

## **PREFACE**

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Bachelor Degree Programme, the opportunity to pursue Honours course in any Subject introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Honours level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Cooperation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of a proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in 'invisible teaching'. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials, the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great deal of these efforts is still experimental—in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

**Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar**  
Vice-Chancellor

First Edition — July, 2017

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Printed in accordance with the regulations and financial assistance  
of the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission.

**BACHELORS DEGREE PROGRAMME: ENGLISH**  
**[BDP: EEG]**

**New Syllabus effective from July 2015 Session**  
**Paper - 7**

**Course Writers:**

<b>Module and Unit</b>	<b>Writer</b>	<b>Editor</b>
Module 1 Unit 1	Sandhya Sen	Bristi Basu
Module 1 Unit 2	Janki Singh	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 1 Unit 3	Rumela Ganguly	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 2 Unit 1	Sutanuka Ghosh Roy	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 2 Unit 2	Kushal A. Biswas	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 2 Unit 3	Suchismita Hazra	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 3 Unit 1	Anupama Maitra	Bristi Basu
Module 3 Unit 2	Sutanuka Ghosh Roy	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 3 Unit 3	Srideep Mukherjee	Bristi Basu
Module 4 Unit 1	Adharshila Chatterjee	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 4 Unit 2	Monbinder Kaur	Srideep Mukherjee
Module 4 Unit 3	Anindya Sen	Bristi Basu

**Paper Editors :** Srideep Mukherjee and Bristi Basu

**General Editing, Formatting, Layout Design and Coordination:**

Srideep Mukherjee  
Assistant Professor of English  
School of Humanities  
Netaji Subhas Open University

**Notification**

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**Mohan Kumar Chattopadhyay**  
Registrar

## **General Editors' Foreword**

It has been a rewarding experience coordinating the syllabus revision exercise and the induction of new Self Learning Materials (SLM) for the EEG Programme under the aegis of the School of Humanities of our University. The new syllabus and its attendant study materials are the result of concerted endeavours through workshops, repeated interactions, shared leadership and above all, protracted labour on the part of everyone who has been associated with this project.

The need for a thorough syllabus revision for BDP English was a long standing one, as the existing framework had long stood its time and needed to take a fresh look at the dynamically altered literary scenario. In framing the new syllabus, experts have been guided by the rationale of putting in place a curriculum that would effectively serve as proper foundations for a Graduation level course in English Literature, which by itself has come to be seen as a widely interdisciplinary area. The Learning Objectives envisaged in this syllabus include a periodic knowledge of History of English Literature spread across Papers that will be divided mainly in a chronology – genre pattern; acquaintance with literary texts in a similar sequence and logic; primary knowledge of relevant literary criticism/theory; essentials of History of Language and basics of pronunciation; and an introduction to the basics of Indian Writing in English which is the least that one can think of from the New Literatures arena at this level.

Being a University dedicated to Open and Distance Learning, the creation of SLM's is a corollary to the formulation of a new syllabus. This has traditionally been the mainstay of Student Support Services at NSOU and efforts have been made to produce SLM's that can be as learner friendly as possible. While the print material shall be inducted to begin with, there is in the pipeline a project for introducing multimedia learning aids for relevant portions of the syllabus, to augment SLM's at the earliest possible instant. This could include live audio-video interactions on select topics, on-screen and on-stage footage clips, readings of poetry and prose, recordings from classrooms and the like; all of it for widest possible dissemination among our learners. We would welcome suggestions on this from our BDP counsellors as well. It is hoped that since our Study Centres are now mostly ICT enabled, learners will be able to enjoy their studies with the help of both versions of study tools. While they can look upon NSOU materials thus provided on offline and online modes as primary aids, they will however be expected to equip themselves with thorough reading of

texts and references on the lines indicated in the SLM's. After all, we presume that as a student of literature by choice, one has a predilection for literary texts and has taken up this Programme to augment his/her levels of understanding, along with the necessity of acquiring a degree that shall stand in good stead in life.

On behalf of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University, we stand to thank the experts on the Syllabus Committee, the content writers and the Paper editors for their constant support and adherence to timelines, the valuable academic inputs they have provided, and the numerous ways in which they have embellished the final print materials, their own engagements notwithstanding. It has I'm sure, been a labour of love for all of you, and we acknowledge your support for enabling us to see through the successful implementation of the entire project.

To all our learners, dear students, we congratulate you on your choice of NSOU as the preferred institution for enhancing your academic pursuits. Here's hoping and wishing that you will make the most out of our blend of the serious acquiring of knowledge amidst flexible conditions and achieve your cherished goals in life. Let us make learning an enjoyable activity.

Dated: Kolkata  
15<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

**Srideep Mukherjee**  
Assistant Professor in English  
School of Humanities

**Dr Oindrila Ghosh**  
Assistant Professor in English  
School of Humanities

## **Paper Editors' Introduction to Paper VII**

Dear Learners,

With Paper VII of your EEG course, you have arrived at the last portion of your syllabus of British history. This Paper which is titled "Literature of the Modern and Postmodern Periods" commences where Paper VI concluded, and takes you even beyond the middle of the twentieth century. But more than the time frame covered, what is important is that here you are into the thick of the Modernist movement and are as well introduced to the confluence of Modernism and Postmodernist tendencies. As students, your obvious question should concern the epithet 'post' in postmodern, for this is indeed one of the most intriguing aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. Without doubt, the texts in this Paper have been so chosen as to give you a feel of this transition that has indeed left literature a far more complex proposition than what you have studied in your previous Papers.

Accordingly, Module 1 of this Paper, in keeping with the general trend of the syllabus, takes up in great detail the study of literature and culture of this period. Striking a continuity with where we left off in Paper VI, the background of the age has been perused. Against this, various facets of modernism and the turn it has gradually taken towards postmodernity have been explained in as much detail as possible. In your interest, you are to consult the texts of History of English literature and Social History that have been referred to at the end of each Unit. Consequently, the second, third and fourth Modules take up for detailed study the representative trends in poetry, prose – both fictional and non-fictional, and drama respectively. As you read through these Units carefully, you will definitely have a view of the diverse tendencies that literature of the era has come to converge upon. Naturally, literary criticism and theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes across as equally complex, but for the present we have not exposed you to its study.

As in your earlier Papers, the question pattern for Assignment and Term-End examinations remain the same:

2 (out of 4) essay-type questions of 20 marks each

3 (out of 6) mid-length questions of 12 marks each

4 (out of 8) short answer type questions of 6 marks each

As always, the reading of complete texts, even those that are not included in this SLM, remain a prerequisite for satisfactory results.

Kolkata

15<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Editors

# SYLLABUS

## **Module 1 –Literature and Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Unit 1 – The Background of the Age

Unit 2 – The Moderns

Unit 3 – Towards Postmodernity

## **Module 2 – Reading Poetry**

Unit 1 – Yeats: *The Second Coming*; Eliot: *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

Unit 2 – Brooke: *The Soldier*; Owen: *Strange Meeting*;

Unit 3 – Larkin: *Church Going*; Heaney: *Digging*

## **Module 3 – Reading Prose**

Unit 1 – Lawrence: *Sons and Lovers*

Unit 2 – Conrad: *The Lagoon*; Maugham: *The Lotus Eater*

Unit 3 – Shaw: *Freedom*; Orwell: *Shooting an Elephant*

## **Module 4 – Reading Drama**

Unit 1 – Shaw: *Pygmalion*

Unit 2 – Osborne: *Look Back in Anger*

Unit 3 – Pinter: *The Birthday Party*



**Module**

**1 Literature and Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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<b>Unit - 1</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The Background of the Age	13-55
<b>Unit - 2</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The Moderns	56-82
<b>Unit - 3</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Towards Postmodernity	83-100

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**Module**

**2 Reading Poetry**

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<b>Unit - 1</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> W. B. Yeats: The Second Coming; T. S. Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock	101-142
<b>Unit - 2</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rupert Brooke: The Soldier; Wilfred Owen: Strange Meeting;	143-160
<b>Unit - 3</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Philip Larkin: Church Going; Seamus Heaney: Digging	161-175

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# Module-1

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## Unit-1 □ The Background of the Age

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### Structure:

- 1.1.0 Introduction
- 1.1.1 The Important Terms
- 1.1.2 Economic and Political Backgrounds
- 1.1.3 End of British Supremacy
- 1.1.4 Impact of the First World War
- 1.1.5 The Russian Revolution
- 1.1.6 The Second World War
- 1.1.7 Britain in the 1950s
- 1.1.8 A Brief Recap
- 1.1.9 The Intellectual Background: 1901-1960
- 1.1.10 The Winds of Modernism
- 1.1.11 Poetry
- 1.1.12 A Brief Recap of Poetry
- 1.1.13 The Changes in the Novel
- 1.1.14 A Brief Recap of the Novel
- 1.1.15 Drama in the First Six Decades
- 1.1.16 A Brief Recap of Drama
- 1.1.17 Trends in Literary Criticism
- 1.1.18 Summing Up
- 1.1.19 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.1.20 Suggested Reading

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## **1.1.0 Introduction**

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In this unit we are going to take a look at the important economic trends and political events that define and determine the prevailing socio-economic temper of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cultural atmosphere of the modern age, as of any other age, was largely the resultant product of these social and economic changes. For this unit, you need to have in mind a time frame spanning the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1950s. The time frame chosen is however flexible, for we shall be often going backwards into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and sometimes take a peek at the 1960s. But it is not quite arbitrary. Queen Victoria died in 1901, officially ending the Victorian era in terms of history and what we generally call postmodernism begins to grow prominent from the 1970s. By the 1950s high modernism had lost its steam. So you need to understand that the period in focus here is that which lies between the close of the Victorian era and the beginnings of postmodernism. Let us now go into the details of the manifold happenings that this period witnessed.

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### **1.1.1 The Important Terms**

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You have already come across terminology like modern and postmodern in the Introduction. Let us begin by clearly defining some of these commonly used terms - Modern, Modernity, Modernism, Modernist. The word ‘modern’ from French ‘moderne’ (Latin ‘modo’) is a time indicating word. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as “Of or pertaining to the present and recent times as opposite to the remote past”. It came into use in English in late Middle English, and you will definitely recall that we have called the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer one of the earliest instances of modernist literature in English. In one sense the history of modern Europe can be said to begin from the 16<sup>th</sup>. century. The Tudor period is early modern. Modernity is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as ‘The quality or condition of being modern’; its use can be dated to the mid18<sup>th</sup> century. The simplest way to define modernity is to think of it in terms of new technologies. The concept of modernity is associated with new modes of transport—trains, surface and underground, aeroplanes, motor cars; new media— camera, film, telephone, typewriter; new materials—plastic, steel, man-made fibres like nylon, reinforced concrete, asphalt; new sources of power—petroleum, electricity, the internal combustion engine etc. New technologies drastically changed the way men had lived and worked for centuries. Above all, the concept of time changed beyond measure. Exact time keeping became essential for availing

trains or for factory shifts. world-wide standards of time were fixed in the International Conference on Time in 1912.

The characteristics of modernism are intellectual and cultural. On the intellectual level we can think in terms of an importance attached to the application of reason in all spheres of human activity, secular liberalism, scientific growth, acceptance of individual autonomy etc. In this sense some have called it a continuation by other means of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment project. But modernism also is the name of a European cultural movement which spread through major cities like Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, Zurich, and ultimately to New York. In a sense there were not one, but many modernisms. In fundamental ways, modernism was antagonistic to modernity. The philosopher Theodore Adorno has defined modernism as the form of modern culture that says 'no' to modernity. Modernism was an aesthetic formulation of resistance to the prevailing or hegemonic modes of capitalist modernisation in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Major modernists, i.e. the writers, artists, musicians of modernism are all anti-modernity and anti- modernisation. Modernism is anticipated from around the mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century in the art criticism of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, in the impressionist painters who broke away from art tradition by their techniques. In the year 1900 Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published, which would exercise far –reaching influence on 20<sup>th</sup> century thought, art and culture. The same year saw the birth of quantum physics, challenging the boundaries of classical Physics. 1907 witnessed the public viewing of Picasso's archetypal modernist painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*. In 1910 T.S. Eliot's "**The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**" would bring into poetry the modernist element of cultural disenchantment. In 1911 Arnold Schoenberg began composing his atonal pieces. In 1914 James Joyce published *The Dubliners*. What was common to all these different cultural creations in different spheres of art was a strong impulse for **experimentation**, both with form and matter, breaking away from tradition, a refusal to conform to common denominators of audience preference. Difficulty and novelty are the two commonly acknowledged features of modernist art and literature. The modernists were trying, either overtly or covertly, to fight the forces of capitalist production and consumerism. You can thus see that much more than previous phases of cultural-literary history, modernism shows intricate connections with various disciplines of study and ways of life. This perhaps makes it a complex category to pin down by monologist definitions.

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## 1.1.2. Economic and Political Backgrounds

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Due to the momentum of capitalist enterprise, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a radical transformation of people's lives in the western world. The modernisation we have talked about was propelled by a generation of big capitalist entrepreneurs — Henry Ford and Rockefeller in the U.S.A., Lord Leverhulme in Britain, The Krupp family in Germany and many others. England, the world's greatest trading nation at the beginning of the century, exported both capital and manufactured goods. Her share to the world's foreign investment was 43% while Germany's was 13%. In this discrepancy lay the seeds of the First World War. Meanwhile Japan embarked on a project of industrialisation, choosing the German model. This would lead to new power equations later on. Competition from Japan would, in a few more years, break the backbone of Britain's textile manufacture, the original pioneering industry of Britain's Industrial Revolution. The system of assembly-line production introduced by Henry Ford in the Ford Motor Company created a disjoint between the worker and his work. Production was faster and more efficient but the worker felt alienated. The boring repetitive work reduced human beings to mere machine parts. If you see Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times* you will notice how Chaplin depicts this dehumanisation of the factory worker. This would emerge as a theme for several important social problem novels of the early 20<sup>th</sup>. century. Authors like Alan Sillitoe in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the American writer Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle*, or a little later, the playwright Edward Bond would show the degradation and dehumanisation of the working class people in his plays.

But the process was irreversible. Of Britain's total population, 80% came to live in urban districts. Import of cheaper wheat from America or refrigerated meat from Argentina meant the end for millions of acres of arable land, income from landed rents for the aristocracy, and migration of agriculture labourers from their traditional homes. Trade thrived. The banks became richer. But the human implications were far-reaching. There is a veering of interest from nature towards urban and cosmopolitan themes. D. H. Lawrence commented that even the countryman had become a 'town bird' at heart.

The growth of capitalist enterprise meant an expansion of Imperialism. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the British empire stretched across four continents. The colonies were used as sources of raw materials, markets and as outlets for emigration. However, the Second Boer War of 1902, while it enabled Britain to wrest large parts

of South Africa from the Dutch-speaking settlers, was also a blow to British complacency, with major early setbacks in battle.

On the continent meanwhile, France, Russia, and an industrially advanced and affluent Germany were all arming themselves. By 1894 Germany was already preparing the first version of battle plan to scuttle the alliance between other major European nations. She also backed her ally Austria's repressive measures in Serbia, and the annexation of Bosnia. Tension mounted. Things finally came to a head with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian rebel at Sarajevo on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1914. A month later Austria declared war against Serbia. Germany invaded neutral Belgium to make a quick move to France. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914 Britain joined France against Germany. Fiftyone months and nine million deaths later, the war finally ended in November 1918. By that time the old Europe and in fact the old world order had changed forever. What had begun on a note of nationalist frenzy brought with it long-drawn despairing years of agony.

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### **1.1.3 End of British supremacy**

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The high financial cost of the war crippled Britain. Formerly a stable growing economy, a haven for free trade and the world's banker, Britain had to borrow heavily from the U.S. which now became the world's banker. American financial supremacy was confirmed by American technological advances and methods of industrial production. In Britain and the rest of Europe there was initially a spurt of economic boom, spurred by heavy government spending to replace war-damaged resources and pent-up consumer demand. But problems of British economy loomed large. Heavy industries like shipbuilding and the cotton mills declined. The twilight years had begun for Britain.

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### **1.1.4 Impact of the First World War**

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A number of social paradoxes were also the resultant product of the war. At a time when millions were dying, the working classes in Britain found their living standards enhanced and their health improved. Working class labour was in high demand. As a result, there was an increase in their political power and their ability to consume. The Trade Unions grew in size and strength.

For the middle classes the impact of war was disastrous. Unearned income from

securities, mostly invested in different European enterprises was wiped out. When the 'head' of a family joined military service, the families were badly provided to keep up their social status. When the soldiers returned home from the front, readjusting to the major social changes proved extremely difficult. Disabled men struggled to survive on meager disability pensions. Marriages broke down. Social equations had changed beyond measure. Economic changes broke class barriers, already weakened during the shared hardships in the trenches.

Women however benefitted from the war. The war revolutionised the place of women in European society. They gained tangible social, political and economic advances. Women were needed not only for nursing but for work in the munitions factories, for secretarial work and school teaching. They could demand wages undreamed of before the war. As adult males of the family joined the war, daughters became more important. In 1918 women's suffrage (voting rights) was granted. The Suffragist Movement had been going on for a long time, the contribution of women to the war effort finally changed the attitudes of the political establishment. One interesting external sign of the growing emancipation of women was the way they began to dress. Many women had worn trousers as uniform— and they continued to wear trousers, delighting in their new found freedom of movement and pockets.

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### **1.1.5 The Russian Revolution**

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The Russian Revolution was an immediate product of the First World War. Deprivations of the Russian peasantry and working classes had been manifest in simmering discontent and sporadic strikes and revolts for a long time. Repeated military defeats, internal chaos, massive food shortage, industrial disruption came to a head with the revolt of the Navy aboard the battleship Potemkin. The Tsar was forced to abdicate and a provisional Government was created. As the news reached them, Lenin and Trotsky quickly returned from exile and the Bolshevik party seized power. In March, the new government of Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty with the central powers on very humiliating terms, primarily to fight the civil war at home. The socialist government and the changes anticipated from its functioning would remain a major point of concern for the western world, with far reaching impact in the following decades. For British writers and thinkers, the implications were many and varied as we shall see later.

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## 1.1.6 The Second World War

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A defeated Germany had to agree to very humiliating terms at the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. The French policy was to permanently weaken Germany and the other allied powers did not or could not ameliorate the French attitude. The British economist John Maynard Keynes wrote later that the outcome of the French policy posed a tremendous danger for European politics. He would be proved right within two decades

After the war there was a brief period of economic upsurge, propelled by government projects to restore resources damaged in the war. But the European nations had not quite adjusted to long term, far-reaching structural changes to world economy. American loans to countries like Germany and American investments in Europe had given a boost to Europe's economic recovery. But a high percentage of unemployment continued. With the crash of prices in the New York stock market in October, the Great Depression began in America and quickly spread to Europe. There was an alarming rise in unemployment and spread of poverty. The governments of all countries turned to protectionist policies, raising tariff on imports. In countries where the governments were already weakened by internal political squabbles and economic troubles, right –wing, jingoistic nationalist forces used the opportunity to seize power. The first casualty was Italy. Mounting confrontation between the forces of the political left and right and common people's increasing frustration with the liberal democratic government led to the seizure of power by Mussolini and his Fascist party. While it did not solve Italy's economic problems, the fascists forcibly brought a semblance of discipline in public life. This was done by enhanced spending on arms manufacture, as a result of which, employment immediately shot up. This enabled Mussolini to boldly sell to the crowds the dream of a new Roman empire.

Meanwhile in Germany, the economic slump was aggravated by the cost of welfare measures introduced earlier by the Weimer Republic and the reparation payments Germany was being made to pay to countries like France for its 'culpability' in the First World War. Small and medium businesses failed. The small farmers were resentful at the preferential treatment given to big landowners. Unemployment figures rose to 25% of total populace. The German currency became devalued due to hyper- inflation. The condition was rife for the rise to power of the Nazi party and Hitler, with their promise of 'bread and work'. The next demise of liberal democracy happened in Spain, where an economic recession gave the army the chance to stage a coup, and one of the generals, Francisco Franco established a brutal dictatorship.

Germany, Italy and Japan thought of themselves as the have-not powers since Britain and France enjoyed the largest shares of the colonial pie and started a process of expanding their territorial boundaries. Initially Britain and France tried a policy of appeasement. But with Germany's invasion of Poland, the Second World War began. In a realignment of nations, Italy joined Germany forming the Axis powers, and Japan would later join the Axis powers. Unlike in the First World War, the battles were not confined to European soil; this war spread across continents—to Africa and Asia. The United States, initially reluctant to get involved, helped from the sidelines, but joined the allies after an ambitious Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Stalin's Russia, which equally distrusted Britain, France and Germany, had signed a peace treaty with Nazi Germany, in order to better prepare for war.

When Hitler attacked Russia, the Russians incurred heavy losses at first. The extremely well-prepared German wehrmacht or war machine appeared invincible. From 1943 however the allies began to gain ground. Germany finally surrendered in May 1945. The War ended with Japan's surrender in September 1945, after the U.S. had dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the deadliest conflict in world history, the dead in combat numbered 25 million. For the first time in history the number of civilian dead was greater, numbering around 55 million. Air attacks had destroyed large parts of great European cities. And the horrifying possibility of an ever-present nuclear threat loomed over the world. Winston Churchill said: This noble continent (Europe) contained "a vast, quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gaping at the ruins of their cities and scanning the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny and terror". In fact, as some say, the second World never ended, it only continued in different forms - in the Cold War between America and USSR, in the smaller wars in Korea and Vietnam, in the Russian invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The world of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century lived under the threat of 'the finger on the button' of nuclear weapons.

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### **1.1.7 Britain in the 1950s**

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Immediately after the war the Labour party came to power in Britain and started building the 'welfare state' with state funding of health and education. The government of Clement Atlee followed the policy of gradual rolling up of the British Empire and

India gained her independence in 1947. For financially impoverished Britain it was no longer possible to run the colonial administration which drained the exchequer. Still, Britain and France tried jointly to flex their colonial muscles in 1956, when the Egyptian leader Nasser decided to nationalise the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company which owned and operated the canal. The British and French forces defeated the Egyptian army, but Nasser blockaded the canal. Strong intervention from the U.S. government led to Britain's withdrawal, driving home the point that Britain was no longer a world power. Successive Labour and Conservative governments turned their attention to managing internal issues rather than playing decisive roles in world affairs. The 'mixed economy' continued. Increased public spending led to more employment. Public Housing Schemes gradually replaced the slums. The National Health Service, introduced by the Labour Government in 1947, greatly improved public health. Universal literacy, which had begun with the Education Bill of 1870, spread with increased number of grammar schools and a number of new civic universities developed from local university colleges as in Nottingham, Reading, Southampton, Exeter, Leicester etc. Class barriers, still further weakened by the war, began to disappear for several reasons. The governments, both Labour and Tory, pursued schemes for a comprehensive social security, aiming to take care of citizens 'from cradle to grave'. The principle was that all members of the community should be involved and on the same terms in post-war social policy.

The old upper class, the aristocracy of birth and culture crumbled under the challenge from two opposite groups. The lower middle classes and the working classes, better paid and better educated, were moving upward. At the same time a new aristocracy of money was becoming dominant. The trend had begun in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *nouveau riche* of market enterprise had no sense of the social and moral obligations of the old upper class. The pre-war British Labour Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald said about such people that they "did not command the moral respect which tones down class hatred nor the intellectual respect which preserves a sense of equality even under a regime of considerable social difference". The working classes comprising semi and non-skilled as well as skilled, got higher wages and the markets were boosted by their higher spending capacity. Unemployment sank to very low levels. In fact, the need for more workers facilitated the immigration from former colonies, thereby sowing the seeds of the later rise of racism. The economic recovery led to great rise in consumption. The wartime austerity measures ended and the age of consumerism began. Practically every house had labour saving

devices like the vacuum cleaner and the washing machine, the refrigerator and the ‘telly’. Car and house ownership continued to rise among the working classes. In 1957, the prime minister Harold Macmillan said in a speech: “Our people have never had it so good”.

