deborah Primrose is an active agent in the story who brings in the main action to plot.
9. Sheridan's characterization is based on the Jonsonian pattern in which every character represents a class or type rather than an individual.

## NOTES

10. According to Sir Henry Irving, Sheridan “is at once the heir to the best traditions of the Restoration Comedy and the most notable English dramatist of the eighteenth century.”
11. One of the weaknesses of Sheridan’s art of characterization is that his characters lack subtlety of emotion and motivation.
12. With the restoration of Charles II in 1660, came the reopening of the theatres. In this age of “energy and curiosity”, as Bonamy Dobree points out, the playwrights wrote the Comedy of Manners so called, because of their concern with polished personality of men and women – i.e., their manners amidst a galaxy of wit and fashion of the elitist ethos. In them we find, a reflection of the gay intrigues, and an echo of the cynical and fabulous conversation which was the reality of the dissolute Restoration worldlings.
13. The three most-acclaimed plays produced by R.B. Sheridan are *The Critic*, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*.
14. The play is considered to be one of the comic masterpieces of the Restoration period. The excellence of *The Rivals* lies in its amusing situations, its sparkling witticisms and its lively reproductions of contemporary life.
15. *The Rivals* differs from the comedy of manners on one point. The Restoration Comedy of Manners was highly immoral as the characters were engaged even in illicit love-making. There is no instance of illicit love-making in *The Rivals*.
16. According to Dryden, the true end of satire should be ‘the amendment of vices through correction.’
17. Satire has the objective of derision against the prevalent temper of the age with a clinical and curative design. This is what Sheridan seems to have attempted, but without venom or spite.
18. *The Rivals* depicts the life of the aristocrats in a very colourful manner. His criticism of life offers a vivid picture of the distorted outlook of the urban society of Bath in the eighteenth century.
19. In the portrait of Mrs. Malaprop, Sheridan is found to have finely caricatured the tendency of the well-to-do country women of the time to imitate the fashions of the city and to show off the smartness as well as knowledge of city life. The ludicrous ignorance of such women is quite amusingly dramatized through Mrs. Malaprop’s views and talk.

## 3.12 SUMMARY

- Oliver Goldsmith was a noted novelist, playwright, poet, essayist and prose writer of the Augustan Age of English letters, who hailed from Ireland. It cannot be affirmed if Goldsmith was born on a particular date or year, however, 1728 or 1730 is assigned as the year of his birth.



- Goldsmith was short and stout, blessed with wit, very simple-natured and devoid of a single streak of cunningness. If he had gambled in his life, he also never saved a penny that caused a sufferer a pretty smile.
- *The Vicar of Wakefield*, published in 1766, written about 1761 or 1762, has a native English setting of two village parishes: the first one is named Wakefield, and the other is never mentioned, save hinting at a dominant family name: Thornhill. The English village where the majority of the action is set reiterates Goldsmith's memories of his Irish home of childhood days in Lissoy. The hero of the novel is a virtuous man, who having left behind a lavish life and modern facilities in his previous job, appreciates his hard and close-to-nature life.
- Goldsmith's work emits shades of his personal philosophy and attitude towards his age. And that verges on the lightness of life, which he seemed to admire in the countryside, and less complex characters, in contrast to the pomp and polish of his age.
- *Sperate miseri, cavete faelices* is the Latin phrase tagged on the top of the novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It means 'Let the wretched live in hope and the happy be on their guard'. Oliver Goldsmith begins his story with the nature and description of the protagonist's family: the Vicar of Wakefield.
- In the second last chapter of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, when the nephew Squire Thornhill bids his greeting and tries to embrace his uncle, his uncle repels it. He strictly conveys that Squire Thornhill should not expect his uncle to endure his vices, but rather only honesty in a person which can find a space in his heart.
- Oliver Goldsmith's in his masterpiece *The Vicar of Wakefield*, has carefully woven some important themes which he has tried to validate by his hero's life and those of others characters.
- The protagonist of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Dr. Charles Primrose is a righteous and kind gentleman who lives his life on the principles of simplicity.
- Mrs. Primrose, the wife of Vicar Dr. Charles Primrose, is a poorly educated woman who is though simple and sweet by nature, yet runs behind superficial charms of life.
- With the restoration of Charles II in 1660 came the reopening of the theatres. In this age of 'energy and curiosity', as Bonamy Dobree points out, the playwrights wrote the Comedy of Manners so called, because of their concern with the polished personality of men and women – i.e., their manners amidst a galaxy of wit and fashion of the elitist ethos.
- Sheridan is one of the greatest dramatists of his time. His success rests on two of his plays – *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*. Following Goldsmith, Sheridan expressed a strong reaction against the Sentimental Comedy which was in vogue during the time.

## NOTES

## NOTES

- Sheridan has often been criticized for his mild satire. Critics point out that his satire is not bitter enough as that of Ben Jonson. But Jonson's satire is bitter and pungent, for he is a self-proclaimed reformer and preacher.
- The second half of the eighteenth century is associated with sentimentalism both in the novel and in drama. In the case of drama especially, sentimentalism had a very vitiating influence and marked a decline in the quality of dramatic writing.
- Of course, the anti-sentimental character of Sheridan's play is also marked in the dramatist's sling at the sentimental characters of the contemporary plays. This is to be found in the treatment of the love episode of Julia and Faulkland which is elegantly caricatured for its sentimentality.
- Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*, is one of the most outstanding comedies in this class. It shows all the features of the comedy of manners but is free from its coarseness or immorality. It is, in fact, an anti-sentimental comedy which is actually the artificial comedy of manners.
- An image of the times is exactly what Sheridan provides in his plays. The world which he presents before us is essentially an eighteenth century world in its habits, tastes and appearance.
- According to Dryden, the true end of satire should be 'the amendment of vices through correction.' But the satires of Swift, Dryden and Pope – the masters of satire in the Age of Reason – were pungent and vitriolic in nature.

## 3.13 KEY TERMS

- **Augustan age:** It refers to the period of English literature in the early 18th century, when writers such as Swift and Pope were active. The name comes from that of the Roman emperor Augustus, who ruled when Virgil, Horace and Ovid were writing, and suggests a classical period of literature.
- **Sentimental fiction:** It refers novels of the 1760s and 1770s exhibit the close connections between virtue and sensibility, in repeatedly tearful scenes; a character's feeling for the beauties of nature and for the griefs of others is taken as a sign of a pure heart.
- **Vicar:** It refers to a priest in the Church of England who is in charge of a church and the religious needs of people in a particular area.
- **Anti-sentimental Comedy:** It may be referred to as the comedy of manners without the elements of vulgarity and the profanity which came about in the 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature.
- **Prologue:** It is an introductory part of a play. It gives information to the audience about the play.

### 3.14 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

#### Short-Answer Questions

1. What chiefly does *The Vicar of Wakefield* exhibit as a work of art?
2. Apart from Charles Primrose, which character employs the characteristics of Oliver Goldsmith in the novel?
3. Are there elements of eighteenth-century polished society and style of expression in Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*?
4. *The Rivals* is found to bear the spirit of the anti-sentimental comedy in all its aspects. Do you agree with the statement?
5. Give a brief description of the characters in *The Rivals*.
6. How is Sheridan's satire different from other dramatists, such as Pope and Shaw?

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. What is the significance of the advertisement and the ballad in *The Vicar of Wakefield*? Explain with reference to the context.
2. Discuss major themes in Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.
3. Examine *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a proponent of the sentimental and domestic fiction genre told in a satirical vein.
4. Analyse the major themes in *The Rivals*.
5. Discuss the role played by Sheridan in introducing Anti-sentimental Comedy?
6. Discuss the Comedy of Manners with special reference to *The Rivals*.
7. Elaborate 'the method of contrast' — a method of characterization adopted by Sheridan.
8. Many critics consider Sheridan second only to Shakespeare. Do you agree with the statement? Discuss in your own words.

### 3.15 FURTHER READING

- Rousseau, G.S. 2013. *Oliver Goldsmith: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Manning, J Peter. 1990. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Marilyn. 1985. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Ousby, Ian. Ed. 1993. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. Revised Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Drabble, Margaret. 1995. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. rev. and updated. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## UNIT 4 GALSWORTHY AND SHAW

### Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 About the Author: John Galsworthy
- 4.3 *Strife*: A Play in Three Acts
  - 4.3.1 *Strife*: A Meaningful Drama
  - 4.3.2 Presence of Objective Detachment in *Strife*
  - 4.3.3 Play as a Creative Tool to Expose Social Hypocrisy
- 4.4 Setting and Characterisation in Galsworthy's *Strife*
  - 4.4.1 Attributes in *Strife*'s Characters
  - 4.4.2 *Strife* as a Realist Drama
- 4.5 *Strife* as a Reflection of Industrial Society
- 4.6 About the Author: G.B. Shaw
- 4.7 *Arms and the Man*: Summary
  - 4.7.1 Characters in *Arms and the Man*
  - 4.7.2 *Arms and the Man* as an Anti-Romantic Play
  - 4.7.3 Drama of Ideas
  - 4.7.4 Shaw and *Arms and the Man*
- 4.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.9 Summary
- 4.10 Key Terms
- 4.11 Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.12 Further Reading

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## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit covers in detail the play *Strife* written by John Galsworthy and the play *Arms and the Man* written by G. B. Shaw.

*Strife*, a three-act play, is the most successful of the three plays written by the English writer John Galsworthy. It premiered in 1909 in London at the Duke of York's Theatre, and in New York at the New Theatre. *Strife* is a realistic drama about an industrial strike at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works and deals with the antagonism between industrial workers and those who are determined to remain their masters.

In the play, there is a prolonged unofficial strike at a factory. The trade union and the company directors attempt to resolve the affair, which is causing hardship among the workers' families. There is a confrontation between the company chairman and the leader of the strike.

Through the play's structure, Galsworthy intends to present an impartial balance between the forces of revolt and conservatism, describing the fierce stalemate from both the workers' and the directors' points of view. On the one side, there is the dynamic, white-haired John Antony, who dominates the Board of Directors with his fixed ideas of class supremacy; on the other, David Roberts is

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the passionate and righteous orator who leads the strikers through the struggle. As starvation threatens the families of the strikers, the relationships of the women on either side of the dispute falter across the class divide.

Galsworthy's portrait of realism leaves the argument carefully poised and ultimately unresolved, as the vehement ideologies of each side are eventually defeated by the negative, reductive force of compromise. But the power of his characters is designed to resonate beyond their circumstances as portraits of absolute extremism.

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, critic and controversialist whose influence on Western theatre, culture and politics extended from the 1880s to his death in 1950 and beyond. He wrote more than sixty plays, the most important ones being *Man and Superman* (1902), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923). Shaw became the leading dramatist of his generation with a range incorporating both contemporary satire and historical allegory. In 1925, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Shaw's first box-office success was *Arms and the Man* (1894), a mock-Ruritanian comedy satirizing conventions of love, military honour and class. The title *Arms and the Man* comes from the opening words of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in Latin: *Arma virumque cano* ('Of arms and the man I sing').

The play was first produced on 21 April 1894 at the Avenue Theatre and published in 1898 as part of Shaw's *Plays Pleasant* volume. The volume also included *Candida*, *You Never Can Tell* and *The Man of Destiny*. *Arms and the Man* was one of Shaw's first commercial successes. It is a humorous play that shows the futility of war and deals with the hypocrisies of human nature, presenting it as a comedy.

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## 4.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Prepare a brief biographical sketch of John Galsworthy
  - Critically analyse the play *Strife*
  - List the significant works of G. B. Shaw
  - Identify the main characters of the play *Arms and the Man*
- 

## 4.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: JOHN GALSWORTHY

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John Galsworthy is an English writer and playwright, who earned the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932. He is largely remembered for his works *The Forsyte Saga* (1922), and its sequel, *A Modern Comedy* and *End of the Chapter*. John Galsworthy belonged to a wealthy family. His father was a solicitor. John received his education at Harrow and New College, and Oxford. His intention was to earn

his specialization in marine law. Consequently, he undertook a voyage during which he met Joseph Conrad (on a merchant ship). Conrad was a distinguished English writer who became famous for his novels and short stories.

John Galsworthy somehow did not wish to pursue his studies in marine law and hence, took to writing (his new found interest). Initially, he used the pseudonym John sinjohn for writing his first works, *From the Four Winds* (1897), a collection of short stories, and the novel *Jocelyn* (1898). Galsworthy's other novels include *The Country House* (1907), *The Patrician* (1911), and *The Freelanders* (1915).

In 1905, John Galsworthy married the divorced wife of his first cousin, A.J. Galsworthy.

The Forsyte Saga was made into a television series by the British Broadcasting Corporation and became immensely popular in 1967.



**Fig. 4.1** John Galsworthy

### Important Works

- *The Silver Box* (1906),
- *The Man of Property* (1906)
- *The Country House* (1907)
- *Strife* (1909),
- *Justice* (1910),
- *The Eldest Son* (1910)
- *The Little Dream* (1911)
- *The Fugitive* (1913)
- *The Dark Flower* (1913)
- *The Full Moon* (1915)

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- *The Skin Game* (1920)
- *Loyalties* (1922)
- *The Foundations* (1922)

## NOTES

### Check Your Progress

1. In which year was the play *Strife* published?
2. Mention the significant works of John Galsworthy.

## 4.3 *STRIFE: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS*

John Galsworthy's play *Strife* is about a strike that takes place in a tin factory. The workers' strike highlights the various problems that were common during the early part of 20th century. The play is about the conflict between John Anthony and David Roberts. Antony represents the chairman of the Board while Roberts is the leader of the strike. The play takes into account various issues related to social reforms, difficult working conditions of the workers, the demanding working hours as well as the low wages that were given to the factory labourers.

*Strife* is a play in three acts and written in the English language. The action in the play takes place on 7 February. The location is Trenartha Tin Plate Works which is situated in the border area of England and Wales.

### Act I

As we get to know, several months have gone by and the strike is still continuing. The opening scene highlights concern of the directors who are now concerned about the damages that the company is recurring because of the long drawn strike. The trade union representative Simon Harness mentions about the trade unions' withdrawal of support to counter strike. He claims support that he can make the workers withdraw their demands only if the director agrees for the demands that the union is going to place.

On the other hand, there is David Roberts who is trying to safeguard the rights of the workers. He is the leader of men's committee and is in favour of continuing with the strike until the logical demands are made with. He says that even though the men are starving and are on the verge of death, they are still not looking for a compromise. This leads to a deadlock situation as the company chairman, the elderly John Anthony, refuses to mellow down on the stand just as Roberts refuses to review the situation.

After the meeting we are introduced to Enid Underwood who is daughter of John Anthony and she is also the wife of the manager. Enid tries her best to reason out with her father and find an amicable solution for the situation as she was aware of the suffering of the family of the workers. Even Annie, who was the wife of Roberts and served as a helping hand in the Enid household was very concerned about the situation as it was taking a toll on both John Anthony as well as her husband.



## Act II

In Scene I of the second act, we see Enid visiting Annie Roberts (because of her heart condition) in the Robert's cottage. Enid on David Robert's arrival tells him that there is a need for a compromise here and that he must show more sympathy towards his wife. This falls on deaf ears as he refuses to change in perspective apathetic of the concern his wife shows towards the condition of the families of strikers.

In the second scene we observe that a platform has been raised near an empty space close to the factory. Here Harness makes a speech to the protesting strikers that hunger strike is not a good advice and that they should instead consider reducing their demands. They should side with the Union who will definitely support them. Two contrasting speeches are then delivered. In one, Robert opines that the fight is anti-Capitalism "a white-faced, stony-hearted monster". But soon, the news of his wife's death is communicated to him and he leaves. Later on, the meeting fizzles out.

## Act III

The next Act takes place in the manager's home where we see Edgar Anthony and Enid in conversation. Edgar is the son of the chairman and also one of the directors. Enid is now more concerned about her father and is not thinking much about rest of the men. Edgar, on the other hand, has the men as his priority. Amidst this, the news of Mrs Roberts' death reaches them.

This changes the course of the already troubled meeting. Edgar, in a totally frank manner, says that he cannot go on starving women and will rather resign which does not sit well with the other directors. John Anthony now makes a rather grand speech saying that they should give in to the demands of the men. He also puts forward the motion that the dispute should be transferred to the hands of Harness, this draws agreements from all the directors. Anthony is the only one who disagrees and therefore he decides to resign.

Next, we see that Roberts and Harness from the Men's Committee are present to receive the result. Roberts reiterates his point but as soon as he finds out the result, he comes to see that both Anthony and him are being removed and the final agreement is the one that was proposed even before the strike.

### 4.3.1 *Strife*: A Meaningful Drama

John Galsworthy, in one of his seminal essays, 'Some Platitudes Concerning Drama', mentions that: 'A drama must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to poise the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day. Such is the moral that exhales from plays like *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*.' His *Strife* is a great example of his theories.

John Galsworthy had composed *Strife* by early 1907, long before the play *Joy* was produced. Galsworthy himself was slightly reluctant to schedule another production immediately after one was being performed. But as luck would have it, after *Joy* miserably failed to earn any commercial attention no one was willing to

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produce his play. Moreover, Galsworthy, himself did not feel very confident about *Strife* as he knew it was too grim. This was a feeling which was haunting him since that time he had begun writing the play. His friend and critique Garnett himself was unsure about how he felt about the play. He had some issues especially about the ‘psychological exactitude’ that the play was trying to project. Yet, at the same time, he insisted about his own lack of confidence over and an instinct to comment on a text like *Strife*.

By 1907, after reading the play, Murray was convinced about the quality of work. He wrote how impressed he was after reading the manuscript of *Strife*. Even Conrad did not hesitate to express his delight on reading the manuscript while showing his discomfort over the persistence of critics who were turning hostile towards new manuscripts. He wrote, ‘Bad as it is to see one’s work misunderstood, the murmurs against *Joy* shall be drowned in such a shout around *Strife* as this country has not heard for a hundred years or more. That is not only my conviction but my feeling and absolutely overpowering feeling. You’ve got only to sit tight and watch your glory approaching...’

### 4.3.2 Presence of Objective Detachment in *Strife*

As a play, *Strife* is a fair playground of motives, opinion, actions and facts which organically come together to form a coherent meaning. The play highlights the struggle between the capitalist society and the labour class and demonstrates the opinion of the author without taking sides. In his essay ‘Some Platitudes Concerning Drama’ Galsworthy mentions about three significant elements that are available to a dramatist. The dramatist can give the public whatever it is looking for or the dramatist can hand out the audience what s/he things should be given out or extend the audience a slice of life as it appears in reality without any distortion. This undistorted version will carry the dramatist’s outlook which will carry certain portions and various combinations of life as we come across. But this outlook will be devoid of any kind of prejudice or preference leaving the audience to draw its own conclusion or moral perspective. The final method, of course, requires a second amount of detachment while it expects to showcase certain amount of love, curiosity, sympathy, etc., which are expected of an art form. This detached view with an amount of involved emotion is used only to highlight certain aspects of life without calling for immediate result.

The detachment about which John Galsworthy mentions in his essay can be seen throughout the play, *Strife*. Galsworthy’s idea of ‘sympathy for things’ can be easily identified in the balance that he creates in the creation of the scenes in the play. Let us take an example; first we come across the representatives of the capitalist state, after that we are introduced to Harness. And after that within no time, we are made to meet ‘the men’. The audience first gets to hear the arguments of the capitalists. After that they get to know what is going on in the minds of the working class. And within a few moments into the play we come across a deadlock situation between both the parties. Soon we come across someone called Enid. She represents another aspect of the situation. She is the daughter of Anthony (the head of the capitalist army). Critics have identified Enid as the ‘human element’ in

the play. At one point in the play, Enid says ‘We see all the distress.’ At some other point, she says, ‘You remember my maid Annie, who married Roberts? It’s so wretched, her heart’s weak; since the strike began, she hasn’t even been getting proper food,’ to remind everyone that the strike was bringing nothing but suffering and pain to those who are already weak. In Act II, we see Enid visiting Robert’s cottage. But we do not come across a scene which has been overtly sentimentalist or swings in favour of the workers. It does not draw conclusion as to if it is a good idea to empathize with the obduracy of the Board. John Galsworthy’s detachment is more than evident in this scene. The playwright needs to present a neutral aspect to present the truth while creating an intriguing dramatic contrast makes him introduce the soft and gentle Enid.

Apart from detachment, Galsworthy abides by the rule of creating drama that he himself lets down as a theorist. According to him, ‘The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all license, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.’ In the first scene of the second act, we come across characters who are laid bare a commendable sense of detachment while showcasing clarity of vision and clarity of approach. The playwright seems to suggest that if the financially deprived are in a bad state, it probably (to a certain extent) is a reflection of their own pride coupled with a dogged tenacity. The response of Madge Thomas: ‘What suffering? ... Who said there was suffering?’ is levelled against the person before the audience who is in sync with reality and not someone who is a whining and overtly melodramatic in nature. Galsworthy seems to imply that if the rich are called they also carry with them the milk of human kindness; while the poor are miserable because at time they refuse to understand the demand of the situation and remain stubborn and haughty.