All was not well with the society however. The rise in living standards also meant a cutting off of old links of community culture. The new housing projects had improved living standards but they also made families into nuclear units, separated from relatives and familiar neighbourhoods. Old shared ways of community communication like church going declined. Philip Larkin’s poem “**Church Going**” written in 1954, brings out a picture of this social paradox. The cinema became the chief mode of entertainment, and was a major factor of the ‘Americanisation’ of the new generation. The weakening of family and community ties led to increasing frustration among the younger generation, members of which had money to spend and used it for fashion statements and behaviour patterns which gave birth to subcultures, like the teddy boys of the 50s and the mods and rockers of the 60s. The American film *Rebel Without a Cause*, the Alan Sillitoe story *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* – all depict the malaise of the post-war youth.

By the 60s British economy had begun to slow down. Unemployment rose. Race relations, already an issue, with the Notting Hill riots of 1958, grew worse. The economic downturn caused a change in Government policy. The pound sterling was devalued in 1967. Britain joined the European Common Market in 1973. The Tory Government of Edward Heath in 1970 began to cut down Government costs for welfare schemes, a process which accelerated under Margaret Thatcher later. Industries were re-privatised, the Trade Unions were crushed. In the next decades Britain would be a minor force, in economy and International Politics.

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### **1.1.8 A Brief Recap**

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You must be wondering why you have had to read so much of European history in the preceding sub-sections. It is indeed impossible to understand the why and the what of the Modern Period of literature without comprehending the European background and the emerging power equations therein. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the gradual diminution of British economic and political supremacy and the rise of the global influence of the United States of America. Great advances in

science and technology improved the living conditions of common men, but also provided lethal destructive powers to warring nations. The two defining happenings of the first half of the century were definitely the First and the Second World Wars. Also, the Russian Revolution of 1917 introduced new power equations in international relationships. As a maimed Europe crept back to normalcy, especially, after the Second World War, the countries in the western world would be divided into the so-called free world and the Iron Curtain countries; and the world continued to live under the shadow of the cold war.

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### **1.1.9 The Intellectual Background: 1901–1960.**

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The years between 1871, in which the Franco-Prussian war ended and 1914, i.e. the beginning of World war I are sometimes called the *Belle Epoque* or the beautiful era to contrast it with the traumatic experience of the War. It was an era of comparative regional peace, economic prosperity and a sense of optimism. The origins of a ‘modernist movement’, linking the late 19<sup>th</sup>. and early 20<sup>th</sup>. centuries, in painting, music and literature, can be traced back to this time. The French poet Arthur Rimbaud’s concern with the ‘new in ideas and forms’ would also become the major focus of the modernists.

In spite of the 19<sup>th</sup> century links, there was also a deep dissatisfaction with its important ideas. In Philosophy this was seen in the repudiation of F.H. Bradley’s Idealism. In the early 1900s G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell totally rejected him, advocating a realist philosophy. There was a retreat from the comprehensive system-building and metaphysical nature of 19<sup>th</sup>. century philosophy and a focus on logic and language, as in A.J. Ayers’ *Language, Truth and Logic* or Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Another important reaction against the 19<sup>th</sup>. century can be seen in the changing concepts of Love and Family. Romantic love was seen as a sharp contrast to the spirit of competitive enterprise which drove industrial economy. The family, said to be the bedrock of a stable constitutional government, started being assessed more realistically. Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian prophet of modernity, exposed the warts beneath the veneer of bourgeois civility. Freud too was fascinated by the implications of authoritarian family structures and it would become an important field of his psychological theory.

Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx were arguably the two most influential figures in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century. Freud’s ideas of the Unconscious, of infantile sexuality, the Oedipus Complex, fetishism etc. would profoundly influence novelists

like Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka on the continent, as well as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, playwrights like August Strindberg, artists like Edward Munch, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte etc. The stream of consciousness technique of narration, characteristic of major 20<sup>th</sup> century novels, is to a large extent indebted to Freud's ideas about how the unconscious mind yokes together disparate images and feelings. In poetry the Freudian ideas can be tangentially traced, for example, in Lawrence's "**Snake**", or Auden's "**Miss Gee**". Freudian ideas were actively applied to much literary criticism too, one important example being Ernest Jones' *Hamlet and Oedipus*.

Marxism had never been very influential in Britain except among minor radical groups. The preferred economic viewpoint and programme for intellectuals had always been socialism. British socialism was a mix of Chartist Radicalism, Christian Socialism, Fabian Socialism and William Morris's rather romantic ideas of revolutionary socialism, Robert Owen's Utopian Socialism and Marxist Materialism. The last was the least important. But after the economic slump of the 30s, it gained ground not in action but as an increasingly accepted theory. Arthur Koestler, the Hungarian-British author who gave up his membership of the Communist Party in 1938, later explained the attraction of communism for the intellectuals of the 30s :

"... born out of the despair of world war and civil war, of social unrest and economic chaos, the desire for a complete break with the past, starting human history from scratch, was deep and genuine."

The 1930s, which W.H. Auden called **The Age of Anxiety**, evoked a desire for a simplifying formula like the Marxist social system. The poets like Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice were left wing thinkers in their youth, and Marxist ideas of working class exploitation and class struggle are covertly present in their early verse.

Read a few lines from Stephen Spender's poem, "**An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum**"

On their slag heap, these children  
Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel  
With mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.  
All of their time and space are foggy slum.  
So blot their maps with slums as big as doom.

No major English novelist was a committed leftist. But even in the works of non-Marxist authors, some basic Marxist ideas can be traced as in the proliferation of working class heroes of Arnold Bennett and D. H. Lawrence. On the other hand, the information about the Stalinist excesses which was already available, and later on, the role Soviet Russia played after the Second World War, disillusioned the majority of British intellectuals. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four* and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness At Noon*, both anti-Stalinist and Anti-authoritarian novels, were highly popular and widely read.

On British theatre of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was little influence of Marx. Shaw's problem plays were marked by the spirit of Fabian socialism. Galsworthy explores the issues of class allegiances in *Loyalties* and of clash of interests between the capitalist and working classes in *Strife*, but from a liberal-humanitarian point of view. The kind of innovative changes in acting and stagecraft that Bertolt Brecht, inspired by Marxist ideas, brought about in theatrical production, made an impact on British theatre less for the ideological content and more for its innovative modes of production.

British Literary Criticism however had a rich and fruitful interaction with Marxism. Major Marxist critics of the 1930s were Christopher Caudwell, with *Illusion and Reality* and *Notes on a Dying Culture*, Ralph Fox (*The Novel and the People*) and Alice West (*Crisis and Criticism*). Significantly, all the books except *Notes on a Dying Culture* were published in 1937, two years before the Second World war, when anxiety and uncertainty were at the highest. A very influential literary critic to emerge from the New Left in the 1950s was Raymond Williams, with *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* in 1952, and his seminal study of culture, *Culture and Society* in 1958. He also pioneered the school of Cultural Materialism.

In the world of science, George Johan Mendel's experimental findings in genetic inheritance gained attention several decades after they were actually made, influenced not only scientific thought but also led indirectly to the warped theories of racial purity in Nazi Germany. An extremely influential anthropological work was Sir James Fraser's 12-volume *The Golden Bough*. Its basic thesis was that mankind progressed from magic through religion to scientific thought. Its controversial views on religion shocked believers, but its treatment of myths influenced nearly all creative writers. W. B. Yeats refers to it in "**Sailing to Byzantium**", Eliot in the First Book of "**The Waste Land**". Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, Hemingway, even Freud himself show in their writings the impact made on them by the book.

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### 1.1.10 The Winds of Modernism

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The French poet **Charles Baudelaire** is supposed to have first coined the term ‘modernity’ in his mid- nineteenth century influential essay: ‘**The Painter of Modern Life**’. See below for a quote from the essay:

“By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable...This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with.”

Baudelaire’s own poetry, while still written within the ambience of late Romantic tradition, anticipates modernist poetry in its use of images and symbols in its urban bias and innovative style. Later poets like **Paul Verlaine**, **Mallarme** and **Rimbaud** acknowledge him as a pioneer.

The first remarkable modernist changes however happened in Art. Art began to lose common grounds between the artist and the audience. It no longer expressed the shared perceptions of the community but the unique sensibilities of the artist as an individual. It became self-referential. This was seen in the emergence of Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Abstract Art and many other form-specific styles. In 1924, **Virginia Woolf** famously said in her essay “**Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown**” that, “on or about December 1910, human nature changed”. She was indirectly referring to the impact made by a controversial Post-Impressionist exhibition in London, where British viewers for the first time saw the works of Van Gogh and Gauguin. Of course, as Woolf herself went on to clarify, the change was not sudden or abrupt and she had only chosen a convenient date. In modernist art, form was no longer merely a transparent medium, providing a window on the visual world, it was also the content. What Andre Salmon, a major critic wrote about Picasso’s iconic modernist work, *Les Femmes d’Alger* would give you some idea about what the modernists, writer or painters, tried to do: “...the expression of the faces is neither tragic nor impassioned. They are masks almost completely devoid of humanity... they are not even allegorical or symbolical figures”. In fact, although there were not one, but many modernisms, what the various artists and writers shared was a concern with the ‘materiality’ of art. Paint, line, words assumed a new kind of self-sufficiency. The viewer or the reader is not asked to look beyond the work for something to explain or justify.

- The Literary Scene: We cannot get a clear correspondence between the way modernism manifested itself in painting, music and literature. The changes in literature, whether poetry, prose fiction or drama, happened in phases, and not all modern writers were revolutionary modernists in their style. We shall see how the writers of the Modern age responded to the challenges of modernism.

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### 1.1.11 Poetry

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Barring the attempts of Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas, and Robert Bridges at novelty, English poetry of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had become overly conventional.

The one poet from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who stands as a class apart is **Gerald Manley Hopkins**. His experiments with language and prosody produced a unique poetry which reflected the discords and conflicts of his mind as he strove to come to terms with his religious doubts and despair as a Jesuit priest. His ‘sprung rhythm’, based on the rhythmic structure of Old English verse, the contrapuntal play of regular metrical form and irregular speech rhythms, his striking imagery and word coinages anticipated and influenced many of the later experiments with poetic form. Read below the first stanza of his ‘**Pied Beauty**’:

Glory be to God for dappled things—  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

❑ **Georgian Poetry:** The term is used for the poetry of the years before the First World War mainly to demarcate it from Victorian poetry. Modernist critics have in general assessed the poetry as vapid and stylistically barren as it failed to reflect the literary sensibility which resulted from the trauma of the War and its aftershock. There were anticipations of change as well. Five Georgian Poetry anthologies were edited by **Edward Marsh** and published by **Harold Monro** between 1912 and 1922. The poets included some from the previous generation like **G.K. Chesterton** and **T. Sturge Moore**, but we also find **Wilfred Owen** as well as **Rupert Brooke**,

**A.E. Housman, Robert Bridges, Edward Thomas.** While the lesser poets show the weaknesses of this poetry, in poets like **W.H.Davies**, who in “**The Bird of Paradise**” writes about the death of a prostitute and in “**The Head of Rags**” about a drunken tramp, or **W.W. Gibson**, who contrasts the beauty of the flowers with the abject poverty of a poor old flower seller in “**Geraniums**”, we notice a desire to make the poetry-reading public aware of the brutal realities of life. The following lines are from “**Geraniums**”:

Broken with lust and drink, blear-eyed and ill,  
Her battered bonnet nodding on her head,  
From a dark door she clutched my sleeve and said:  
“I’ve sold no bunch to-day, nor touched a bite...  
Son, buy six-penn’orth; and ‘twill mean a bed.”

**Robert Graves** in an essay written in 1949, noted that Georgian poetry as a reaction to Victorianism discarded archaic diction and poetic constructions and avoided all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes and also all sad, wicked, cafe-table themes of the 90s decadents.

□ **Poetry of the First World War:** A number of poets who participated in the First World War reshaped English poetry in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century. They were **Siegfried Sassoon, Julian Grenfell, Issac Rosenberg, Cecil Day Lewis, Edmund Blunden, Wilfred Owen** and others. The impact of the war trauma was so great that it eclipsed the high poetic talent of even a poet like **Rupert Brooke**. But since the war experience sharply denigrated his patriotic themes, the control of language which never allows excess of emotionalism in the **War Sonnets**, or the complexity of a poem like “**Grantchester**”, where nostalgia is kept in check by irony, has not been properly appreciated. Read the following lines from Brooke’s “**The Soldier**”:

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there’s some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;

A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

In contrast to such glorification, the other extreme too is seen for instance, in one of **Charles Sorley's** sonnets, which is an explicit rejoinder to Brooke's above sonnet:

When you see millions of the mouthless dead  
Across your dreams in pale battalions go  
Say not soft things as other men have said,  
That you'll remember. For you need not so.  
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know  
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?

Two things that stand out from war poetry are, use of strikingly realistic images and an ironic perception of the contradiction between the formal grace of poetry and the chaotic and grotesque encounter with death. Repeatedly, we find ironic references to nature, contrasting it with the battle scenes. Read the following lines from **Wilfred Owen's Spring Offensive**.

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field—  
And the far valley behind, where the buttercups  
Had blossomed with gold their slow boots coming up,  
Where even the little brambles would not yield,  
But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing hands;  
They breathe like trees unstirred.

**W. B. Yeats** criticised the War poets for their lack of detachment. But in the poetry of Owen and Isaac Rosenberg we find a growing sense of detachment, giving maturity to their poetry. Owen is the most versatile among them. His experiments with form, known as para-rhyme, which uses assonance to create a sense of discord, captured the disintegration of war. The strong realistic imagery and the rapid succession of images in Owen and Rosenberg paved the way for later modernist achievement, for example the imagery in Eliot's **The Waste Land**.

□ **The Imagist Poets:** Imagist poetry was an anticipation of Modernist poetry. The imagist poets in their turn were influenced by the French symbolists of late 19<sup>th</sup>

century. **The Symbolist Movement** in literature began with the publication of **Charles Baudelaire** 's poetry. Baudelaire himself was greatly indebted to the American poet **Edgar Allan Poe**. The symbolists were reacting against realism and naturalism. They focussed on imagination and dreams and some of them turned to religion and spirituality. Stylistically, poets like **Paul Valery**, **Stephen Mallarme**, **Jules Laforgue** wrote in a metaphorical manner, explored the relationship between the form and content of poetry. Laforgue's experiments with the poetic possibilities of speech greatly influenced Eliot.

The Imagist poets favoured precision of images and economy of language. The sense of poetry as a linguistic construct is strongly conveyed through their experiments with form. The group was centred in London. But American poets were also its members. **T. E. Hulme**, in his *Speculations* wrote on the difference between Romantic and Classical poetry, ideas which influenced modernists like Eliot and Pound. An Imagistic Manifesto was announced in **Poetry** magazine in 1913. Among the Imagist poets were **T.E. Hulme** himself, **John Gould Fletcher** and American poets like **Amy Lowell**, **Hilda Doolittle**, **Ezra Pound**. **D.H. Lawrence** and **James Joyce** came under their influence. Imagist poetry, with its focus on precision and economy, freedom from what they called metronomic regularity of rhyme, and the composition of series of discontinuous poems in which the subject shifts from passage to passage passed into the bloodstream of modernist poetry.

□ **William Butler Yeats**: Yeats' life (1865—1939) spans across two centuries and his poetry bridges two traditions—the romantic and the modernist. Graham Hough has called him 'the last Romantic'. He is also a key figure of modern poetry. Yeats' poetry can be divided into two phases. The early poetry is strongly reminiscent of the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites. In his early poems he is a Primitivist, wandering in the 'Celtic Twilight' (a phrase of Yeats which meant a revival of Ireland's past, its myths, legends etc.). The imagery was drawn from nature, we notice a marked escapist vein, the wish to lose himself in a dream world. *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *The Wind Among the Reeds* and other early poems show an ornate language as well as a primacy of images drawn from nature. In his youth he had been greatly influenced in the magical and the supernatural. But a number of external influences matured him and turned him towards the realities of life and contemporary history. Disappointments in personal life, especially in love, the practical experience of running the Abbey Theatre of Ireland, above all his emotional involvement in the Irish nationalist movement and its violent manifestations, his

ambivalent attitude to it - all these brought in a stronger note to his later verse. In *Responsibilities* (1914) he indicated a turning away from his old poetic world. In September 1913, a poem about the workers' strike in Ireland, he used the line "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone" as a refrain at the end of every stanza. Later, in "**An Acre of Grass**" (1934) he would write "Myself must i remake". The remaking went on throughout his life. In the poem "**A Coat**" in *Responsibilities* he wrote :

I made my song a coat  
Covered with embroideries  
Out of old mythologies  
From heel to throat;  
But the fools caught it,  
Wore it in the world's eyes  
As though they'd wrought it.  
Song, let them take it  
For there's more enterprise  
In walking naked.

In the poetry that followed, the language became simpler. He remained a master of traditional verse forms, but used a colloquial idiom, a note of detached irony and satire began to creep in, and the images came to have a chiselled brilliance. He was strongly influenced by the Symbolist Movement through Arthur Symons' 1899 book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and that heritage underlies many of his images of art and life, as in the Byzantium poems. But the ability in the late poems, like **Lapis Lazuli** or **The Man And The Echo** show an effortless transmutation of commonplace feeling and experience into great poetry. He said in **The Municipal Gallery Revisited** that he, Synge and Lady Gregory were motivated by the idea that whatever they wrote should be connected to the people of the soil and arise from the daily experiences of life. That would help them record the dreams of noble men as well as beggars on the same level. This would remain his lasting inheritance.

□ **Modernist poetry:** The new poetry which began from around the second decade of the century was a sharp departure from traditional poetry. It was city poetry—written by and for a city intelligentsia, using city life as a theme. It was influenced by French poetry, particularly of Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. Baudelaire

had been the first major European poet to centre his poetry on the city. His lines in “**Tableaux Parisienne**”

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams,  
Where spectres in broad day accost the passer-by!

would be echoed by Eliot in “**The Waste Land**” :

Teeming, swarming city, city full of dreams,  
Where spectres in broad day accost the passer-by!

The two dominant personalities of Modernist poetry are **Ezra Pound** and **T.S. Eliot**. Pound began as an Imagist. He continued to focus on images but the images grew later into non-mimetic clusters which he called ‘vortex’ Pound’s insistence on precision and objectivity, refusal to consider readers’ taste or ability for comprehension, defined many features of modernist poetry. His insistence on the distinction between his own feelings and ideas and those in his poems lay behind his exploring of the possibilities of the dramatic lyric in “**Homage to Sextus Propertius**”, “**Hugh Selwyn Mauberley**” and the characters in the *Cantos*. Eliot has said about his friend and mentor that he “is more responsible for the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolution in poetry than any other individual”.

□ **T.S. Eliot** however, was the more innovative figure. Even before his association with Pound, in the poems published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*, which were written between 1911 and 1915, his remarkably flexible technique is clearly seen. His style, as Eliot himself said, was influenced by the verse of Jacobean drama and the free verse of Jules Laforgue . Here, already, we find the features which would define Modernist verse. The poems in *Prufrock* are about city life, not celebrating it, but denigrating. The topics are not matter of long established poetic tradition. The shift in the social orientation of poetry goes further. It is not only that notions of social respectability are not allowed to restrict what is said in poetry; the insistence on economy, concentration, elliptical speech, and intertextuality, the tone of ironic detachment meant that poetry was not going to be made easy for the relaxed reader. This poetry would not provide a self-explaining easy to follow train of thought. Colloquial speech and quote from Dante are juxtaposed, irregular but rhymed lines are suddenly disturbed by striking lines left without rhyme support:

Let us go then, you and I ,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherised upon a table

.....

Discontinuous composition became a major characteristic of modernist art. The technique of *Collage*, seen in the art of Picasso or George Braque becomes in Eliot an idiom for the disintegration of European civilisation. In “**The Waste Land**” (1922) Eliot used the ‘mythical method’ he had admired in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The parts are grouped around the theme of post-war Europe as barren and infertile, a wasteland of spirit, where all values have dried up. The poem explores the realms of myth, and symbols, archaeology, religious faiths including Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism in the Upanishads, Psychoanalysis, the associative theory of Gestalt psychology, intertextuality ranging through St. Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, and music hall phrases, musical strains from jazz to Wagner. Many speaking voices and shifting points of view as also the cosmopolitanism in using scraps of languages like German, French, Italian, and a range of unfamiliar geographical references add to the reader’s difficulty.

Time is a central preoccupation in Eliot—time as an aspect of individual life, time in relation to generations, or to the discredited idea of progress, time in relation to eternity. In his later poetry after he had converted to Anglicanism as a path to personal salvation, the theme of time remains. “**Ash Wednesday**” still retains the impersonality of the dramatic monologue but the verse becomes more melodic. While the complex allusive manner is still there, echoing Dante and Cavalcanti, Shakespeare, the Book of Common Prayer, the Thirtynine Articles etc. The range becomes narrower. The obscurity of style is much less evident. The influence of the 17<sup>th</sup>. century devotional poet George Herbert is a strong factor. In the last major poem, *Four Quartets*, the parts were published individually. The first, “**Burnt Norton**” was written in 1926. The other three were written and published during the second World Wa . Time becomes a central motif while music, especially the music of Beethoven influences the structure. The verse form he used was different. the lines were of varying length, with four strong beats with a pause in the middle. It was challenging, but not confusing to the modern ear. While very complex issues are dealt with, and the allusiveness is still there, the language at first reading seems less obscure:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future ,  
And time future contained in time past.

The poem received mixed reactions. Critics like George Orwell felt that the religious preoccupation had led to an extinction of his poetry. Others like C.K. Stead have said that the creative imagination which ran its own course in earlier poetry is balanced and controlled here. But whatever the arguments about religious faith as subject in his later poetry, with his poetry and his criticism T.S. Eliot is the seminal modernist poet, The achievements of Eliot and Yeats , along with others , like Pound, the war poets etc. make the 1910—30 period one of the great epochs of English poetry.

❑ **Poetry of the 30s:** The poets of this generation brought in the clarity and rhythm of native English speech along with an involvement with socio-political issues into their poetry. Their reaction to the upper class establishment institutions which had led to the destruction of war turned a number of them, notably **W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis Cyril Connolly** etc. to Marxist ideology. As a result, they have often been called ‘the pink generation’. But except for the Scottish poet **Hugh MacDiarmid**, their Marxism was more gestural than deep rooted. The influence of Freud was another important factor, in both Auden and Spender. In **Miss Gee** Auden uses the Freudian idea of sexual frustration causing physical maladies. The poets chose to write on contemporary life, its mundane, commonplace aspects. The verse and diction are studiously kept low key, the logic and syntax are those of ordinary discourse. Their concern with social and cultural disorder is very different from that of Eliot. Eliot saw his own times as part of a large European and universal order. The topicality of the 30s poets is more limited. The hatred for a commercial bourgeois culture is strong, but the remedy suggested is superficial. Tinned minds, tinned breath.

❑ **W.H. Auden:** In spite of his immense talent, his political and psychological concerns about contemporary society, and a high degree of technical skill, his achievement is largely uneven. When his first volume of poems was published in 1930, he was hailed as a striking new voice, with a distinct individual sensibility and style. There were memorable phrases and images like ‘The swallow on the tile, spring’s green/ Preliminary shiver’ (**The Letter**). In his later, more political poems Auden often exploited the form of popular light verse to reach a wider public. But the lightness of rhyme and language failed to carry the deeper meanings. Auden at his best shows an easy mastery of verse style from free verse to a number of lyric forms. His imagery is striking, but sometimes seems to be too consciously smart. But

with Auden, as with other poets of his generation, what we are finally left with are a number of good poems, technically skilful but no major achievement.

□ **The Poetry of the 40s:** The Second World War, like the first, produced a rich harvest of poetry. A number of major poets were Americans, for example, **Randall Jarrell** (*Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*), **Karl Shapiro** (*V-Letter*) etc. The major names in British poetry are those of **Keith Douglas**, **Alun Lewis** and **Sidney Keyes**. The memory of the great war poets of 1914—18 seemed to inhibit them to some extent. Perhaps the scale of horror and inhumanity, for which language was inadequate accounts for the comparative scarcity of poems from this war.

The major poet to emerge from the 40s was **Dylan Thomas**. His unashamed emotionalism and verbal rhetoric was totally different from the poetic model of Eliot although he shows a high capacity for juxtaposing words in new and sudden combinations in the Eliotesque manner. His verse is very melodic and his sheer love of words is seen in the way he uses them, without economy and without any care for meaning and appropriateness. The emotions expressed are superficial and the syntax and diction, simply because he is carried away by words, are obscure; but at his best, his poetry is a celebration of life and the richness of language. The lines below are from “**Poem in October**”:

A springful of larks in a rolling  
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling  
Blackbirds and the sun of October  
Summery  
On the hill's shoulder,  
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly  
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened  
To the rain wringing  
Wind blow cold  
In the wood faraway under me.

□ **Poetry of the 50s:** Two anthologies, independently published, assembled the works of the same set of poets in the 50s. They were, *Poets of the 1950s* (1955) by **D. J. Enright** and *New Lines* (1956) by **Robert Conquest**. The poets chosen were

**Philip Larkin, John Wain, John Holloway, Donald Davie, Elizabeth Jennings Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, and Enright and Conquest** themselves. These poets came to be called **The Movement** poets. They did not group together under any particular poetic creed or theory. What brought these disparate poets together was a conscious rejection of the complex, experimental, cosmopolitan, allusive poetry of the modernists like Pound and Eliot, the clever-intellectual Freud-Marx flavoured verse of the Auden generation, and the neo-romantic exuberance of Dylan Thomas. They turned back to traditional metres, used the low-key diction of ordinary speech and chose to write about the humdrum details of lower middle class people, not in terms of irony or ridicule but in a vein of detached empathy. The poets themselves came from the lower middle class, who, in the changed social milieu, had accessed the opportunity of an Oxbridge education and a higher class position. They redefined both the concept of the poet's identity and the relationship between the poet and his readers. The poet was not a prophet nor alienated outsider. He was a common man, living a humdrum life, like other men. He wrote to be read like men like himself. They derided the modernists' contempt for the uninitiated reader. F.W. Bateson, the critic and Oxford scholar put it : "Without the reader's co-operation the poem might as well not exist".

□ **Philip Larkin** is the major poet of the Movement. Larkin dismissed the idea of poetic tradition, myths or allusions and said that poets who used these were merely airing their erudition. He said, "I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe.." In a letter to Robert Conquest he spoke about the 'right method' for poetry as, "plain language, absence of posturing, sense of proportion, humour.." We find that Larkin builds his poems on a structure of commonsense rationality , using colloquial language which builds a bridge between the poet and the reader. Below are lines from one of his best poem, "**The Whitsun Weddings**":

The fathers with broad belts under their suits  
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;  
An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,  
The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,  
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that  
Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.

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### 1.1.12 A Brief Recap of Poetry

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British poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began with **Georgian Poetry**, which used mostly conventional form and diction and confined itself to Romantic themes and motifs. The shock of the Great War impacted on poetry by introducing realistic content in the verse of the **war poets** whose graphic descriptions of trench life, poison gas deaths etc, use of realistic images, ironical challenge to traditional beliefs brought about a change of perspective. The **Imagist poets** with their focus on economy of expression and precision of images, and the **French Symbolist poets**, introduced by the influential book of Arthur Symons, prepared the ground for high modernist poetry.

The poets of the 30s shifted away from the model of Eliot. The major poets had a loose Marxist political orientation, but evince no real feeling for the lower classes. There is a lack of major innovation.

In the 40s the Second World War produced poets who seemed inhibited by the remarkable achievement of the poets of the Great War.

The 50s **Movement poets** rejected the poetic models of three previous generations and wrote in a low-key, rational comprehensible style on commonplace everyday topics.

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### 1.1.13 The Changes in the Novel

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The impact of Modernism on prose fiction is seen most clearly in a famous literary challenge posed by **Virginia Woolf**. In her 1923 essay **Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown** mentioned earlier, Woolf presented the theoretic position of the modernist novel. She also stated this theory in a number of other essays like “**Modern Novels**” 1919, “**Character in Fiction**” in 1924, and “**Modern Fiction**” in 1925. She defined the idea of the ‘modern novel’ against the practices of the previous generation of novelists, particularly identifying the most prominent novelists of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - **Arnold Bennett**, **H.G. Wells** and **John Galsworthy**. Significantly, **D. H. Lawrence** a little later criticised Galsworthy’s novels in very similar terms. Before coming to Woolf’s or Lawrence’s charges against them, we shall begin our survey by looking at the kind of novels these three and other important writers were producing for the late Victorian and Edwardian reading public.

- **Arnold Bennett** wrote prodigiously and his novels were strongly influenced by the French realism of **Flaubert**, and even the naturalism of **Emile Zola**. The locale of most of his popular novels was the pottery towns of Staffordshire – among them are *Anna of the Five Towns*, the *Clayhanger* trilogy and *The Old Wives’ Tale*, which is Arnold’s best, but , as **E.M. Forster** commented, while it is a strong, sincere, and well-narrated tale, it misses greatness. Bennett believed that the subject of fiction should be a slice of plain life and the job of the novelist was detailed documentation —so much so, for example, that in the novel *Anna of the Five Towns* he interrupts a dramatic scene between Anna and her future husband with a two-page detailed description of the room in which the conversation takes place.
- **John Galsworthy**’s novels, especially the first of the *Forsyte Saga* trilogy, *The Man of Property*, were immensely popular with contemporary readers. The central theme is property and its effect on personal relationships of the Forsytes. He admitted he was interested in depicting the Forsytes as types of acquisitiveness, to satirise the commercial-bourgeois society and not in the fine differentiation of character from within. Robert Liddel too in *A Treatise on the Novel* (1947) said that the Forsytes were built up from the background. We learn to know them apart from their furniture and their food.
- **H.G. Wells** seems a still clearer example of a novelist committed to objective documentation at the expense of development of individual psychology of character . A pioneer figure in the field of English science fiction with books like *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, he also wrote novels like *Kipps* and *The History of Mr. Polly* on lower middle class life and *Tono- Bungay* a social satire criticising the whole of society. Wells had no interest in the novel as art form. He wanted to stimulate thought through his novels. He suggested in *Kipps* (1905) that the business of the novelist was not ethical principle but facts. “I had rather be called a journalist than an artist”, he said. What jars the reader of his novels is a very slapdash style, and the curious insubstantiality of characters.
- **Virginia Woolf** was the most vociferous critic of the three Edwardian novelists who, she felt, represented a trend in fiction which was not adequate to present the texture of life. She accused them of being ‘materialistic ‘and their faithful depiction of the perceived, objective world was achieved at the expense of interest in the perceiver, the human subject with his or her

complex thought processes and emotions. But hints of the change that would transform the novel are found in some at least of those who preceded Woolf and Joyce.

- **Henry James** spanned the end 19<sup>th</sup>. as well as the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>. He was certainly influenced by Flaubertian realism but also by the Symbolists, and Russian writers like **Turgenev**. James repeatedly takes up the theme of story and the problem of the artist in his works like *The Lesson of the Master*, *The Author of 'Beltraffio'*, *Broken Wings*, *The Death of the Lion*. These, along with his important critical work *The art of Fiction* make him an important signpost towards the modernist novel and its form. He was a pioneer figure with his use of point of view, interior monologue and unreliable narrator. Even his minor characters, who are mainly presented through description, like Mrs. Touchett, Pansy Osmond, or Henrietta Stackpole in *Portrait of a Lady*, Aunt Penniman in *Washington Square*, Flora in *Turn of the Screw*, —are never 'flat'. The main characters are not described; they are presented from a particular point of view, for example Isabel Archer's in *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). But the point of view is a shifting one, because in *Portrait of a Lady* the narrative is revealed to us through the consciousness of Ralph Touchett. In *The Ambassadors* (1903) on the other hand, the events are narrated through the perspective of a single character, Strether. The concentration on Strether allows an intimate, detailed examination of the way a character's experiences modify his consciousness and outlook.
- Another important modern novelist is **Joseph Conrad**. Conrad was a Polish expatriate and English, his choice for literary creation was his third language, after Polish and French. The astonishing precision and economy of style which make him a major figure in modern novel, has been ascribed by some critics to this fact. His range of experience as a merchant seaman accounts for the great variety of his novels. *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outpost of Progress*, and *Heart of Darkness* are set in the Congo, *Nostramo* in South America, *The Shadow-Line* in the Gulf of Siam and shipboard life, *The Secret Agent* in the streets of London. There is a strong element of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism in Conrad. But paradoxically it is a realism that transcends realism by becoming the mirror of the inward depth and complexity of characters. The details, whether of the inner station in *Heart of Darkness* or the descriptive passages on Costaguana's history and geography in *Nostramo*

—become symbols of the ‘moral discovery’ which, as Conrad believed, should be the object of every tale. His narrative technique broke away from the linear chronological pattern. He presents a story, not directly, but through interpolation between author and subject matter of a narrator through whose consciousness the events are perceived and in whose words and narrative arrangement the story unfolds. In several novels, this narrator is Marlow—*Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. This results in Conrad concentrating on the means by which reality is perceived; upon its reflection in the individual mind. It is the effect of events on the narrator, his responses to his world, his re-telling of his experience, which forms the substance of the novel. Here we find the modernist eschewing of the omniscient narrator, focus on the psychology of the individual ‘s inner being rather than on the psychology of the social being. There is also the constant going back and forth in time. In *Nostramo*, the story at points reflects back from a forward point of time whose consequences have become evident. In *Heart of Darkness* the dark of Africa and the darkness of a past Britain, Roman and Contemporary imperialism, the Congo and the Thames converge . The unnamed novelist, at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* says about Marlow, the raconteur, “ ...to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze”

The First War produced a rich harvest of trend-changing poetry as we have seen. In comparison, British novels on the direct war experience are few. **Ford Madox Ford’s** *Parade’s End* tetralogy (1924-28), which used his own war experience is a major fictional product, but the modernist upsurge made it, like much else in fiction, seem dated and less memorable to later critics. But the War speeded things up. The changes in western consciousness needed a transformation of modes of expression. David Daiches has said : “... the great surge of experimentation in fiction was in large measure caused by the novelists’ search for devices that would enable them to solve the problem of the breakdown of a public sense of significance”. Many of the changes date from before the War. You have already been acquainted with **Freud’s** work focussing on the unique importance of the individual’s subconscious as distinct from his socially conditioned consciousness. The impact of this can be traced in the modernist novelists’ increased concentration on the subjective self. **Einstein’s** suggestion that time was not an independent universal order, but depended for its

measurement and understanding upon the perspective of the individual, finds echoes in the increasingly internalized chronologies of Joyce and Woolf; **Bergson**'s idea that time and consciousness were a continuous, homogeneous flux, the American psychologist **William James**' idea of the free flow of thoughts in the conscious mind, which he called the 'stream of consciousness', as well as **Marcel Proust's** *Remembrance of Things Past* (translation published 1922) which, working through associations of past events with present ones, attempts to regain lost fragments of experience by intermingling memory and present consciousness, led to the invention of a new form, which at its utmost point in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, would go beyond the boundaries of narration.

- **James Joyce** is as seminal a figure in modernist fiction as Eliot is in poetry. In his first published work, the short story collection *The Dubliners* (1914), although all the stories except one were written before 1906, most features of his later technique are already discernible. The absence of the authority of the omniscient narrator, the irresolute, plotless, open-ended narrative structures, the moral uncertainty and linguistic ambivalence, the modulations in point-of view – cumulatively make the stories the first instalment in Joyce's lifelong attempt to explore the ways in which meaning and identity are constructed through language. In the largely autobiographical first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), while large parts of the novel are vividly realistic, we find the characteristically Joycean linguistic density, extensive use of free indirect narration interspersed by snatches of the stream of consciousness interior monologue as it works out Joyce's creed of artistic objectivity through Stephen Daedalus. In an earlier version named *Stephen Hero*, he explained his idea of the 'epiphany'. *Portrait of the Artist* ends with an assertion of his exile status as he forswears his nationality, religion and family ties. Stephen's theory of the de-personalisation of the artist is similar to Eliot's. Joyce also invites comparison with Eliot in his cosmopolitanism, his dense and variegated allusiveness and the elliptical economy of his style. His most important work, *Ulysses* (1922) has for its subject a day in the life of Leopold Bloom, a very anti- heroic figure. *Ulysses* is simultaneously a triumph of modernist fiction and realism. The characters are realistic, the locale is an actual city, Dublin, and the details are presented in the manner of French and Chekhovian realism. But it soon becomes apparent that it is not how the narrative progresses but how the story becomes, i.e. how language of fiction represents reality, how words are related to the world and the world to words, which constitutes the content of *Ulysses*. In the process

Joyce uses diverse linguistic styles ranging from newspaper headlines, religious catechism of the Catholic church, parody of other literary forms (the book is a gigantic parody of Homer's *Odyssey*), unusual chronological structures, Freud's ideas as well as Jung's idea of archetypes, anthropology, Scholastic philosophy, music. The virtuosity of the style is astonishing. A large part of the novel is written in what Arnold Kettle has called 'shorthand impressionism' which aims to convey the thought track of the character. Objective statements in the third person are mixed with unspoken soliloquy. The stream of consciousness technique of interior monologue—an attempt to find the verbal equivalent for the thought process of a character—is most successfully used in the final chapter of the book. As modernist novelists realised, you cannot isolate an individual's consciousness from what is happening around him and to him. In Joyce's novel the technique is successful because at this point Molly Bloom is half-asleep. Action is suspended and therefore she can dispense with punctuation.

- **Virginia Woolf**, bred in the intellectual milieu of her parental circle, the friend of avant-gardists like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, was very aware that society, literature and art were passing through a tremendous transition. She felt that fictional form must change to accommodate the new concepts of the receptive process of the human mind. In her novels and short stories as well as in critical essays, some of which I have already referred to, she became a standard bearer of modernist practices. She began to discard the well-rounded conclusion in her short stories, three of which were published as *Monday or Tuesday* (1921). Reading the Russian writers in translation, she was drawn to **Chekhov's** technique of leaving matters puzzlingly unresolved at the end of his stories and began to defuse her plots. She also divested her narrator of any kind of authority. She was not satisfied with her first two novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), which have the characteristics of the realistic novel she derided. But with *Jacob's Room* (1922) she felt she was at last finding a way out of structural conventions of plot, genre and accepted style. From her first works to her last, in fiction and non-fiction, her attitude was that of an innovator. Fiction for Woolf was a re-creation of the complexities of experience. She begins to do this by using imagery to connect different moments in a novel so as to form patterns. The narratives become progressively plotless. The themes are not important. In fact, it is difficult to say what the themes of her novels are. The motifs of a trip to the lighthouse and Lily Briscoe's picture of Mrs. Ramsey are the

binding ideas in *To the Lighthouse*, but the novel is not about them. Her characterisation and her overall technique have been compared with impressionist art, in “her focus on the texture of experience, her attempt at capturing the myriad impressions of the individual consciousness and to weld into a significant whole the apparently diverse and casual elements of a particular scene”. (Arnold Kettle)

Woolf’s novels explore several modes of modernist creativity. *Mrs Dalloway* works through associations between memory and the present; *The Waves* is a set of soliloquies of six characters, interspersed by nine third person interludes; *Between the Acts*, her last novel, which seems to be about the presentation and performance of a play in an English country house, is full of veiled allusions. Different threads and ideas are dispersed through the narrative, and rhyme words are used to suggest hidden meanings. She examines the link of history with the present and the paradox of relationships. She uses the stream-of consciousness method, its device of interior monologue, and also film techniques of flash-backs, montage, multiple view and close-ups.

□ **D. H. Lawrence** seems apparently out of place among the modernists because he continued with the familiar narrative conventions. He has sometimes been credited only with defiantly venturing into hitherto taboo areas of sexual relationships of men and women. Moreover, the moralistic outrage at books like *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, his extreme right wing political opinions, his practice of preaching his views to his readers obscured his great achievement to most of his contemporaries. **Lawrence**’s idea about the novel however, show similarity with the major modernists. Lawrence, like Woolf, condemned Galsworthy’s characterisation. He said, the characters in *Forsyte Saga* were not truly vivid human beings because of “the collapse from the psychology of the free human individual into the psychology of the social being”. Lawrence’s most popular book was and is his partly autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*. The Freudian influence is evident in the way he interlinks husband-wife and child-parent relationship. *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* share the characters of the two sisters, Ursula and Gudrun but they are essentially different books. All Lawrence novels have as their focus the theme of man-woman relationship. He wrote in his essay ‘**Morality and the Novel**’:

“I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about, and that, at present, is the relationship between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of a new relation, or the readjustment of the old one...”.

The relationships in Lawrence go beyond the conventional patterns in traditional novels. Frank and genuine human emotions become an assertion of freedom against the corrosive effects of modernity and the industrial society. The rainbow that Ursula Brangwen sees at the end of the novel of that name, like other evocations of nature that we come across in his novels, most of which are written against the industrial background of the mining county of Nottinghamshire, is not simply a romantic description as in nature poetry. It represents the cosmic mystery of Nature to which the positive Lawrence characters, like Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or Ursula or Birkin in *Women in Love* are alive to. Lawrence's technique does not assert itself in the startling way Joyce's or Woolf's does. But his plots are not simply character-in-action. *Women in Love* is not about Ursula's marriage to Birkin. His characters are not, as Lawrence said, "the old stable ego of character". While he never divorces them from society, his intense interest in "the psychology of the free human individual", in the effect on them of powerful emotions, led him to a new fictional style. Pages are devoted to minute examination of the characters' reflections and emotions. The intimacy with which Lawrence seeks to present the inner experience leads to a distinctive intermingling of a character's inner voice with the objective authorial tone. He does not use the interior monologue of the stream of consciousness manner, but his extensive use of free indirect discourse, carrying it to ultimate limits, marks him as a master of the modern subjective novel.

There are limitations to any division of writers into specific schools according to their time-frames. Among major writers of the 1920s who cannot be indexed as 'modernist' but are still important, are **E.M. Forster** and **Aldous Huxley**. Forster's works can be divided into two phases. His early novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *A Room With a View* (1908), and *Howards End* (1910) project the liberal belief that social or individual problems can be solved by a modification of outlook and imagination, by building relationships, so to speak. The later, post-war novels are uncertain and perplexed. The individuals are alienated from society and cannot connect. In *A Passage to India* (1924) not only does the hollow boom in the Marabar caves mock at human values ("Everything exists; nothing has value"), but also, despite their desire to be friends, history stands as a barrier between Aziz and Fielding. **Huxley** too is difficult to categorise. In *Point Counterpoint* (1928) he uses an unusual narrative strategy. Several different 'counterpointed' stories supposedly occurring simultaneously are presented in successive blocks of narrative. This shows a new sort of narrative style, part of the modernist urge for technical innovation. But

works like *Chrome Yellow* (1921) and *Antic Hay* (1923) are more conventional, though very witty presentations of the post-war social, sexual and intellectual mores.

The novel in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century, whether or not in the high modernist mode, set itself in deliberate antithesis to the more traditional, formally conservative kind of fiction. They explored new possibilities and techniques of narration, concentrated on subjective consciousness, re-ordered episodes independent of chronology, broke and re-shaped language. As Ezra Pound commented, works such as Joyce's added to the international store of literary technique. The novel seemed poised to conquer new territories of art. In 1924, In *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Virginia Woolf wrote, " ...we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature." Writing in 1940, in the essay "**The Leaning Tower**" she conceded that her hope had not been fulfilled.

□ **British Novel from the 1930s to the 1950s:** A survey suggests that the novel in these years seems to have reached a plateau and stayed there. No single novel or novelist can be identified as great or even remarkably unique, although there are important novelists and good novels aplenty. One feature of the 30s novel was a turning away from the aesthetic concerns of modernism towards a direct reflection of contemporary political events and public affairs. Living in a world threatened by economic depression and the looming menace of another war, intensifying conflict between left and right wing politics, these writers felt that modernism was escapist. The Marxist critic **Georg Lukacs** denounced the modernists' rejection of 'narrative objectivity' and 'surrender to subjectivity'. **George Orwell** said that for the modernists "Literature was supposed to consist solely in the manipulation of words". In reaction they turned back to the mainstream narrative tradition. Through the next few decades, realism, simplicity and a colloquial style predominated.

In the 30s generation, in **George Orwell** most clearly, but also in **Christopher Isherwood** and **Graham Greene**, the novel shows a marked political awareness. **Isherwood** was influenced by both **Forster** and **Woolf**. He uses a lot of interior monologue, for example in the character of Victor, the sensitive young hero in conflict with an older generation represented by Victor, in *All The Conspirators*. One of his important themes is depiction of the Edwardians who survived the Great War and had difficulty adjusting to new social conditions. **George Orwell**, novelist and essayist, shows a strong social awareness. His novels show a meticulous documentary realism which is used to express a strong criticism of social evils His early service

in the colonies, as he wrote in *Burmese Days*, increased his natural hatred of authority and made him fully aware of the existence of the working classes. His novels like *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, written in a strong colloquial style, deal with important public causes. **Orwell's** novels display a hatred of all attempts, whether left wing or right wing, to curb individual autonomy. He commented in 1946, "...every line of serious work that I have written since 1936, has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism". *Coming Up For Air* is artistically his most successful novel, but his more famous novels are *Animal Farm*, a political fable satirising the betrayal of the Russian Revolution under Stalin's rule, and *Nineteen Eighty Four*, a dystopic novel about the destruction of the autonomous individual under totalitarian dictatorship.

**Graham Greene** has been called by **William Golding** "...the ultimate twentieth century chronicler of consciousness and anxiety". The central figure in **Greene's** novels is an anti-hero, middle aged rather than young, living a tedious, routine life, whose meaningless pattern of existence is suddenly challenged by a situation forcing him to face his true identity and moral values. His locales stretch beyond England, to Cuba, Vietnam, Mexico, Haiti, the European cities etc. so that the whole world seems enveloped in an atmosphere of despair and moral decadence. He offers his readers a strong exciting story in the tradition of **Conrad** and **Robert Louis Stevenson**, which serves as a basis for examination of moral dilemmas and psychology of characters. As a result, he is one writer who bridges the gap between the highbrow and the lowbrow novel reader. The popular contemporary thriller undergoes a psychological- intellectual transformation in novels like *A Gun for Sale*, *The Confidential Agent*, *The Third Man* etc.

In contrast with the mild leftism of **Orwell** and **Greene**, another 30s writer, **Evelyn Waugh's** satirical novels show a commitment to right-wing views. *Scoop* (1938) mocks English communists. However, he was more interested in social rather than political satire. In *Decline and Fall* (1928) he targets the smart, rich social world of his time. The 'bright young people' of this novel, and also of *Vile Bodies* (1930) and *Black Mischief* (1932) live a fashionable, self-indulgent life and rebel against conventional morality. Waugh is a precise observer of society and uses comic exaggeration to create eccentric characters and grotesque situations for his satires.

A very powerful novelist of the 40s was **Henry Green. Green**, whose presentation of wartime London in *Caught* (1943) reminds us of the response of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World

War poets. Like them, he too through his central character raises the problem of how the language of literature could “cope with experience too violent to transcribe in art”. **Green** circumvented the problem by presenting the violent action through the consciousness and narration of a character. Even as *Caught* is a rare example of a successful British War novel, his earlier novel *Living* (1929) is one of the best English novels about factory life. **Green** avoided the straightforward narration of the 30s novelists. His prose style and narrative organisation are both unusual, creating an opacity of meaning. His prose uses repetitions, odd syntax and gives no indication how the different sections of his narratives relate to one another. **Green** believed that the novelist should communicate obliquely with his readers and so, as the critic Frederic Karl says, “forced his reader into making the novel himself”.