### 4.3.3 Play as a Creative Tool to Expose Social Hypocrisy

John Galsworthy hailed from an aristocratic background and was trained in legal studies. He used his keen sense of observation and acute sensitivity to bring forward the injustice and hypocrisy that plagued the world. Just like George Bernard Shaw he was interested in exposing class snobbery that he came across. For him the desire to expose such hypocrisy was more important than the medium. Galsworthy’s plays are known for their solidly built structures and a central problem around which the entire play revolves. His plays document various perspectives and try to objectively examine the problem. The various perspectives are exposed through situations or characters in the play. The conclusion that is provided in the play might appear unsatisfactory at the beginning but upon reflection one would realise that the ending is justified in context to the circumstances and events that appears in the drama.

In both *The Silver Box* (1906) and *Justice* (1910), Galsworthy tries to expose the double standards of the law while in *Strife* (1909), he undertakes the

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responsibility of highlighting the clash between capital and labour. The playwright points out, through the unnatural stubbornness of his characters, John Anthony and David Roberts. Even though both represented antagonistic view of life and seem to understand each other's position yet the inevitable took place. There was both suffering and violence. In the end, we get to know that Robert's wife is dead and both the men are shaken in spirit as well as in health.

The vein of irony, which is hallmark of Galsworthy's drama, can be witnessed in *Strife* as well. In the play, we see that the terms on which the owners and the workers agree to call off the strike are the same condition that was submitted before the strike had commenced. It is this element of irony which is Galsworthy's inherent strength as well as his chief weakness. Although the ending sounds logical and impressive, *Strife* still carries the level of 'well made' something that was very common in his days.

**Check Your Progress**

3. What is the location of the play *Strife*?
4. What is the main theme of the play?

## **4.4 SETTING AND CHARACTERISATION IN GALSWORTHY'S *STRIFE***

*Strife* as a play is meant for the thoughtful public. It is emotionally steering tale of a strike that takes place in the Trenartha Tin Plate Works. The factory is located on the borders of England and Wales. The play revolves mostly around John Anthony and David Roberts.

### **4.4.1 Attributes in *Strife*'s Characters**

In this section, let's study the main characters of the play, *Strife*.

#### **John Anthony**

He is the chairman of the plant. His character is very much reminiscent of and drawn from the popularly found leaders in twentieth century industrial disputes. He is very much headstrong and fixed on his attitude, is fiercely adamant about his principles in life. He is projected as a rigid and uncompromising man who is autocratic in his decision making process. John Anthony is portrayed as a man who is unwilling to make even the slightest of the change so as to incorporate the demands of the working class. Even though the strike has been on for 6 months and most of his workers are in a state of semi starvation yet he refused to budge from his position. But in the end of the play, we see that he is forced to resign from the board of chairmen for his refusal to compromise with the union.

#### **David Roberts**

He can be called the opposite of Anthony in the play. He is the leader of the striking workers. He is projected as the voice of the working class and a revolutionist.

He is devoted to the cause of the workers and their freedom. He is a witness to the terrible life of the workers who are on strike, who have now turned worn and weary and are tortured by the awful poverty that haunts them. David is equipped with almost all the mental as well as moral attributes that his opponent carries. Along with it he is also armed with the spirit of revolt and carries within him the inspiration for modern ideas. Even he is very rigid in his principles. He will not take anything except victory for the class that he is representative of. But just like Anthony, he is also stripped of the union membership when a compromise is reached.

The commercial age looks for flexibility and anyone who is unable to adapt himself or herself to the demands of the modern day is considered to be a dead person. Irrespective of how important the cause is or the person is, the moment he or she denies to allow himself/ herself to be used or bend his principles, within no time s/he is thrown into the garbage bin of no significance. Both Antony and David meet a similar fate because of their rigid clinging to their respective principles. Superficially, it might seem that both Antony and David will represent two opposite ideas which, in turn, make them appear antagonistic to each other. Their perspectives are divided by a large gap that can never be bridged over. Despite that they both share a common fate. After all Anthony is the symbolic representation of conservatism. He was the flag-bearer of old ideas and iron methods. Whether we like or dislike his adherence to archaic notions and old school of understanding, we cannot deny that despite his adversaries, his courage and consistency is extremely admirable.

### **Anna Roberts**

Anna Roberts is the wife of David Roberts. She is not an active participant in the play's plot, but her presence is important to the plot. She is shown to be suffering from heart ailment and she was slowly being consumed because she was extremely undernourished and did not possess enough to keep herself warm. It can be said that her death which results from her condition due to the strike is what makes the parties to the strike think about a compromise.

### **Enid**

She is the daughter of the President, Anthony. She is sympathetic of the labour's cause. Like many others, she also thinks that a little bit of sympathy will be sufficient to bring a closure to the problem of the classes. But her father never agreed with her. He always ignored her by saying; 'You think with your gloved hands you can cure the troubles of the century.' Enid, needless to say, had never been exposed to the harsh realities of the working class. Even Mrs Roberts does not have a first-hand experience of the lives of the factory workers. She states, 'Roberts says workin' folk have always lived from hand to mouth. Sixpence to-day is worth more than a shillin' to-morrow, that's what they say. . . . He says that when a working man's baby is born, it's a toss-up from breath to breath whether it ever draws another, and so on all 'is life; an' when he comes to be old, it's the workhouse or the grave.' She is important to the plot to see how she tries to mediate the opposing parties. She not only tends to Roberts' sick wife but also meets Roberts personally to persuade him to let go of the fight.

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**Edgar Anthony**

Edgar Anthony, the son of the President, is someone who thinks kindly about the situation of the strikers. In a meeting attended by the representative of the company Edgar tries to project the perspective of the workers. Let us take a moment to consider the following conversation from the meeting:

*Edgar: I don't see how we can get over it that to go on like this means starvation to the men's wives and families . . . It won't kill the shareholders to miss a dividend or two; I don't see that that's reason enough for knuckling under.*

*Wilder: H'm! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if that brute Roberts hadn't got us down here with the very same idea. I hate a man with a grievance.*

*Wilder: We paid him five hundred and a bonus of two hundred three years later. If that's not enough! What does he want, for goodness' sake?*

**Simon Harness**

He is the union officer whose compromise is accepted in the end. Harness as a character is good at reading the pulse of the workers. The men seemed to be swayed by every other speaker. They were convinced by the various ideas that different speakers extend to them. But, by the end of everything, they are unaware of what exactly to do. Harness was the first one to identify this weak spot and play around with it. He tries to demotivate and weaken the determination of the workers. He tells them, 'Cut your demands to the right pattern, and we'll see you through; refuse, and don't expect me to waste my time coming down here again. I'm not the sort that speaks at random, as you ought to know by this time. If you're the sound men I take you for—no matter who advises you against it—you'll make up your minds to come in, and trust to us to get your terms.'

In the very beginning when the strike had just commenced we were told that the union had withdrawn its support. It was so because according to them the workers had used their own decision while calling for a strike. The company considers this as a great opportunity. They try and negotiate with Harness, putting the blame for the strike on the workers. The trade union is lacking to bring in solidarity and the workers are unaware of their real power. The company considered it to be a golden opportunity to not let the demands of the workers to be fulfilled. But David Robert was the only one who actually understood the situation. He tells others:

*Justice from London? What are you talking about, Henry Thomas? Have you gone silly? We know very well what we are—discontented dogs—never satisfied. What did the Chairman tell me up in London? That I didn't know what I was talking about. I was a foolish, uneducated man that knew nothing of the wants of the men I spoke for.... I have this to say—and first as to their condition.... Ye can't squeeze them anymore. Every man of us is well-nigh starving.*

In the play, the miserable state of the family of the workers on strike can barely be expressed. One of the women folk, called Anna Roberts, is shown to be suffering from heart ailment and she was slowly being consumed because she was extremely undernourished and did not possess enough to keep herself warm. While

on the other hand, Mrs. Rous projected a completely different picture. It seems as if she was so used to poverty that this miserable life seemed much better in comparison to what she had led in her previous life.

Into this abyss of sadness, remorse and misery enters Enid. She is the daughter of the President. Like many others, she also thinks that a little bit of sympathy will be sufficient to bring a closure to the problem of the classes. But her father never agreed with her. He always ignored her by saying; 'You think with your gloved hands you can cure the troubles of the century.' Enid, needless to say, had never been exposed to the harsh realities of the working class. Even Mrs Roberts does not have a first-hand experience of the lives of the factory workers. She states, 'Roberts says workin' folk have always lived from hand to mouth. Sixpence to-day is worth more than a shillin' to-morrow, that's what they say. . . . He says that when a working man's baby is born, it's a toss-up from breath to breath whether it ever draws another, and so on all 'is life; an' when he comes to be old, it's the workhouse or the grave.'

The meeting of the workers on the strike is an interesting case study on understanding the mind-set of mass psychology. The men seem to be swayed by every other speaker. They are convinced by the various ideas that different speakers extend to them. But, by the end of everything, they are unaware of what exactly to do. Thus, Harness was the first one to identify this weak spot and play around with it. He tries to demotivate and weaken the determination of the workers. He tells them, 'Cut your demands to the right pattern, and we'll see you through; refuse, and don't expect me to waste my time coming down here again. I'm not the sort that speaks at random, as you ought to know by this time. If you're the sound men I take you for-no matter who advises you against it—you'll make up your minds to come in, and trust to us to get your terms.'

Playing the second fiddle, Old Thomas approaches the workers and tries to harp on their religious sentiments. He tells everyone, 'It iss not London; it iss not the Union—it iss Nature. It iss no disgrace whateffer to a potty to give in to Nature. For this Nature iss a fery pig thing; it is pigger than what a man is. There is more years to my hett than to the hett of anyone here. It is a man's pisness to pe pure, honest, just, and merciful.'

Not wanting to let go of such a golden opportunity, Roberts comes forward to make his plea. Roberts after all had invested his heart and soul into this cause. He had even sacrificed his life for the cause. It's with the power of his eloquent and the sincerity of his efforts that he manages to keep the colleagues at least, to sit through his speech and listen to him, even though he knew very well that his friends were too weak to even have the courage to think of a change. Robert pleads: 'You don't want to hear me then? You'll listen to Rous and to that old man, but not to me. You'll listen to Sim Harness of the Union that's treated you so fair; maybe you'll listen to those men from London... You love their feet on your necks, don't you? ... Am I a liar, a coward, a traitor? If only I were, ye'd listen to me, I'm sure. Is there a man of you here who has less to gain by striking? Is there a man of you that had more to lose? Is there a man among you who has given up eight hundred pounds since this trouble began? Come, now, is there?'

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The commercial age looks for flexibility and anyone who is unable to adapt himself or herself to the demands of the modern day is considered to be a dead person. Irrespective of how important the cause is or the person is, the moment he or she denies to allow himself/ herself to be used or bend his principles, within no time s/he is thrown into the garbage bin of no significance. Both Antony and David meet a similar fate because of their rigid clinging to their respective principles. Superficially, it might seem that both Antony and David will represent two opposite ideas which, in turn, make them appear antagonistic to each other. Their perspectives are divided by a large gap that can never be bridged over. Despite that they both share a common fate. After all Anthony is the symbolic representation of conservatism. He was the flag-bearer of old ideas and iron methods. Whether we like or dislike his adherence to archaic notions and old school of understanding, we cannot deny that despite his adversaries, his courage and consistency is extremely admirable. David Roberts on the other hand is equipped with almost all the mental as well as moral attributes that his opponent carries. Along with it he is also armed with the spirit of revolt and carries within him the inspiration for modern ideas. Even he is very rigid in his principles. He will not take anything except victory for the class that he is representative of.

The dramatist, in the end, does not intend to profess anything as he is not meant to do that. But the moral implications are evident. The audience as well as the working men realise that they have to take records to method which are probably unfamiliar to them. They need to get rid of the idea that they can reconcile someday something which can never happen, i.e., the reconciliation between labour and capital. They are expected to understand that people like David Roberts are the real reason why revolutions have been brought in the world which has paved way for brighter futures and has brought people out of the clutches of the 'white-faced monster with bloody lips'.

#### 4.4.2 *Strife* as a Realist Drama

John Galsworthy was a dramatist of the modern times. His plays mostly deal with the problems of the society. Just like Ibsen, he did not support the old school of drama which had no relationship with the real life. He took inspiration from the theatre of realism and naturalism. English theatre found a different voice in Galsworthy's composition. His writings did not sacrifice the truth. Eugene Scribe, the influential French playwright had once mentioned in his speech: '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.'

This notion of the function of theatre was a summary of what was prevalent in both France and England at that time. The Victorian era in England had witnessed the performance of stage being governed by commercial motives. Since money was a primary significance no one tried to experiment or innovate. They never desired to include any realism or draw characters who were born out of everyday boring life. Every play written by Galsworthy is a reflection of realistic social



problems. The purpose of his writing was to expose the various shortcomings within the social institutions. He displayed a remarkable sense of objective detachment while creating his version of the society. Most of his writings are composed under the influence of French naturalism. For example, his play *The Silver Box* highlights the fact that there is no universal law. Law is different for the rich and the poor. In *The Eldest Son*, Galsworthy focuses on how the rules of morality vary from rich to poor. *The Fugitive*, on the other hand, showcases the position of women in social life. *The Mob* speaks about the spirit of the crowd and how idealism can change the perspective of life. The unexpected conflict between the workers and the employers are highlighted in the *Strife*. In *Strife*, Galsworthy refrains from taking sides and tries to present the perspective of both the workers and the employers with utmost truthfulness.

John Galsworthy finished writing his play *Strife* by the end of April 1907. This was the third play that Galsworthy had written. Interestingly, Charles Frohman produced the play that earned universal acclaim. The critics, who had earlier seemed not impressed with Galsworthy's tendency to provide impartiality to the conflict, now could not stop praising his ability to create perfection in terms of dramatic construction and technical efforts. Galsworthy's efforts in terms of drama that one can visualise in *Strife* was immediately adapted into the realistic theatre of England. Certain critics of today's era, at times, raise issues about lack of dramatic tension or about the tendency to take reports to sentimentalisation especially after the death of Mrs. Roberts or the superfluous nature of the characters. But they failed to take into account the context as well as the age in which Galsworthy was composing his dramas. These critics are probably true in their understanding but, at the same time, one cannot deny that these are trivial problems. After all, the lasting popularity that the play has earned is a hallmark of its authenticity and popularity.

The English labour movement found its real momentum in the 20th century. This was the period which witnessed the play of the power in the modern era. It was also a subject that Galsworthy found easy to approach. *Strife* retains a reputation of being a play for every age. The skilful dramatic opposition of ideas, metaphors, structural settings and characters' health established the tragedy of two leaders of opposing ideas. Despite the differences, they were bound by their iron willed principles.

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## 4.5 *STRIFE* AS A REFLECTION OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

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The play is stretched over a period of six hours that takes place in an afternoon in the month of February. Trenartha Tin Plate Works has already witnessed a strike for more than 5 months. This was sufficient enough to bring the company to a crippling position. On the other hand, there was a story of a heartless winter that was being faced by the hungry and suffering workers. The deadlock of the situation was the result of the opposite ideas that David Roberts, the representative of the strikers, and John Anthony, the representative of the company, brought with themselves.

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The play, *Strife*, is an intelligent craftsmanship that presents the audience with the current structure of industrial society. As the name suggests, it is about a 'strife' that takes place between the labour and the capital. The play advocates for a better understanding between these two forces for a smooth functioning of the society. Galsworthy understands the fact that the industrial world can function in harmony only if the capitalist and the labours work in union and not necessarily get obsessed with each other right. One should take into account that reconciliation between two parties is of utmost significance because regular strikes and lockouts only result in hampering the progress of flourishing industrial world and negatively impact the production.

Galsworthy had constructed the play in such a manner that the multiple meanings that arise from the discourse of the opening ideas, represented by Antony and Roberts, present detached perspective to introspect upon the situation. When a director of repute approached the playwright in 1931 to revive the play, Galsworthy had suggested that the actual theme of the play was not the difference of opinion inaugurated by the capital or labour but in actuality, it was about 'hubris or violence; *Strife* is, indeed, a play on extremism or fanaticism.' We get to know that both Anthony and Roberts refuse to move from their position. Their refusal to compromise can be seen as a heroic but intellectual arrogance that only resulted in suffering and death. Even though the playwright takes recourse to his usual 'type' characters, yet they are kind of extremists and not the regular representative of their class.

Galsworthy brings about a structural balance in the action to achieve the effect that contrast idea and parallel situation that character could bring. For example, the confrontation that takes place between the labour and the management in the first as well as in the third act balances each other. Again if we considered the meetings that take place between the directors and the labourers, respectively, they give vibes of being similar to each other, when in each side will come across a situation where the plan of action sketched out by the leader is rejected and a distinct inclination to accept the terms laid bare by the union representative is suggested. The playwright handles a large cast by bringing out the proper balance of psychological as well as social stereotypes. Moreover, his usage of 'setting, properties and dramatic language' which is absolutely relatable to the occasion elevates the quality of the play. Throughout the year, there are instances where we find the contrast being set between the unbearable cold and the warmth of heat, the pangs of hunger against the luxury of excess and the story of plenty against deprivation. Galsworthy uses constructive metaphoric language which conveys the idea that both Antony and Roberts are like Gods, especially in the way they exercise their power over the man they have at the disposal. Yet, at the same time, they reflect the qualities of devil especially the way they use the power to aggravate suffering for the sake of principles. The play has its fair amount of melodramatic moments (the fight that takes place between the workers towards the end of the Act II), but such instances are far and few.

In a very interesting twist to other existing plays, *Strife* neither celebrates nor condemns either of the sides who are involved in the struggle for principal.

Instead what the playwright tries to promote is the need of human touch and human feelings while trying to handle a critical situation like this. As we all know now, the plan that was opposed by the union representative at the beginning of the claim was the one to wish finally everyone better for by the end of the game and it was during this moment of rejection and humiliation that both Antony and Roberts realised how blind they had been in their approach to reject humanity. They were obsessively adhering to principles that brought nothing but unhappiness to all involved.

Over the years, everyone began to agree that economic disparity was the real problem. One can safely agree that after the publication of *Communist Manifesto*, literature started witnessing and increased interest in the economic setup of the society. Similar themes were introduced by stalwarts like Ibsen, Shaw, Wells and many others in their compositions. The divide between the rich and the not-rich in places like England and other European countries which called for a tug of war between the workers and their masters, was one element that attracted a lot of writers of that era.

Many historians as well as social researchers have pointed out that the class antagonism was extremely common in the early part of the 20th century. During the time inflation had skyrocketed. Even though the profits had increased by 29.5 per cent, yet, at the same time, wages were still low. This imbalanced increase in production profit and labour wage was the main reason for enhancing poverty at the time. This led to a strike that put forward the idea for higher wages. The other agenda in the strike was the reduction of working hours as well as access to national programme meant for improvement of labour conditions.

#### Check Your Progress

5. Why do both Antony and David meet a similar fate because of their rigid clinging to their respective principles.
6. Which character's opinion is considered in the end?
7. Why does the union had withdrawn its support when the strike had just commenced?
8. '*Strife* neither celebrates nor condemns either of the sides who are involved in the struggle for principal.' What does the author tries to promote instead?

## 4.6 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: G.B. SHAW

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was born in Dublin. He was the son of a civil servant. But despite his upbringing, his education was to a large extent irregular. This happened because Shaw hated any kind of organized training. He was soon involved in working in the office of an estate agent. Sometimes around 1876, while as a young man, Shaw moved to London. There he established himself as one of the leading critics of music and theatre. This was sometime during the eighties and nineties, and soon Shaw became a significant and influential member

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of the Fabian Society. It was for this society that Shaw went on to compose many pamphlets. Shaw launched his literary career as a novel writer. He was an absolute advocate of the new theatre that was started by Ibsen. Thus, switching modes, Shaw decided to compose plays which would help him highlight his criticism against the typical English stage. One of his earliest dramas was naturally titled plays *Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). Of the various plays that he wrote, *Widower's Houses* as well as *Mrs Warren's Profession* brutally attack the hypocrisy that prevails in society. But if we compare them to plays like *Arms and the Man* or even *The Man of Destiny*, we realize that the criticism is less intense. The plays foregrounded Shaw's radical rationalism. They also showcased his absolute disregard for conventions. They focused on his dialectic interest while indulging in a verbal wit. A confluence of these eventually turned the stage into a forum meant for ideas. But nowhere do we come across these issues more evidently than in *Life Force* as well as in the third Act that dramatizes woman's love chase of man in *Man and Superman* (1903).