We shall conclude this survey with **William Golding** who wrote till the beginning of the 90s but whose best known book *Lord of the Flies* was published in 1954. The story of a group of boys abandoned on a paradisaic island during some future war and their descent into barbarism is a tale of evil triumphant in human nature and history. A similar tale of evil destroying innocence and goodness is told in *The Inheritors* (1955) showing the destruction of innocent Neanderthal man by Homo Sapiens, a more skilled but also sadly more malicious and violent species.

The novels of these decades are strongly marked by a pessimistic attitude. Arnold Kettle, in 1961, accused the 40s and 50s novelists of both narrowness and pessimism. The effect of the Second World War and the Holocaust were certainly enough to destroy any belief in the myth of civilisation and innate goodness of human nature. Also, the context of immediate history would have been a factor. The novelists were inhabiting a society where adjustment was the keyword rather than upheaval. G.S. Fraser suggested in his essay “**The Modern Writer and his World**” that the drab world of war and post-war did not lend itself to the imagination. But the pre-and post war years, if they give us no major innovators, do offer extremely gifted novelists who give their readers a fiction that is sensitive to and deeply concerned with the topicalities of their times.

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### **1.1.14 A Brief Recap of the Novel**

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Modernism thus brought about major changes in the content and form of the novel.

The 20<sup>th</sup>. century began with realism dominating fiction in novelists like **Arnold Bennett**, **John Galsworthy** etc. But towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>. century, in writers like **Henry James** we notice formal experiments like shifting points of view, which anticipate the modernists. **Conrad**'s presentation of external events indirectly, mediated by the narrator's consciousness, was an important formal experiment. The major modernists were **Joyce**, **Woolf**, **Lawrence**. After the phase of high modernism, in the next decades we come across which are good rather than great, and the novelists turn back towards more conventional narrative techniques.

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### 1.1.15 Drama in the First Six Decades

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When we look at the drama of the period, we have to keep certain things in mind. One was that drama in this period had to contend with the very serious challenge of the film—first silent and then the sound films from the 1930s. For the masses, another popular form of entertainment were the music halls. The music halls were so called because they offered a species of variety programme combining popular songs, dances and short comic sketches in a theatre hall. The popularity of their dramatic sketches contributed to the popularity of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century one-act play. Another important feature was the development of amateur theatre companies. They did not need government license for performance because they performed only for members and could stage plays which were literary or artistic and which the commercial theatre would not produce. **The Independent Theatre company** of London for example staged **Henrik Ibsen**'s *Ghosts*, a dramatization of **Emile Zola**'s *Therese Raquin*, **George Bernard Shaw**'s *Widowers' Houses*, all very controversial plays. **The English Stage Company** produced **John Osborne**'s *Look Back in Anger* for the first time. The fourth significant feature was the influence of Continental drama. English intellectuals, and playwrights in particular, were eagerly interested in what was being done, by **Ibsen** and **Strindberg** in Scandinavia, by **Anton Chekhov** in his plays and by the production styles of **Stanislavski** and **Meyerhold** in Russia, by the French *Theatre Libre* or the **Theatre of Cruelty** of **Antonin Artaud** in Paris, or by **Bertolt Brecht** in Germany.

Victorian drama in the commercial theatres of the mid-nineteenth century consisted mainly of sentimental plays, melodramas and spectacular extravaganzas. But a few playwrights began to produce a type of realistic drama. **Thomas Robertson**, in plays like *Ours* (1866), *Home* (1869) *School* (1869) wrote a kind of domestic

drama, which delighted the middle class audience because they could immediately recognise elements of their own life. He also used the language of natural conversation instead of the stilted language of melodramas. **A.W. Pinero** and **Henry Arthur Jones** both wrote comedies as well as serious plays in which they tried to depict the clash of social conventions and personal emotions. But though they had commercial success neither was gifted enough to give new life to the theatre. In the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup>. century two playwrights, both of Irish origin, **Shaw** and **Oscar Wilde**, gave British theatre a new breath of life. The themes of **Wilde's** plays like *A Woman of No Importance*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* etc are sentimental, but the highly skilled manipulation of stage situations, use of paradoxes and witty dialogue brought in a breath of fresh air. The fantastical play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, his most successful play showed how Wilde's impossible quips could also be pointed barbs at social pretensions and hypocrisy.

At the beginning of the century, the stage was dominated by realistic social drama. **John Galsworthy**, in plays like *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910), *The Eldest Son* (1912), *Loyalties* (1922) criticises social institutions and customs. He avoids condemning individual persons, and focusses on the sense of waste which results from the inexorable movement of institutions like the legal system, as in *Justice*, the failure of mutual understanding between the representatives of Capital and Labour in *Strife*, the essential hollowness of upper class attitudes in *Loyalties*. Galsworthy's plays are marked by a deep humanitarian attitude and are well-constructed, but the plight of his ordinary characters fail to touch deep emotional response. Among other playwrights of realistic drama there was **Harley Granville Barker**. His themes were also social problems, but unlike Galsworthy he focussed on the inner life of characters rather than on social problems. Thus, in *The Voyage Inheritance* (1905), which has a theme similar to **Shaw's** *Mrs Warren's Profession*, he emphasizes, not the social squalor or the ugliness of unscrupulous business methods, but the agony and inner turmoil of the central character, Edward Voyagey. **John Masefield** tried to write realistic tragedies in plays like *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908) and *Melloney Holtspur* (1923). These plays and playwrights had contemporary success but in revisiting them we find a constant clash between the speech and actions of real life and an intellectually contrived structure. The inadequacy of the English stage of this phase of time is especially evident in comparison with what was happening in the **Abbey Theatre** of Dublin, set up in 1903. The plays of **W. B. Yeats**, **Lady Gregory** and **J. M. Synge** were rooted in Irish soil but still had a strong imaginative approach.

The **Abbey Theatre** presented a wide variety of themes and styles, ranging from Yeats' poetic plays like *The Countess Cathleen*, *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Synge's plays melding poetry with the harsh reality of Irish peasantry in *Riders to the Sea*, *Playboy of the Western World*, or **Sean O'Casey's** depiction of the impact of nationalistic ideal on the sordid life of Dublin slum dwellers in *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*. In fact, when the Abbey company visited England, they received great acclaim for their realism in scenery, dress and language, and above all by their style of controlled acting, avoiding unnecessary gestures or melodramatic delivery.

It was an Irish dramatist who would bring new life to the English stage, though he had no association with the Abbey Theatre. The new phase may be said to begin with **Bernard Shaw's** essay, "**The Quintessence of Ibsenism**", published in 1891. The essay largely misrepresented **Ibsen**, and focussed on only one aspect of the range and variety of **Ibsen's** oeuvre—his realism. But under the influence of **Ibsen**, Shaw went on to write his **Plays Unpleasant** - *Widowers Houses* on the problem of slum landlordism, and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* on prostitution. In his later plays he went on to write the drama of ideas, using the comic form and intelligent dialogue to debate ideas, ranging from anti-romantic views about love and war (*Arms and the Man*) to Bergsonian creative evolution (*Man and Superman*, *Back to Methuselah*). He devised a style of dialogue, highly polished and witty as well as thought provoking. It was quite artificial, Shaw made no attempt to reproduce the tone, vocabulary or rhythm of natural speech. He was of the opinion that the 'new drama' must compete with the novel and so wrote lengthy prologues and epilogues and his character descriptions become commentaries. In *Pygmalion* in a long epilogue appended to the actual play, he goes on to explain what his dramatis personae would do in future. **Shaw** claimed to write in the tradition of classical comedians like **Moliere**, using drama 'to chasten morals with ridicule'. His plays amused, stimulated, and sometimes shocked contemporary audiences. But as posterity has discovered, they are better read than staged. In plays like *Back to Methuselah*, the debating of ideas results in making the play itself intolerably boring. That is one reason why Shavian plays are seldom revived in theatrical repertoire and why, in spite of reaching the peak of fame, he had practically no influence on later playwrights. Shaw took great interest in the publication of his plays. There were other dramatists of the late 19<sup>th</sup>. and early 20<sup>th</sup>. century, like **Arthur Pinero**, **Robertson Jones**, and others who tried to invest their plays with literary quality and as part of that endeavour, tried to revive the reading of plays as a piece of literature by publishing plays.

The development of the **verse drama** in the 1930s was also an attempt to create drama with literary quality instead of merely in terms of stage production. The verse drama was a movement of writers none of whom was closely involved with the theatre. They were also in revolt against the conventions of naturalism, and focussed on the question of dramatic dialogue. Full range of human experience and emotion, they argued, could not be expressed by the limits of probable conversation. **Yeats** in his '**plays for dancers**' and **T.S.Eliot** in his unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* (1927) also tried to search for new kinds of dramatic action. There is a strong dramatic quality in Eliot's poetry and of his verse plays *Murder in the Cathedral* is a major success. But *Murder in the Cathedral* had a special kind of action. Eliot could draw on the formal language and rituals of the church, which suited the verse medium but in other plays, for example *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Elder Statesman*, where he uses contemporary action, often combining it with themes from Greek drama, eg the *Oresteia* for *The Family Reunion*, *Alcestis* for *The Cocktail Party*, he is successful only in isolated scenes. Also in the later plays he brought dramatic verse so close to everyday speech as to be practically indistinguishable from it, thereby defeating his original purpose of expressing the full range of experiences in verse instead of using language suitable for probable characters. **Christopher Fry** also wrote a number of verse plays, which enjoyed a temporary success, eg. *The Lady's not for Burning*, *A Phoenix too Frequent* etc. His verse however is merely decorative. He made no attempt to address the major problems of suiting verse credibly to the needs of dramatic action. A few other playwrights, like **Lancelotti**, **Abercrombie** and **Gordon Bottomley** also ventured to write verse drama. But it was soon realised that the actors used to the naturalistic style were not capable of giving full expression to the language of verse dialogue and the audience too were not receptive to the medium. There were no theatre houses to carry out these experiments either. Gradually the verse drama petered out.

The major change came to the theatre in the mid- fifties. While the commercial theatre was still providing entertainment to the general play-going public with domestic comedies, Agatha Christie's murder mystery plays etc., a feeling was growing that the majority theatre was miles away from the actual lives of audiences. A major breakthrough happened with the production of **John Osborne's** *Look Back in Anger* (1956) in the **Royal Court Theatre**. It did not challenge the form of the established drama, but presented explosive new content. **Osborne's** theme was an old one : an upper class girl marries outside her social milieu. The novelty lay in the

treatment. The realistic scenes, the vituperative dialogue poured out by Jimmy Porter raging against everything from the British class system to the nuclear bomb expressed the frustration of an entire generation of 'angry young men'. The anti-establishment sentiments and shock tactics deployed by **Osborne** were followed up by a number of the 50s dramatists, eg. **Arnold Wesker**'s plays on life in the Jewish East End (*The Kitchen* in 1959, *Roots* in 1960, and *Chicken Soup with Barley* also in 1960); **Shelagh Delaney**'s *A Taste of Honey* in 1958, **Doris Lessing** in *Each His own Wilderness* also in 1958 - explored the social and political landscape. **John Arden**'s *Live Like Pigs* was about a vagrant family, and *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* juxtaposed ideals and everyday basic needs. All these playwrights sought to cultivate the realistic drama. Their realism was mainly in terms of the class of their characters and the social message conveyed. They were hailed by critics and , staged mainly in the independent theatres , received an enthusiastic audience.

The works of a new generation of European dramatists like **Jean Anouilh**, **Jean Paul Sartre**, **Eugene Ionesco**, and **Bertolt Brecht** were introduced to English theatre in the fifties. Their varied influences were gradually absorbed and led to new kinds of work later. Within our scope, the other important new development, directly in contact with European drama, was **Samuel Becket**'s *Waiting for Godot*. Translated by **Becket** from his original French text, the play premiered in London in 1955. The minimal scenery and action, the dialogue, were all in a distinctly anti- realistic mode. This kind of drama later came to be labeled '**Absurd Drama**'. **Becket** would be followed by **Harold Pinter** with plays like *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and other plays. These plays have been called comedies of menace.

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### 1.1.16 A Brief Recap of Drama

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The popularity of British drama in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was challenged by the likes of the cinema and the music hall. However, it surged forward with the support of amateur theatre companies and further broadened its horizon by incorporating the performances of translations of Continental drama within its pale. It changed gear from the sentimental drama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to realistic drama and was simultaneously augmented and challenged, aesthetically and professionally, by the Irish dramatists of the Abbey Theatre. While Theatre of Ideas occupied the stage for many years, Verse Drama also provided a fillip to the aesthetic and literary quality of drama over the nitty-gritties of stage production. By the middle of the century

there was seen a spurt of interest in the socio-political aspects of British life which was reflected in the content of the Angry Young Theatre of the time. The fifties also saw the introduction of the anti-realistic mode on the English stage through the presentation of Absurd Drama which offered sneak-peaks at postmodern theatre.

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### 1.1.17 Trends in Literary Criticism

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Amidst such a plethora of literary effusion, Literary criticism becomes an important institution in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dominant critical idea, developed by **T.S. Eliot** on the one hand and **F.R. Leavis** on the other, was that literary values were at one with living itself. The most important academic influence was that of **Leavis**. Although **Leavis** was often extremely dogmatic and idiosyncratic, his major critical views, for example that literary criticism should shape social sensibility, dominated the academic world for a long period of time, disseminated through *Scrutiny*, the magazine he published and edited from 1923 to 1953. In *New Bearings in English Poetry* and *Revaluations*, his denigration of Victorian poetry as well as of romantic poets like Shelley and his acclaim of Eliot, Pound and Hopkins strongly influenced modern viewpoints. In *The Great Tradition*, his major book on fiction, he argues that awareness of the complexity and importance of moral values advocated by great novelists like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad determine the content and form of their novels. **Leavis** himself was influenced by **T.S. Eliot**, as was another major critic, **William Empson**. **Eliot** tended to undervalue his literary criticism, calling it a by-product of his poetry. But several of his critical ideas were seminal. In “**Tradition and the Individual Talent**” he said that a work of literature must be judged in the context of previous works, by the standards of the past, i.e. tradition. In “**Hamlet and His Problems**” he discussed the idea of the ‘objective correlative’ which he defined as the only way of expressing emotion in art by finding a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events that shall be the formula of that particular emotion.

As far as general theoretical trends are concerned, **I. A. Richards’** *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) introduced an elaborate theory of text analysis which was generally known as ‘practical criticism’. **Robert Graves** and **Laura Riding** in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) and **William Empson** in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) did pioneer work in the field of poetic ambiguity. The school of **New Criticism** which developed in the 1940s to 1960s, was strongly influenced by

**Richards** and **Eliot**, but in flourished mainly in the universities of the United States. Although **Structuralist criticism** as well as **Russian Formalism** began respectively in France and Russia in the 1930s, their impact on critical studies in England were felt much later, only from the late 60s.

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### 1.1.18 Summing Up

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You might feel that this has been an inordinately long unit, but the objective here has been to introduce you to the entire gamut of Modernism. If you go back and forth with this unit and relate it to the texts you will be studying in this Paper, you will form an idea of the linkages that have predominantly worked in connecting the literary scenario to the wider cultural perspectives prevalent from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. With help from your counselor, we are sure you will be able to assay the Modern period of English literature in a befitting manner.

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### 1.1.19 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Analyse the economic and political background of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. What was the impact of the two world wars on English literature?
3. Which major intellectual influences formed the sensibilities of the modernists?
4. How would you define modernism? Discuss with reference to at least two major modernist writers.

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Analyse the trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry up to the 50s.
2. Briefly sum up the changes and development in the English novel in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Write a brief essay on English drama of the modern period.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What was the imagist movement? How did it influence modernist poetry?

2. Can we say that modernism was an international phenomenon?
3. Who were the Movement poets? How did they differ from the modernists?
4. Write briefly on the contributions of : Henry James; Charles Baudelaire; Ezra Pound; Dylan Thomas; John Osborne; D.H. Lawrence.

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### **1.1.20 Suggested Reading**

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1. *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. 7, edited by Boris Ford (Penguin, 1964)
2. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol. 7, edited by Boris Ford (Penguin, 1983)
3. *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot* by C.K. Stead (London: Hutchinson, 1964)
4. *The Twentieth Century Mind* Vol. 1(1918—45), Vol. 2 (1945—65), edited by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (London, O.U.P.1972)
5. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* by Raymond Williams (Penguin, 1973)

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## **Unit-2 □ The Moderns**

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### **Structure:**

- 1.2.0 Introduction**
- 1.2.1 Modernism in English Literature**
- 1.2.2 Modern Poetry: Trends and Features**
- 1.2.3 The Modern Novel: Themes and Techniques**
- 1.2.4 The Modern Short Story**
- 1.2.5 Non-Fictional Prose of the Modern Period**
- 1.2.6 Development of Modern Drama**
- 1.2.7 Presaging Postmodernity**
- 1.2.8 Summing Up**
- 1.2.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 1.2.10 Suggested Reading**

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### **1.2.0 Introduction**

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In the extensive previous Unit, you have been acquainted with the conditions that led to what is called ‘Modernity’, its implications on the socio-cultural plane, and what all of this has meant in the domain of literature. In continuation of that, in this Unit you will come across a brief survey of the major contributors to the literary Modernist movement. As you read through this Unit, you are expected to relate the history of literary modernism to the texts that are syllabized in the subsequent units across different genres.

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### **1.2.1 Modernism in English Literature**

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Looking back at the nineteenth century it is fairly accurate to define it as falling into distinct moments—before and after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte (1815), before and after the accession of Queen Victoria (1837) on the throne of England, before and after Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859). It is relatively difficult

to define the twentieth century in the same manner. The events take on a global scale, the First and Second World Wars (1914-18 and 1939-45 respectively) had a worldwide effect. Before the War, English Literature was still looking back at the nineteenth century modes of expression, post-War ; the term '**Modern**' begins to define the nature of the twentieth century. When we use the term Modern, it generally implies something new or recent. It is believed to have set itself against tradition.

The end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901 marked the end of a period of stability. The Boer War (1899-1902) came as a blow to the imperialism of the later years of the reign. The reawakening of social conscience found its expression in the development of local government and its influence upon the health and education of the citizen. The major issues of the day were growth of Trade Unionism, Home Rule for Ireland, Free Trade or Protection, Women's Suffrage, the decline in an agrarian lifestyle and the growing urbanization of England. The growing German strength and national rivalries finally came to a head in the First World War.

Post War, the after-effects only increased the forebodings of the second war. England was focused on foreign affairs issues like the growth of the League of Nations, the troubles in India and Ireland and the growing uncertainty in the Middle East. Attention towards home was directed due to the General strike of 1926, which culminated in the slump, that in turn made the thirties a period of distress, due to lack of employment opportunities.

The rise to power of the Nazis in Germany made foreign problems come to the fore. The immediate post-war mood of desperate gaiety turned into self-doubt and uncertainty regarding ethical, social and political problems until the hostilities began in 1939, culminating in the Second World War.

When we talk of literary modernism, among its influences have been the psychological works of Sigmund Freud and Sir James Frazer's anthropological work, *The Golden Bough*. Modernism is essentially post-Darwinian—it is a quest for man's position in a world where religious, social and ethical issues are challenged. Darwin shook the foundations of society by questioning man's origin itself. Religion could never be viewed in the same manner again. The "tradition of the new" (Harold Rosenberg) was based on questioning and challenging negative traditions. It would

be short sighted to see modernism as anti-tradition. It may be regarded, in fact, as an introspective interrogation of the self in the context of one's received tradition when the contemporary global events begin to prove the redundancy of tradition itself. Conventional modes of narration and description were challenged by the stream of consciousness technique, concrete imagery and reinvention of traditional myths. If there is an artistic movement that may be used as an analogy, then it is Impressionism that relates most closely to the Modernist literary movement of the twentieth century.

**Let us take a brief look at some of its defining features:**

- Literature was greatly impacted by the Education Act of 1870 (and the Act of 1902). A new demand arose for works in the fields of science, travel and history. The authors began writing prolifically to meet the **demands of the new reading public**. This, more often than not, led writers to publish over-frequently, leading to decline in quality and an increase in 'pot-boilers'. This led to the commercialisation of literature.
- The spread of literacy led to the **awakening of the national conscience** to the evils resulting from the Industrial Revolution. Literature (especially the social novel and social drama) began to be seen as the **vehicle of social propaganda**. This led to the novel becoming a dominant form and also the rebirth of drama. It is during the inter-war period that poetry resurges to fulfil the need for a new idiom and tradition.
- In the pre-war years itself it became evident to the writers that traditional forms of expression and structure had become outdated. Experimenters began evolving new forms to sustain the new demands being made.
- Moreover, radio brought literature into the home, in the form of broadcast stories. Much like radio, cinema appealed to the non-reading public and had a mass appeal. However, it was more influential than the radio since several film techniques influenced writers to experiment with literature.

Keeping these complexities in mind, let us proceed to discuss briefly the major genres of the twentieth century. To make the discussion relevant to the literary texts prescribed in your syllabus, some texts which are generally grouped as 'postmodern', also feature in the sections that follow. The method adopted in this Unit is to look at developments till the mid twentieth century for the sake of convenience and comprehension.

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## 1.2.2 Modern Poetry : Trends and Features

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The primary aim of this section is to introduce you to the major themes and techniques used by the major modernist poets:

➤ **Georgian poetry**

This came as a reaction to the works of the decadent poets of the 1890s, who adopted “art for art’s sake” as their slogan. Between 1912 and 1922 Harold Monro, from his The Poetry Bookshop, published five volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, an anthology of poems by poets like **Rupert Brooke, Edmund Blunden, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare and Lascelles Abercrombie**. The Georgian Poets, despite their individual poetic traits, **rejected the escapist outlook** of the Decadents. Instead they focused on the beauty of the natural landscape and attempted at presenting it in a simple and realistic manner. **Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) and Lionel Johnson (1867-1902)** formed ‘The Rhymer’s Club’ of which **W. B. Yeats** was a member, for a short time. Let us make a brief survey of the contribution of William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) who is regarded as instrumental in the development of twentieth century poetry.

Yeats began his poetic journey under the influence of Spenser, Shelley, Rossetti and the Aesthetic Movement of the late nineteenth century. However, his native Irish influences were also working on him—the Irish National Movement in Dublin and the popular Irish folklore and speech he found in Sligo (his grandparents lived there). While, in London, he came in contact with the younger poets, in Dublin he was exposed to Irish nationalism, tales of an Irish Heroic Age, translations of Gaelic Poetry and folk songs. Yeats despised Victorian science and he continuously sought for a new religion. His mysticism was influenced by William Blake (evident in Yeats’ ‘The Wind among The Reeds’), as well as theosophy, neo-platonism and finally **heterodox mysticism**. The exoticism of his juvenile poetry gradually gave way to the handling of contrasting pairs of forces in the universe, namely, man and nature, the natural and the supernatural, the transient and the eternal and so on. He fell in love with an Irish revolutionary, **Maud Gonne**, whom he saw as a complex symbol for Irish nationalism. He, along with **Lady Gregory**, contributed to the formation of the **Irish literary theatre**. His early writings are essentially in a romantic vein, some of these poems are *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889), *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899), *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (1893). Gradually, Yeats became aware of the need for an assertive idiom and common syntax. The maturing of the

young poet is seen in his personal as well as poetic development, in works like *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914) and *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919). The most significant development is the emergence of a more detached persona. The development continues in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), *Last Poems* (1939). ‘Easter 1916’ pays tribute to the executions after the 1916 risings. ‘The Second Coming’ is powerful in its depiction of post-war disintegration of society (‘things fall apart the centre cannot hold’). ‘The Second Coming’ is representative of modern poetry as Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ epitomizes Victorian Poetry. To express deep emotional experiences, Yeats used symbols like the tower, the moon, the Swan, the rose and Byzantium in poems like ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantium’.