However, in the plays of the later period, we come across discussions which sometimes engulf the drama as it happens in *Back to Methuselah* (1921). Even though it is in the same period that Shaw worked on his famous *Saint Joan* (1923), the essence of both tales are extremely different.

Shaw is known for allusions which are associated to modern times as seen in *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901). *Major Barbara* (1905), which is considered to be one of Shaw's most successful plays, the audience is captivated by the power of the witty argumentation which is delivered on stage. Something that highlights that man can definitely receive aesthetic salvation, and this is possible through political activity and definitely not as an individual. *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), which is always classified as a tragedy (at least by Shaw himself), is actually a comedy and the humour of this is directly pinpointed towards the medical profession. Later in *Pygmalion* (1912), we come across a witty understanding of phonetics.

**Important Works:**

- *Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898)
- *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901)
- *Man, and Superman* (1903)
- *Major Barbara* (1905),
- *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906)
- *Pygmalion* (1912)
- *Androcles and the Lion* (1912)
- *Saint Joan* (1923)

**Check Your Progress**

9. Mention the significant plays written by G. B. Shaw.
10. When did Shaw become a leading critic of music and theatre?

## 4.7 ARMS AND THE MAN: SUMMARY

The play *Arms and the Man* starts off in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff. The year is 1885 and the story is taking place in a Bulgarian town. This incident is taking place during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. Once the play begins, we see Catherine Petkoff as well as her daughter (Raina) have got to know that the Bulgarians have managed to register a massive victory against the cavalry charge which was led by Major Siergius Saranoff. Major Saranoff is engaged in the same regiment as Major Paul Petkoff. On hearing this, Raina is so caught up in anxiety that she starts to believe she might never be able to match up to the nobility of her fiancé. But just at the same time, Louka (the maid) comes rushing in with the most unexpected news. According to her, the Serbs are now actually being chased on the streets. Thus, it was necessary to bolt up all the windows and doors of the house. Raina caught in her thought promises to do so soon and, thus, Louka leaves.

As Raina is engrossed in reading, she hears gun shots. She comes across some noise at the balcony window. Soon she gets to encounter a bedraggled enemy soldier who was carrying a gun. He threatens to kill her in case she makes sound of any kind. Immediately after the soldier manages to tell Raina these words, we see Louka calling for her mistress from outside the door. She informs that there are several soldiers in the house who want to search the house. They want to investigate a case based on the report that a soldier from the enemy Serbian camp was witnessed by many to be climbing her balcony. On hearing this, Raina looks at the soldier. The soldier insists that he is ready to die. Yet at the same time, he intends to finish off a few Bulgarian soldiers before he dies. Thus, Raina instantly decides to keep him safe from others.

The soldiers soon launch their investigation but find no one and, thus, leave the place. Soon Raina asks the man to come out from the hiding. But unfortunately, she sits on his gun but is happy to know that it is not loaded. Soon the soldier informs that he is not carrying any cartridges. The man explains that instead of bringing bullets along with him, he almost always prefers to carry chocolates into the battlefield. Moreover, he informs that he is not an enemy. The man was a Swiss national who was a professional soldier that the Serbian army had hired. Hearing this, Raina offers him the last of her chocolate creams. He devours it and continues saying that she has actually saved his life. Once the Bulgarian soldiers had left the house, Raina wants the soldier to climb down through the drainpipe. Yet he refuses to do so. Even though he had the strength to climb up, he does not have the strength to climb down. Thus, Raina decides to go to her mother for help. Just then the 'chocolate cream soldier' moves on to Raina's bed and he falls instantly asleep on the bed. In fact, when these people finally re-enter the place, they find him sleeping so soundly that they are unable to wake him up.

Act II takes place four months after this incident. It takes place in the garden of Major Petkoff. We see Nicola lecturing Louka on the significance of nurturing proper respect for the superior class. Yet on the other hand, Louka is too wild and free a soul to fit into a regular servant role. She nurtures more lucrative plans for herself. She has no intension of marrying someone like Nicola. This is because she

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believes that he has the 'soul of a servant'. On the other hand, we see Major Petkoff arriving home after the war was over. We find his wife Catherine greeting him with significant information. She informs, while in the meantime Major Siergius Saranoff arrives in the scene. He is in the course of discussing about the end of the war. They both recall (and by now the famous story) how a young Swiss soldier managed to escape enemy clutches by climbing up a balcony that belonged to a noble Bulgarian woman and entered into her bedroom. The women are extremely unhappy to know that that such an aesthetically unsound story should be narrated in front of them. When left alone, Raina and Siergius profess their love for each other. Then Raina romantically announces that the two of them have definitely managed to find a love that was way higher than all.

As Raina goes out to get her hat (as she intended to go for a walk), Louka comes into the room. Immediately, Siergius wonders if she understands how tiring it is to get involved with something of the nature of 'higher love'. He immediately makes an attempt to embrace the attractive Louka. But as he is very familiar to her, Louka announces that Miss Raina is just like her. Louka discloses that Raina was involved in an affair, while Siergius was away in war. Yet at the same time, she denies to share who was Raina's lover. Siergius had accidentally managed to bruise Louka's arm while making an effort to get a confession from her. Finally after he apologizes, Louka forces him to kiss her arm. Hearing this, Siergius refuses and just at this moment Raina gets into the house. Siergius is soon called away, and we see Catherine entering the stage.

Soon we find both the ladies discussing how odd it was that Siergius actually related the tale of the escaping soldier. On the other hand, Raina shows no interest to know if Siergius had heard about it. By now she is absolutely tired of his disciplined propriety. At that very moment, Louka makes announcement that a Swiss officer with a carpetbag has arrived and is looking for the lady of the house. According to her, his name is Captain Bluntschli. Within no time, they both realize that he is no other than the 'chocolate cream soldier'. He is here to return the Major's old coat with which they had managed to disguise him. While the women are trying to make rapid and desperate arrangements to send the man away, Major Petkoff enters. He hails Bluntschli and instantly greets him in a warm way. It turns out he was the person who helped them in the ultimate negotiations related to the war. Thus, the old Major convinces everyone that Bluntschli must remain as their houseguest as long as he does not return from Switzerland.

With this, Act II comes to an end and Act III unfolds shortly after lunch. This scene takes place in the library. We see Captain Bluntschli engrossed in a large amount of paperwork which appears to be confusing. But he is doing it in a very efficient manner. While he is working, Siergius and Major Petkoff appear to merely just observe. Then we see Major Petkoff complaining about a certain favourite old coat that has lost. Just at that very instance, Catherine rings the new library bell. She then sends Nicola with the coat and the Major is left astounded by this unexpected retrieval of his lost coat. When Raina and Bluntschli are left in private, she compliments him for his good looks. Soon she replicates a high and noble tone. She suddenly chides him bringing into context certain stories that he

has told others. Bluntschli makes fun of her 'noble attitude' and insists that he is definitely delighted with her demeanour. This leaves Raina amused. Raina insists that Bluntschli is the only person who could ever see through the pretensions that she put up. Yet at the same time, she is surprised that he had never felt into the pockets of the old coat that she had given him. Actually, in that, she had put a photo of herself and had written on it 'To my Chocolate Cream Soldier'. While this confession had been made, at that moment, a telegram arrives announcing to Bluntschli the news of his father's death. It also said that he has to immediately return and make arrangements for inheritance of his six hotels.

While Raina and Bluntschli are all set to leave the room, we see Louka entering the stage wearing her sleeves in an odd fashion so that one can see her bruise more clearly. Siergius entered the place and asked if he can undo the wound with a kiss. Louka takes up the occasion and questions his real bravery. She elaborately questions if the man has the courage to walk the aisle with a woman who is otherwise beneath his social standing. Siergius insists that he would have done it otherwise, but given that now he is engaged to a girl who is noble, such kind of talk is immaterial. This is when Louka discloses that Bluntschli is his rival. Moreover, Raina is all set to marry the Swiss soldier. On hearing this, Siergius is left incensed. He comes across Bluntschli and insists him for a duel. But soon he retracts as Raina enters the scene and accuses him of making love to Louka so that she can spy on her as well as on Bluntschli. While continuing the argument, Bluntschli looks for Louka. Until now, she had been eavesdropping at the door. Once she is brought in, Siergius goes on to apologize to her. He kisses her hand. Soon they get engaged. Now Bluntschli seeks permission to turn into a suitor for Raina. On getting to know about the amount of money he will inherit, the permission for the marriage is granted. Eventually, Bluntschli says that he will return in two weeks' time and will get married to Raina. Succumbing with pleasure, Raina gives a loving smile to her 'chocolate cream soldier'.

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### 4.7.1 Characters in *Arms and the Man*

In this section, we will analyse the characters of the play *Arms and the Man* in detail.

- **Captain Bluntschli:** He is a professional soldier from Switzerland. He is seen serving in the Serbian army. Bluntschli is by now thirty-four years old. Moreover, he is projected as somebody who is realistic about the stupidity of war.
- **Raina Petkoff:** He is the romantic idealist. He is of twenty-three years. For him, wars are nothing but noble and heroic acts.
- **Siergius Saranoff:** He is the extremely young and handsome Bulgarian officer. He was the one who led an attack against the Serbs and this was an overwhelming success.
- **Major Petkoff:** He is the inept man. He is fifty-year-old. He is also the father of Raina. Petkoff is extremely wealthy by Bulgarian standards. Yet at the same time, he is unread. He is also uncouth and incompetent.

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- **Catherine Petkoff:** She is Raina's mother. Her appearance and actions are like that of a peasant. Needless to say, she wears fashionable clothes all the time so that she can resemble a Viennese lady.
- **Louka:** She is the female servant. She is also young and physically very attractive. Louka uses her appearance to reach ambitious goals.
- **Nicola:** He is a realistic man. He is a middle-aged servant.

#### 4.7.2 *Arms and the Man as an Anti-Romantic Play*

G. B. Shaw has always managed to wage a war against romantic as well as idealistic perspective of life. He spoke against the lies and hypocrisy that consumes the society. However, mostly critics agree that his war commences with *Arms and the Man*. According to Shaw, *Arms and the Man* is 'an anti-romantic comedy'. It is so because 'here he exposes the hollowness of the high idealistic romantic motion of love and war'. Taking a clever and witty stance, Shaw makes his audience to see the real truth which includes ideas about love and war.

*Arms and the Man* glimpses through the notes on romance and heroism. We see Raina as a romantic girl. She is engaged with Siergius. He is more like a 'Byronic hero' and has gone to the battlefield just like a knight should. The man manages to make a heroic charge and wins a victory, and turns into the hero of the nation. As we see, we realize Raina and Siergius both live in a world of romance laced with unreality. The romantic ideals they are consumed with are the outcome of excessive reading of Byron and Puskins. This is the very reason that their romance gets easily shattered while coming in contact with the formidable truth. Thus, Bluntschli eventually makes Raina see sense into her foolish ideas about war. Bluntschli convinces her that Siergius is a dim witted man. Moreover, during war, his regiment had nearly committed suicide, but fortunately, only the pistol had missed fire. He added that 'nine soldiers out of ten are born fools'. Eventually, both Raina and Siergius realize their hollowness while Siergius acknowledged that war is nothing more than a 'coward's art'.

As Raina and Siergius turn disillusioned, Siergius finds such life very tiring and, thus, seeks relief in Louka. She is the maid, and whenever he gets the chance, he tries to flirt with her. Soon Raina discovers her real 'hero'. On the other hand, Siergius realizes about Raina's new real love for Bluntschli. Soon she draws her attention towards Bluntschli not because he takes charge of bullets, but because he has the power to face reality. Raina is eventually educated by the realist Bluntschli. She manages to fully understand herself as well as the reality that she faced with. The cobweb of romance that had blinded everyone is broken. Thus, the searchlight of reality manages to ridicule the sense of false romanticism.

G. B. Shaw is not just someone who is a realist but he is also an anti-romantic. Shaw never presented realism in a way so that it looks like a photograph. But in order to achieve his anti-romantic stance, the dramatist had to resort to various exaggeration of reality. Thus, we have a fugitive soldier who must demand food only when he is famished. Yet on the other hand, when Bluntschli asks for it, it is hard to believe.



But it will be extremely unjust to assume that the play is devoid of romance. The initial part of the drama has a melodramatic tone. We have the beautiful and the dreamy heroine. Even the stories of heroic exploits as well as the war cry coupled with the running away of the soldiers along with the fugitives and the close saves last but not the least, the love at first sight—all screams of romanticism. But despite his realistic attitude, Bluntschli goes on to portray himself as a man of romantic temperament.

*Arms and the Man* is an anti-romantic play and Shaw in this play exposes the romantic notion associated with life, especially the foolish notions concerning love and war. Here Shaw highlights the fact that ‘the truth that lies behind the romantic illusion of life’. It is, therefore, correctly said by literary critic Chesterton that it is ‘a play built not on pathos, but on bathos or anti-climax’.

### 4.7.3 Drama of Ideas

As we know, drama of ideas or the drama of social criticism in its absolute sense is a modern day phenomenon. We encounter a number of everyday problems. We also have the evils being subjected to debates and looking for examinations as well as criticism which appear in these plays. Hence in it, the structure as well as the characterization is of secondary significance. Dramatists like Ibsen and Shaw or Galsworthy and Granville Barker were the initial propagators of this kind of realistic drama or drama of ideas.

For G. B. Shaw, drama was essentially a mode for articulating his own ideas along with his literary philosophy. Shaw ‘enunciated the philosophy of life force’ that he expected to disseminate through his dramatic recordings. Thus, the plays by Shaw are turned into vehicles for carrying the ideas. Yet at the same time, they might appear a bit propagandist at times.

Out of the many discussions that takes place in the play *Arms and the Man*, we see Shaw breaking into the ideas of love and war. We see the iconoclast Shaw drawing a curtain over all the false goods which men live and swear by. By including a smart juxtaposition of characters as well as that of dialogues, Shaw merrily disillusions romantic ideals about war as well as those of war heroes. According to Shaw, war is definitely not a thing related to banners and glory like most nineteenth century dramatist conceptualized. For him, it is a rather dull and sordid affair which was about brutal strength and dealt with callous planning. The dialogues uttered by Bluntschli or Raina and even Siergius are not mere words they are meant to propagate his message with great effect. As Siergius says, ‘War is a hollow sham like love’. But one thing to remember in *Arms and the Man* is that Shaw definitely does not attack war. Shaw is not Tolstoy. Instead, what he does is that he has to denounce the sentimental illusion that is surrounded around the concept of war. ‘Fight if you will’, insists Shaw, ‘but for goodness, sake don’t strike picturesque attitudes in the limelight about it.’ One can view it as one of the most irrational things of life. Yet in certain cases, it might be a brutal necessity. So Bluntschli turns into the ‘very mouth piece of the play that exposes the dreamful reality of war. There is a lot of learning in the disillusionment of Raina and Siergius.

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Yet we realize that this is not the only message that Shaw intends to convey through his play. In the *Arms and the Man*, Shaw has managed to take a realistic perspective of life as well as that of war and heroism. He also focuses on ideas of love and marriage. Shaw has thrown a realistic perspective of life that is complete in itself. The playwright has destructed the halo of romance that usually surrounds human life. In this play, his message is the destruction of the conception of the regular heroic soldier as well as that of the romantic perception of marriage. He criticizes life as a whole. Shaw promises for judging each and everything that is about human life, especially from a realistic point of view. In *Arms and the Man*, the hero that Bluntschli is, serves as the mouth piece of the author. Bluntschli is the epitome of calmness. He manages to see through shallowness of romantic love as well as that of romantic heroism. He speaks about all others and eventually breaks all the regular theories and the so called high ideas. He manages to convert Raina and Siergius to his own views and succeeds in life.

Moreover, like all the propaganda plays are destined to be, *Arms and the Man* is devoid of action, and instead of action, what we get is plenty of dramatic dialogues. Thus, it is not a lie that we see in *Arms and the Man*. Shaw shows us a perfect combination of these elements of action as well as that of ‘discussion’. The conversation that we come across in Raina and Captain Bluntschli is obviously very lively and perfect to mouth these lines in the form of the chocolate cream soldier. G. B. Shaw gives us the expression to his own understanding and reading regarding the glories of warfare. Soon the fugitive soldier begins to discuss about the universal issue of the flaying instinct. Yet his talk is not an end by itself. He begins to argue that only those with a view to persuade Raina to give him shelter and to protect him from the raids of Bulgarian soldiers. Thus, there is not a single discussion for the sake of debate. Most of the action in the drama expects that Raina’s dislike for a cowardly act should be elaborated.

#### 4.7.4 Shaw and *Arms and the Man*

As it is already a common knowledge now, the title of the play *Arms and the Man* is borrowed from the beginning lines of the Latin epic poem *Aeneid*. The poem was written between 29 and 19 BC by the great Roman poet Virgil. In this poem, Virgil tries to glorify war, whereas Shaw incorporates irony through the title *Arms and the Man*. Shaw makes it a point to attack the romantic notions of war. Even the conflict that we come across in *Arms and the Man* is all about contradictory beliefs as well as ideas. The romantic as well as the idealistic notions of war as well as that of love are held by Raina who also happens to be the heroine. Along with it, the realistic picture of war is sketched by Bluntschli. Even the practical aspect of love and marriage is presented by Louka. We realize that *Arms and the Man* is one of those early plays by Bernard Shaw that only has an amusing appearance but also a serious message. The play is amusing while it is thought-provoking. We have here laughter as well as seriousness being juxtaposed. For the aspects of love and marriage, A. C. Ward’s suggests: ‘The realities of love and marriage became one of the most frequent themes in Shaw’s plays throughout the remainder of his long life. He thought of marriage not as a means of satisfying the personal desires of individual men and women, nor as a means of strengthening

family ties, but as the means of bringing to birth a new and better generation. Though no one can predict with certainty the consequences of any marriage, Shaw never swerved from the conviction that marriage is a solemn contract, not a frivolous domestic excursion'. In the play *Arms and the Man*, we often come across situations where he laughed at the humours shared by his own characters like Raina, Siergus and Bluntschli. These characters lay the memories of Shaw's own childhood where he stayed in a home shadowed by the failure of the marriage that his parent's underwent.

While most of the play is fun-filled as well as light-hearted, yet through the fun, we see several smart hints which are about snobbery, and this also, in turn, presents the real nature of the society. The 'snobbery of the man servant Nicola who regards his employees with cynical servility, despising them, yet humbling himself before them because 'That's what they like; and that's how you will make most of them.' In the play, Shaw makes a point to poke at the materialistic mindset of the people that is irrefutable in the contemporary world. But the reader comes across such kind of snobbery through people like Petkoffs and who consider themselves to be better than their friends and because they have a library as well as modern appliances like an electrical bell. Thus, 'an upholder of social equality, Shaw was opposed to any idea that servants are inferior class. He held that all necessary work, however menial, is valuable as a service to the community.' Moreover, Shaw believed that 'it was mean and foolish to act as though the possession of wealth, or any other material advantage, is a sign of personal superiority'. It is very clear through the portrayal of his characters. The Petkoffs also claim that they are the richest family in Bulgaria. But most people have not got any positions in army because they just do not have the ability but rather they are also affluent. Most of the time, it is true that it is the affluence and definitely not the ability to move up in life as it happens in the case with Major Petkoff. We realize that the comedy of the play relies on contrasting elements of characters as well as the unexpectedly twists and turns of events along with few mistaken identities.

It is clear from the play that Shaw was actually challenging the basic stereotypes of character that were present on the Victorian stage. Yet in other respects, we see that in Shaw's dramas, as Shaw puts it in his own words, 'utterly unlike Ibsen in its stage methods and its Socialist view of human misery.' As we realize, Shaw 'wanted to bring in "reality", and reality for him was neither black, white, nor gray but all the colors of the rainbow'. As we understand, Shaw's works are the playground of psychology where the hero and villain are readily interchanged with a tragic-comedy of the actual elements. This man does not adopt the methods to completely the lineage of heroes as well as that of villains but to suggest that it is itself a superstition. Moreover, with such realities, which arises from the interweaving of superstition along with natural fact stems Shaws' brand of dramas. But the main segregation between Shaw's characters as well as being true to the whole theory of drama it is that which takes place between the significant people as well as the mechanized souls where there are a couple of other antitheses which cut across the vital characters. 'These are the antithesis of male and female and the antithesis of the actual and the ideal.'

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In 1894, the reception of *Arms and the Man* was nothing to write home about. The majority of people could not recognize its merit. But towards the fag end of the same year, the play was performed at the Deutsches Theater (Berlin). The title of the play was *Helden*. But by December 1894, the things had turned in favour of Bernard Shaw. Instantly, Shaw had become popular and was recognized as a great dramatist.

### Check Your Progress

11. How does the play *Arms and the Man* begin?
12. Who is Captain Bluntschli in the play?

## 4.8 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. The play *Strife* was published in the year 1909.
2. The significant works of John Galsworthy are *The Silver Box* (1906), *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *Loyalties* (1922) and others. He also wrote verse.
3. The location of the play *Strife* is Trenartha Tin Plate Works which is situated in the border area of England and Wales.
4. The play *Strife* highlights the struggle between the capitalist society and the labour class and demonstrates the opinion of the author without taking sides.
5. Both Antony and David meet a similar fate because of their rigid clinging to their respective principles.
6. Simon Harness is the union officer whose compromise is accepted in the end.
7. In the very beginning when the strike had just commenced, we were told that the union had withdrawn its support. It was so because according to them the workers had used their own decision while calling for a strike. The company considers this as a great opportunity. They try and negotiate with Harness, putting the blame for the strike on the workers.
8. *Strife* neither celebrates nor condemns either of the sides who are involved in the struggle for principal. Instead what the playwright tries to promote is the need of human touch and human feelings while trying to handle a critical situation like this.
9. The important works of Gb Shaw include:
  - *Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898)
  - *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901)
  - *Man, and Superman* (1903)
  - *Major Barbara* (1905),

- *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906)
  - *Pygmalion* (1912)
  - *Androcles and the Lion* (1912)
  - *Saint Joan* (1923)
10. When Shaw moved to London in 1876, he established himself as one of the leading critics of music and theatre.
  11. The play *Arms and the Man* starts off in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff. The year is 1885 and the story is taking place in a Bulgarian town. This incident is taking place during the Serbo-Bulgarian War.
  12. Captain Bluntschli is a professional soldier from Switzerland. He is seen serving in the Serbian army. Bluntschli is by now thirty-four years old.

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## 4.9 SUMMARY

- John Galsworthy is an English writer and playwright, who earned the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932. He is largely remembered for his works *The Forsyte Saga* (1922), and its sequel, *A Modern Comedy* and *End of the Chapter*.
- Galsworthy is also noted as a playwright. His significant plays include *The Silver Box* (1906), *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *Loyalties* (1922) and others. He also wrote verse.
- John Galsworthy's play *Strife* is about a strike that takes place in a tin factory. The workers' strike highlights the various problems that were common during the early part of 20th century. The play is about the conflict between John Anthony and David Roberts.
- John Galsworthy had composed *Strife* by early 1907, long before the play *Joy* was produced. Galsworthy himself was slightly reluctant to schedule another production immediately after one was being performed.
- By 1907, after reading the play, Murray was convinced about the quality of work. He wrote how impressed he was after reading the manuscript of *Strife*.
- As a play, *Strife* is a fair playground of motives, opinion, actions and facts which organically come together to form a coherent meaning. The play highlights the struggle between the capitalist society and the labour class and demonstrates the opinion of the author without taking sides.
- John Galsworthy hailed from an aristocratic background and was trained in legal studies. He used his keen sense of observation and acute sensitivity to bring forward the injustice and hypocrisy that plagued the world.
- Edgar Anthony, the son of the President, is someone who thinks kindly about the situation of the strikers. In a meeting attended by the representative of the company Edgar tries to project the perspective of the workers.

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- John Galsworthy was a dramatist of the modern times. His plays mostly deal with the problems of the society. Just like Ibsen, he did not support the old school of drama which had no relationship with the real life. He took inspiration from the theatre of realism and naturalism. English theatre found a different voice in Galsworthy's composition.
- The play is stretched over a period of six hours that takes place in an afternoon in the month of February. Trenartha Tin Plate Works has already witnessed a strike for more than 5 months. This was sufficient enough to bring the company to a crippling position.
- Galsworthy brings about a structural balance in the action to achieve the effect that contrast idea and parallel situation that character could bring. For example, the confrontation that takes place between the labour and the management in the first as well as in the third act balances each other.
- George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was born in Dublin. He was the son of a civil servant. But despite his upbringing, his education was to a large extent irregular. This happened because Shaw hated any kind of organized training.
- Some other significant plays written by Shaw include *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901). It is a historical play that is filled with allusions which are associated to modern times. The other one would be *Androcles and the Lion* (1912).
- The play *Arms and the Man* starts off in the bedroom of Raina Petkoff. The year is 1885 and the story is taking place in a Bulgarian town. This incident is taking place during the Serbo-Bulgarian War.
- G. B. Shaw has always managed to wage a war against romantic as well as idealistic perspective of life. He spoke against the lies and hypocrisy that consumes the society. However, mostly critics agree that his war commences with *Arms and the Man*.
- *Arms and the Man* glimpses through the notes on romance and heroism. We see Raina as a romantic girl. She is engaged with Siargius. He is more like a 'Byronic hero' and has gone to the battlefield just like a knight should.
- For G. B. Shaw, drama was essentially a mode for articulating his own ideas along with his literary philosophy.
- As it is already a common knowledge now, the title of the play *Arms and the Man* is borrowed from the beginning lines of the Latin epic poem *Aeneid*. The poem was written between 29 and 19 BC by the great Roman poet Virgil.
- In 1894, the reception of *Arms and the Man* was nothing to write home about. The majority of people could not recognize its merit. But towards the fag end of the same year, the play was performed at the Deutsches Theater (Berlin).

## 4.10 KEY TERMS

- **Bourgeois:** In Marxist philosophy, the bourgeoisie is the social class that came to own the means of production during modern industrialization and whose societal concerns are the value of property and the preservation of capital, to ensure the perpetuation of their economic supremacy in society.
- **Rationalism:** It is the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.
- **Anti-romance:** Sometimes referred to as a satire, it is a type of story characterized by having an apathetic or self-doubting anti-hero cast as the protagonist, who fails in the object of his journey or struggle.
- **Heroism:** It refers to the behaviour showing great courage especially for a noble purpose.
- **Victorian age:** It was a period of dramatic change that brought England to its highest point of development as a world power.
- **Strife:** It refers to angry or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues; conflict.
- **Labour:** In the context of the play, labour means workers considered as a social class or political force.
- **Capital:** It means wealth in the form of money or other assets owned by a person or organization or available for a purpose such as starting a company or investing.
- **Communist Manifesto:** It is an 1848 political pamphlet by German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.
- **Stereotypes:** They are widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

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## 4.11 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What is Galsworthy's idea of 'sympathy for things' in *Strife*?
2. Write a short note on the role of female characters in the play *Strife*.
3. Did Harness succeed in his plan to demotivate workers? Mention this in brief in the context of play *Strife*.
4. What is the source and irony of the title in Shaw's play *Arms and the Man*?
5. Which character in the play *Strife* best serves as Shaw's spokesman? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Differentiate between Sergius' and Bluntschli's views on war in the play *Arms and the Man*.

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## Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the conflict between John Anthony and David Roberts in *Strife*.
2. Explain in brief the characters of John Anthony and David Roberts.
3. Which of the Acts in *Strife* do you like most? And why? Explain in brief.
4. Analyse the condition of workers as presented in *Strife*.
5. '*Strife* retains a reputation of being a play for every age.' Justify this statement with relevant references from the play, *Strife*.
6. '*Strife* is a realistic drama about an industrial strike.' Justify this statement with references from John Galsworthy's *Strife*.
7. Examine the play *Strife* as a reflection of industrial society.
8. Assess how Galsworthy uses his play to expose social hypocrisy during his time period.
9. Why is Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* called the 'drama of ideas'? Discuss Shaw's use of farce to demonstrate some of his ideas.
10. 'Shaw rejected romanticism and embraced realism.' In this context, how realistic is *Arms and the Man*? Is there anything 'unrealistic' in the play? Elucidate.
11. How is Shaw's ideas of love and war discussed in the play *Arms and the Man*? Elucidate.

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## 4.12 FURTHER READING

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- Galsworthy John. 1999. *Galsworthy Five Plays: Strife; Justice; Eldest Son; Skin Game and Loyalties*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
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## UNIT 5    SYNGE AND YEATS

### Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 About the Author: J.M. Synge
- 5.3 *Riders to the Sea*: Summary and Critical Analysis
  - 5.3.1 Critical Analysis
  - 5.3.2 Character Sketches
- 5.4 About the Author: W. B. Yeats
- 5.5 Modernism
- 5.6 Irish Revivalist Movement
- 5.7 *Purgatory*: Critical Appreciation
  - 5.7.1 *Purgatory* as a Tragedy
- 5.8 Poetic Drama
  - 5.8.1 *Purgatory* as a Poetic Drama
- 5.9 *Purgatory*: The Ruined House, Bare Tree and the Characterisation
- 5.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 5.11 Summary
- 5.12 Key Terms
- 5.13 Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.14 Further Reading

### NOTES

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century is recognized as the age of modernist approach. 'Modernism' does not mean 'modern' as contemporary, or 'modern age' to be the age of Renaissance. It is rather a collective effort to revive Western Literature in the period after the World War and is termed as modernism. The revival of poetic drama is one of the developments of the inter-war period. This unit will cover in depth the plays, *Riders to the Sea* written by J. M. Synge and *Purgatory* written by W. B. Yeats.

Edmund John Millington Synge was an Irish playwright, poet, prose writer, travel writer and collector of folklore. He was a major figure in the Irish Literary Revival. He was also one of the co-founders of the Abbey Theatre. He is best known for his play *The Playboy of the Western World*. Synge came from a well-known Anglo-Irish background. However, his writings are mainly concerned with the world of the Roman Catholic peasants of rural Ireland. It also reflected the essential paganism of their world view. Synge died of Hodgkin's disease much before his thirty-eighth birthday as he was trying to complete his last play, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* is a one-act tragedy. It was first performed on 25 February 1904 at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. The play is set in the Aran Island, and like all of Synge's plays, it is noted

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for capturing the poetic dialogue of rural Ireland. The plot is based on the hopeless struggle of people against the impersonal but relentless cruelty of the sea.

*Purgatory* is a play written by the Irish writer William Butler Yeats, which was first presented at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 19 August 1938, a few months before W. B. Yeats' death. In the play *Purgatory*, W. B. Yeats represents the story of an old man and his sixteen year old son who are discussing about how the old man has killed his father and how the house they can see in the background is burned down by his father and how his mother is a tortured soul who needs to be salvaged from the purgatory through his actions. The play is often considered a mythical representation of the decline of the Irish culture which was attempted to be revived in the early twentieth century by people like W. B. Yeats. *Purgatory* is a very symbolical play and it needs to be read more than once to understand its complete meaning.

## 5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Prepare a brief biographical sketch of J.M. Synge
- Critically analyse the play *Riders to the Sea*
- State significant works of W. B. Yeats
- Analyse the theme of Modernism as evident in the play *Purgatory*

## 5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: J.M. SYNGE

John Millington Synge is the most popular and respected playwright belonging to the Irish Literary Renaissance, which also featured names like W. B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, at the turn of the twentieth century. Synge, who died before turning thirty-eight, managed to influence audiences, writers as well as Irish culture rather deeply through his works.

Synge was born in a Protestant family in 1871, near Dublin. He lost his father within a year. His religious mother brought up the five kids. At the age of ten, Synge began going to private schools, but had to discontinue for four years, due to his poor health. Thereafter, he studied from a private tutor. His love for music and training of playing the violin earned him a scholarship from the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Therefore, he was able to pursue advanced studies in counterpoint. During this time, Synge started writing poetry too.

Being a nonreligious person, with unconventional career goals, he was not a popular figure in the area where he lived with his mother. In 1893, he moved to Germany with the aim of studying music, but was deterred as he was nervous of performing. A year later, he shifted to Paris and studied language and literature at the Sorbonne.

He wrote poetry and literary criticism, and earned his living giving lessons in English. The following year, he started learning Italian in Italy, and a year later

went back to the Sorbonne. In between his extensive travels, he visited Ireland frequently, and wooed a sincere Protestant lady called Cherry Matheson. However, she rejected him due to his religious scepticism.

In 1896, Synge happened to meet poet and dramatist William Yeats in Paris. It was Yeats who suggested that Synge leave Paris and go to Aran Islands to 'Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression'. Synge followed his advice and soon became interested in studying the life and culture of the Irish. His interactions with the natives helped him gain knowledge of Irish dialect, culture and stories.

*The Aran Islands* was the product of his first encounter with the Islands about which he wrote in 1901. His first play *When the Moon Has Set* was a full-length drama, which was later condensed into a single Act. It is about a young, landowner who is an atheist but happens to be in love with a nun, who agrees to marry him. Owing to its ideologies, the play could not be promoted in Ireland then. In 1902, Synge wrote two verse plays: one pertaining to the disparity between age and youth, and another one about three Spanish fishermen settled in Ireland but who die at sea.

Again in 1902, Synge wrote three plays: *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker's Wedding*. All three used the dialect of the Irish peasants who dominate Synge's works. The preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* contains a description of the way Synge mastered the dialect of the region by carefully listening to the conversations of his mother's maids through a crevice in the floor. He felt that if those servant girls had been aware that they were being watched or observed, they would have tried to speak more accurate English. As a result, Synge preferred to eavesdrop so that he could enjoy the spontaneity.

*In the Shadow of the Glen* is an ironic comedy based on a story he had heard on the Aran Islands and also narrated in his book *The Aran Islands*. It is about a vagabond who takes shelter in a house where he finds Nora Burke guarding the body of her 'dead' husband. When she steps out of the house, the husband comes back to life and discloses to the vagabond that he has been playing dead because he suspects his wife of infidelity and wishes to catch her red handed. Nora, meanwhile, comes back to the house accompanied by a youth called Michael Dara, who expresses his desire to marry her, but whose actual intention is to usurp her land and cattle. On witnessing this, the husband drives the wife out of his life to lead a life similar to the tramps. In 1903, this play was the first play to be staged by the Irish National Theatre Society, which was founded by Yeats and Lady Gregory.

*In the Shadow of the Glen* received negative as well as positive feedback from the viewers. Some objected to the fact that it did not idealize the life of the Irish folk or their women. As a result of such negative feedback, two actors quit the show. However, the feedback improved in Dublin in 1904, when the British audience received it well, and translated versions were staged in Berlin and Prague.

*Riders to the Sea* faced little controversy as compared to *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The one-act tragic play is set on the Aran Islands, and features Maurya, an old woman whose husband, father-in-law, and five sons lost their lives

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at sea. As the play progresses, she loses the last man in the family, her youngest son Bartley. This play received favourable reviews from Irish critics after it was staged in 1904 and also appreciated by critics in London.

That same year, Synge wrote *The Tinker's Wedding*, which became the least renowned of his later works. This farce, narrated the story of the tinkers of Wicklow, who led a nomadic life, travelling, begging and making things for sale, and even swapping spouses. One of the main characters of the play is Sarah Casey, who wishes to marry her boyfriend despite it being an idea which is unconventional in their community. Her boyfriend, Michael Byrne, though is unconvinced and doubtful, is ready to marry her. His mother, Mary, is an alcoholic who scoffs at the idea of marriage. A priest consents to get them married provided they make him a tin can. The bundle they deliver to the priest does not contain the can but only empty bottles. The can is stolen by Michael's mother Mary. The play culminates with the young couple binding and threatening the priest.

As Synge knew that it would not be possible to perform this play in Dublin, he sold it to publishers in London and Berlin in 1908. This play was not staged while Synge was alive. He himself was not happy with its literary quality. Critics were not impressed with the play either. When it premiered in England in 1909, Yeats left after the first act. However, P. P. Howe appreciated *The Tinker's Wedding* for its humour.

Synge had not intended the *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker's Wedding* to be a trilogy but the three had several commonalities in terms of theme. Skelton believed that there was a loose connection between the three, especially in the conflicting folk beliefs and traditional Christian attitudes. Women are shown to be bound by circumstances, and each one presents a different aspect of a woman's dilemmas. In Skelton's words, 'As we proceed from *Riders to the Sea*, through *In the Shadow of the Glen* to *The Tinker's Wedding*, the age of the central female character diminishes and the psychological complexity of the drama increases.'

Synge's source of the plot in *The Well of the Saints* was probably the Sorbonne as it seems to have been derived from a medieval French farce. Set against the backdrop of the western mainland of Ireland across the Aran Islands, it is a story of a blind couple, Martin and Mary. As a result of a miracle, their vision is restored but it makes them realize that their happiness had all been based on illusions. By becoming blind again, they are able to find happiness again. Yeats promptly picked up the play for the Abbey Theatre, in 1905. Again, Synge was criticized for the unsure treatment of the Irish characters. But Howe, on the other hand, appreciated the certainty with which Synge portrays a sense of the theatre and approves of the dialogue and clear characters. After nearly six decades, Skelton called it 'a play with all the light and shade of the human condition. It expresses more distinctly than any other of Synge's plays his belief in individualism, his relish of those that stand up for their right to their vision'.

In 1906, during a tour with the Irish National Theatre Society, Synge fell in love with one of the actresses, called Molly Allgood, who went by the stage name Maire O'Neill. She was fifteen years younger to him and not highly educated

either. She played the main character of Pegeen Mike, in Synge's next work, *The Playboy of the Western World*. He valued Allgood's suggestions and opinions while penning this play. He was suffering with Hodgkin's disease at the time and, therefore, took a lot of time to pen the last act. In fact, even during rehearsals, the act was undergoing revisions, and therefore, its opening had to be put off for a while.

When *The Playboy of the Western World* premiered, the audiences reacted rather violently. People began hissing in the third act at Dublin theatres. The plot idealises parricide and has an unhappy conclusion, which did not go down well with the audience. The main character of the play is a young man called Christy Mahon, who believes he has taken the life of his father who was a tyrant. Hearing his narration of the story, the folks of his area uphold him as a hero. Pegeen Mike, a widow in her thirties, as well as other local women folk has a soft corner for him. Later, the 'dead' father appears with a bandaged head, in search of his son. One more attempt at murder follows before the two are finally reconciled when Christy turns the tables on his bullying father, who lends his support to the son's bravery and masculinity. They come go away together, leaving the women rather disappointed.

What drew the most criticism was the fact that Christy, in the play, insists that he wants only Pegeen Mike, and will not be drawn towards 'a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself'. County Mayo girls being called 'chosen females' and the comment on the undergarment offended people. *Freeman's Journal* accused the play of being an 'unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men and worse still upon peasant girlhood'. Though the play ran to a packed house the entire week, there was a lot of ruckus and even the police had to intervene to ensure security and law and order. Yeats appeared in court against the rioters and made sure they were fined. When the play was revived in 1909, there arose some controversy yet again, as it did during a tour of North America two years later. *The Playboy of the Western World* was condemned via resolutions passed in Liverpool and the counties of Clare and Kerry. But despite all odds, the play was well supported and defended by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Literary critic Charles A. Bennett called the play the most characteristic work of Synge. American neoconservative writer Norman Podhoretz, called the play 'a dramatic masterpiece', and analysed it as portrayal of 'the undeveloped poet coming to consciousness of himself as man and as artist'.

Before he passed away, Synge drafted one more play, while he was convalescing from Hodgkin's disease. This was one play that did not have peasant life as its theme. It was based on the Irish legend of Deirdre, the highly independent girl who was raised by King Conchubor to be his queen. However, she eloped with the brave man called Naisi, thus, making the prophecy made at her birth come true. Synge was not sure whether his health will allow him to complete the play; so he had requested Yeats and Lady Gregory to complete it, if the need arose. After Synge's death in March 1909, Yeats and Lady Gregory went ahead and staged the play just as Synge had left it, with the character of Deirdre being played by Molly Allgood, who also directed it.

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Yeats believed that had Synge completed the play, it would have been the best of his works.

### Important Works

### NOTES

- *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903)
- *Riders to the Sea* (1904)
- *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907)
- *The Well of the Saints* (1905)

### Check Your Progress

1. In which year was J. M. Synge born?
2. Name Synge's first play.

## 5.3 *RIDERS TO THE SEA*: SUMMARY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The play revolves around the misfortunes endured by a family due to the sea. The short play tells the story of an old woman from whose family all the fishermen were snatched away by the sea. The play is set in the kitchen of a cottage on an island to the west of Ireland. The presence of the fishing net and spinning wheel are proof that the family earns its living by catching fish and they also weave their own clothes from yarn spun at home.

The white boards stood against the walls are indicative of the fact that a coffin is about to be made to bury someone who has died.

The island is one of a group called Aran Islands. The incident depicted in the play is based on stories that Synge had heard from the natives when he had visited the Aran Island. Synge uses accurate local dialect which he grasped by keen listening and observation.

The first scene depicts twenty year old Cathleen, busy kneading flour. After putting the dough in the oven, she begins to spin yarn with the spinning wheel. Her younger sibling, Nora, arrives with a small bundle of clothes hidden beneath her shawl. She enquires about her mother's whereabouts and is told that she is trying to sleep in the other room. Nora informs Cathleen that the bundle of clothes was given to her by the priest and that the clothes were removed from the body of a man which was washed ashore in Donegal. She had been informed that the man was buried decently by the local at Donegal.