On the other hand, a poem like ‘The Circus Animals’ Desertion’ makes evident the flashback of his own poetic development,

Now my ladder is gone,  
I must lie down where all the ladders start,  
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

### ➤ The War Poets

Another important contribution made to modern poetry, though in a separate vein, is by the War Poets. They were essentially soldiers by profession and poets by necessity. The necessity of bringing to public notice the pity and horror of war made them turn to poetry. Poets like **Rupert Brooke** (1887-1915) glorified war in his poems like “If I should die, think only this of me”. A reputation for sentimentality and a reaction against his **celebratory attitude** to war led to a decline in his popularity. As the war grew more appalling, poets like **Siegfried Sassoon** and **Wilfred Owen** took up cudgels against the glorification of war. They wrote of their first-hand experiences and the resultant feelings of suffering, helplessness, brutality and futility of war. Sassoon’s best-known collection of war poems, *Counter-attack* (1918) is a series of blunt and provocative sketches of life and death in the trenches. Sassoon had an immense impact on the greatest of War Poets, **Wilfred Owen** (1893-1918). Though Owen’s juvenile poetry was in a

#### Activity fo the Learner

Do take a look at the paintings and photographs documenting the carnage of war. To begin with you may look at “The First World War: The Western Front” and “The Second World War: The Tube Shelter” by Henry Moore.

romantic vein (in the tradition of Tennyson and Keats), his meeting with Sassoon at the infirmary opened his eyes to the pity of war. He did better than his mentor at being realistic without being bitter or exaggerated. Owen wrote: "I am not concerned with Poetry. The Poetry is in the pity." He is also known for his experiments with technique especially the invention of **the para-rhyme**. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1931) is a posthumous collection of his poems with a memoir by another war poet **Edmund Blunden**. Poets like **Julian Grenfell** (1888-1915), **Robert Graves** (1895-1985), **Laurence Binyon** (1869-1943) are other important contributors to this poetic trend.

The hopes for a new world dissipated with the end of the First World War in 1918. The despair, disillusionment and barrenness experienced is epitomised in **T. S. Eliot's** major poems like *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925). The mood of despair at the lack of any redemptive means is evident and sets the tone for the works of high modernism. The realistic representation of the world in ruins, needed a new poetic idiom, the inspiration for which came from **T. E. Hulme** (1883-1917). He reacted against the traditional forms of expression and structure used in Georgian Poetry, instead advocating the use of **concise and concrete images** as well as *vers libre*, with its rhythms resembling natural speech. In Hulme's essay titled '**Romanticism and Classicism**', he stated thus his ideas, "I object to the best of Romantics. I object still more to the receptive attitude. I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or the other". Most writers of the new movement accepted, though not entirely, Hulme's perception of Classicism—**hardness and clarity**, and his **rejection of self-expression as a literary ideal**. American Poets **H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)** and **Ezra Pound** put Hulme's ideas into practice in their poems and coined the name **Imagism** for the movement. In 1914, Pound edited *Des Imagistes*, an anthology of Imagist poems. The Imagist movement deriving from Hulme and Pound, demanded clear images, pruning of words that "did not contribute to the presentation" and a rhythm freed from demands of metrical regularity in an attempt to "make it new". The French Symbolists' invention of *vers libre* was adopted by the Imagists (precision of expression was central to both movements). The influence of Hulme's concrete image is seen also in the poetry of the high priest of Modernism, T. S. Eliot. The *vers libre* advocated by Hulme and used by the Imagists, gave the poet a certain liberty at the same time running the risk of obscurity of expression. The **formal innovation, learned allusions, glossaries, sprung rhythms (G.M. Hopkins)** and

**disregard for syntax** were comprehensible only to a learned elite group of readers. **Metaphysical conceit**, symbols and allusions added to the complexity of expression. In the words of Eliot himself, “the poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning.”

➤ **T. S. Eliot and other Contemporary Poets**

An American by birth, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) is universally accepted as the greatest poet of the twentieth century, with the possible exception of W.B. Yeats. In the forty years or so after the First World War, he shaped English poetry and criticism for years to come, and still remains an important writer of the time with universal significance. When he settled in London, literary figures like **Ezra Pound**, **Wyndham Lewis** and **Ford Madox Ford** influenced his work. Eliot’s poetry reflects **the barrenness, disintegration, ennui, disillusionment and despair** of the post-war English society to the extent that Yeats called it “grey, cold, dry”. His first volume of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations* is remarkable in its portrayal of the unsavoury depths of contemporary society. His *magnum opus*, *The Waste Land* (1922), along with Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, are regarded as a momentous literary breakthrough of the twentieth century. It is a non-linear narrative account of the fragmented culture the poet sees around him in the ruins of post-war Europe, and the work may be regarded as an attempt at convalescence from the breakdown he experienced upon looking around. Based on the Grail Legend of the Fisher King in the Arthurian Cycle, it uses the symbols of drought (death) and flood (rebirth) to present modern London as an arid waste land. The hollowness of modern life is also echoed in *The Hollow Men*. Eliot’s baptism in the church of England in 1927, influenced his poetic as well as spiritual quest for hope as seen in *Ash Wednesday* (1930), a poem of penitence; and in *Four Quartets* (‘Burnt Norton’, ‘East Coker’, ‘The Dry Salvages’ and ‘Little Gidding’) one finds a study of the relation between time and eternity. In his philosophical quest, Eliot was “moved by fancies that are curled around these images” (‘Preludes’) of symbolic and connotative significance, in a fashion resembling Joyce’s *Ulysses*. His major contributions to modern criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) secure his place as one of the most important modern literary critics. Almost oracular in his precise judgements, he had a deep feeling for tradition and a dislike for self-indulgent romantic subjectivity as he championed the “impersonal theory of poetry” (‘Tradition

and the Individual Talent’). The poet was no longer regarded a bard whose function was to render a self-indulged personal emotion using selectively the objects of nature. In modern poetry, the poet “has not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways...poetry is not a turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotions, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (‘Tradition and Individual Talent’).

In the 1930s, poets like W.H Auden **began to** explore Marxist ideology and Freudian psychoanalysis to seek solutions for the social and political problems of the thirties. Auden and the likes of Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and others aimed at reaching the masses, unlike the elite experimental Poets of the twenties. This group of poets was ideologically left-wing and had proletarian sympathies. Their expression was colloquial, with the idiom and vocabulary of everyday speech, influenced by Yeats’ simple diction. The Auden group of poets gained popularity through the anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Verse* (1933).

The inter-war Poets achieved a semblance of stability by surviving the despair of the 1920s. Something akin to a constructive attitude, at least, an attempt at recuperating and finding remedies to the malaise of post war world is glimpsed in their poems. The experience of war was documented in several anthologies of which most popular was *Poems from the Forces* (1942, 1943) – it dealt with the possibility of a violent untimely death, the bonding shared by fellow-sufferers and the frustration and despair of service life. Sidney Keyes’ *The Iron Laurel* (1942), Alun Lewis’ *Raider’s Dawn* (1942), Keith Douglas’ *From Alamein to Zem-Zem* (1946) are worthy of mention.

In the 1940s, the most highly-regarded poet is **Dylan Thomas** (1914-53) — the originator of neo-romantic poetry. However, some critics regard the Apocalyptic Poets (J. F. Hendry, Henry Treece and G. S. Fraser) as influencing the neo-romanticism of the post-war years. The tenets of this movement include **repulsion for the Machine Age** and conversely a focus on the **individual’s perspective** and abilities.

In the 1950s, Dennis Enright had edited an anthology of poems titled *Poets of the 50’s* (1950) which brought into motion The Movement interested more in a realistic representation and **less in stylistic innovation**. Popular poets of this

movement were **John Wain, Kingsley Amis, John Holloway, Donald Davie, D. Enright, and Philip Larkin**. Of these Larkin (1922-1985) is regarded one of the most outstanding poets of the 1950s. His works are characterized by a sense of loss and despair. They are pensive meditations on the loss of beauty and the changing landscape of English life in the Mechanical Age. His often melancholic deeply personal poems are collected in *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974). Larkin also edited *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse*.

A discussion of Modern Poetry will remain incomplete without the mention, however brief, of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. **Ted Hughes** (1930-1998) is most popular for his *Hawk in the Rain* (1957). He used animal imagery in an unsentimental manner. The Yorkshire landscape, he described in great detail, acted as a backdrop for his poems. His important works include *Crow* (1970), *Crow Wakes* (1971) and *Eat Crow* (1972). **Animal imagery** is pervasive in his poetry, for he employs these images to better illustrate and intensify the human experience. His ‘verbal belligerence’ owes partly to his love for the Yorkshire dialect. Hughes was married to another brilliant poet **Sylvia Plath** (1932-1963), whose poems attempt at understanding the complexities of everyday life, the world of nature and most importantly **her place as a woman** in that world. Her poems are the result of the acute **observation** and the **anxiety** that she began to experience due to her mental imbalance, which eventually led her to commit suicide. Her best works include *The Colossus* (1960), *Ariel* (1965) and *Crossing the Water* (1971).

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### **1.2.3 The Modern Novel : Themes and Techniques**

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The twentieth century may be called the hey-day of the English novel. The primary aim of this section is to introduce you to the major themes and techniques used by the major novelists of this period:

- In the pre-war years the novel was animated by **social purpose** and teemed with ideas. Novelists like H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy sought to propagate ideas for the betterment of society. Post-war, the novel began to focus primarily on the interpretation of life itself. In the novel is most clearly seen the disillusionment, cynicism, despair and bewilderment in the face of the crumbling of established moral values which characterize the post-War world.
- The twentieth century novel is realistic. It deals with the facts of contemporary life. Man — struggling in the dark to choose between religion and science,

communism and capitalism, God and the atom bomb— is the focus of the twentieth century novel. Novelists like **George Moore** (1852-1933) and **Arnold Bennett** (1867-1931) are regarded as realist writers for their accurate and unbiased representation of the lives of ordinary people. On the other hand, the modern period also witnessed great novelists like **Rudyard Kipling** and **Joseph Conrad**, who were seduced by the unusual, the exotic, and the distant. W.L. Cross remarks, “[Kipling] is the romancer of the present, of the modern social order, on which shines from afar a light as resplendent as that which shone on medieval society. Joseph Conrad, the greatest modern romancer seeks his subjects wherever he can expect to find adventure in an unusual or exotic setting.”

- **Attitude towards sex:** the general breakdown of Puritan attitudes towards sex was a result of Freudian psychology and Havelock Ellis’s *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1910). Moreover, the invention of contraceptives and the uncertainty of life in general contributed immensely to the attitude of free sex. A major advocate of free love is poet and novelist **D. H. Lawrence**, who believed that “man’s primitive instincts are his safest guides in life” (*Lady Chatterley’s Lover*) and that man should rid himself of the “fribbling intervention of mind or moral or what not” (*Sons and Lovers*).
- **The Stream of Consciousness technique:** The psychological novels of **Henry James** are concerned less with the external events, focusing instead on the analysis of the psyche of his characters. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James presents an incisive picture of the mind of Isabel Archer. An analysis, however brief, of the modern psychological novel is incomplete without the mention of **Sigmund Freud**, who laid inroads into the subterranean passages of the human psyche, the subconscious and the unconscious. His major works include *The Interpretation of Dreams* (tr 1913), *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (trans. 1916) and *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (trans. 1914). In the twentieth century the psychological novel reaches its pinnacle of success in the stream of consciousness techniques employed by major novelists like Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. **William James** (brother of novelist Henry James) and **Henri Bergson** (*‘duree’*) emerged as a major force in inspiring the Stream of Consciousness technique that came to be pioneered by the modernist writers.

Our consciousness is compared to a stream which flows uninterrupted by mechanical clock time. In our consciousness merge the past and the present, everflowing into the thoughts we encounter drifting in the stream. The realm of

conscious sensations, thoughts and feelings is expressed using **the internal monologue**, which may be defined as the almost telegraphic expression of the innermost thoughts of a character, with little regard to logical organisation. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf expresses the thoughts and memories submerged in the stream of the protagonist's consciousness using the technique of interior monologue. Outwardly she seems to be going about her day organising her birthday party, in her thoughts she has been traversing far and wide into her past (love affair with Peter Walsh), delving into the stream picking up fragments of her life. Similarly, in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, there is no conventional plot, it questions narrative modes and parodies Homer's *Odyssey*, thereby cutting down its scale drastically. It recounts the trivial events in the life of Leopold Bloom, a solicitor in an advertising agency on the day and night of **June 16, 1904 (known as Bloomsday)** questioning modes of synchronic and diachronic representation. It is in this manner that the stream of consciousness novel frees itself from the shackles of conventional modes of narration and representation of spatio-temporality. In the words of David Daiches, "the stream of consciousness technique is a means of escape from the tyranny of time dimension".

- However, it is to be kept in mind that the techniques and themes of the experimental Novelists made great demands upon the reader. As a result, they were not for the masses. Consequently, writers in the **established tradition** like W. S. Maugham and J. B. Priestley made a reputation.

**W. S. Maugham** was a realistic writer with a keen interest in human nature and the conundrums of life. He worked as a doctor in the Red Cross during the First World War. His works include *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *Cakes and Ale* (1930) and *The Painted Veil* (1925). He was a prolific short story writer as well and his stories focused on the complexities of human relationships against the backdrop of exotic oriental locales. Other 'traditional' novelists include Priestley (*The Good Companions*) and Sir Compton MacKenzie (*Carnival*). Some **regional novelists** who gained popularity during this time include L. G. Gibson (*A Scots Quair*, set in Aberdeen) and Mary Webb (*The Golden Arrow*, set in Shropshire ).

- Another important feature of the development of fiction in the modern period is the growth of the American novel. The American novel has been bold in its expression and its mode of representation is realistic. Major American novelists include **Ernest Hemingway** (*A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*), William Faulkner (*The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom! Absalom!*), F. Scott Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*).

Disintegration of society in the post-war years is one of the major concerns of mid-century novelists. Genocide and nuclear destruction marked the global conflict thereby setting the tone of violence and sadism in the literature produced in those years. The conflict between materialism and spirituality is another theme of the novel. Realism, cynicism, dark comedy and satire are used in the search for the ever-elusive stability. Most characters fail to cope with their **disintegrating surroundings** and instead choose **escapist means** of survival. Success in their quest for survival, fulfilment and happiness is little and often the discovery of some small assurance amid incomprehensible surroundings is all one gets.

The influence of technical advances, space travel and chemical warfare led to a number of writers experimenting in **science fiction**. Novels about an **apocalyptic future** struck a chord with the readers. Much revered names are **John Wyndham, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke** and **Isaac Asimov**.

The **growth of the American novel** had an immense impact on the development of the novel on this side of the Atlantic. Some of the features of the novel in America which influenced the mid-century novel are **realism, disillusionment, political and social criticism, lack of inhibitions** and **the spiritual conflict caused by the materialism of the urban milieu**. The most obvious examples of such texts would be:

Henry Miller (*The Rosy Crucifixion Trilogy*), John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*), J. D. Salinger (*The Catcher in the Rye*), Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*), Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*), James Baldwin (*Go Tell it on the Mountain*), Truman Capote (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*), Ralph Ellison (*The Invisible Man*), Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), Joseph Heller (*Catch 22*), V. S. Naipaul - from Trinidad - (*A House for Mr Biswas*), Saul Bellow - from Canada - (*Herzog*) and Vladimir Nabokov – (a naturalized US citizen) - (*Lolita*).

In addition to the deluge of American Fiction that hit the literary scene of the mid Twentieth Century, **novels translated from foreign languages** became available due to the revolution in publishing. In 1935, the emergence of the paperback volumes made books affordable and accessible, ensuring a wider circulation among the general reading public—the demand grew during the Second World War. The bestsellers had enormous sales. Foreign writers were no longer mysterious creatures talking in an incomprehensible tongue. Gunter Grass, Sartre, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and influential philosophies of naturalism, existentialism and feminism became accessible to interested readers.

**Television** played an important role in taking literature, especially novel and drama, to the drawing room. The demand for material for TV serials led producers and directors to turn to novels and short stories for inspiration.

**Let's take a brief look at some of the major Novelists of the mid-century Novel.**

**Graham Greene** (1904-1991) is regarded as one of the most noteworthy writers of this period. His novels *Power and Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) and *The End of the Affair* (1951) are gems of literary craftsmanship with their taut language, local flavour and accurate presentation of the situation of the times. The moral dilemma faced by the characters (informed by his Roman Catholicism) who in their encounter with evil, understand and appreciate good. The locals are wide ranging from West Africa to Vietnam.

Unlike Greene, **C. P. Snow** (1905-1980) does not range far and wide for his material. Instead he gives an insight into the English society, using his hero, Lewis Eliot, the narrator of an entire series of novels. In his hero's rise to the upper ranks of Civil Service (Snow himself was in the Civil Service), we see a close study of moral, social, intellectual and political power. His style is marked by a dignified aloofness and a lack of emotion. The recurrent theme in his novels is the power-motive theme. His novels include *Strangers and Brothers* (1940), *The Conscience of the Rich* (1958) and *Corridors of Power* (1964). Snow is also remembered for his views on art and technology being mutually exclusive in his 1959 Rede Lecture, who was challenged by eminent critic F. R. Leavis in his Richmond Lecture of 1962.

Apart from Graham Greene, another important contributor to the modern novel was **Evelyn Waugh** (1903-66). The effervescent wit and satirical humour of his early novels (*Decline and Fall*, *Vile Bodies*, *Black Mischief*) gave way to more serious writing, owing partly to his Army experiences and his conversion to Roman Catholicism. His later novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) is characterised by sympathy with and nostalgia for a lost world, less harmful than present. His *Sword of Honour* trilogy (1952-1961) and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961) the mood became sombre and resigned marked by dark humour.

The presentation of 'denaturalized humanity' is also seen in **L. P. Hartley's** (1895-1972), Eustace and Hilda trilogy (1944-47). Hartley's writing is characterised by a lucid style, devoid of sentimentalism and full of imagery and symbolism.

Another giant in the world of modern fiction is **H. E. Bates** (1905-74). His fame rests primarily as a short story writer, his collections like *The Wedding Party* (1965) and *The Four Beauties* (1968) deal with the people living restricted lives against a countryside setting. His short stories *The Greatest people in the World* (1941) and *How Sleep the Brave* (1941) tell of his experiences in the R.A.F. In Bates' noteworthy novel *The Jacaranda Tree* (1949) he writes of Burma (now Myanmar) and India.

**Lawrence Durrell** (1912-1990) had succumbed to the beauty of the Eastern Mediterranean— his four novels known are collectively known as *The Alexandria Quartet*. Durrell is known for 'the relativity proposition'— the narrative method in which the same situation is presented from different perspectives to provide an explanation.

**Joyce Cary** (1888-1957) is known for his objective portrayal of characters as extroverted as himself. His best novels include *Mister Johnson* (1939) inspired by his career in the Nigerian political service and *The Captive and The Free* (1959) voicing his personal convictions in an ever changing political and social world.

**Angus Wilson's** (1913-1991) satirical sketches of middle-class misfits with outdated ideals in an increasingly materialistic post-war society are seen in *Hemlock and After* (1925) and *The Old Men at the Zoo* (1961). Unusual sympathy is evident in his portrayal of the woman protagonist in *The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot* (1958). As a critic, he wrote studies of Dickens and Kipling in *The Wild Garden* (1963).

**Let us now take a look at the 1950s Angry Young Man Movement in novel writing.**

**John Wain** (1925-1994) in his novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) portrays the protagonist as an **anti-hero** who despises his contemporary society, **rants** about it, nonetheless this **anger** is marked by a certain level of **impotence** owing partly to his own **lack of initiative** and partly to his **powerless position** in society. Though Wain himself objected to be called an Angry Young Man, his novels made a significant contribution to the image of the lower middle class young man wronged by societal forces.

**Kingsley Amis** (1922-1995) in his novel *Lucky Jim* (1954) anticipates the later **campus novel**, having as its protagonist a university lecturer of lower middles class origins. He aspires at social climbing to gain material benefits only to realise that he has become like 'the establishment' that was the object of his ridicule. He cannot

supply alternatives; he can only criticize. His anger is destructive rather than constructive. A semblance of reconciliation is achieved by striking a compromise. His other works include *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955), *I Like it Here* (1958) and *One Fat Englishman* (1963). *The Anti-Death League* (1966) shows his take on nuclear warfare and the role of God whom he considers malevolent. His son **Martin Amis**, also a successful novelist, talks of the collapse of the established class system which the Angry Young Man movement railed against.

**John Braine's** (1927-1986) *Room at the Top* (1957) and *Life at the Top* (1962) shows the lack of scruples in the game of survival. But the material possessions are gained by paying the price of one's self-respect since the members of the wealthy class always view the protagonist as an intruder. Insecurities and promiscuities are also the theme in *The Crying Game* (1968) and *Waiting for Sheila* (1976).

Apart from these novelists, dramatist **John Osborne** has made a major contribution to the Angry Young Man movement. (Osborne is discussed in the section on Modern Drama.)

Another major contribution to the novel of the fifties was made by **William Golding** (1911-1993). He presents a grim picture of civilization as ever-tempted by evil and good as almost impossible to achieve. His novels have a fable-like character especially his best-known, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), which shows civilization as a mere veneer which cracks under the instinctual pressures felt in a setting beyond one's familiar surroundings. It is a 'revision' of the desert-island myth originating in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and continued in R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, which harps on man's innate goodness even in uncivilised places. Other works like *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956) and *The Scorpion God* (1971) are studies of an evil disposition.

**Anthony Burgess'** (1917-1993) early Malayan trilogy is set against an exotic Malayan backdrop. His true element is seen in his works *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and *The Clockwork Testament* (1974). **Farce, horror and satire** are genres he exploits most in his novel writing. He feels the "need to laugh in the face of a desperate future", a future where '**nadsat**' (teenage language of violence) and 'reclamation treatment' using violence prevails.

Any discussion on **dystopian novels** is incomplete without the mention of **George Orwell** (1903-50). He was a typical product of the Inter-war years. His proletarian sympathies surfaced early in his writings. The love-hate relationship

between him as a servant of the British empire and the corrupt ways of the Administration form the staple of much of Orwell's writing. The White Man's Burden is an issue he felt deeply conflicted about. His *Burmese Days* (1934) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) present a life of squalor and despair. Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) are seminal texts in the sub-genre of dystopian writing (a world, having an uncanny resemblance with one's contemporary society, governed by distorted moral and social values, pervaded by an atmosphere of gloom and presented in a satirical manner).

Often compared to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* is **Aldous Huxley's** *Brave New World*. It depicts a dystopia where human beings are scientifically conditioned to occupy a place on the social scale— manual workers ('Epsilons') and intellectuals ('Alphas'). The novel provides a prophecy of a world of genetic engineering and social control.

Another form of **escape** from reality is the **high-fantasy genre** brought to perfection by **J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892-1973). He was Professor of Anglo-Saxon Literature and later of Language and Literature at Oxford. Generally regarded as fantasy literature for children, he presented in his works of fairy and folklore cult, the ever-relevant issues of good versus evil and the test of one's values in times of great upheaval.

Women novelists of the twentieth century made an invaluable contribution to development of the modern novel. Virginia Woolf (discussed under 'Stream of Consciousness technique') is the most influential woman writer of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, her presence should not overshadow other women writers, each of whom introduced 'a room of one's own' where women novelists could express themselves.

Major women novelists include **Muriel Spark** (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, The Mandelbaum Gate*), **Iris Murdoch** (*The Severed Head, The Bell*), **Doris Lessing** (*The Golden Notebook, Children of Violence*), **Brigid Antonia Brophy** (*The Snow Ball*) and **Edna O'Brien** (*The Country Girls, The Lonely Girls*).

From this brief survey, it is evident that the heterogeneous nature of Modernism is exemplified in the development of the novel.

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## 1.2.4 The Modern Short Story

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The qualitative adjective “**short**” before the term “story” stamps the genre with the seal of brevity, a highly subjective measure leading to widely disparate notions of length. While for instance, **Katherine Mansfield**’s short story ‘The Fly’ is an exemplary specimen of compression, the same cannot be said of **Conrad**’s ‘The Lagoon’, which spans several pages. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, the short story became characterised by a “**cosmopolitan expatriate spirit**” (Cleanth Brooks) owing to various sources, namely, Russian fiction writers, French philosophers, German and Austrian psychologists. Under the influence of Russian writers, the British short story writers attempted to use philosophy as a solution to profound social and moral dilemmas. The old narrative of anecdote transformed into one of character and feeling. **Joyce**, among others, transformed the Irish short fiction from anecdote to impression. From **Chekhov**, the writers learnt dialogue and detail, focus on inward rather than physical action, the role of mood and atmosphere in plot—features of the early twentieth century short fiction.

It is also to be kept in mind, that the **American short story** was an established form by the early twentieth century. The literary movements like **Symbolism** and artistic ones like **Impressionism** were first absorbed by Henry James before influencing Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

The modern short story dealt with **the experience of exile and expatriation**, which the First World War brought in its wake. In short fiction is seen themes of alienation due to altered boundaries of nation states, loss of identity with regard to religion and spirituality and the question of individuality. Moreover, its commitment to the social and moral aspects of human solitariness is seen in its choice of subjects, namely, war veterans, performers, artists and such like.

The **motifs of entrapment and escape** are employed abundantly to emphasize the sense of alienation and culminate in **the quest motif**— the protagonist Arsat in Conrad’s ‘The Lagoon’ searches for light in a dark world full of illusions. Joyce uses the quest motif to portray the coming-of-age of the unnamed adolescent narrator in ‘Araby’. In modern fiction, the quest is an oft-frustrated attempt at attaining knowledge. The themes of sexual repression, spiritual barrenness, escape and alienation indicate the state of mind of the writer in those times.

To even a casual reader, it is evident that the modern practitioners of the short

story moved away from the traditional plot structure and universal symbols towards the tentative plot with an **open ending**. Omniscient **narration** is replaced by multiple points of view. The narrator is no longer god-like all-seeing, the narrator becomes human and fallible, provides shreds of observed or perceived data put together by **cumulative effect**.

The modern short story writers, particularly Joyce and Mansfield used the **omission** of the formal beginnings as often their stories, being interrelated, came from a familiar setting. Despite the heterogeneous character of modernist writing, certain conceptual unities give to the movement its clarity of method and motive. Accuracy, authenticity of expression and the “scrupulous fidelity to the truth of his sensations” (Conrad, Author’s note to *Within the Tides*) were important to the aesthetics of modernist fiction.

To sum up, one may observe that the modern short story, in its search for themes as well as *mot juste* or the precise word (Ezra Pound), crossed borders and disciplines. It is in essence a **multi-faceted expression**.

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### **1.2.5 Non-Fictional Prose of the Modern Period**

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One of the finest writers of literary prose was **G. K. Chesterton**, a writer of great versatility. As a critic, he showed interest in the Victorian period as is evident from his works *Charles Dickens* and *The Victorian Age in Literature*. Among twentieth century essayists, his works are known for their elements of wit, humour and paradox.

**W. H. Hudson**’s most popular work, *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest*, set in South America, shows his meticulous observation of natural phenomena. Another naturalist prose writer, **John Richard Jeffares**, presents a sympathetic insight into the life of men of the countryside in his works *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Toilers of the Field*.

Of literary essays, **Sir Max Beerbohm**’s essays are outstanding satirical works—*The Essays of Max Beerbohm*, *More*, *Yet Again*, *And Even Now*. (Note the titles of the four publications, indicative of his humour!)

**E. V. Lucas**, biographer of Charles Lamb, shows immense ease and grace in his *Character and Comedy* and *Old Lamps for New*.

**Literary Criticism** was an important part of twentieth century prose as well. Eminent Oxford scholars and critics of the period were **A. C. Bradley** (*Shakespearean Tragedy* and *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*), **Sir Walter Raleigh** (*Milton, Shakespeare*) and **W. P. Ker** (*The Art of Poetry, Essays on Medieval Literature*). Other important writers include **George Saintsbury** (*Elizabethan Literature, A History of Criticism*) and **Sir Edmund Gosse** (*Father and Son* - the crisis between his father's scientific career and religion and **Darwinism**).

The immense contribution made by **T. S. Eliot** has been discussed in the section on modern poetry. Apart from him, **I. A. Richards** (*Principles of Literary Criticism, Practical Criticism*) and **F. R. Leavis** (*The Great Tradition*), **Sir Maurice Bowra** (*The Romantic Imagination*), **F. L. Lucas** (*Style*) and **William Empson** (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*).

**Shakespeare studies** received a boost from the works of **H. Granville Barker, Edward Dowden, John Dover Wilson, E.K. Chambers, G. B. Harrison, John Palmer** and **Wilson Knight**. As is obvious, when making such lists, one always runs the risk of omission. However, on the list are names of (already familiar) major critics of Elizabethan and Romantic literature who were writing in the twentieth century, indicating that the conditions of the modern period gave a great impetus to **literary studies and criticism**.

Another prominent form of prose writing in the twentieth century was **exploration and travel literature**. The most popular was **C. M. Doughty's** *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888). The explorations of the Oriental East are seen in **M. W. Pickthall's** *Said the Fisherman* (1903) and **Norman Douglas's** *Oriental Encounters, Palestine and Syria* (1918). **Freya Stark's** *East is West* (1945), **Peter Fleming's** *Brazilian Adventures* (1933) and **Gerald Durrell's** *The Overloaded Ark* are excellent pieces of travel writing.

Science writers like **Havelock Ellis** made an immense impact on the Modern novelists through his work *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1910). **Freud's** contribution to literature has been discussed, albeit briefly, in the section on the development of the Modern Novel. **Bertrand Russell's** philosophical explorations in *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1917), *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (1948) and *History of Western Philosophy* (1946) and **Sir James Frazer's** *The Golden Bough* (abridged, 1922) are considered seminal texts of Modern prose.

Other popular **scientific literature** writers include **Sir James Jeans** (*Physics and*

*Philosophy*), **Jacob Bronowski** (*The Ascent of Man*) and **Sir Julian Huxley** (*Man in the Modern World*).

During the inter-war years, **Lytton Strachey**, a member of the **Bloomsbury Group**, is credited with having established the style of Modern **biography** in his ironical portraits of **Eminent Victorians** (1918).

One of the most renowned names in **historical biography** remains that of **Sir Winston Churchill**, whose works include *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (1923-31), *My Early Life* (1930), *Into Battle* (1941) and *The Second World War* (1948-54). Other biographers include **Sir Arthur Bryant**, **Sir A. F. Pollard**, **J. E. Neale** to name a few. Major contributors to the genre remain **G. M. Trevelyan** (*English Social History*), **H. A. L. Fisher** (*A History of Europe*), **R. H. Tawney** (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*), **A. L. Rowse** (*The Early Churchills*), **A. J. P. Taylor** (*The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*), **Sir Arnold Toynbee** (*Study of History*) and **Sir Lewis Namier** (*Europe in Decay*).

Other biographers who deserve mention are **G. B. Shaw** (*Sixteen Self-Sketches*), **Sean O'Casey** (*I Knock at the Door*) and **James Kirkup** 's (*Sorrows, Passions and Alarms*).

The **pioneering magazines** of the times include *The Egoist*, *The Criterion*, *The Athenaeum* and *Scrutiny*. Unfortunately, only a few of these continued post the Second World War.

Another form of writing which became popular during the twentieth century was **Children's Literature** (an adult writer looking at the world of a child, at times, posing as a child). The most important early contribution was made by **Iona Opie** who wrote *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* and *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*.

The desire to explore beyond the immediate English-speaking world, led to **translations**, as an important part of Twentieth Century prose writing. To name a few, **Sir Gilbert Murray** 's translations of Ancient Greek plays and **Constance Garnett**'s translations of Russian writers like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov made English readers familiar with literature of foreign languages.

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## 1.2.6 Development of Modern Drama

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As you have read earlier, in the early part of the nineteenth century, the professional theatre of the period was in a low state since the respectable middle

classes despised it as a place of vice. At this time, the only popular and available forms of stage enactment were melodrama, farce and sentimental comedies.

- **The growth of Realism: The Problem Play** -The movement away from melodrama towards realism, achieved impetus from the works of **T. W. Robertson** (1829-71) who introduced the idea of characters and dialogue of a more natural kind, though there was a considerable element of sentimentalism in his works. Other writers who attempted at bringing realism to the stage were **Henry Arthur Jones** and **A. W. Pinero**. It was in the 1890s, that the influence of Norwegian dramatist **Henrik Ibsen** is felt through **George Bernard Shaw** who brought to the British stage, serious **drama of ideas** dealing with themes of religion, labour, capital, war and sexuality. Apart from Shaw, **Galsworthy** and **Granville-Barker** contributed to the field of social drama. However, the weaknesses of the new realistic drama were its lack of appeal to the imagination, lack of poetry, lapsing into mere intellectual reporting of the times. Shaw and Galsworthy rose above these limitations in their best plays. On the side, melodrama and musical comedy continued to flourish in the provinces. In an attempt to win support for the new realistic drama **the repertory movement** began to grow in popularity. **Shaw, Ervine, Houghton** and **Monkhouse** benefited from this movement aimed at bringing social drama to a wider audience. Let us take a brief look at the features of the plays written by Shaw, the pioneer of **social drama** in Britain.

**George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950)** was born in Dublin of Irish Protestant stock; most of his cultural background he owed to his mother, with whom, in 1876, he came to London. There he became a member of the **Fabian Society** and he wrote pamphlets on politics and economics as well as did platform speaking to disseminate Fabian Socialist ideas.

*Features of his plays* – Shaw saw the stage as a platform for his views and wrote with the intention of the betterment of humanity. Slum landlordism, prostitution, marriage conventions, social prejudices, the glorification of war– these are but some of the social issues that came under the microscope of this rationalist. This **play of ideas** focused on **socialism** as the cure for the malaise. Shaw also believed that the theory of **Creative Evolution**, (as presented in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*) would eventually bring about perfection through **selective breeding** and **longevity**.

Arguably, his characterisation, variety and vividness, resemble Shakespeare's,

however Shaw lacks the interest in the individual *per se* which is one of Shakespeare's qualities. His characters are seen as representatives of ideas and mouthpieces for his propaganda. Nonetheless, Shaw's memorable characters include Eliza Doolittle, Alfred Doolittle, Raina, Bluntschli, Sir Ralph Bloomfield and such like. His women characters (Eliza, Raina) are the emancipated **New Woman**—who subverts the usual conventions of a love affair or a marriage, breaking the status quo and revealing the power dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The influence of Norwegian dramatist **Henrik Ibsen's** *The Doll's House* is the driving force behind this progressive treatment of women characters.

Shaw's important works include *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) – *Widower's Houses* (1892), *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894: banned by the censor, privately produced 1902: publicly produced 1925) and *The Philanderer* (1893; 1905). His Pleasant plays include *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1895), *The Man of Destiny* (1895: 1897), *You Never Can Tell* (1897: 1899). *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901) includes *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898: 1899) and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1899: 1900). Important plays include *Man and Superman* (1903: 1905), *Pygmalion* (1912: 1913) *Back to Methuselah* (1921) and *St Joan* (1923).

#### Activity for the Learner

With help from your counselor, make a chart of the plays of George Bernard Shaw, and the major characters. Try and find consistent patterns in the art of characterisation. Also locate the major continental influences in his work. This will help you to have a better understanding of the syllabized text.

- Another important theatrical development outside London was the **Irish National Theatre (Dublin)**. **W.B. Yeats**, **J.M.Synge** and **Lady Gregory** became directors of the Abbey Theatre.

#### John Millington Synge (1871-1909)

Synge was born in Dublin and took a degree at Trinity College. In 1899, while wandering in Paris, he met Yeats, who persuaded him to abandon his bohemian life and return to Ireland and the Isles of Aran. Consequently, Synge inspired by the tragic beauty of the sea, and the simple life and native dialect of the fisher-folk, began writing plays for the Irish stage. Soon afterwards, he joined **Lady Gregory** and **Yeats** as a director of the theatre, for which he wrote six plays – *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The*

*Tinker's Wedding* (1907), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910). He died of cancer at the early age of thirty eight. His non-dramatic works include *The Aran Islands* (1907) and *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* (1911).

Yeats and Synge reacted against the realistic movement in drama inspired by Ibsen and popularised by Shaw. Like Yeats, he sought inspiration in the Irish myths and legends and in it he found that “rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality”. His keen insight into human nature is best seen in the characterization of Nora (*The Shadow of the Glen*), Maurya (*Riders to the Sea*) and Christy Mahon (*The Playboy of the Western World*). Synge viewed nature as something mystical and pagan and he presented it not in didactic or moralistic terms, but in an almost spiritual tone. Tragedy seems his natural element as is evident in *Riders to the Sea*, a powerful tragedy in one act which deals with the toll taken by the sea in the lives of the fisher – folk of the west coast of Ireland. The uneven contest between the old woman Maurya and the powerful forces of nature is presented in a grandly stark, almost stoic manner.

- By 1920s, there were signs of a rebirth of poetic drama, but the atmosphere, dominated by realistic drama, was uncongenial to it. **Stephen Philips** (*Paolo and Francesca*), **John Masefield** (*The Tragedy of Nan*) and **Gordon Bottomley** (*The Crier by the Night*) experimented with poetic drama but with limited success. Experiments in verse drama were made by eminent poets like **T.S. Eliot**. His works include *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939) and *The Cocktail Party* (1949). In the 1930s, the verse plays of **W. H. Auden** and **Christopher Isherwood** focused on social and political themes. Isherwood's works include *The Dog beneath the Skin* (1935) and *The Ascent of F6* (1936).

During the Second World War, due to wartime black-out London theatres for were closed for some time. They soon reopened but never completely dominated by the frivolity of ‘leave entertainment’ as in the 1914-18 war.

**Drama in the forties** was dominated by three men. **Christopher Fry (1907-2005)** caught the mood of the times using wit in *The Boy with a Cart* (1939), *A Phoenix too Frequent* (1946) and *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1949). **Sir Terence Rattigan (1911-77)** achieved tremendous success with neatly constructed plays on human relationships as *The Winslow Boy* (1946) and *Cause Célèbre* (1977). **Peter Ustinov (1921-2004)** contributed to the success of his many plays by acting in them.

His best plays are *The Love of Four Colonels* (1951) and *Romanoff and Juliet* (1956). However, in the early 1950s, some leading foreign dramatists influenced the English stage. First and foremost was **Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)**, with his uncompromising views on production, his use of songs and music, his humanitarian communism, his insistence on the alienation of the audience and the action even as he projects the play into the midst of the onlookers. After Brecht, the most important influence was **Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)** whose *Waiting for Godot* (Fr. 1952; Eng. trans. 1954) represents, using meandering, seemingly incoherent dialogue, the despair of a society which is destroying itself and of mankind unsuspectingly surrendering its natural liberties. His other works include *Endgame* (1955) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958).

A revolution in playwriting came about when **television** appeared in everyone's home. Authors like **Alun Owen** and **John Mortimer** wrote for the small screen rather than the public stage.

English drama took an entirely new turn with the establishment in 1956 of the English stage company at the **Royal Court Theatre**. Outstanding among its products was **John Osborne** (1920-1994). His work *Look Back in Anger* (1956) gave the strongest impetus to the concept of the **Angry Young Man** (discussed in the section on Modern Novel). The tragi-comic depiction of the failure of welfare policies regarding red brick universities among others has him raving and ranting impotently about his contemporary society only to use the escape route of nostalgia and childlike images of the bear and the squirrel. In collaboration with Anthony Creighton he wrote *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1957).

For a time, the leading figure in Post-war drama was **Arnold Wesker (1932-2016)** whose loosely related trilogy – *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959), *I'm talking About Jerusalem* (1960) – dealt with East End Jews in search of security and happiness.

**Tom Stoppard (1937-)** influenced by Beckett, portrays his characters suspended in isolation. Due to their lack of self-awareness, their words, ideas and philosophies seem irrelevant to their actions. Stoppard made a name for himself with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), which is regarded as a comic representation of Shakespeare's portrayal of the two minor characters in *Hamlet*. His other plays include *Jumpers* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974).

**Harold Pinter (1930-2008)** also influenced by Beckett, conveys the silences and ambiguities of everyday conversation with an authenticity that uses them to build up

the sense of menace and violence in his plays *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and *The Caretaker* (1960). The plays are set in a claustrophobic space, emphasizing the sense of being trapped, with the fear of someone or something 'outside'. The characters live in constant self-doubt due to the fear of this unidentified menace. This other plays include *The Homecoming* (1965), *Silence* (1969) and *Old Times* (1971).

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### **1.2.7 Presaging Postmodernity**

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As with any new or experimental movement gaining momentum, Modernism attracted its fair share of criticism. The most common would be its elitist nature, its appeal to a select intellectual readership. This is one of the major differences between Modernism (first half of the twentieth century) and Postmodernism (second half of the twentieth century) which sees as celebrating the breakdown between high and popular art. Because of its continuity with and reaction against its precursors, Postmodernism eludes definition. The movement encompasses a wide range of philosophical, aesthetic and critical ideas. However, postmodernism is defined by an attitude of distrust towards to grand narratives, and a general atmosphere of skepticism. It uses pastiche, the combination of genres and subjects hitherto deemed low for literary works. Postmoderns use parody as a reaction to the works of their precursors, thereby questioning grand narratives and modes of representation. The critical theory movements of Deconstruction and Reader-Response theory influenced the attitudes of negation, challenge, parody and pastiche. These definitions and concepts will be explained in greater detail in the Unit that follows. At times, it gets really difficult to distinguish the dividing lines between Modernity and Postmodernity, but if you read representative texts carefully, you will discover the continuities and disjoints for yourselves.

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### **1.2.8 Summing Up**

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On closer inspection, one may conclude that though experimentation by the likes of Eliot and Pound is the most striking feature of the modern period, writing in the traditional forms was still thriving. If there were Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Eliot, there were also Galsworthy, Bennett and Maugham. From your reading of the prescribed texts, you will gain a better understanding of the literary movements of

Modernism and Postmodernism, as attempts at challenging the traditional modes of representation and expressing the sensibilities of their times, in different ways, of course.

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## 1.2.9 Comprehension Exercises

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### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

1. What were the factors leading to the emergence of the novel in the twentieth century?
2. Examine the contribution made by the War poets in documenting the condition of the twentieth century.
3. Evaluate Shaw's contribution to twentieth century social drama.
4. How does the modern short story contribute to literary modernism?

### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

1. Examine the contribution made by T. S. Eliot to modern poetry and criticism.
2. Write a note on the women novelists of the twentieth century.
3. Discuss the Angry Young Man movement, in the drama and novel writing tradition.
4. With special reference to the poems you have read, discuss briefly Yeats' contribution to modern poetry.

### ● Short Questions: 6 marks

1. Write a short note on any two prose writers of the twentieth century.
2. Examine how Hulme's ideas influenced the emergence of experimental poetry.
3. With reference to the texts you have read, write a short note on Synge's contribution to the one act play.

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## 1.2.10 Suggested Reading

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Boris Ford, *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*. (vols.7& 8)

David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*. (vol. 2 new/ vol. 4 old)

Ronald Carter and John McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English*.

David Ayers, *Modernism: A Short Introduction*.

Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement*.

Michael Levenson, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*.

Philip Tew and Alex Murray, *The Modernism Handbook*.

Richard Ellman and Charles Fiedelson, eds., *The Modern Tradition*.

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## Unit-3 □ Towards Postmodernity

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### Structure:

- 1.3.0 Introduction
- 1.3.1 The term Postmodernism
- 1.3.2 Precursors of the Postmodernist Tendency
- 1.3.3 The Postmodern Condition
- 1.3.4 Postmodernism in Art
- 1.3.5 Postmodernism in Literature
- 1.3.6 Postmodernism in Literary Theory
- 1.3.7 Postmodernism and Popular Culture
- 1.3.8 Summing Up
- 1.3.9 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.3.10 Suggested Reading

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### 1.3.0 Introduction

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After reading about Modernism in the previous Units, here you will read about Postmodernism. It will naturally strike you as learners that if we are talking of post-modernism, does that mean the end of modernism? As stated in the previous Unit, to talk of Postmodernism is not to imply that we are over and done with modernism. You may on a broad scale look upon it as a general intensification of the traits of modernism in a way that seemed difficult to contain under the same bracket; hence the new terminology. The term “postmodernism” first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979, with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by the French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist **Jean-François Lyotard**. That postmodernism is undefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical practices employed in architecture, art, literature and culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. J. A. Cuddon in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* describes Post-modernism as characterised by “an eclectic approach, aleatory writing, parody and pastiche”. By “eclectic” he means the use of fragmented forms, whereas “aleatory writing” suggests the incorporation of chance and randomness. “Parody”

and “Pastiche” suggest the abandonment of divine authorship. As you proceed along this Unit you will find an in depth analysis of these terms and thereby arrive at an understanding of what the journey “Towards Postmodernity” means.

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### 1.3.1 The term Postmodernism

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From your reading of the previous Units you must already know that Modernism is of crucial importance in the understanding of twentieth-century culture. Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* writes “Modernism was that earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre-twentieth century practice in music, painting, literature, and architecture.” So if Modernism was an earthquake it is important to trace its epicenter. One of the important epicenters was the artistic and cultural developments in Vienna from 1890 to 1910 whose effects can still be felt today. It successfully toppled several structures which were impossible to rebuild. However due to the economic and political crisis perpetrated by successive World Wars and the attendant developments, Modernism started to retreat considerably in the 1950’s. This phase was marked by people’s change in attitude and critical thinking. Several critics therefore began to use the term **Postmodernism** to refer to the socio-historical condition and a change in people’s perception from 1950’s onwards that was highly influenced by:

- Emergence of media (television, video, computers)
- Globalisation
- Consumerism
- Popular Culture (rock music, TV soaps, horror stories, science fiction)
- Tremendous growth in information and communication technology

In simpler terms postmodern literature and culture, should be understood as a vision of the world influenced by socio-historical conditions of the post-World War II period and marked by a rapid growth of advanced technology, mass society, media, popular culture influencing individual’s vision of the world as manifested in arts and culture especially of the post 1950s period. You realize that at once we are talking of something highly negative as the devastation of war, and something positive in the sense of advancements in terms of culture, thought, technology communication and so on. It is basically this hiatus between the two – in other words the indeterminacy of life, that is broadly the subject of the postmodern condition.

The term Postmodernism however was used at different times and with different meanings. Let us trace the evolutionary history of the term:

- In **1870** an English painter **Chapman** wanted to launch a Postmodern painting which was meant to be a reaction to French Impressionism. However, the term was not used systematically and gradually went out of use.
- The first person to use the term Postmodernism was sociologist **Rudolf Panwitz** who in his work *The Crisis of the European Culture* (**1917**) tried to define “a postmodern man” as one who in his view was self-conscious, religious and nationally aware individual. Panwitz wanted his “postmodern man” to overcome the crisis of Modernity.
- In **1934**, **Frederico De Onis** used the term to chart a new tendency in Latin American Hispanic literature. He went on to use the term “postmodernismo” (1905-1914) as a successor of “modernismo” (1896-1905) and a predecessor of “ultramodernismo” (1914-1932) but then again failed to express the term as it is used today.
- **Charles Olson**, a leading poet of **1940s** was the first to use the term in poetry which is closer to its contemporary understanding.
- In **1947**, a British historian and philosopher **Arnold Toynbee** published his *A Study of History* where he used the term to mark the transition from nation state to globalizing relationships.
- In 1949 the term came to be associated with architecture when a British architect **Joseph Hudnut** published his work *The Post-Modern House*.
- **Leslie Fiedler** in **1965** started to use the term in context of literature. He used it as a term for the emergence of the new literature which he found was very different from that of **Eliot, Joyce, Proust** and **Kafka**. He found this new literature to be a celebration of popular culture as opposed to the more academic and difficult Modernist works.
- The term however began to be used more systematically in literature with publication of **Ihab Hassan’s** work *PostmodernISM: A Paracritical Bibliography* where he tried to bring out the difference between Modernist and Postmodernist literature. In another work *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1971) that was later reprinted in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* (1998), Hassan came out with his famous table of differences between Modernism and Postmodernism, that has hence been the subject of much controversy.