Nine days ago, their brother, Michael, had drowned at sea, and the family, their mother, Maurya, in particular was in mourning. They were waiting for his body to be found so that they could put it in a coffin and bury it in a decent manner. The priest had asked Nora to identify the clothes in the bundle so that if they really did belong to Michael, they could relax in the knowledge that their brother had been decently buried in Donegal. He had also told Nora that if the clothes were

not Michael's, they should refrain from mentioning it to their mother or else she may die of grief.

Bartley, their brother and the last male member of the house, was to go to the mainland by sea to sell his horses at the Galway fair that day, and Cathleen wanted Nora to request the priest to stop Bartley from going. Nora tells her that the young priest had said he will not prevent Bartley from going and that the family should not worry about his safety because their mother prays to God up till midnight daily, and God would never leave her in a hopeless situation by snatching away her only surviving son.

Cathleen enquires whether the sea looked rough near the rocks and is told that the sea is not very bad. She informs that the great roar heard from the west indicates that the condition will worsen once the tide turns. The sisters hide the bundle from Maurya, deferring the identification of the clothes till the time their mother goes down to the sea to find out if Michael's body has been washed ashore.

On learning that Bartley is all set to leave for Connemara, Maurya insists that he should not go because the weather is not favourable. Bartley arrives at that moment looking for a rope to make a halter for one of the horses. But Maurya asks him to spare the rope for lowering Michael's coffin into the deep pit that they will dig for that purpose. But Bartley is in a tearing hurry and needs the rope urgently so that he can catch the next boat to the mainland. He makes his determination to go very clear, stating that he has heard that his horses will fetch him good money at the fair. Maurya tries to dissuade him saying that she finds him to be more precious and valuable than a thousand horses.

Without heeding his mother's pleadings, Bartley prepares for the journey. He gives Cathleen instructions to take care of the sheep and sell the pig, and also tells the sisters to gather enough sea-weed. He mentions that with just one male member left in the house, work will be difficult. Maurya says that the family will face even tougher times if the only surviving male member is also drowned. So, she questions Bartley as to how he expected an old woman like her to live and also provide for her daughters if he were to die at sea?

Ignoring his mother's words, Bartley makes up his mind to proceed. He tells that he would return in two or three days or four if the weather is bad. Maurya is left lamenting about how cruel her son is as he is so disobedient. Cathleen supports her brother saying that it is natural for young men to nurture a desire to go to the sea, and that it was wrong of their mother to keep repeating herself in vain. Bartley leaves with the halter that he has fashioned out of the rope saying he would ride the red mare and lead the grey pony behind him. After invoking God's blessings on the three women, he departs.

Maurya is absolutely shattered to see her son go. She is certain that he will not return alive. Her daughter scolds her for letting Bartley go without blessing him. Cathleen realizes that she has forgotten to give Bartley the cake and that he would be hungry by the time he reaches the mainland at night. She blames her mother's incessant talking for her forgetfulness. She wraps a piece of the cake in a cloth and asks her mother to rush to the spring well and hand it over to Bartley

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when he passes that way on his way to the pier. She tells her to bless Bartley so that no evil befalls him and the effect of her negative thoughts is nullified. Maurya follows her instructions mumbling that while it was the general norm for the older people to leave behind things for the youngsters, in her house, it was the opposite because the young men died first, referring to the walking stick she used, which once belonged to Michael.

In Maurya's absence, the sisters examine the clothes in the bundle given to them by the priest. By matching the fabric with that of the sleeve of Michael's shirt and recognizing the fifty-six stitches in the stocking that Nora herself had stitched for Michael, they confirm that Michael was indeed the person who was buried in Donegal. They decide to keep the news to themselves and hide the clothes from their mother till Bartley returns.

Maurya returns to the house without giving the cake to Bartley. She talks of a scary vision—of Bartley riding the red mare followed by Michael astride the grey pony running behind them. Cathleen chooses that moment to reveal to her mother about Michael's clothes and his dead body being given a decent burial at Donegal. But Maurya insists that she saw Michael astride the grey pony in his finest clothes and new shoes, and that she wanted to bless Bartley while he rode past but the words were trapped in her throat.

Cathleen interprets her mother's vision as a sign of Bartley's death. But Nora relies on the Priest's comment that God would not leave the women so helpless. Her words, however, do nothing to console Maurya. She opines that the young priest is unaware of the ways of the sea. She is sure that Bartley will die and even asks the girls to arrange for a good coffin to be made for her, as she will not last long after her sons are all gone.

Maurya recalls the times when her husband, her father-in-law and her six sons were alive in the house. She recalls the deaths of these men and how the news had arrived each time. While she is recalling the death of Patch, women start entering their house and kneeling. Maurya learns that Michael's death is confirmed.

At that moment, they see men carrying in Bartley's body wrapped in a sail. They are told that the grey pony knocked him into the sea while the strong current pulled him and dashed him against the rocks.

Maurya talks about how the sea has taken away all the men of her family, doing the worst that was possible to them. That she now does not have to pray for anyone's safety when the weather turns rough; that she no longer has to stay awake looking out for her men to return; that she would be able to sleep peaceful at nights. She says that even though she and her daughters will have a hard time, they will at least have peace of mind as they will not have to worry about their men folk's safety as they are all dead and gone.

Cathleen sets about giving instructions for the coffin for Bartley, while her mother prays for all her dead sons and also all those people who are alive in the world. Maurya seems to come to terms with the fact that death is inevitable and that no one can live forever. She is content with the fact that Michael has been given a decent burial and Bartley would soon be lowered into his deep grave in a decent new coffin.



### 5.3.1 Critical Analysis

Synge and Yeats

*Riders to the Sea* is a play that depicts suffering on many levels. While the mother, Maurya, is left to deal with the loss of her six sons and her husband to the sea, her two daughters have no option but to bear the loss of their brothers and also take care of their grieving mother.

Their only surviving brother is aware how risky it is to work against a rough and violent sea, but he has no other option. The locals of the island suffer from bearing the hardships imposed on them by the rough weather and the altering economic conditions that seem to have an adverse effect on the Aran Islands.

The play has many varying meanings beyond what is literally evident. The title is derived from the Bible—the *Book of Exodus* (15:1)—‘The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.’ The Book of Revelation (6:1-8) also sheds light on the central incident in the play: ‘And I looked and beheld a pale horse: and his name that sat on it was Death.’

While many things in the play allude to the Old Testament, certain actions also refer to events in the New Testament. When Maurya sprinkles Michael’s clothes with holy water, one is reminded of Easter morning, when the body of Jesus is smeared with spices and perfume by three women. The scene seems to symbolize the Resurrection. Cathleen’s reference to ‘when the sun rises’ is only a reinforcement of the idea of resurrection along with ‘resurrection of the son’.

There is an interesting mix of Christian beliefs and pagan superstitions. The occupants of the island are simple fishermen and women who are able to easily integrate the two of them. The mention of sprinkling of ‘holy water in the dark nights after Samhain’ by Maurya clearly symbolizes purification and refers to the pagan feast (on November 11).

The play also mentions some superstitions. The peasants believed that it was possible for the dead to control the lives of the living—for instance, to avoid being lonely, a ghost can cause a loved one to lose his life. This explains the worry that enveloped Maurya when she saw the vision of Michael on a pony behind Bartley. The peasants also believed that the dead did not approve of other people wearing their clothes or using their possessions. That could be one of the reasons why Bartley was chosen to die—he wore Michael’s shirt. Also, Michael who had already died, was alone in the other world aching for company; so he may have chosen Bartley. Another instance is that of Maurya, Michael’s mother who was walking with the support of Michael’s stick, was unable to bless Bartley. All these instances show various local superstitions and Christian beliefs.

The play reflects the struggle of the individual against society. The folk living on the island are self-subsisting people, surviving on what they grow, the fish they catch and even wearing clothes woven from yarn spun by themselves. Of course, all this was altered by the Industrial Revolution, which led to stiff competition from commercial techniques of farming, fishing and weaving. Those who failed to adopt the modern ways and adhered to the old simple techniques ended up battling insurmountable odds.

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Bartley had to choose between the traditional option of staying with his family with the future full of poverty or adopting modernism and commercialization by selling his animals, even if it meant fighting the rough seas—a conflict that ultimately resulted in his death.

### 5.3.2 Character Sketches

In this section, we will discuss and analyse the characters in the play.

#### **Maurya**

She is an old peasant woman residing in a small cottage on an island in the Aran Islands. Her house, which sheltered a big family of two daughters and eight men—her father-in-law, husband and six sons—now has only three women, including her and two sons. The rest of them have been swallowed by the sea. She already suspects that one of the two remaining sons has drowned, and is waiting for his body to be washed ashore. She is scared and fears for the safety of the last remaining male member of her family, her son, Bartley. Therefore, she tries to stop her last son, Bartley, from going to the mainland, which entails battling the fierce waters of the sea. As luck would have it, she is unable to bless him when he leaves the house and also has a fearful vision. Being a superstitious native, she sees the vision as a warning of death. In fact, she is certain that her last son will also die, as he leaves the house to sell his horses at a fair.

However, instead of grieving she manages to come to terms with reality. Her daughters mistake her stoicism for partiality. They think that she cried a lot when the other son, Michael, went missing at sea, and is calm on hearing of the death of the last one, Bartley, because she probably loved Michael more than Bartley. At one point, it is also suggested that Maurya has had so many opportunities to grieve and wail over the deaths of so many male members of her family that now she is tired and her tears have dried up. But the truth is, Maurya has become practical, and has accepted the eventuality of death and the mortality of human life. She is aware of the fact that life will not be the same for her and her daughters, and that they will have to struggle to eke out a living. She manages to understand that everybody has to die one day. She only looks at the positive outcome of the deaths. She says that with no men from her family going out to sea or fighting bad weather conditions, she will not have to pray for their safe return, or stay awake waiting for them to come home. She also realizes that she may not live long after the deaths of her young sons. She is mature enough to focus on the good in the fact that all her men have come together in heaven. While sprinkling Holy Water over the dead body of her last son Bartley, she prays with a pure heart to the Almighty to have mercy on the souls of her men as well as all those people in the world who are still alive.

#### **Bartley**

He is the youngest of Maurya's six sons and the only surviving male member of the house. He realises that he has a big responsibility. He is ready to risk the high seas to reach the mainland where he can sell his horses at the fair for a good price. He is very practical and, therefore, ignores his mother's requests to stay home and

avoid going out to the sea. He invokes the blessings of God on himself and his family and rides off as he had decided. But being a responsible man, he instructs his sisters on matters regarding sale of their livestock. His practical outlook makes him mention to his sisters that life is going to be more difficult with just one man in the house. His mother who foretells his death forgets to bless him, which is considered a bad omen. Unfortunately, even when his mother goes after him to give him her blessings, she is unable to utter the words. She also sees a vision that foretells death.

### **Cathleen**

She is Maurya's twenty year old daughter, the elder of the two daughters. A mature and responsible girl, she is aware of her mother's age and mental condition and behaves accordingly. A part of her is superstitious and another part is progressive and willing to change, which is clear when she takes her brother's side. She explains to her mother that young men are naturally interested in going out to try their luck, for their betterment. She criticizes her mother for repeatedly trying to stop her son when he is going out with a purpose. She feels bad that her mother sends him off without blessing him. She is a caring sister and insists that her mother go after Bartley to hand over the cake, which will come in handy during his journey. She is an efficient individual whose smartness is clear when she is trying to identify the clothes given to her as Michael's. Her mother's incessant grieving and chatter are clearly testing her patience. Cathleen stands in sharp contrast to her mother's deep, powerful and mature emotions.

### **Nora**

The younger of Maurya's two daughters, Nora's main role in the play is to interact with Cathleen. Her attitude towards Maurya is more respectful than that of her elder sister. She is clearly very concerned about her brother when she mentions that he has not eaten anything since morning. She emphasizes that it is important to give him the cake because he will otherwise be hungry till he reaches the mainland.

J. M. Synge with his keen observation and grasping power, managed to weave a tragic folk tale from the stories he had heard from the locals, from the experiences he had during his stay and interactions with the natives. He has employed the typical Irish dialect very well along with the juxtaposition of poetic changes of mood with varying situations. He has employed local dramatic monologues interspersed with images to achieve an intense dramatic quality.

Unfortunately, the early critics failed to notice any such genius. Instead, they rejected the play for its gloominess, impacted by the corruption of Europe. They thought the play lacked a sound knowledge of Irish Catholicism. The Irish magazines and newspapers were the first to lash out.

Irish novelist, James Joyce was probably the first one of the critics to appreciate the play. He translated it into Italian, and even learned Maurya's concluding speech by heart. English critic Max Beerbohm called it a 'masterpiece'.

There have been no dearth of debates over whether the play is a tragedy as per Aristotelian ideas. Some, including Joyce, were of the opinion that the play

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was too short. P. P. Howe disapproved of its violation of the unity of time, claiming that it was not possible for so many actions to take place within twenty-four hours. What almost all critics agreed on was the fact that Maurya emerged as an individual who accepts the blows dealt out to her by fate. She is a noble and sad person, who finally accepts the mortality of human life.

Synge is said to have told Irish poet, dramatist and novelist Padraic Colum that the idea for this play was born from his own thoughts on death and the phenomenon of aging. The play concludes with a narration of the hardships of an Irish family, caused due to economic penury.

The single setting of the play allows the readers and viewers to focus on the emotions that build up around the four principal characters—Maurya, Cathleen, Nora and Bartley. This single setting also permits readers to closely examine the symbols employed by Synge drive home his theme, for instance, the hand-knitted stocking, the piece of string, the rope, new clothes, a grey pony and the white boards. The fact that the rope is used as a substitute for a halter reinforces the poverty being experienced by the family.

In *Riders to the Sea*, there are several levels of interpretation where Synge has merged the life of one poverty-stricken Irish fisherman's family with a Christian understanding of death and resurrection, with the folk beliefs of the local Irish occupants of the island.

### Check Your Progress

3. In what way do the mother and daughters suffer in *Riders to the Sea*?
4. Identify the source of the title of the play.
5. In what way does the play refer to the New Testament?
6. How are Christian beliefs and pagan superstitions highlighted in the play?

## 5.4 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: W. B. YEATS

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin and spent most of his childhood in Sligo, in the west of Ireland, which formed the background of most of his literary works. He tried to revive popular interest in the fairy tales and folklore of the Irish people, thinking that through these Celtic myths and legends, the whole world would be stimulated. His original works consist of *The Wanderings of Oisín* and *The Wind among the Reeds*, his most influential collection of lyrics. He also published studies in Criticism and helped to establish the Irish Literary Theatre and wrote several dramas. His literary style is full of delicate artistry, a touch of elfin magic and haunting music characterizes his verse. In 1915 Yeats was awarded with Knighthood but he refused the offer. In 1923 he was awarded with the Nobel Prize in literature which he accepted in person.

During the disintegration of the Catholic state in the wars of the seventeenth century, 'Irish laws and customs, the whole framework of the Gaelic civilization,

had been annihilated. Music, literature and classical learning, loved by even the poorest of the Irish, had been driven into hiding, with only “hedge schoolmasters” and wandering bards to keep them from oblivion.’ During the years when the nation (Ireland) was coming to be literary force behind Irish nationalism, traditional Gaelic survived in the minds of the Gaelic speaking peasants. Elsewhere it had disappeared, and from these minds and memories it was rapidly fading. After generations of poverty and oppression, the orally transmitted songs and histories had become fragmentary. Few educated Irishmen knew them, since no educated Irishmen knew Gaelic. The Irish language was forbidden in the national schools and the sons of the Anglo-Irish landlords and rectors who passed through Trinity College in Dublin learned English culture and English Literature.

William Butler Yeats first appears in the memories of his contemporaries, as a rarefied human being a tall, dark-visaged young man who walked the streets of Dublin and London in a poetic hat, cloak, flowing tie and intoning verses. The young man’s solid qualities were not then apparent to the casual observer. But it was during these early years that Yeats was building himself, step by step, into a person who could not cope with reality but would eventually accept it. His intellectual energy, whirling yet deeply intuitive and ordered mind, with its balancing streak of common sense had come to Yeats through a mixed inheritance. In short, he combines in his personality and writing an inclination towards sexual love and philosophy and his notions about these influence his attitude to nature also, which is essentially romantic and other – worldly. Moreover, all this fused with a symbolical way of expression. In one phrase, it may be said that his attitude to nature and his poetic treatment of nature is essentially ‘symbolical.’

In 1891, W. B. Yeats became a member of Rhymers’ Club. Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) was also a member of this club. After 1890, Yeats started writing plays and this played a significant role in the revival of the Irish Drama and Irish National Movement. W. B. Yeats was an enthusiastic follower of the Irish National Movement; and he did his best to help in the establishment of the National Theatre of Ireland. In 1923, W. B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for his significant poetic and artistic contribution. He died in the South of France in 1939.

There was simplicity of expression as well as melodic quality in the early poems of W. B. Yeats and *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is an important example of this feature. He was very much influenced by the Irish (Celtic) legends as well as Pre-Raphaelite poetry. Therefore in his early poems, we see a certain melodious quality which is of much significance. At the same time, the gross materialism of the age, as well as the Victorian ethos was something that he was tired of and hence, he took refuge in the fairy land as well as the Irish legends where the eternal impulses of man’s primitive nature finds its expression.

Though W. B. Yeats started his literary career by writing poetry; but soon he abandoned writing poetry and focused on writing plays and philosophical essays. In 1910, he came up with *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) and *Responsibilities*. In these volumes, instead of the earlier lyrical and fairy land like quality, we see W. B. Yeats to be very realistic as well as philosophical and mystical. The mystical element in Yeats’ poems makes him one of the major poets of the

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early twentieth century. In *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) Yeats exhibits much of his poetic maturity. Next comes *In The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) which represent the philosophical aspects of his poetry. His last two collections are *New Poems* (1938) and *Last Poems* (1939).

### Important Works

- *The Celtic Twilight* (1893)
- *Mosada* (1896)
- *Countless Cathleen* (1892)
- *The Rose* (1893)
- *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899)
- *The Shadowy Waters* (1900)
- *In the Seven Woods* (1903)
- *Deirdre* (1907)
- *The Green Hamlet and the Other Poems* (1910)
- *Easter* (1916)
- *The Wild Swans of Coole* (1919)
- *The Second Coming* (1920)
- *The Tower* (includes *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Leda and the Swan*) (1928)
- *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (1929)
- *The Resurrection* (1927)
- *The Herne's Egg* (1938)

### Check Your Progress

7. When did W. B. Yeats receive the Nobel Prize for Literature?
8. Mention the significant poems written by W. B. Yeats.

## 5.5 MODERNISM

Modernity and modernism are two different things – whereas ‘modernity’ refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism. Modernism generally refers to the broad aesthetic movements of the twentieth century. In this unit, we will be focusing on modernism as an aesthetic movement and how it is represented in the literary history of English language and literature. Usually, the first half of the twentieth century is considered to be the modern period in the history of English Literature. With the end of the Victorian age, there is a change in the circumstances in England which produced certain changes in the literary outputs. It can be said that the modern period marks a sharp and clear departure from the self- complacency, compromise and stability

of the Victorian period. The transition from the old to the new, from blind faith to rational thinking is very interesting to note.

Synge and Yeats

The writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Auden and others shaped the literary concerns of the age by portraying the spiritual and metaphysical vacuum created in the modern minds by various forces and events such as industrialization, the two World Wars and other significant events. The age was also influenced by various thinkers and movements such as symbolism, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Frederick Nietzsche and others.

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Some of the prominent traits of the Modern age have been discussed as follows:

- (a) The biggest change that we perceive in the literature of the first half of the twentieth century from that of the earlier Victorian age is that the literature of the age was shifting from the exterior realism to the inner aspects of the humankind. The writers and poets of the age looked within the human consciousness and human mind and portrayed the anxieties perplexing the modern mind.
- (b) Modern age is also called the Age of Interrogation and Anxiety as mankind was suffering from immense loss of faith in God and also that of fellow human beings. The loss of faith in God was something that was the natural outcome of the Victorian age. In Victorian age, we have seen mankind suffering from the question of faith and doubt. By the time, we come to modern age, mankind had lost faith in God and in the absence of God, humankind suffered from an anxiety which is best represented by W. B. Yeats in the poem *The Second Coming* – ‘Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.’
- (c) The two World Wars and its effect had shaken mankind and more so the whole of Europe. The effect of the World Wars was such that mankind lost faith in fellow human beings and therefore a sense of loneliness crept into the minds and consciousness of the modern man.
- (d) Modernist writers had a new ‘subject matter’ for literature as they believed that their new way of looking at life required a new form, a new way of thinking and writing. Consequently, writers were more experimental, innovative and very individualistic in their writing. Therefore, they tried to do something pioneering in their writing as they were influenced by new ideas from the emerging fields of psychology (James Joyce in his novels *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan’s Wake*; Virginia Woolf with her ‘Stream of Consciousness Technique’ novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, D. H. Lawrence with his novel dealing with the theme of ‘Oedipus complex’ – *Sons and Lovers*) and sociology (such as the working class background of D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, where the class background of the hero has much to do with his psychology and artistic temperament). One of the main focuses of the modernist writers is to probe the ‘unconscious’ as after Sigmund Freud

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- it is seen as one of the most significant aspects of our everyday existence (Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* 1900).
- (e) The Modernist writers turned away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to 'Duree' or psychological time. All the stream of consciousness novels, whether of Virginia Woolf or that of James Joyce, deal with psychological time.
  - (f) Anthropological studies of comparative religion became one of the subject matters of writing (There are numerous examples of such work, but one of the best known is that of T. S. Eliot's famous poem *The Waste Land*; Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also talks about inner illumination or enlightenment and compares it to Buddha).
  - (g) If the Victorian art was more inclined to portraying the external reality (Realism) then the modernists attempted to reflect the inner turmoil, the inner reality of man. Therefore, there is less emphasis on art's reflection of external reality and a greater emphasis on art's reflection of the perceiving mind; (It can be seen not only in fiction and poetry, but also there is a shift in painting such as, the shift from 'representational' Victorian painting —painting that represents identifiable, often narrative scenes in external reality through Impressionism, for example, Whistler; the attempt to paint the quality of the sensations stimulated by the external scene to Post-Impressionism for example, Matisse; painting the 'painterly' scene, the pure elements of colour and form—perhaps as a way of painting the perceiving mind, the aesthetic consciousness).
  - (h) There was a growing concern for feminist cause – females are not anymore passive consumer of the male literature but they have already come to the forefront with a literature of their own and moreover talked about the feminist causes and issues in details to create an awareness amongst people about patriarchal victimization, oppression, suppression and silencing of the female voice (Virginia Woolf, not only in her fictional works, but also in her non-fictional writings such as *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas* emphasizes on all these issues).
  - (i) Myth as 'collective unconscious' (Carl Jung) is one of the prime concerns of the modernist writing and the modernists (such as James Joyce, W. B. Yeats) were preoccupied with myth-making.
  - (j) The effects of the World Wars, imperialism and heavy industrialization on human psyche has been the subject matter of much of the modernist writings such as the literary works of T. S. Eliot, Wilfred Owen, Virginia Woolf and others.
  - (k) The drabness of everyday routine existence and metaphysical anxiety has been another significant concern of the writers such as T. S. Eliot, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and others.



- (l) A focus on epistemological concerns (how do we know what we know?) and linguistic concerns (how is the way we think inseparable from the forms in which we think?); a sense of the breakdown of a shared linguistic community; a reaction against the dominance of rational, logical, 'patriarchal' discourse and its monopoly of power.

Some of these features of modernist writings can especially be seen in the play *Purgatory*, especially the way the dramatist tries to deal with 'myths' so as to construct the signification of the play. It is necessary to understand that many of the modernists are also termed as myth makers and W. B. Yeats is one of them who used to elaborate mythical patterns and myths in his writings, especially the plays.

As we have had a brief knowledge of the modernist movement in literature as well as the concerns of the modernist writers, it is also essential that we have a look at the Irish Revivalist Movement which happened in the early twentieth century. So the next section will be dealing with the Irish Revivalist Movement.

### Check Your Progress

9. Mention two significant features of the Modern age.
10. Define the term 'modernity'.

## 5.6 IRISH REVIVALIST MOVEMENT

*... John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said and sang  
Must come from contact with the soil from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong...*

*W. B. Yeats, Elegy on the Death of Major Robert Gregory*

The mood of the movement known as the Irish Literary Revivalism, spearheaded by W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge and Sean O'Casey among others, is perfectly captured in the Yeatsian eulogy above. In other words, it can be said that the above lines of W. B. Yeats sums up the spirit of the Irish Revivalism which happened in Ireland in the early twentieth century which typifies a kind of a nationalist spirit to go back to Irish folks and legends in their literary and cultural endeavours. It is usually thought that the literary movement was supposed to be an offshoot of a larger nationalist movement and was a fight for the revival of Irish culture and past literary greatness of Ireland, largely lost to cosmopolitanism and British colonialism. It is usually believed that the Irish People had a great past and a vast powerful body of literature written in Irish Gaelic language. But mostly people have forgotten that language and the intense literature written in that language, it is only in the West and South of Ireland that this language was used. The members of the Irish Revivalist movement wanted to revive that language and its literary heritage by celebrating the local language of Ireland which would provide them a distinct identity and would lead them to form a nation of

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their own. As a nation is narrated, so it is formed in our consciousness leading to a significant change in the perceptions of the people about the nation. Irish writers in the beginning of the twentieth century were looking forward to such changes in their literary practices and the language of their plays and poems so as to manifest the Irish spirit in their works. Though the Irish revivalists wanted to celebrate the locale to form a discrete identity of their nation, but they in no way wanted it to have a provincial and narrow focus. Thus, even though they wrote about the Irish experience but their literature had a universal appeal.

For example, the Aran islands of Ireland appealed to J. M. Synge so much that he not only wrote a book on the Aran islands, but at the same time, made it a background to many of his plays as well as use its rustic language, myths and symbols in his works so as to provide his works with a typical Irish flavour which belongs to that of the Aran Islands. All the writers of the Ireland of this era were more or less focusing on the construction of the Irish nation. James Joyce is another such Irish writer who though formally was not a part of the Irish Revivalist movement, but was concerned about the city of Dublin of Ireland and consequently made it a point to represent Dublin in all his works. His first famous collection of short stories is also significantly named *Dubliners*.

In 1898, W. B. Yeats discussed the possibility of setting up an Irish Theatre with Lady Gregory so that ‘certain Celtic and Irish Plays which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature.’ It is not that Dublin did not have any dramatic tradition of its own — it was the centre of theatre after London. But at the close of the nineteenth century, the Dublin stage was centering on light operas and sentimental melodramas which Yeats wanted to do away with and in its place plant a kind of theatre that would be ‘the home of ancient idealism’ and ‘not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment’ (*The Prospectus of the Irish Literary Theatre*).

Moreover, these plays were not meant to appeal to the senses but to the intellect and the spirit so that they can have an impact on building up the nationalist feelings and ideals. In other words, these plays were political in nature as it was a part of a particular agenda – the regeneration of Ireland. It is with this aim that the Irish Theatrical establishment was set-up in the twentieth century to provide an ambience for the spectators to witness the national spirit as well as the ancient Idealism of Ireland in display so as to manifest it in their consciousness. Such an attempt was not only laudable but talks highly about the ways in which literature can shape the consciousness of the people as well as manifest itself in making the world a better place to live.

Apart from W. B. Yeats whom we have discussed in detail a little bit earlier, the other two well-known dramatists of the Irish Revivalist theatre are J. M. Synge and Sean O Casey, whom we will study in short in the following sections.

### **John Millington Synge (1871-1909)**

John Millington Synge is one of the greatest dramatists who was instrumental in the rebirth of the Irish Theatre. *The Shadow of Glen* (1903), a comedy based on

an old Irish folktale, presents a romantic picture of Irish peasant life which was necessary for the Irish National Revival Movement. His other plays such as *The Well of Saints* (1905) and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1907) are also considered as good comedies. *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) is a comedy which appeals to the readers even today and it deals with an old legend and presents an excellent but ironical picture of Irish character. *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is a powerful and deeply moving tragedy in one Act; it is also considered as one of the greatest poetic dramas written in the twentieth century. The One Act space of the play deals with the tragedy of its principal character Maurya who loses her husband and six sons to the sea. *Deirdre of Sorrow* (1910) is also based on a legend and in it the themes of love and death are tragically interwoven. J. M. Synge was against the notion of the realistic theatre and, therefore, he often fell back on the poetic element in drama as well as went back to Irish myths and legends.

### Sean O. Casey (1884-1964)

Sean O. Casey was an Irish playwright and was thought to be one of the greatest dramatists dealing with Irish/ Celtic Revivalism. His naturalistic tragicomedies are *The Shadow of A Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), *Within the Gates*, *The Stars Turn Red* (1940), *Purple Dust* (1941), *Red Roses For Me* (1946), *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1946) and *Cockadoodle Dandy* (1949). The usual background of O. Casey's plays was the slums of Dublin, crowded, noisy tenements where women quarrelled and loafers drank, and the tragic violence of civil war was at hand. In his plays, comedy and tragedy often commingle.

Dramatists such as W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge as well as Sean O Casey tried their best to revive the nationalist spirit in Ireland through their plays and all these three dramatists make use of elaborate myths and mythical patterns in their plays as so as to represent the Irish culture in its entirety and make Ireland proud of its ancient idealism as well as its nationalist spirit.

### 5.6.1 One Act Play

One act play is a play that has only one act, as distinct from plays that occur over several acts. It is to be remembered that usually plays are there in five acts. Most of William Shakespeare's plays are in five acts with many scenes in each act. Even though one act plays have only one act, but it may consist of one or more scenes. The origin of the one act play may be traced to the very beginning of drama: in ancient Greece, *Cyclops*, a satyr play by Euripides, is an early example. Some one act plays by major dramatists are the following:

- Edward Albee – *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (2002)
- Samuel Beckett – *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)
- Anton Chekhov – *A Marriage Proposal* (1890)
- Israel Horovitz – *Line* (1974)
- Eugène Ionesco – *The Bald Soprano* (1950)
- Arthur Miller – *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955)

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- August Strindberg – *Pariah* (1889), *Motherly Love* (1892), and *The First Warning* (1892)
- Thornton Wilder – *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931)

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The above list makes it clear that a one act play is a form of a play which became popular in the twentieth century and, therefore, it can be termed as a modern form of theatrical activity which finds expression in such terms as the modern day people have less time and therefore their theatrical activities also have shorter duration of time. Moreover, in the early decades of the twentieth century, we witnessed that the one act plays are more or less very poetic in nature. They may be shorter, but they do not lack intensity.

For example, W. B. Yeats's *Purgatory* is a play in one act which deals with the old man talking to his sixteen year old son about how he killed his father as he was the one responsible for his mother being in the purgatory and how he kills his son so that the problem with his family is not perpetuated any further. It is interesting to note that within a span of few pages/ few minutes a whole narrative dealing with the killing of the father and an action of the killing of the son is achieved. This helps in creating an effect on the audience which will make them think about the ways in which the theatrical activity is used for arousing the nationalist spirit of Ireland. Ireland once upon a time had a glorious past which got lost into a kind of buffoonery because of multiple reasons, but primarily because of British colonialism. The bare burned house in the background – the setting of the play probably is a representation of the Irish nation which needs to be read symbolically in the play so as to achieve a better understanding of it.

### Check Your Progress

11. Name the significant literary artists who played a vital role in the revival of Irish theatre.
12. List some of the prominent one-act plays.

## 5.7 PURGATORY: CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Often critics thought that the play *Purgatory* deals with afterlife – the mother's life in purgatory from where the Old Man is trying to free her soul. Critic like F. A. C. Wilson is of the opinion that the play is a dramatization of Yeats' *Vision* where he talks about the theory of afterlife. The afterlife of the mother of the Old Man seems to be the concern of the Old Man and therefore people usually tend to make an interpretation of such kind which values the notion of afterlife more than anything else. But what is more significant to understand here is that as a social critic and a moral human being, W. B. Yeats was more concerned with Irish sensibilities which was marred in the present context because of the hierarchical societal set-up as well as vulgar materialism and violence. It was against these that W. B. Yeats and other playwrights and poets of the age were trying to fight; which is termed as Irish Revivalism. Therefore, often the play *Purgatory* is taken to be a symbolic

representation of the destroying and decaying Irish traditions which was once heroic and valuable, but now is decayed and in ruins. Richard Taylor observes, 'In the context of destroying an aristocratic tradition of refinement and taste as symbolized by the great house, the action also becomes a paradigm for the loss of heroic values and the present vulgarity in contemporary Ireland (195).'

Thus, the house which provided a line of great men at one point of time now is ruined and in darkness. Not only the house is in darkness, but the relationship between the newer and older generations is strained as it is represented through the relationship of the Old Man and his son. Whatever the Old Man says about his past, the son is unable to accept it with glee and moreover shows his disbelief to what the Old Man says. In other words, it can easily be said that the decline of culture – through the boy's reaction, the bare tree and the ruined house – can be noticed in the play. The Old Man says in the play:

*'Where are the jokes and stories of a house,  
Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty?'*

This clearly points out the way the house, therefore Ireland, has suffered a great fall and has not been able to recover from that cultural dislocation though the poets and dramatists had tried their best to get back to the myths, traditions and cultures of the ancient Irish past. The Old Man further adds in the play:

*Great people lived and died in this house;  
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,  
Captains and Governors, and long ago  
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.  
Some that had gone on Government work  
To London or to India came home to die,  
Or came from London every spring  
To look at the may-blossom in the park.*

These lines clearly suggest how the house had a great lineage and how the house is a proof of the 'great people' who 'lived and died' in that house. The Old Man's father had killed the house which to the Old Man is a great offence:

*... to kill a house  
Where great men grew up, married, died,  
I here declare a capital offence*

The house is now in ruins and it is unacceptable to the Old Man as it is not just any other house but a house which had a great lineage of nobility. The father of the Old Man is responsible for its death, but also his mother to some extent whose social transgression led to the marriage of his parents. The Old Man still could not approve of the social transgression. He, therefore, killed his father earlier and now to stop the impure blood to carry on any further in the next generation, he kills his son.

If the Old Man speaks of the age old traditions and customs whose transgression has led to the fall of this great house, then on the other hand the sixteen year old boy seems to be too pragmatic and materialistic in his approach

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to things and therefore when the Old Man talks about his parents, the son's reaction is 'My grand-dad got the girl and the money.' For the new generation, material gain is something which matters the most and not the moral inhibitions by which one should be guided.

It seems that the Old Man is too much concerned with purity of the bloodline and therefore considers that the impurity that exists in his son should not be carried forward any further. This idea leads to the murder of the son by the Old man. After repeatedly stabbing his son to death, the Old Man stands on the stage in a reflective mood and says:

*Dear mother, the window is dark again,  
But you are in the light because  
I finished all that consequence.*

The Old Man tried his best to do away with all the consequences of the social transgression of his mother. But with the addition of supernatural forces at the end of the play, the playwright seem to suggest that the Old Man and his actions end in a meaningless way as he is rendered powerless with the hoofs of the horses which suggest that the past will carry on haunting him and 'all that consequence' is actually now over. The Old Man hears the sounds of his father's ghost riding towards the house to repeat his mother's purgatorial moment. The Old Man cries out:

*Hoof-beats! Dear God,  
How quickly it returns—beat—beat!  
Her mind cannot hold up that dream*

The play seems to end without any catharsis and without any tragic recognition of the Old Man leading to an ironic situation when the Old Man expresses his anguished admission to God that 'Mankind can do no more' and his final plea to 'Appease / the misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.'

### **Purgatory as a play dealing with Irish Revivalism**

As suggested in the earlier section of critical appreciation, the play *Purgatory* seems to be concerned with the fate of the Irish Revivalism with which W. B. Yeats was associated. But in the mature phase of his life because of the manifold political turmoil as well as his own experiences, he was very frustrated about the fact that the Irish Revivalist Movement could not and did not see the necessary enthusiasm as well as the spirit which could have revived Ireland. He was, therefore, disillusioned with the whole project and this finds manifestation in the play *Purgatory*. The 'ruined house' as has already been stated, is the symbol of the old Ireland which is now in a decayed state because the age old customs and traditions have been destroyed and social transgressions and violence has marred the society. Moreover, vulgar and gross materialism has taken over the higher ideals of living life. In such a state, the Old Man could not endure the impurity that had crept leading him to make efforts to cleanse the blood of his family by the evil means of murder. But what the Old Man does is to fall back on one kind of violence to deal with violence. This, therefore, leads to a situation when the purpose of the Old Man is defeated at the end of the play. The defeat of the Old Man probably is a

pointer to the fact that Irish Revivalist Movement had also suffered a similar fate. The play can, thus, be read as a metaphor of the failure of Irish Revivalism.

Synge and Yeats

### 5.7.1 *Purgatory* as a Tragedy

W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* is a tragedy – no doubt about it – as the Old Man, the protagonist of the play, in his ambition to save his mother's soul from purgatory, commits two murders – one of his father and the second of his son. But in spite of it, at the end of the play, the sounds of the horse hoof makes it clear that the ghostly presence of the old man's father is there, suggesting that what he intended to do in the course of his life was not accomplished and that things will keep haunting him and his consciousness even though he has tried his best to do away with them. But before giving the play *Purgatory* the tag of a 'tragedy', it is essential for us to understand what a tragedy is and what theoretically is thought to be a tragic play.

Aristotle has taken up the question of Tragedy from *Poetics* VI onwards and tragedy comprises most of his theoretical formulations henceforth. In the discussion on the elements of tragedy, the main emphasis as expected is on the centrality of action, which is evident in the definition itself:

*Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished ... in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.*

This foregrounding of action as opposed to being in Aristotle's theory of literature is what constitutes the universal in drama. Now, action springs from character and thought. So, character, as the source of moral judgment is distinguished from thought, which informs the minds of the agents and, thus, is given expression. When talking about the aims of a successful tragedy, one that arouses pity and fear, Aristotle formulates the following requirements:

- The plot must have unity of action.
- The characters should be good, appropriate, like real and consistent – neither pre-eminently just or virtuous nor extremely bad.
- The tragic deed be done in the family – when murder or the like is done or contemplated by brother on brother, for example.
- The discovery should arise from incidents – the cause of change in the hero's fortune must be in his 'hamartia', that is, a great error on his part. Discovery, along with *peripeteia* and suffering are three essential elements of a good tragedy.
- In the famous definition of Tragedy by Aristotle, catharsis is regarded as the prime objective of a tragic play.

Now the question is whether the play *Purgatory* is a tragic play according to Aristotelian sense of tragedy or not. Let us take the Aristotelian scheme of tragedy one by one in the context of *Purgatory* and see if it falls into this category:

- The hero / protagonist of a tragedy is usually a noble character from a family of high lineage, having a flaw (*hamartia*) in his character which

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leads to his downfall. In *Purgatory*, the Old Man is the protagonist who does not belong to a very noble family, though the house he is referring to has produced a line of elites for the Irish nation. Thus, the Old Man cannot be called a typical tragic protagonist in the Aristotelian sense of the term; though he has achieved some sense of tragedy as all his works (killing of both his father and his son to save his mother from purgatory) are undone at the end even when after killing his son, he hears the hoof of the horses suggesting that the past is going to come to haunt him. This is divine justice, when unjust killings are punished with a supernatural intervention. Yet, at the same time, it is also very significant to understand that there is no 'tragic recognition' in the Old Man that all his efforts are in vain; that he will never achieve some peace for his dead mother by his evil deeds. Even in the poetic world of *Purgatory*, it is not at all possible to justify one's evil deeds for the sake of some other good. Shakespeare's Macbeth murders Duncan and he had to suffer for it. Similarly, the Old Man has to suffer for his deeds as life would not allow him to achieve any peace with himself even if he tries his best to justify the murders by showing the 'ruined house' and the 'bare tree'.

Moreover, it is also to be understood here that even though the Old Man does not have the sublimity and grandeur of the typical Aristotle's tragic hero, but all modern protagonists are such where they are common men trying to deal with their angst and anxieties. In such terms, the Old Man is a modern tragic hero, though at the same time, it is also true that most modern heroes are very passive characters whereas the Old Man is not as passive as he makes continuous efforts to take revenge for the 'ruined house'.

As discussed earlier, one of the chief aims of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is the 'purgation of feelings of pity and fear'. In the famous definition of tragedy by Aristotle, catharsis is regarded as the prime objective of a tragic play. Aristotle defines tragedy as:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions (p.12).

In *Poetics*, apart from talking about catharsis, Aristotle also talks about the pleasure that is derived from the tragedy. Pleasure proper to tragedy can be derived from the play for three reasons: (i) tragedy should derive pleasure which is proper to tragedy as it is a kind of pleasure which cannot be derived from any other form of drama whether comedy or tragedy, (ii) the pleasure is to be derived from the completeness and organic wholeness of the action of the plot, (iii) pleasure may also be derived as a result of the musical and spectacular elements of the play.