- **François Lyotard** in his work *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) treated the term as a philosophical concept and tried to theorise the nature of science and knowledge and their legitimacy in the period of Modernism and Postmodernism.

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### 1.3.2 Precursors of the Postmodernist Tendency

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The philosophical Modernism at issue in Postmodernism begins with Immanuel Kant's "Copernican revolution". Kant assumes that we cannot know things in themselves and that objects of knowledge must conform to our faculties of representation. Ideas such as God, freedom, immortality, the world, first beginning, and final ending only have a regulative function for knowledge because they cannot find fulfilling instances among objects of our daily experiences. With the growth of mass communication and transportation in the later nineteenth century, the human perceptions were reshaped. They lost distinction between natural and artificial experience. Postmodernists challenge the viability of such a distinction. A consequence of Modernism is what Postmodernists refer to as de-realisation. De-realisation affects both the subject and the object of experience, such that their sense of identity and constancy is either upset or dissolved. Important precursors to this notion are found in Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche.

**Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher, poet, social critic and religious author who is considered the first Existentialist philosopher. He wrote critical texts on religion, ethics, morality and psychology. He had a fondness for metaphor, irony and parables.**

**Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a German philosopher, poet, philologist, critic whose works have exerted tremendous influence on Western philosophy and modern intellectual history. Nietzsche's work deals with art, philology, religion, history, culture, science and tragedy.**

**Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German scientist, philosopher, economist, journalist and revolutionary social thinker. He is known for his most influential work *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). His work has largely influenced economic and political theory, and has ever since been the foundation of the anti-capitalist bloc.**

Nietzsche can be considered as an important precursor for postmodernism for his analysis of the fundamental concept of Western metaphysics, the “I”. According to Nietzsche, this concept of “I” arises out of our moral sense to be responsible for our actions. In order to be responsible we must acknowledge that we are the cause of our actions and both reward and punishment are the consequences of our actions. In this way, the concept of the “I” comes about as a social construction and moral illusion. According to Nietzsche, the moral sense of the “I” as an identical cause is projected onto events in the world, where the identity of things, causes, effects, etcetra, takes shape in easily communicable representation. Thus logic is born from the demand to adhere to common social norms which shape humanity into a society of knowing and acting subjects. For Postmodernists, Nietzsche’s concepts in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* is also an important reference where he attempts to provide a critique of the contemporary considerations of truth and concepts.

In Nietzsche’s view, the life of an individual and a culture largely depend on their ability to repeat an unhistorical moment, a kind of forgetfulness, along with their continuous development through time. The study of history ought therefore to emphasize how each person or culture attains and repeats this moment. Historical repetition is not linear, but each age worthy of its designation repeats the unhistorical moment that is its own present as “new”. In this respect, Nietzsche would agree with Charles Baudelaire, who describes modernity as “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” that is repeated in all ages, and postmodernists read Nietzsche’s remarks on eternal return accordingly. Nietzsche presents these concepts of his in *The Gay Science* and develops it in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This concept of Nietzsche is taken up by many as an identical repetition of everything in the Universe, such that nothing occurs that has not already occurred an infinite number of times before. Postmodernists read these theories of Nietzsche in conjunction that history is always the repetition of a specific moment, the moment that is always new in each case, meaning the new always eternally repeats itself as new and therefore recurrence is a matter of difference rather than identity. Postmodernists join the concept of eternal return with the loss of distinction between the real and the apparent world.

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### **1.3.3 The Postmodern Condition**

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Jean-François Lyotard’s influential work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* has been viewed by many as the “bible” of Postmodernism. In this

work Lyotard analyses how the processing of knowledge has changed in the twentieth century with the rapid growth in computer science. The postmodern

**Jean-François Lyotard** (1924-1998) was a French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist. He is best known for his work *The Postmodern Condition* where he analyses the impact of postmodernity on the human condition. Lyotard's work continues to be important in politics, philosophy, literature, art and cultural studies.

condition is the fundamentally different outlook on knowledge post Enlightenment and especially after the World War 2. As said before, the word "postmodern" came into the lexicon with the publication of Lyotard's *La Condition Postmoderne* in 1979 (English: *The Postmodern Condition*). Lyotard was heavily influenced by Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and

based this work on his model of language games. He took Wittgenstein's concept from speech act theory to account for what he calls change in the rules of game for science, art and literature since the end of nineteenth century. He calls his work a combination of two very different language games, i.e., of the philosopher and the expert. According to his theory, the expert knows what he knows but the philosopher knows nothing and poses questions.

Lyotard claims in his work that in the age of computers knowledge has been transformed to information. This proposition basically explains the whole concept of the postmodern condition as the absence of certainties and a loss of what was earlier considered heroic and celebratory. Knowledge is thus downscaled into becoming nothing more than just a coded message within the system of communication. To analyse this knowledge, it is important to comprehend the pragmatics of communication. This in turn means that communication is a process that includes coding the message, selecting the mode of transmission and finally its reception. This process or the order of it must be followed by the one who judges them. However, Lyotard believes the position of the judge is also within this language game which in turn raises the question of legitimation. The languages of science and that of politics and ethics are strongly interlinked. Science is always dependent on government and administration for huge amount of capital and infrastructure required for research. Science plays the language game by displacing the narrative knowledge including the meta-narratives of philosophy. This is the result of the rapid growth in technologies and techniques in the second half of twentieth century, where the

emphasis of knowledge has shifted from ends of human action to its means. Lyotard says, “I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives”. ‘Meta’ in Greek stands for an idea that is transcendent and ‘narrative’ is a story characterized by its telling. Lyotard used the term to show that postmodernism was basically characterised by a mistrust of the grand narratives that had formed an essential part of modernity. In his view, meta-narratives should give way to localised narratives, which can replace grand narratives by bringing into focus the specific local context.

In Lyotard’s view Postmodern sensibility does not lament the loss of narrative coherence any more than the loss of being. However, the dissolution of narrative leaves the field of legitimation to a new unifying criterion: the performativity of the knowledge-producing system whose form of capital is information. The performativity criterion threatens anything not meeting its requirements, such as speculative narratives, which perform the functions of de-legitimation and exclusion. Nevertheless, capital also demands the continual re-invention of the “new” in the form of new language games and new denotative statements, and so, paradoxically, a certain “paralogy” is required by the system itself. By the term “paralogy”, Lyotard meant a flood of good ideas that are inspired by conversation. According to Lyotard, the Postmoderns have a quest for “paralogy”. In the given context, this means a hunger for stimulating conversations and ideas that work in a satisfying way. To get those ideas, paralogists often share an irreverent attitude towards well accepted theories, breaking them up and recombining them in a revolutionary new way. The point of paralogy is to help us shake ourselves loose of stultifying traditional frameworks that we have come to take for granted in order to enhance our spontaneous creativity.

In “What is Postmodernism?” which appears as an appendix to the English edition of *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard addresses the importance of avant-garde art in terms of the aesthetic of the sublime. Modern art, he says, is emblematic of a sublime sensibility, that is, a sensibility that there is something non-presentable demanding to be fit into sensible form and yet overwhelms all attempts to do so. But where modern art presents the unrepresentable as a missing content within a beautiful form, as in Marcel Proust, postmodern art exemplified by James Joyce, puts forward the unrepresentable by foregoing beautiful form itself, thus denying what Kant would call the consensus of taste. Furthermore, Lyotard says that a

<p><b>Marcel Proust</b> (1871-1922) French novelist, critic, and essayist best known for his work <i>Remembrance of Things Past</i>.</p>
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work can become modern only if it is first postmodern, for postmodernism is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state, that is, at the moment it attempts to present the unrepresentable, “and this state is constant”. The Postmodern then, is a repetition of the modern as the “new,” and this means the ever-new demand for another repetition.

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### 1.3.4. Postmodernism in Art

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In this sub-section you will see how Postmodern art questioned the idea that there was only one inherent meaning to a piece of work and that is determined by the artist at the time of creation. For Postmodern art, the viewer became the determiner of meaning. They aimed at breaking distinctions between “high” and “low” art. Postmodern artists intended to incorporate popular culture in their paintings as **Pablo Picasso** often did by including the lyrics of popular songs on his canvases. Postmodern artists wanted to uphold the idea that no formal or aesthetic training is required to enjoy a piece of visual art. The artists challenged any traditional demarcations of “high” or “low” art and focused on the importance of consumerism in the 1960s. This idea was successfully put forward by **Barbara Kruger** in her artistic work *I shop therefore I am* (1987) where she juxtaposes photographs with aggressive slogans and visuals from advertisements. Kruger’s work was basically a photolithograph medium that she used on paper shopping bags. The title of her work subverts **René Descartes’** philosophical claim “I think therefore I am”, thereby critically showcasing how consumerism shapes a person’s identity more than their inner selves in a Postmodern world.

An earlier example of such postmodernist art could be found in **Andy Warhol’s** popular work *The Marilyn Diptych* (1962) became another icon of postmodern art. This again was a silk screen painting by an American pop artist. The work is a collage of fifty images of Marilyn Monroe based on her film *Niagara* (1953). Twenty five pictures of the actress on the left side of the diptych are brightly coloured, while the twenty five on the right are in black and white. This image suggests the multiplicity of meanings in Monroe’s life and legacy.

However, the most important aspect of Postmodern art is the introduction of **Surrealism** in paintings. Surrealism was officially introduced by the writer **André Breton** with his publication of *The Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924. This movement was characterized by a profound disillusionment with the Western emphasis on logic

and reason. Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious influenced this movement to a great degree as the surrealist artists aimed to tap the dream-world of the subliminal mind, visualizing its secrets and mysteries. Eminent surrealist artists include **Salvador Dali**, **René Magrite**, **Max Ernst** and **Man Ray** among others. Dali's most influential and iconic artwork *The Persistence of Memory* introduced a surrealist image of soft, melting pocket watches which rejected the rigid and deterministic concept of time. Surrealism served as an important precursor to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century artistic developments such as Neo-Dada, Nouveau Realisme and Institutional Critique.

#### Activity For the Learner

The preceding sub-section tries to provide certain examples of postmodern art, to place your understanding of Postmodernism in perspective. With the help of your counselor try to look up the pictures with reference to the examples provided in this section. You are also encouraged to find out more such examples of Postmodern artworks. This will provide you a better understanding of Postmodernism, far more than any conventional text book!

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### 1.3.5. Postmodernism in Literature

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While postmodernism as a cultural wave came only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, you will be surprised to know that in literature, the elements of postmodernism appeared as early as in **Laurence Sterne's** novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759). However, given the complexity of the postmodern milieu, we can hardly consider Sterne's work to be a typical postmodern work if we take it as a whole and if read against its socio-historical context. All the same, we need to remember that *Tristram Shandy* represents an exception in the development of the 18th century English realistic novel. This novel, did not have its followers until the 20th century and it did not form a more systematic movement or tendency as the works of American and other postmodernists in the 1960's.

Ihab Hassan sees the roots and early beginnings of postmodernism in Nietzsche's philosophy, Einstein's theory of relativity, and the beginning of the postmodern age around 1939 with such works as James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, and *The Counterfeiters* by André Gide. Hassan further emphasizes the principle of uncertainty, doubt, fragmentation and radical pluralism to be the most important features of postmodern literature. By pluralism he means not only a

plurality of different forms and genres juxtaposed and used within a single literary work, equality of meaning each of these forms creates, formal and thematic diversity, but also the plurality of meaning secured by the openness of a literary work which leaves a space for a reader to be involved in the completion of the literary work.

Postmodern literature is characterised by its depiction of the postmodern life and culture. Through its works postmodern literature tries to bring to the forefront a crisis of identity of human being (ethnic, social, cultural and sexual). There can be no doubt that these themes were previously treated in Western literature but started to be taken more seriously after the Civil Rights Movement in the USA in the 1960's, the Vietnam War, and student protests in Europe and the US. The result of these protests led to the democratisation of public life, and provided education and publishing opportunities for the minorities of the Western nations. As a result, new authors got opportunities to be published. Authors coming from different cultural backgrounds, specially from former British colonies started to appear. Examples of such writers include **Ben Okri, Kazuo Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Quereshi** in British literature; **Collin Johnson, Kath Walker, Sam Watson and Kim Scott** in Australian literature.

This period also saw the rise of the **Beat Generation** which included authors like **Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Snyder, Gregory Corso** and others. These authors expressed strong negative attitudes towards Western civilization and excessive growth of industrialization. They emphasized oriental philosophy for a peaceful way of life with an appreciation of drugs and alcohol as a liberating alternative to the Western hypocrisy. They wrote poems not for reading at home but to be recited in public places accompanied by pop, jazz, and blues music.

Another literary phenomenon that surfaced during this period which the journalists conceptualised for the mass public with the phrase "Angry Young Man" It included writers like **Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, John Braine and Kingsley Amis**. The anger of these writers were directed against age old establishment, middle class society and was marked by their disillusionment of the Labour Party that rose to power. Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (performed 1956, published 1957) supplied the tone and the title for the movement. Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954) provides an effective metaphor for the protesting young men. In his work a young university teacher tries to break the rules of his social class to connect with the

working class, who experience a different life from the one he knows and who he believes have stronger and deeper feelings than the people living around him. Other examples of Angry Young Man drama include John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) and Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958).

The 1950s also saw the emergence of the theatre of Absurd with the publication of Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). The term eventually came to be applied to a group of dramatists in 1950s who shared a common attitude towards the predicament of the man in the Universe. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is considered as a masterpiece of absurd theatre. It is a two act play about two characters Estragon and Vladimir –forever waiting for the arrival of someone named Godot but as Vladimir points out “nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.” The play remains absurd as it is comic and irrational at the same time. Apart from Beckett's work, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is also considered as an important absurd work. Albee's work marked a more naturalistic departure and showed an interest in closely observed human relationships. Other writers associated with absurd theatre were Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, Jean Genet. You are advised to have a close reading of their works which will provide a better understanding of the workings of the Absurdists.

**Postmodernism in literature can be characterised by:**

- **Irony and Black Humour:** Use of irony in their works became a hallmark of Postmodern writers. The Postmodern writers were frustrated by the World War II, the Cold War and the conspiracy theories. They tried to amalgamate it in different ways and therefore took the path of irony and black humour. In fact, several postmodern novelists were initially labeled as black humorists. Examples include **John Barth, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, William Gaddis** among others. Irony often gave way to radical irony. Radical irony does not necessarily manifest itself on verbal level but sometimes on the level of the text as whole, in juxtaposition of different styles creating an ironic effect or in the use of burlesque or travesty as a part of parodic mode. A best example of this can be **Joseph Heller's** *Catch-22* where the phrase Catch-22 bears idiomatic irony. Also the narrative is structured around a long series of similar ironies.
- **Metafiction:** Metafiction is a dominant literary feature of Postmodern works. To a simplistic understanding, it is that “metafiction is a fiction about fiction” . However Postmodern fictional work is more about issues than only

about fiction. **Patricia Waugh's** definition of metafiction provides a most suitable understanding of the term in Postmodern literature. In Waugh's view metafiction is "...a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictitiousness of the world outside the literary/fictional text".

By using metafictional elements, the postmodern authors point out a difference between reality and its linguistic representation and they emphasize the fact that a language works on different principles than reality. At the same, the use of metafictional elements points out to the fictionalities of fiction, involve a reader in a creation of meaning of the literary (artistic) text, and shows a difference between the past and contemporary forms of art. For example, the first chapters of British author **John Fowles'** novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) begin as a traditional Victorian realistic novel, but later a narrator suddenly breaks a narrative and directly addresses the reader by commenting on the previous plot, possible development of the story and on the writing techniques. Later, as readers learn, the characters from this novel overlap with the characters in a film based on this book and a story of a Victorian love is left unfinished (in both the book and a film) and left to the reader's interpretation. Thus direct addressing a reader and the comments on the fictionality of fiction become metafictional elements. Like Fowles, another Postmodern author, Italo Calvino in his work *If on A winter's Night a Traveller* emphasizes the fictionality of his fiction and draws the reader to participate in the construction of meaning.

- **Intertextuality:** One of the most important aspect of postmodern literary work connected with metafiction is intertextuality. The term was coined by French theorist Julia Kristeva in 1966. Kristeva derives her theory of intertextuality from Michael Bakhtin's idea of a "polyphonic novel" as one that is open to various voices and interpretations and understands a literary text as part of other literary texts in the history of the literary tradition. Thus, what stems from it is the undermining of the idea of authorship—the text is not a product of an author, but exists within specific literary and cultural contexts and thus is open to various understandings and interpretations. In this sense, the role of an author is diminished, as is the study of his biography as in traditional criticism. Intertextuality in postmodern literature

can be a reference or parallel to another literary work, an extended discussion of a work, or adoption of a style. A good example of intertextuality in Postmodern literature is its references to Medieval romance of Don Quixote. Don Quixote is a common reference with Postmodernists, for example **Kathy Acker's** novel *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*. Another example of intertextuality in Postmodernism is **John Barth's** *The Sot-Weed Factor* which deals with Ebenezer Cooke's poem of the same name. Often intertextuality is more complicated than a single reference to another text. Example is that of **Umberto Eco's** novel *The Name of the Rose* takes on the form of a detective novel and makes references to authors such as Aristotle, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Borges.

- **Pastiche:** Related to Postmodern intertextuality, pastiche means to combine or paste. It comes from the Italian word “pasticcio” meaning “a medley of various ingredients: a hotchpotch, a farrago, jumble”. This implies a similarity with a Postmodern literary work consisting of different styles, genres, narrative voices. In Postmodern literature the authors combined or pasted elements of previous genres or styles to create a new narrative style, or to comment on their contemporaries. For example, **Margaret Atwood** uses science fiction and fairy tales. **Thomas Pynchon** uses elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction. However, pastiche always does not refer to narrative technique but also to compositional technique. One of the commonest examples of a pastiche is **B. S. Johnson's** 1969 novel *The Unfortunates*. Johnson released his book in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it in whatever way they chose. You will definitely understand from this, the heights to which indeterminacy can get in the grip of postmodernity!
- **Magic Realism:** Considered to be one of the most important Postmodern literary technique, Magic Realism is the introduction of fantastic or impossible elements into a narrative in ways that they begin to seem real or normal. Magic realist novels include fairies and dreams, wild time shifts, myths as a part of the narrative structure. Magic realism has its roots in the works of **Jorge Luis Borges** and **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**. Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and **Salman Rushdie's** *Midnight's Children* serve as the finest examples of this technique.
- **Palimpsest:** Postmodern authors often use a palimpsest technique. It is a way of rewriting of the old texts by putting them in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Palimpsest was originally “A paper or parchment on which

the original text has been partly erased or effaced to allow a new text to be written, leaving fragments of the original still visible". A French theorist **Gerard Genette** first used the term in reference to Proust's works. As in the postmodern authors' works, palimpsestic technique of writing means the writing of a new text on the layers of the old, traditional (pre)text by the operation of which it acquires a new meaning. In his chapter on Literary Text in Context from his book written jointly with Silvia Pokrivèáková *Understanding Literature*, Anton Pokrivèák gives a fine survey of the use of the term palimpsest and different kinds of textuality.

➤ **Postmodern Literature : An example**

You have by now definitely understood that unreliability of language is an important theme explored by Postmodernists in their work. Language, according to Postmodernists is based on arbitrary signs that can be interpreted differently. To take an example from your syllabized authors, Harold Pinter used the scepticism of language and communication extensively in his plays. The play in your syllabus - *The Birthday Party* (1957), was Pinter's second play and it deals with the acute rupture in human communication. In the play as you will find, language fails to connect people as the characters in the play do not have much to say to each other. They use language only to talk and not to converse. Pinter uses the language game to comment on the emptiness of relationships among the characters. The best example from the play is that of Stanley's narration of his successful piano concert to Meg. When Meg narrates Stanley's story to Goldberg she produces a completely different version of the story. In Pinter's play language is thus used to confuse and puzzle instead of informing. Questions are answered with further questions as can be seen in Act 1 in the conversation between McCann and Goldberg regarding finding the right house. Use of absurd language leads the play to another facet of Postmodernism, i.e., ambiguity. In the play, Stanley, Lulu, Meg, Goldberg all have an ambiguous past. The problem of identity surfaces with Goldberg being called "Nut", "Benny" and "Simey" and McCann is referred both as "Demerot" and "Seamis". Irony being an important characteristic of Postmodern writing, it is used to glory by the playwright in the title of the play itself. *The Birthday Party* is an occasion of celebration and happiness, but the play is about the mental breakdown of the protagonist. As you will further notice, Pinter also plays with the idea of the traditional ending. The play closes with the same tone of banality with which it opened. Stanley's departure raises innumerable questions in the mind of the audience/reader. The ending builds up the

suspense instead of bringing all the issues to a close as we expect in traditional dramaturgy.

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### 1.3.6 Postmodernism in Literary theory

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A major theorist of Postmodernism is the French writer Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's book *Simulations* (1981) is considered one of the most influential works in Postmodern literary criticism. According to Baudrillard there has been "the loss of real" in contemporary life with infiltration of popular culture in every sector of private life. It has led to a loss of distinction between real and imagined and has given birth to what he famously called "hyper-reality", in which distinctions between these are eroded. Baudrillard goes on to say that if a sign is not an index of an underlying reality, but of some other signs, then the system becomes what he calls "simulacrum". He then proposes a four-stage model of how sign works.

- First stage: The sign represents a basic reality
- Second stage: The sign misrepresents or distorts the reality behind it.
- Third Stage: The sign disguises the fact that there is no corresponding reality underneath
- Fourth Stage: The sign bears no relation to any reality at all.

Baudrillard himself provides an example of the third stage by bringing a reference to Disneyland. He tells that "Disneyland" is presented as "imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real". Disneyland has the effect of "concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle". Postmodernism, in fact blurs the distinction between real and unreal and leads us to a "hyperreal" world as Baudrillard calls it.

#### **The work of Postmodernist critics:**

1. Discover Postmodernist themes and tendencies in literary work
2. To find out the intertextual elements in Postmodern works; i.e.; to find out the use of parody, irony, meta-fiction, allusion, pastiche that are at work.
3. Postmodern critics challenge the distinctions between high and low culture.

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### 1.3.7 Postmodernism and Popular Culture

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With the rapid growth in commercialisation, globalisation and the pervasive

impact of international capital, Postmodernism got closely connected with popular culture. In section 1.3.4 you have already seen how Postmodernism influenced art. This section will tell you how Postmodernism got connected with the popular culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

➤ **Film:** Postmodern films explore elements of surrealism by using bizarre images and symbols to provoke emotional reactions within the audience, which otherwise would have been difficult to create using a realistic plot. Luis Buñuel's film *Un Chien Andalou* (English: The Andalusian Dog) written by Buñuel and Dali can be considered as a cult in Postmodern cinema. As such the film lacks a plot, in the conventional sense of the word and is a chronology of disjointed and unconnected events that follows a dream logic in the narrative. Other filmmakers like **Quentin Tarantino**, **Stanley Kubric**, **David Lynch** use postmodern influences in their work. **Kubrick** in his film *The Shining* (based on *The Shining* by Stephen King) designs his set abnormally to bring out the sense of madness in his characters and disorientate the audience. Other examples of Postmodern cinema include **David Lynch's** *Blue Velvet* and *Eraserhead*, **David Fincher's** *Fight Club*, **Spike Jonez's** *Her*, **Quentin Tarantino's** *Pulp Fiction*.