Catharsis is a term borrowed by Aristotle from the medical terminology which means the removal or purgation of the afflictions or emotional excesses. Though the term is borrowed from medical term, but Aristotle does not use the



term in exactly the same fashion as it is used in the field of medicine, as Butcher points out – ‘But the word, as taken up by Aristotle into the terminology of art, has probably a further meaning. It expresses not only a fact of psychology or of pathology, but a principle of art.’ Thus, catharsis may mean the emotional satisfaction that the audience experiences when he/ she watches a tragedy, which the play does by evoking two feelings of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ as pointed out by Aristotle. These two emotions of pity and fear are evoked while watching a tragedy as the spectators or the audience perceives the tragic protagonist’s change of fortune. Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of James Joyce’s *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* defines pity and fear as – ‘pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the secret cause.’ Thus, a tragedy involves the double vision of the human sufferer (the tragic protagonist who suffers because of his tragic flaw of character or Hamartia) and the secret cause (the Fate).

Now the question is ‘Does the play *Purgatory* evoke the feelings of pity and fear?’ A simplistic answer would be that it does not as in *Purgatory* the Old Man, the supposed tragic protagonist in some way makes us identify with him which is essential to a tragedy. He commits murders whose reasons seems unjustifiable to the readers / viewers. So the element of ‘pity’ is not evoked at all. Fate does play a role in his tragic essence as at the end even after much of his efforts, when we hear the horse hoofs, we understand that fate has not approved of his decisions of murder and it will carry on haunting him. But even then Fate does not make such a significant aspect in the play so as to make the audience or the readers fear the fate or the secret cause.

In such circumstances when the play *Purgatory* fails to evoke the necessary feelings of pity and fear, it is evident that there is no question of purgation of these feelings. In no way, therefore a cathartic effect is reached in the play so as to make the play a tragedy in the Aristotelian sense of the term.

Yet, *Purgatory* is a tragedy – a modern tragedy which necessarily does not need to follow the rules of Aristotle. Aristotelian terms are essential to understand the classical tragedy; but in modern days, the heroes have lost the grandeur and there are common men dealing with problems and anxieties that are also too common. The Old Man is a commoner, but what he does in the play is nothing common. He murders twice – his father and then his son – and in the process tries to purge off his mother’s sins so as to save her from purgatory, but fails miserably which suggests that a modern man, however, he endeavours to achieve his goals (however, evil or dubious they may be) they are bound up with failures. Some critics suggest that the play has some seeds of the famous play by Samuel Beckett *Waiting for Godot*. In *Waiting for Godot*, we see in the play that the two tramps – Vladimir and Estragon – are waiting for Godot and as they do so, they quarrel, make up between themselves, contemplate suicide at some point and then try to sleep and eat carrot and also chew on some chicken bones. As they wait for Godot, they do all these activities which are not meant to be something concrete

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as they could have done any other activities but their main intention is to wait for 'Godot' when they themselves do not know who Godot is and when he/she/ it is going to arrive. Both the scenes of *Waiting for Godot* also happens under a 'bare tree'. The similarity is striking as both the playwrights use the same set of symbols to manifest the idea of barrenness of the modern existence through their stage props.

Whereas *Waiting for Godot* is considered a tragic-comedy, by the playwright's own supplication, *Purgatory* cannot be called a tragi-comedy as there is no element of comedy in the play. The play is an intense presentation of the way in which the Old Man tries to justify his ways and means to his sixteen year old son and also to the viewers and audience. The reactions of the son to the Old Man's logic and presentation of the details of how the house was once prosperous and now ruined because of the father who was a drunkard and a lecherous person, sometimes find a comic chord. But more than that it shows that the situation of the Old Man is such that even his own son finds it hard to believe his statements. In such circumstances, the readers / viewers are left in a lurch whether to accept the Old Man's words with glee or to reject them as a discourse from a senile man. In such a context, it is therefore very significant to understand that the play evokes a sense of 'pathos' – both for the Old Man and his son. The son dies a tragic death because of his father who is in his own trip to achieve the supposed purgation of sins for his mother and the Old Man is in a pathetic situation where he is left with none of his family members even to sympathize with him.

Thus, it can be said that W. B. Yeats is successful in portraying the utter desolation and frustration of the Old Man who is caught by the fate in the wrong turn of things and is made just to suffer. His suffering is brought forward by his own flaw – by his own perception of things which makes him commit twin murders thought between a gap of time. The twin murders led to a situation where he has to now suffer as the divine intervention as well as justice will not let him go scot-free for the evils that he has committed. In that sense, W. B. Yeats *Purgatory* may be termed as a Modern Tragedy where the protagonist, the Old Man, suffers for his own flaws in his character.

### Check Your Progress

13. How does the play *Purgatory* end?
14. What is the prime objective of tragedy as stated by Aristotle?

## 5.8 POETIC DRAMA

Poetry in drama, takes us a step away from critical realism. In poetic drama, it is not our everyday selves; the masks, which people often adopt in society, but rather the inner souls that converse. According to T. S. Eliot, drama is one of the several types of poetry, the others being the epic, the ballad, or the chanson-de-geste (a medieval narrative). It is poetic drama which is best able to reveal the

fringe of the indefinite extent, which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and never completely focus. Dramatic poetry, in its most intense moments, can convey that which is incommunicable and inexpressible through prose.

The beginning of poetic drama was seen with the plays of Shelley, Wordsworth, Browning, and other Romantic school of poets, but their plays failed to make an impact on the dramatic scene mainly because they were far removed in an unrealistic world of symbols and myths. They failed to establish a communicable relationship with the audience. The failure is partially responsible for the post-realistic plays of Pinero and Jones, which followed under the influence of the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen. However, here, the inadequacy of prose was felt, especially during the moments of high emotions, intense suffering or acute pain. The everyday speech of our lives somehow fades into inarticulateness when confronted by the crisis of life. Therefore, even in modern drama quotations are used at crucial moments, for instance, J. B. Priestley quotes Blake and there is a passage from *The Tempest* quoted in John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*.

Poetic drama is a distinct genre of theatre where the essence of drama is such that it reaches the sublime beauty of poetry. Many Victorian poets attempted the poetic drama; but the Victorians fell short of creating any kind of dramatic excellence in their works except from the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning which are not drama in the real sense of the term. Tennyson wrote plays such as *Queen Mary*, *Harold* (1877) and *Becket* (1884). Robert Browning wrote *Strafford* (1837) *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* and *A Soul's Tragedy* (1846). Even though these two poets of the nineteenth century were writing plays but they could not achieve the greater heights of poetic drama in their plays. It is only in the twentieth century that we see that poetic drama reaches certain heights in the works of T. S. Eliot and others who made drama come up from its slumbering state to the forefront with their artistic efforts.

Some of the practitioners of poetic drama are the following:

- **Stephen Philis (1864-1915):** Stephen Philis wrote poetic dramas such as *Palao and Francesca* (1900), *Herod* (1901), *Ulysses* (1902), *The Son of David* (1904) and *Nero* (1906). Though he wrote extensively, yet his plays did not have the popular appeal.
- **John Masefield (1878- 1967):** John Masefield also did some experiments with the genre of the poetic drama and some of his plays were popular. He is well-known for his plays such as *The Tragedy of Man* (1909), *The Trial of Pompey*, *The Great* (1910), *Good Friday* (1917), *The Trial of Jesus* (1925) and *The Coming of Christ* (1928). Religious in their themes, his poetic plays has some appeal to the mass.
- **Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948):** Gordon Bottomley was another powerful dramatist who wrote many great poetic dramas such *The Crier by Night* (1902), *Midsummer Eve* (1905), *King Lear's Wife* (1915), *Grauch* (1921) and *Culbin Sands* (1932).

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- **James Elory Flecker (1884- 1915):** James Elory Flecker’s play *Hassan* (1922) had a great appeal as a poetic drama as it had for its setting a highly coloured and oriental play.
- **Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1938):** Abercrombie was also one of the finest dramatists dealing with the genre of the poetic drama and his plays include *Deborah* (1913), *The Adder* (1913), *The End of the World* (1914), *The Staircase* (1922), *The Derter* (1922), *Phoenix* (1923) and *The Sale of St. Thomas* (1930).
- **John Drinkwater (1882-1937):** Drinkwater started his career as a dramatist of poetic plays and his significant plays include *Rebellion* (1914), *The Storm* (1915), *The God of Quiet* (1916) and *A Night of the Trojan War* (1917).
- **W.B. Yeats (1865-1939):** We have talked about Yeats in detail when we discussed modernist poetry, in this section we will merely be talking about Yeats’ concern for poetic drama. In his essay ‘The Tragic Theatre’, he wrote: ‘Our movement is a return to the people ..... The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure, should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone prompted to reconstruct contemporary life through the symbols of ancient folklore and the mythology of Ireland. In order to make the audience concentrate on poetry, Yeats went back to the simplicity of Greek theatre and Shakespearean theatre.’
- **T.S. Eliot (1885-1965):** We have also discussed Eliot in detail in the section dealing with modern poetry. In this section, we will be only dealing with his plays. T.S. Eliot propounded the theory of the poetic drama in his essay ‘Rhetoric and Poetic Drama’ (1919). T. S. Eliot can be said to be the foremost runner as far as the genre of the poetic drama is concerned in the modern period. His play *The Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) is one of the greatest examples of the poetic drama which deals with the life of a medieval saint’s legend and comic relief that takes the form of contemporary satire, treatment of the conflict between the claims of the world and the claims of the soul. *The Family Reunion* (1939) is one of the most powerful plays of Eliot which deals with contemporary people speaking contemporary language. In *The Cocktail Party* (1950), Eliot gave up even those rituals which had been retained in *The Family Reunion*. *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) deals with the importance of coming to grips with one’s true self. *The Elder Statesman* (1958) treated Eliot’s familiar theme of an old sin brought to light and acknowledged the consequent spiritual release.

The above discussion of poetic drama probably has made it evident to you that it is a genre which was much in circulation in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is not necessary that poetic drama always will be in the form of verse — merely writing a play in verse, makes the play a verse drama. Poetry must be

inherent to the theme of the play. In other words, the poetry of life needs to be represented in the play in such a way that the artistic way of understanding life is achieved while reading or watching such a play.

### 5.8.1 *Purgatory* as a Poetic Drama

It is thought that the verse (primarily written in Iambic metre) is such in the play *Purgatory* that when one watches the performance or reads the play once he is not only made to experience the rhythm of poetic language, but also at the same time made to feel the poetry that surrounds our life. As we have already seen, poetic drama is a genre which evolved and became very popular in the beginning of the twentieth century as the dramatists (who are also poets) thought that the intense poetry of life can find a just representation in poetic drama. Therefore, rhyme and rhythm of life have been highlighted in the plays of the times, especially that of T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge and others.

If we look at the following lines of *Purgatory*, we can notice that the rhyming lines make much of the poetic effect in the play, such as:

*Stop! Sit upon that stone.*

*That is the house where I was born.*

*or*

*And everything was burnt;*

*Books, library, all were burnt.*

Now the question which usually turns up is why does Yeats employ such rhyming lines as well as 'Iambic' foot (which is thought to be quite suited to poetry) in the course of the play? What purpose does it serve? Answer to these questions can be many; but there can be primarily two reasons why this kind of a poetic language is used by the playwright.

- The poetic language of the play provides a feeling of unconscious flow to the play. This implies that when we read the play, we feel that whatever is happening in the play is not happening in the conscious world, but in the realm of the unconscious where images are being drifting in front of our eyes such as it happens in a dream or a vision. In other words, it can be said that the words and actions of the Old Man have some kind of a hypnotic effect on the readers and audience.
- The monotony of foot and rhyming as well as to some extent incoherent diction of the character of the Old Man also make the readers feel that there are some aspects of life which are not cognizable and comprehensible easily and these incongruous aspects of life – the poetic/ mystic/ mysterious aspects need to be presented in a poetic language so as to make the content and form of the play match each other.

Another significant thing that one notices when one reads the play is that it moreover follows the form of the genre of 'Dramatic Monologue' which was so popularized by the Victorian Poet, Robert Browning.

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## Dramatic monologue

**From** M. H. Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Ninth Edition, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Boston, 2009

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A **monologue** is a lengthy speech by a single person. In a play, when a character utters a monologue that expresses his or her private thoughts, it is called a soliloquy. Dramatic monologue, however, does not designate a component in a play, but a type of lyric poem that was perfected by Robert Browning. In its fullest form, as represented in Browning's *My Last Duchess*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, *Andrea del Sarto*, and many other poems; the dramatic monologue has the following features: (1) A single person, who is patently *not* the poet, utters the speech that makes up the whole of the poem, in a specific situation at a critical moment: the Duke is negotiating with an emissary for a second wife; the Bishop lies dying; Andrea once more attempts wistfully to believe his wife's lies. (2) This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors' presence, and what they say and do, only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. (3) The main principle controlling the poet's choice and formulation of what the lyric speaker says is to reveal to the reader, in a way that enhances its interest, the speaker's temperament and character. In monologues such as *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* and *Caliban upon Setebos*, Browning omits the second feature, the presence of a silent auditor; but features (1) and (3) are the necessary conditions of a dramatic monologue. The third feature—the focus on self-revelation—serves to distinguish a dramatic monologue from its near relation, the **dramatic lyric**, which is also a monologue uttered in an identifiable situation at a dramatic moment. John Donne's *The Canonization* and *The Flea* (1613), for example, are dramatic lyrics that lack only one feature of the dramatic monologue: the focus of interest is primarily on the speaker's elaborately ingenious argument, rather than on the character he inadvertently reveals in the course of arguing. And although Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* (1798) is spoken by one person to a silent auditor (his sister) in a specific situation at a significant moment in his life, it is not a dramatic monologue proper, both because we are invited to identify the speaker with the poet himself, and because the organizing principle and focus of interest is not the revelation of the speaker's distinctive temperament, but the evolution of his observations, memories, and thoughts toward the resolution of an emotional problem. Tennyson wrote *Ulysses* (1842) and other dramatic monologues, and the form has been used by H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, E. A. Robinson, Ezra Pound, Robert Lowell, and other poets of the twentieth century. The best known modern literary work is T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915).

In a dramatic monologue, the single speaker speaks the whole poem where the listener is usually silent and his or her questions are assumed by the speaker and answered in the process of the poem. The dramatic monologist usually enters the monologue at a critical juncture of his life to justify some deeds which he has done or is going to do. The Old Man has murdered his father and is going to murder his son in the course of the play which he needs to justify to himself as well

as to others (readers / viewers) and therefore, he enters into a dramatic monologue at a crucial juncture of his life. He takes his sixteen year old son in front of the ruined house which belonged to his mother, where he was conceptualized on a fateful night of the marriage of his parents and how that has been the cause of the downfall of the house and its members as is narrated by the Old Man himself.

Usually in a dramatic monologue, the speaker speaks and the listener has nothing else to do but to quietly listen to what the speaker has to say, without making much fuss about the speaker's logic, argument, tone, tenor and other aspects of his speech. In case of the sixteen year old boy of the Old Man, he is not a quiet listener, but sometimes shows his disbelief to the Old Man and often does not accept the story of the Old Man. So he is not a typical listener as is the norm in dramatic monologues. *Purgatory* is not a dramatic monologue in the typical sense of the term, but uses some of the techniques of a dramatic monologue to make the play poetic in nature.

Another feature of poetic drama that is very significantly employed by W. B. Yeats is the use of symbolism device. Symbolism is a great device of the modernists, as they used different symbols in their poetry and drama to put across different ideas. Such examples, as the symbol of the bare tree and ruined house to suggest barrenness of human existence in the modern age where the gaiety of life is gone and one is living in perpetual gloom. In such a gloomy atmosphere which is also the anniversary of the Old Man's mother, the Old Man and his sixteen year old son comes in front of a bare tree and a ruined house which makes the Old Man reminiscence about his past glory and how he has tried to purge the sins of his mother by killing his father. The whole scene is presented in a symbolical fashion so as to heighten its effect, for example,

*The moonlight falls upon the path,  
The shadow of a cloud upon the house,  
And that's symbolical....*

Yeats is directly saying the symbolical aspect of his play in the play itself is to point out that if there is any obscurity in the play then that is deliberate and conscious, as the playwright wanted to bring some poetic essence into it by doing so.

Moreover, a whole lot of subjectivity is there in the play as the ruined house may be a ruined one in the background, but the constant reference to it being grandeur makes a contrasting image in the minds of the readers. The subjectivity of the Old Man makes us see the same old house in different ways. Sometimes, he sees it in its present ruined condition, sometimes in its old grandeur, sometimes a ghost appearing in the lit window and so forth. These fleeting moments of the way in which the 'house' has been constantly being referred to in the course of the play makes us feel that there is nothing concrete and that everything is in a state of flux.

*The souls in Purgatory that come back  
To habitations and familiar spots.*

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### The Use of Myths in Yeats' *Purgatory*

The play *Purgatory* can be said to be a family saga of decline which can be related to the decline of a family in general or can be read as a tale representing the decline of the culture of the Irish nation. The unnamed family has only two surviving members, an Old Man who is the father and a boy who is sixteen years old, his son. The setting of the play is outside the previous family home, which as the Old Man recounts was burnt down by the father of the old man when he was in a bout of his drinking. The Old Man then killed his father as the building was burnt.

As the play progresses we come to know about the grandeur and glorious days of the family in the house which is in ruins now. The Old man tells the story of how she lost her mother as soon as he was born. Subsequently, there was decline in the family as misfortunes after misfortunes happen which disturbed the grand ways in which the family used to live. In other words, it can be said that the old man reminisces the way in which once upon a time, his family had a great name and fame and produced people who were in the legislature and other different important positions of the state; but from that state the name of the family fell to that of greatest misfortune as the Old Man's father was someone who caused much shame to the family with his erroneous habits, especially, that of drinking.

The Old Man further adds how he was conceived on the wedding night of his mother when the father after a bout of drunken carousing sealed the fate of his mother. As the Old Man goes on narrating such a tale to his son, a ghostly figure appears in the illuminated window of the ruined house. We have to remember that though the Old man carries on narrating the tale of his family with much interest and enthusiasm, his sixteen year young son was sceptical of the whole narration making him disbelief many of the stories that his father tells him under the bare tree in front of the ruined house. It can be perceived that the young boy is to some extent repelled by the story of his father.

The Old Man further adds that he wants to put his mother's soul to rest from the purgatory. He wishes to purify his mother's soul of the sins and thinks at the same time that the contamination which is being carried on in the family should not be pursued any further. Thereupon, the Old Man suddenly stands and kills the boy. The argument that he provides is that he does not want the propagation of sin from one generation to another and therefore the killing of his son was necessary. However, it seems that all the attempts of the Old man to do away with the sins of the family ultimately end up in vain as we are made to hear the approaching hoof beats of the ghostly father which suggests that the grim cycle has not come to an end and that it is will again continue itself. Thus, the story of *Purgatory* seems to be very simple and brief. Nonetheless, the manner in which the story has been presented to the readers in a poetic way is something which arrests the minds of the readers / viewers leading us to enjoy the play at its utmost.

Many critics are of the opinion that the play *Purgatory* is about 'the soul in expiation' where the old man tries to purge his mother from the purgatory and does two murders — one of his father and second of his son. However, in spite of



the best of his efforts, the same grimness of human existence seems to be coming back to the consciousness of the Old Man as the approaching horse hoofs makes the readers realize that after all there is no way out for the Old Man. Apart from this reading, the other usual reading of the play is that it is a social and political commentary on the then situation of Ireland. To achieve this end, W. B. Yeats deliberately used a lot of myths and symbols which are essential for the understanding of the play.

Firstly, Yeats makes a private myth by combining many myths together. He shows the notion of 'the soul in remorse' which has been adapted as well as modified from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and then combined with the Oriental concept of reincarnation, as he explicated in Book II of *A Vision*. An understanding of this complex mythology of W.B. Yeats is necessary to fathom the fact that the Old Man believes in a set of consciousness which takes into account the supernatural as the part of the natural world; and moreover, thinks that there is an existence of the soul beyond the death of the physical body. It is this belief which makes the Old Man take up actions of killing both his father and his son so that he can free his mother from the pangs of sins which she is suffering in purgatory.

This obsession with the mother is something which can be taken to be significant in our understanding of the Oedipus myth which is much emphasized by Sigmund Freud and thereafter was a subject of much literary endeavours, such as D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* which deals with mother fixation and how the protagonist tries to deal with his own fixation for the mother. W. B. Yeats also seems to be taking up a similar thematic parallel in *Purgatory*, though it has to be kept in mind that the play is not dealing with an exploration of the Oedipus drive or the mother fixation, but uses the same to deal with the different facets of the Irish sensibilities of the early twentieth century.

Another significant symbol is that of the archetypal figure of the man of quest which is being dealt with in the play as the Old Man and his son seem to be on some exploration and arrive before the ruined house and bare tree where the Old Man discourses on his life and actions and how he is being doomed into an existence where he is constantly under the pressure to act to purge his mother from the sins which made her fall in love with his father and marry him. The Old Man believes that his mother is in purgatory and he needs to save his mother from there by performing deeds which will free her soul. According to the play, the soul has to go through this expiatory process repeatedly until it becomes conscious of the passion which causes itself to sin and of the remorse which results from it. The Old Man's mother had transgressed the boundaries of customs and traditions by marrying someone from below her social position and has brought disrepute to the family and the house. It is interesting to note the fact that the sin of conceiving the Old Man as a child was done on the bridal night and it is on the anniversary of that night that the purgation of the sin is taking place. So there exists a cyclical pattern to the whole action of the play. Thus, the myth of soul in remorse has been presented in the play with utmost detail.

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### Check Your Progress

15. Name the two prominent poets of the nineteenth century who experimented with the poetic drama genre.
16. Mention the significant works of Gordon Bottomley which exhibit the use of poetic drama.

## 5.9 *PURGATORY: THE RUINED HOUSE, BARE TREE AND THE CHARACTERISATION*

In this section, you will learn the major theme of the play as well as the characterisation.

### The Theme of Life and Death: Ruined House and Bare Tree

The theme of life and death is crucial to the play *Purgatory*. This is evident right from the beginning of the play, which starts with the stage direction, 'A ruined house and a bare tree in the background'. This kind of a stark realistic description is important to arrest the audience's focus towards the generally sombre theme of the play.

It is crucial to note that it is this very 'ruined house' or dead house for which the Old Man's father is now dead, given that the Old Man has killed him. The house was earlier alive in the sense that it was prosperous but was metaphorically killed or 'ruined' by the old man's father. Another deeper reading of the image of the 'ruined house' can be interpreted to reflect the state of Ireland which has been the focus of the contemporary Irish Revivalist Theatre. They too wanted the nation to become alive again and restored to a state of glory.

The theme of life and death is present in the title itself: '*Purgatory*'. This is to say that the author wants to probably showcase that the ruined house is the 'purgatory', a transitional death like world where there is no life and people suffer to make it to heaven. As per the author, the Ireland of his times, too, was in a death like state. The author wants to refer to the aim that is to reach a Garden of Eden and in this journey what is most required is to burn away the debilitating traditions and customs as well as practices which are taking the Irish spirit away so as to revive the ancient golden Irish world.

Life and death is also reflected in the 'bare tree' which is present behind the 'ruined house'. The tree too is in a death like state: bare. The bare tree suggests that all its 'greenness' – that is, life is almost on the verge of its end. If the tree continues to be so then the day is not far when the tree, like that of the Irish nation, will see its end. The Old Man remembers the greenness of the tree and probably is aspiring to get it back to life so as to make the Irish nation strong and cheerful.

The Old Man probably is representative of that world who wants to do away with all corrupting influence on the Irish culture so as to regain the so called heavenly days which will bring back the glory of Ireland.

## Objective Correlative

T. S. Eliot in his critical essay 'Hamlet and his Problems' discusses the concept of Objective Correlative where he says that: 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"... a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion.' Eliot cites the example *Macbeth* and *Othello* and tries to show how Shakespeare made use of this successfully, which is, according to him, precisely not the case in *Hamlet*.

In the above sense, Yeats' use of the symbols of the 'ruined house' and the 'bare tree' as the background of the play *Purgatory* may be taken as an Objective Correlative of the Irish nation. The Irish nation which once had a grandeur and sublimity of its own has degenerated to an extent that it is same as the ruined house which needs to be brought back into shape and that's the project of the Irish Revivalist writers, poets and dramatists. The main concern of these literary artistes was to revive the ancient traditions and myths of the Irish culture so as to make Ireland proud of its own culture on the face of onslaught of the colonial culture.

Furthermore, these images are also symbolical of the spiritual barrenness that Modern Age is replete with. When we discussed modernism, we witnessed that one of the essential feature of the Modern age is that it is a time when mankind having lost faith in god and also in fellow human beings are living a lonely life when there is no hope of even a second coming of Christ to save mankind from the utter hopeless situation thrust upon them by the modernist circumstances. In such a state of spiritual and emotional barrenness, the actions of human beings have lost all their meanings as they strive to get it.

## Characterisation

Characterisation is a very significant part for any dramatist because a dramatist is known for the immortal and memorable characters that he or she creates in his or her plays. William Shakespeare is known for delineating characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Feste, Touchstone, Rosalind, Portia, Shylock and numerous other such memorable characters. Ben Jonson is known for his play *Volpone*. Webster is known for his *Duchess of Malfi*. Each dramatist is, thus, famous for the characters that they produce in their plays who are distinct and achieve much grandeur in what they do. The characters of these dramatists that we have mentioned here are immortal as they have performed actions which are of sublime heights or heroic in the traditional sense of the term.

But when we come to the Modern age, we see that the characters in the plays in particular and in other works of art in general have lost their grandeur and sublimity leading to a situation when the common man is the protagonist of the play and often they lack the heroic grandeur which the traditional heroes of tragedies usually possess. In such circumstances, it is evident that the characters of modern times are devoid of heroism and sublimity; and are more so common human beings leading a common life. In such circumstances, dramatic protagonists have become more or less almost non-heroic. This is not only true about modern drama, but also that of modernist literature. For example, in the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T. S. Eliot, the poet makes his protagonist a common aging

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man who shudders from performing any action as he thinks passivity is the only way life can be lead in the modern times. Or in *Sons and Lovers*, a novel by D. H. Lawrence, the protagonist Paul Morel is trying to fight with his weakness of mother fixation. All such modern protagonists are commoners trying to fight their own weakness and anxieties and in their fight against themselves they achieve some kind of grandeur, though nothing can be compared to the classical hero like Achilles.

In such times, when W. B. Yeats wrote *Purgatory*, he chose only two characters in the play who are common men – a father and a son, an Old Man (the father) and his sixteen years old son (the boy). The entire play is a conversation between these two characters who talk about the lost grandeur of their family. The characters are also not even named so as to provide some kind of anonymity as well as have some kind of universal appeal. These characters are Irish, but they can be from any place and any time. Thus, keeping the characters of the play anonymous; is a significant ploy used by the dramatist W. B. Yeats to achieve the tragic effect of the play.

Yeats seem to be inverting the tradition of making famous characters in tragedy and trying to experiment with the idea that a common man like the Old Man of *Purgatory* can also have a tragic life which is worthy of being witnessed by the readers or viewed by the spectators. It is an unusual feat to be achieved as nameless characters find themselves achieving some kind of a pathetic status in the play to evoke our pity for them. Yet, at the same time, the Old Man seems to be Yeats' ideological mouthpiece in the play as it is only through him that the playwright builds up the tempo of the play. The Old Man is untrustworthy as well as evil which leads to his pathetic situation when in spite of all his efforts, he is presented to be powerless to bring about any change in his mother's fortune as the supernatural elements seems to be coming back again to haunt him and his sensibilities.

### Check Your Progress

17. How has T. S. Eliot defined 'Objective Correlative'?
18. What does the symbol of 'bare tree' denote in the play *Purgatory*?

## 5.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Synge was born in a Protestant family in 1871, near Dublin.
2. Synge's first play *When the Moon Has Set* was a full-length drama, which was later condensed into a single Act. It is about a young, landowner who is an atheist but happens to be in love with a nun, who agrees to marry him. Owing to its ideologies, the play could not be promoted in Ireland then.
3. *Riders to the Sea* is a play that depicts suffering on many levels. While the mother, Maurya, is left to deal with the loss of her six sons and her husband to the sea, her two daughters have no option but to bear the loss of their brothers and also take care of their grieving mother.

4. The play has many varying meanings beyond what is literally evident. The title is derived from the Bible—the *Book of Exodus* (15:1)—‘The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.’ The Book of Revelation (6:1-8) also sheds light on the central incident in the play: ‘And I looked and beheld a pale horse: and his name that sat on it was Death.’
5. While many things in the play allude to the Old Testament, certain actions also refer to events in the New Testament. When Maurya sprinkles Michael’s clothes with holy water, one is reminded of Easter morning, when the body of Jesus is smeared with spices and perfume by three women. The scene seems to symbolize the Resurrection. Cathleen’s reference to ‘when the sun rises’ is only a reinforcement of the idea of resurrection along with ‘resurrection of the son’.
6. There is an interesting mix of Christian beliefs and pagan superstitions in *Riders to the Sea*. The occupants of the island are simple fishermen and women who are able to easily integrate the two. The mention of sprinkling of ‘holy water in the dark nights after Samhain’ by Maurya clearly symbolizes purification and refers to the pagan feast (on November 11).
7. W. B. Yeats received the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1923.
8. The significant poems written by W. B. Yeats are as follows:
  - *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1894)
  - *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899)
  - *The Shadowy Waters* (1900)
  - *In the Seven Woods* (1903)
  - *The Green Hamlet and the Other Poems* (1910)
  - *Easter* (1916)
  - *The Wild Swans of Coole* (1919)
  - *The Second Coming* (1920)
  - *The Tower* (includes *Sailing to Byzantium* and *Leda and the Swan* (1928)
9. Two significant features of the Modern age are the following:
  - (a) The Modernist writers turned away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to ‘Duree’ or psychological time. All the stream of consciousness novels, whether of Virginia Woolf or that of James Joyce, deal with psychological time.
  - (b) The two World Wars and its effect had shaken mankind and more so the whole of Europe. The effect of the World Wars was such that mankind lost faith in fellow human beings and therefore a sense of loneliness crept into the minds and consciousness of the modern man.
10. ‘Modernity’ refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism.

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11. M. Synge, Sean O Casey, James Joyce, W. B. Yeats are some of the significant literary artists who played a vital role in the revival of Irish theatre.
12. Some of the prominent one-act plays are the following:
  - Edward Albee – *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (2002)
  - Samuel Beckett – *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)
  - Anton Chekhov – *A Marriage Proposal* (1890)
  - Israel Horovitz – *Line* (1974)
  - Eugène Ionesco – *The Bald Soprano* (1950)
  - Arthur Miller – *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955)
13. The play *Purgatory* seems to end without any catharsis and without any tragic recognition of the Old Man leading to an ironic situation when the Old Man expresses his anguished admission to God that 'Mankind can do no more' and his final plea to 'Appease / the misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.'
14. Catharsis is regarded by Aristotle as the prime objective of a tragic play.
15. Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning are two prominent poets of the nineteenth century who experimented with the poetic drama genre.
16. Gordon Bottomley was another powerful dramatist who wrote many great poetic dramas such *The Crier by Night* (1902), *Midsummer Eve* (1905), *King Lear's Wife* (1915), *Grauch* (1921) and *Culbin Sands* (1932).
17. T. S. Eliot in his critical essay 'Hamlet and his Problems' discusses the concept of Objective Correlative where he says that: 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"... a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion.'
18. The 'bare tree' in the play *Purgatory* suggests that all its 'greenness' – that is, life is almost on the verge of its end. If the tree continues to be so then the day is not far when the tree, like that of the Irish nation, will see its end.

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## 5.11 SUMMARY

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- John Millington Synge is the most popular and respected playwright belonging to the Irish Literary Renaissance, which also featured names like W. B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, at the turn of the twentieth century.
- In 1896, Synge happened to meet poet and dramatist William Yeats in Paris. It was Yeats who suggested that Synge leave Paris and go to Aran Islands to 'Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression'.

- *Riders to the Sea* faced little controversy as compared to *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The one-act tragic play is set on the Aran Islands, and features Maurya, an old woman whose husband, father-in-law, and five sons lost their lives at sea.
- Synge had not intended the *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Tinker's Wedding* to be a trilogy but the three had several commonalities in terms of theme.
- When *The Playboy of the Western World* premiered, the audiences reacted rather violently. People began hissing in the third act at Dublin theatres. The plot idealises parricide and has an unhappy conclusion, which did not go down well with the audience.
- The play revolves around the misfortunes endured by a family due to the sea. The short play tells the story of an old woman from whose family all the fishermen were snatched away by the sea. The play is set in the kitchen of a cottage on an island to the west of Ireland.
- *Riders to the Sea* is a play that depicts suffering on many levels. While the mother, Maurya, is left to deal with the loss of her six sons and her husband to the sea, her two daughters have no option but to bear the loss of their brothers and also take care of their grieving mother.
- The younger of Maurya's two daughters, Nora's main role in the play is to interact with Cathleen. Her attitude towards Maurya is more respectful than that of her elder sister.
- William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born in Dublin and spent most of his childhood in Sligo, in the west of Ireland, which formed the background of most of his literary works.
- William Butler Yeats first appears in the memories of his contemporaries, as a rarefied human being a tall, dark-visaged young man who walked the streets of Dublin and London in a poetic hat, cloak, flowing tie and intoning verses.
- In 1891, W. B. Yeats became a member of Rhymers' Club. Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) was also a member of this club. After 1890, Yeats started writing plays and this played a significant role in the revival of the Irish Drama and Irish National Movement.
- There was simplicity of expression as well as melodic quality in the early poems of W. B. Yeats and *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is an important example of this feature. He was very much influenced by the Irish (Celtic) legends as well as Pre-Raphaelite poetry.
- Modernity and modernism are two different things – whereas 'modernity' refers to a set of philosophical, political, and ethical ideas which provide the basis for the aesthetic aspect of modernism.

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- The writers like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, poets like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Auden and others shaped the literary concerns of the age by portraying the spiritual and metaphysical vacuum created in the modern minds by various forces and events such as industrialization, the two World Wars and other significant events.
- Modernist writers had a new 'subject matter' for literature as they believed that their new way of looking at life required a new form, a new way of thinking and writing.
- The Modernist writers turned away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to 'Duree' or psychological time.
- Myth as 'collective unconscious' (Carl Jung) is one of the prime concerns of the modernist writing and the modernists (such as James Joyce, W. B. Yeats) were preoccupied with myth-making.
- The members of the Irish Revivalist movement wanted to revive that language and its literary heritage by celebrating the local language of Ireland which would provide them a distinct identity and would lead them to form a nation of their own.
- John Millington Synge is one of the greatest dramatists who was instrumental in the rebirth of the Irish Theatre. *The Shadow of Glen* (1903), a comedy based on an old Irish folktale, presents a romantic picture of Irish peasant life which was necessary for the Irish National Revival Movement.
- One act play is a play that has only one act, as distinct from plays that occur over several acts. It is to be remembered that usually plays are there in five acts. Most of William Shakespeare's plays are in five acts with many scenes in each act.
- Often critics thought that the play *Purgatory* deals with afterlife – the mother's life in purgatory from where the Old Man is trying to free her soul. Critic like F. A. C. Wilson is of the opinion that the play is a dramatization of Yeats' *Vision* where he talks about the theory of afterlife.
- The Old Man tried his best to do away with all the consequences of the social transgression of his mother.
- W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* is a tragedy – no doubt about it – as the Old Man, the protagonist of the play, in his ambition to save his mother's soul from purgatory, commits two murders – one of his father and the second of his son.
- Poetry in drama, takes us a step away from critical realism. In poetic drama, it is not our everyday selves; the masks, which people often adopt in society, but rather the inner souls that converse.
- Poetic drama is a distinct genre of theatre where the essence of drama is such that it reaches the sublime beauty of poetry.



- It is thought that the verse (primarily written in Iambic metre) is such in the play *Purgatory* that when one watches the performance or reads the play once he is not only made to experience the rhythm of poetic language, but also at the same time made to feel the poetry that surrounds our life.
- The play *Purgatory* can be said to be a family saga of decline which can be related to the decline of a family in general or can be read as a tale representing the decline of the culture of the Irish nation.
- The Old Man further adds how he was conceived on the wedding night of his mother when the father after a bout of drunken carousing sealed the fate of his mother.
- Symbols are very significant in modernist canon as it is through symbols that most of the poets and dramatists convey messages across to the readers/viewers.
- Characterization is a very significant part for any dramatist because a dramatist is known for the immortal and memorable characters that he or she creates in his or her plays.
- In such times, when W. B. Yeats wrote *Purgatory*, he chose only two characters in the play who are common men – a father and a son, an Old Man (the father) and his sixteen years old son (the boy).

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### 5.12 KEY TERMS

- **Poetic drama:** It refers to any drama written as verse to be spoken.
- **Catharsis:** It is a term in dramaturgy which means the ‘emotional cleansing’ or purgation. According to Aristotle, a tragedy should evoke the feelings of pity and fear.
- **Dramatic monologue:** It is a literary device that is used when a character reveals his or her innermost thoughts and feelings, those that are hidden throughout the course of the story line, through a poem or a speech.
- **Enlightenment:** This term was applied to the intellectual and cultural movement in Western Europe during the seventeenth century which reached its height in the eighteenth century.
- **Hamartia:** It is a serious flaw of the main character (protagonist) of a Greek tragedy. Often, this flaw is great pride, or hubris.
- **Myth:** It is defined as an old traditional story or legend, especially one concerning fabulous or supernatural aspirations and perceptions of a people and the origin of a people.
- **Protagonist:** A protagonist is considered to be the main character or lead figure in a novel, play, story, or poem. The term may also be referred to as the ‘hero’ of a work.
- **Symbolism:** It is an essential attribute of the modernist poetry and Yeats was one of the greatest of the symbolist poets of the modern age.

- **Tragedy (Greek):** It refers to drama written in elevated language in which a noble protagonist falls to ruin during a struggle caused by a flaw (hamartia) in his character or an error in his rulings or judgments.

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### 5.13 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

#### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the life and works of J. M. Synge.
2. Briefly mention *Riders to the Sea* as a one-act play.
3. Write a short note on the character of Nora in the play *Riders to the Sea*.
4. What inspired Synge to write this play *Riders to the Sea*?
5. Outline the role of women in the play *Riders to the Sea*.
6. What according to you is the theme of W. B. Yeats' play *Purgatory*? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Write a short note on the character of the Old Man in *Purgatory*.
8. What is a one act play?

#### Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse the settings and themes in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*.
2. Examine the importance of language in *Riders to the Sea*.
3. 'The journey of life in the closed system of the Island presented in *Riders to the Sea* often results in death and loss.' Elucidate.
4. Examine the naturalist aesthetics in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*.
5. Do you think Poetic drama is a genre which deals with the poetry of life rather than the verse form in which it is usually written? Write a detailed note on Poetic drama with special reference to W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory*.
6. W. B. Yeats is thought to be one of the foremost figures in the revival of Irish theatre in the early twentieth century. Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer with special reference to W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory*.
7. Critically analyse the contribution of *Purgatory* to the Irish Revivalist theatrical tradition.
8. How does W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* as a One Act Play heighten the scope of the play? Discuss with close reference to the play.
9. Do you think W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* is a tragedy? Why do you think so? Give reasons for your answer.
10. In what ways does W. B. Yeats' *Purgatory* achieve the tragic effect? Discuss the norms of tragedy to enumerate the ways in which *Purgatory* achieves the tragic height.

11. Critically comment on the use of myth by W. B. Yeats in the play *Purgatory*.
12. Critically analyze the following lines along with reference to the context:

(a) *Study that house.*

I think about its jokes and stories;  
I try to remember what the butler  
Said to a drunken gamekeeper  
In mid-October, but I cannot.  
If I cannot, none living can.  
Where are the jokes and stories of a house,  
Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty?

(b) *But there are some*

That do not care what's gone, what's left;  
The souls in Purgatory that come back  
To habitations and familiar spots.

(c) *And he squandered everything she had.*

She never knew the worst, because  
She died in giving birth to me,  
But now she knows it all, being dead.  
Great people lived and died in this house;  
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,  
Captains and Governors, and long ago  
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.  
Some that had gone on Government work  
To London or to India came home to die,  
Or came from London every spring  
To look at the may-blossom in the park.  
They had loved the trees that he cut down  
To pay what he had lost at cards  
Or spent on horses, drink, and women;  
Had loved the house, had loved all  
The intricate passages of the house,

(d) *This night is the anniversary*

Of my mother's wedding night,  
Or of the night wherein I was begotten.  
My father is riding from the public-house,  
A whiskey bottle under his arm.  
A window is lit showing a young girl.  
Look at the window; she stands there  
Listening, the servants are all in bed,  
She is alone, he has stayed late  
*Bragging and drinking in the public-house.*

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- (e) *I am a wretched foul old man*  
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck  
This old jack-knife into a sod  
And pulled it out all bright again,  
And picked up all the money that he dropped,  
I'll to a distant place, and there  
Tell my old jokes among new men.
- (f) *Hoof beats! Dear God,*  
How quickly it returns – beat – beat –!  
Her mind cannot hold up that dream.  
Twice a murderer and all for nothing,  
And she must animate that dead night  
Not once but many times!  
O God!  
Release my mother's soul from its dream!  
Mankind can do no more. Appease  
The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

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## 5.14 FURTHER READING

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