➤ **Music:** Popular music experimented with fragmentation in its chronology. They used disoriented and unconventional orchestral pieces that challenged the perception of time. For example, **David Bowie**, an influential musician of the period uses several fragmented songs and composes one long song in an effort to disorient the listeners. Postmodern trends in musical compositions can also be noted in the works of **Beatles**, **Pink Floyd**, **Radiohead**, **Courtney Love**, **Michael Jackson**, **Madonna**, among others.

➤ **Sports:** With the spread of international capitalization, Postmodern world has seen the commercialization of sport stars. They are often used as a face of advertisements to promote distribution and sales of the particular brand they are endorsing. The sports stars' outfits of the club or national team are manufactured by brands like Reebok and Nike which sell it as a casual wear to the sports fanatics which in turn actually eradicates the distinctions between high and low cultures.

This eradication of a former distinction between high and low culture in literature and culture connects literature to the emerging field of cultural studies which tries to place literature within the context of a broader cultural product.

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### 1.3.8 Summing Up

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The purpose of this Unit has been to acquaint you with the key features of Postmodernism. It is a movement that initially began in art and architecture and moved on to literature, literary criticism popular culture. You are suggested to constantly go and read the section on Modernism in the previous Units because Postmodernism can be best understood in relation to Modernism.

#### **Think and Apply**

This unit gives you a rough idea of what postmodernism is all about. However, there have been controversies galore regarding the nature(s) of postmodernism and the extent of its influence. The whole issue stems from the fact that while several critics believe that it was a reaction to modernism, there are yet many others who look upon it as a continuation of the former. For example, Charles Jencks who is understood to be one of the most significant representatives of postmodernism in architecture and architectural thinking claims that postmodernism started exactly on July 15th, 1972 at 3:32 p.m. in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, when a residential quarter Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, a typical symbol of modernism, was blown up. This residential quarter was built in keeping with rationalist and pragmatic thinking of modernism and modernist architecture. While these are unending debates, you can on your part, with help from your counselor, engage in discussions on the scope and nature of postmodernism. In the present days of neocolonialism that is the ensuing stage of postcolonialism, the aspect of the postmodern renders itself anew to interpretations and reinterpretations that are radical to say the least. You will thus find that it all remains an open-ended proposition.

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### 1.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

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#### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

1. What are the important features of Postmodern literature?
2. In your opinion how can Lyotard be seen as an important figure of Postmodernism?
3. How did the term Postmodernism come into existence?

#### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

1. In your opinion how did Postmodernism get connected with Popular Culture?

2. How did Postmodernism begin as a movement in art?
3. How can Baudrillard be seen as a key figure in Postmodern Literary criticism?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Comment on Baudrillard's four stage model of signs.
2. How is pastiche used in Postmodern literature? Elucidate with examples.
3. Meta-fiction or meta-narrative has been an important characteristic of Postmodern literature. How far do you agree with this statement?

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### **1.3.10 Suggested Reading List**

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Benjamin, Andrew, ed. *The Lyotard Reader*. New Jersey: Blackwell, 1977.

Bhatnagar, M.K. and M. Rajeshwar. Ed. *Post-modernism and English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996.

Connor, Steven. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. New Jersey: Blackwell, 1996

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Kirpal, Viney, ed. *Postmodern English Novel: Interrogating 1980's and 1990's*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1996.

Lewis, Barry. *Postmodernism and Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Powell, Jim. *Post-modernism for Beginners*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd., 1988.

Woods, Tim. *Beginning Postmodernism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

## **Module-2**

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### **Unit-1 □ W. B. Yeats: The Second Coming T. S. Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**

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#### **Structure:**

- 2.1.0 Introduction**
- 2.1.1 Modernism in English Poetry**
- 2.1.2 The Modernist Vision of W.B Yeats and T.S Eliot**
- 2.1.3 Brief Literary Biography of W.B Yeats**
- 2.1.4 Text of ‘The Second Coming’**
- 2.1.5 Glossary and Annotations**
- 2.1.6 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis**
- 2.1.7 Myth and National History in W. B Yeats’ Poetry**
- 2.1.8 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.1.9 Brief Literary Biography of T.S Eliot**
- 2.1.10 Text of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’**
- 2.1.11 Glossary and Annotations**
- 2.1.12 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis**
- 2.1.13 Treatment of Form and Content**
- 2.1.14 Eliot’s Idea of the Modern Man and his Society**
- 2.1.15 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.1.16 Activity for the Learner**
- 2.1.17 Summing Up**
- 2.1.18 Comprehensive Reading List**

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### **2.1.0 Introduction**

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This unit will introduce you to some aspects of Modernism in general and specifically acquaint you with modernism in English Poetry. It is important to

understand such expressions as these terms signify literary concepts and techniques which powerfully characterise the great poems written by the greatest poets of the modern period. The key elements of these poems are experimentation, anti-realism, individualism and a stress on the cerebral rather than emotive aspects. Previous writing was thought to be stereotyped, requiring ceaseless experimentation and rejection of old forms. To a modernist view, poetry should represent itself, or the writer's inner nature, rather than hold up a mirror to nature. Indeed, the poet's vision is all-important, however much it cut him off from society or the scientific concerns of the day. The two poems in this Unit will give you a representative picture of how wide indeed the canvas of Modernism can be.

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### **2.1.1 Modernism in English Poetry**

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As you must have gathered from your reading of Module 1 of this Paper, the term 'modernism' generally covers the creative output of artists and thinkers who saw traditional' approaches to the arts, architecture, literature, religion, social organization (and even life itself) as being outdated in the light of the new economic, social and political circumstances of a society that was by now fully industrialised. Not that modernism categorically defied religion or shunned all the beliefs and ideas associated with the Enlightenment; it would be more accurate to view modernism as a tendency to question, and strive for alternatives to the convictions of the preceding age. The past was now to be seen and treated as different from the modern era, and its axioms and undisputed authorities held up for revision and enquiry.

Modernism has no precise boundaries. In Anglo-American literature, the period is taken as running from 1890 to 1920 and includes the likes of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S Eliot and Wyndham Lewis among many others. But few of its writers shared common aims, and the term was applied retrospectively. In a broad sense, the themes of Modernism begin well back in the nineteenth century, and many do not even reach full expression until the latter half of the twentieth century. That way, Modernism is perhaps better regarded as part of a broad plexus of concerns which are variably represented in a hundred and twenty years of European writing. Modernism is open to diverse interpretations, and even rife with apparent paradoxes and contradictions, it is perhaps best illustrated by the uneasy juxtaposition of the viewpoints declared by two of modernist poetry's most celebrated and emblematic poets: while Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was making his famous call to "make it new",

his contemporary T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was stressing the indispensable nature of tradition in art, insisting upon the artist's responsibility to engage in a complex way with tradition. The overtly complex, contradictory character of modernism is summed up by Peter Childs, who identifies "paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair" (*Modernism*, 2000).

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### **2.1.2 The Modernist Vision of W.B Yeats and T.S Eliot**

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Yeats started his literary career as a romantic poet and gradually evolved into a modernist poet. You need to understand at the outset that the keyword 'modernist' which is a technical innovation or experimentation, basically epitomizes an addition to 'Modern' which is primarily a matter of quality, attitude and treatment. When Yeats began publishing poetry in the 1880s, his poems had a lyrical sense, romantic style, and they focused primarily on love, longing and loss, and infused with Irish myths. His early writing follows the footsteps of romantic verse, utilizing conventional rhyme schemes, lyrical metric patterns, and poetic structures. Although it lacks the serious note of his later writings, his early poetry is still sophisticated and popular. He evolved as a modernist poet. Now, there are several factors which contributed to his poetic evolution: firstly, his interest in mysticism and the occult urged him to explore spiritually and philosophically complex subjects. Yeats' frustrated romantic relationship with Maud Gonne dashed his hopes, this defeat in love made his poetry become cynical. Thus for Yeats, changes and developments in the private domain primarily played an important part in signaling his evolution as a modernist poet.

Moreover, his concern with Irish subjects evolved as he became more and more involved in nationalist political causes. Yeats therefore shifted his focus from myth and folklore to contemporary Irish politics. He united the personal, political and mystical concerns in an intense and visionary artistic whole. Finally, Yeats was a witness the changing face of literary culture in the early twentieth century. As a result, he picked up some of the styles and conventions of the modernist poets. One such is the apocalyptic or catastrophic vision, which is common among all modernists. The modernists experimented with verse forms, the breakdown of the traditional form, the dislocation of that progression and aggressively engaged with contemporary politics, challenged poetic conventions and the literary tradition at large. The use of

disparate images in modernist poetry builds up an emotional pattern which replaces the form of a traditional poem. The discontinuous syntax gives such a poem the look of a jigsaw puzzle. These influences caused his poetry to become darker, edgier, and more philosophical. His poetry changed its course, there is a shift in style and tone over the course of his long poetic career.

T.S Eliot's short poems show an incremental development of the poet's modernist thought. 'Prufrock' as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is more commonly called, was published in June 1915 in *Poetry*; 'Preludes', 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' in *Blast* July 1915, and 'Portrait of a Lady' in *Others* in September 1915. When he was in London Ezra Pound introduced him to the literary group which included Wyndham Lewis, H.D., Richard Aldington, Harriet Weaves, and Ford Maddox Ford. Further he became acquainted with the 'Bloomsbury group'. The avant-grade artists, grouped, and set out to 'make it new' in accordance with Pound's prescription—a revolution—in the arts took place during this period. This period significantly known as the 'modernist' period saw the break-up of the old patterns. This new poetry is anti-representational, anti-narrative, disjunctive, discontinuous and choppy. Its counterparts are cubist painting and cinematic montage. Eliot was never officially an Imagist, but his poetry is a distillation of imagism. Deliberate discontinuance of the linear narration of any discussion or paraphrasable matter is a distinctive feature of Modernist art. In Eliot's poetry we hear an individual speaking, the whole man speaking and then a century speaking.

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### **2.1.3 Brief Literary Biography of W.B Yeats**

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William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865. His father John Butler Yeats was a precariously successful painter, an intellectual, a skeptic, an agnostic, as well as a wit. His mother Susan Pollexfen Yeats was a quiet, religious woman of deep, intuitive feelings who shared a deep bond with nature and peasant life in Sligo. Sligo is a town in North-West Ireland, about 135 miles from the capital city of Dublin and beautifully nestled between rugged mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. It is commonly held that Yeats' poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' talks of Lough Gill, a fresh water lake in Sligo. A look at the poem on the panel beside will tell you what is typical of Yeats' Modernism, that is highly tinged with aspects of Romanticism. For more on Sligo, which was central in shaping the Yeatsian sensibility, you can log on to <http://www.sligo-ireland.com>.

In 1874 the Yeats family moved to London, though Yeats spent his childhood in the Irish countryside with his grandparents in Sligo. He studied at Godolphin School, Hammersmift England and then went to High School at Dublin. During this time, he became acquainted with such leading pre-Raphaelites as William Morris and Burne-Jones. After completing high school, he enrolled in the Metropolitan Art School. In 1885 his first published poems appeared in *The Dublin University Review*. Soon after, he began to come under the influence of John O’Leary, the influential Irish nationalist leader. He also met George Russell, along with whom and a few friends; he founded the *Dublin Hermetic society*. This club was devoted to occult research—magic, theosophy, and spiritualism. In 1888 he joined Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society.

In 1889, his first book, *The Wanderings of Oisín* was published with the help of John O’Leary. He then moved to London and became deeply involved in current literary society. In London he met such literary figures as Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson and others. He founded the Rhymers’ Club. He also met the poet-critic Arthur Symons, who was instrumental in introducing him to new aesthetic ideas as well as to towering personalities like the French poet Mallarme, Verlaine and Villiers de L’Isle-Adam. It was in 1889 that Yeats

met the beautiful actress and nationalist Maud Gonne. He fell in love with her and remained so for the rest of his life. Maud Gonne however felt that Yeats was too idealistic, too dreamy to become her husband. In 1903 she married Major John

### **The Lake Isle of Innisfree**

I will arise and go now, and go to  
Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of  
clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there,  
a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud  
glade.

And I shall have some peace there,  
for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the  
morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight’s all a glimmer,  
and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet’s  
wings.

I will arise and go now, for always  
night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low  
sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or  
on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

Source: The Collected Poems of  
W.B Yeats (1989)

MacBride. Yeats was heart-broken. His frustration in love was followed by many catastrophic events on the national as well as international scenario. His poetry lost its old charm and became terser, harder and full of politics and metaphysics.

In 1905 Maud Gonne was separated from her husband. Yeats renewed his marriage proposal and was rejected once again. He became involved with another woman named Olivia Shakespear. The relationship was brief. It made him more sour. In 1899 Yeats along with George Moore, Edward Martyn and Lady Augusta Gregory, founded the Irish theatrical society which later became the Abbey theatre. It was here that the plays of Irish playwrights like Lady Gregory, John Synge, Sean O'Casey were staged. Yeats' plays *The Countess Cathleen* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* were also staged. After being turned down again by Maud Gonne, he proposed to her beautiful adopted daughter, Iseult, who was almost thirty years his junior. He was rejected. Frustrated and defeated in love, he finally married Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees. He was obsessed with the thought of creating some kind of unity in his life. His wife's power of automatic writing spurred him to write *A Vision*. In 1925 he published *A Vision*. *The Tower* was published in 1928 and *The Winding Stair* in 1933. He was also appointed as a senator of the Irish Free State and served in that capacity till 1928. In 1924 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. During the last years Yeats suffered from heart and lung conditions and a nervous breakdown. In 1939, just five months before his death he composed 'Under Ben Bulbin', one of the greatest poems of his career.

The poem that we are going to study in this unit was composed in 1919 and first appeared in *The Dial* in 1920. It was finally included in the 1921 collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. "The Second Coming" is one of Yeats' most famous and anthologized poems

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#### 2.1.4. Text of 'The Second Coming'

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*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

(Source: W. B. Yeats. *Selected Poetry*. London. Pan Books Ltd. 1974).

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## 2.1.5 Glossary and Annotations

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**The gyre**, a circular or conical shape. The image of interlocking gyres—visually represented as two intersecting conical spirals—symbolize Yeats’ essential belief that all things could be described in terms of cycles and patterns. The soul (or the civilization, the era, and so on) would move from the smallest point of the spiral to the largest before moving along to the other gyre. Yeats describes the current historical moment in terms of these gyres. Yeats believed that this image captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process, and he divided each gyre into particular regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods (and could also represent the psychological phases of an individual’s development). The image is therefore applied to the waxing and waning of a particular historical age or the evolution of an individual from youth to adulthood to old age. The symbol of the interlocking gyres reveals Yeats’ belief in fate and historical determinism as well as his spiritual attitudes toward the development of the human soul. Yeats believed that the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic revelation, as history reached the

end of the outer gyre (to speak in plain terms) and began moving along the inner gyre. With the image of the gyre, Yeats created a symbol in his poetry that stood for his entire philosophy of history as well as spirituality.

**Falcon:** A bird of Prey. Falconing was an activity that was popular in medieval times. The feudal landowners in the middle ages often built aviaries where they kept birds to use for hunting. The most common were falcons and hawks. The bird was tightly controlled by its master.

There is also a Biblical reference to a falcon in Job 28:7 which refers to it's eye."That path no bird knows, Nor has the falcon's eye seen it". Their eye's are constantly watching for prey. And in the poem the falcon did not return to the falconer. The falcon represents humanity and brings in the image of ferocity.

***Spiritus Mundi:*** is literally the "Soul of the Universe", "Spirit of the World", "Collective spirit of the mankind". *Spiritus Mundi* brings an image of the sphinx to the poet's mind. Yeats sees the sphinx rising up to bring forth the end of the world. The sphinx slept in a world of nightmares for two thousand years.

**A rocking cradle:** The birth of the Anti-Christ (literal and figuratively), and Bethlehem was the birth place of Jesus Christ. The "beast" is slouching toward it's aim (Bethlehem) to wreak havoc (the spirit of this world hates humans) on this earth.

**The lion** is a beast that is mentioned in the Bible, Revelations 4 but it is not as an ominous sign. Jesus was also called the lion of the tribe of Judah. However, there are several scriptures that mention the lion's predatory might.

**Anarchy:** The reference is to chapter 13, Book of St. Mark. calls to mind the reign of terror on Earth before Christ comes back. It is related to the futility and anarchy of the present times.

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## 2.1.6 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

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### ➤ The Paraphrase

The speaker describes a nightmarish scene: the falcon, turning in a widening "gyre" (spiral), cannot hear the falconer; "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold"; anarchy is let loose upon the world; "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned." The best people, the speaker says, lack all conviction, but the worst "are full of passionate intensity." Surely, the

speaker asserts, the world is near a revelation; “Surely the Second Coming is at hand.” But definitely, this is nothing like the benevolence of the First Coming. No sooner does he think of “the Second Coming,” that he is troubled by “a vast image of the *Spiritus Mundi*, or the collective spirit of mankind: somewhere in the desert, a giant sphinx (“A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / A gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun”) is moving, while the shadows of desert birds reel about it. The darkness drops again over the speaker’s sight, but he knows that the sphinx’s twenty centuries of “stony sleep” have been made a nightmare by the motions of “a rocking cradle.” And what “rough beast,” he wonders, “its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”

### ➤ Critical Analysis

Yeats begins the poem with the image of a falcon wheeling about in the sky, far away from the falconer who released it. The bird continues to wheel and gyre further and further away from the falconer. This metaphor stands for the young people of Ireland who have given up the standards of their age old tradition, for the new art, the new literature, the new music, and the other novelties during Yeats’ time. There is yet another interpretation of the falcon-falconer image, and that is the image of the head or intellect as the falcon and the rest of the body and the sensations of the body and feelings and emotions as the falconer. The last two lines of the first stanza are simply a commentary on the present times. Yeats says “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” This also suggests a dissociation between the best, which Yeats identifies as the intellectuals, and the worst, whom Yeats associates with the common people, the mob who react with passionate intensity not with conscious intellectual study and expression. The first part of the poem also illustrates by reference not only to the contemporary events but also to Yeats’ fundamental belief — the fusion of mythology and history. The central belief or idea around which our civilization (falcon) had revolved (Christianity) has lost its stronghold. It can no more hold society in an orderly structure like a wheel around it (gyres or outward-spiraling circles). Things are falling apart. The present civilization is disintegrating.

In the first stanza of the poem Yeats gives us the first bird metaphor. In the second part of the poem Yeats gives us the second bird metaphor in the form of

“indignant desert birds.” These creatures appear to have been roosting on the Sphinx, but when the mammoth creature began to move its “slow thighs” the birds became agitated and took off. The poet shows us the image a little later. The birds are flying around above the slowly moving Sphinx.

At the start of the second stanza Yeats calls for a revelation, saying “Surely a revelation is at hand.” In terms of the Christian myth, the poem prophesies the arrival of a new God. It incorporates Christ’s prediction of His second coming in Matthew XXIV and St. John’s description of the beast of the Apocalypse in Revelations. Falcon, darkness and blood accentuate the horror that is closing in upon Mankind. Yeats was influenced by the theosophical notion as well as by the view of comparative mythologists that a new God comes at regular intervals to replace the old God. The contemporary scene will be followed soon by another. The “rough beast” slouching toward Bethlehem is the symbol of this new age; the speaker’s vision of the rising sphinx is his vision of the character of the new world.

Thus the second coming here is not really a second coming of Christ himself, but a new figure. A cruel, bestial, pitiless creature who will represent the new era as Christ symbolized the old civilization. The second coming of such a fierce spirit after two thousand years will be a new nightmare. For Yeats believed that history moves in vast two thousand year cycles. Each cycle representing a civilization—such as the Greco-Roman era (200-0 B.C.) which had begun with the annunciation of Leda and birth of Helen. The Christian era (0-200 A.D.) which marked the annunciation of Mary and the birth of Christ. This new dark beginning of a subjective civilization will usher in no hope. No Christ like figure but a rough beast, “a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*” is going to take place the cradle of Bethlehem.” Twenty centuries of stony sleep/ Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle”. There will be no pity, no mercy but the rough beast will “vex” man’s old sleep and turn it not to a dream but a nightmare. Yeats modifies the well-known image of the sphinx to embody the poem’s vision of the climactic coming. By rendering the terrifying prospect of disruption and change into an easily imagined horrifying monster, thus Yeats makes an abstract fear become tangible and real. The “rough beast” slouching toward Bethlehem is the symbol of this new age; the speaker’s vision of the rising sphinx is his vision of the character of the new world.

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### **2.1.7 Myth and National History in W. B Yeats' Poetry**

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Myths enable man to reach what he misses in life: they thus, lend completion and unity in life. The poetry and plays of W.B. Yeats often take subject matter from traditional Celtic folklore and myth. You must remember having read of the Celts in Paper 1. So you can well understand how far back in time Yeats travels to source his myths. By incorporating into his work the stories and characters of Celtic origin, Yeats endeavoured to encapsulate something of the national character of his beloved Ireland. The reasons and motivations for Yeats' use of Celtic themes can be understood in terms of the authors own sense of nationalism as well as an overriding personal interest in mythology and the oral traditions of folklore.

'The Second Coming' illustrates by reference to the essential oneness of world's mythologies and the close correspondence between mythology and national history. The poem prophesies the arrival of a new God, in terms of Christian faith. The poet successfully blends Christ's prediction of His second coming in Matthew XXIV and St. John's description of the beast of the Apocalypse in Revelations. In the poem another related imagery which stresses the Christian connection is the mention of Bethlehem with its suggestion of the idea of innocence. The Christian myth that a new God comes at regular intervals to replace the old God is an integral part of the symbolic structure of the poem.

The Christian era to which Yeats himself belongs, is coming to an end. So he is trying to interpret the contemporary scene in terms of the philosophy of national history. He essentially believes that the horror of the subjective era will surely replace the present objective era of which he himself is a part. He, therefore, picks from the Christian myth the image of Christ and that of the beast of Apocalypse to emphasize the contrast between the present objective era and the one that is to follow.

The falcon represents man out of touch with Christ. Anarchy and the worst men dominate the present world as it is drowned in a blood-dimmed tide. Out of this chaos must emerge another cone of civilization. The place of birth of this civilization will again be Bethlehem, but this vision of the Second Coming turns into a nightmare as Yeats sees a rough beast with " A shape with lion body and the head of a man/

A Gaze blank and pitiless as the sun” slouching towards Bethlehem to replace the Christian era. Blood, darkness, Falcon all accentuate the horror that is coming upon mankind. Thus the Christian myths, theosophical and anthropological notions of rebirth, Yeats’s own theory of national history of Ireland are fused in the poem.

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## **2.1.8 Comprehension Exercises**

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### **● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Critically examine the thematic aspects of Yeats ‘The Second Coming’.
2. Discuss Yeats use of symbolism in ‘The Second Coming’.

Show how ‘The Second Coming’ becomes a condemnation of degenerate times.

### **● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. How does Yeats depict his time in ‘The Second Coming’?
2. Is ‘The Second Coming’ a conflict between the modern and ancient world?
3. What is the “vast image” he sees in ‘The Second Coming’?
4. Is the poem a commentary on the weakening of Christian values?

### **● Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What is gyre in ‘The Second Coming’?
2. What drowns the “ceremony of innocence” in ‘The Second Coming’?
3. What vision of future is described in the second half of the poem ‘The Second Coming’?

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## 2.1.9 Brief Literary Biography of T.S Eliot

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Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri. Eliot's grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot was a Unitarian minister and founded the first Unitarian Church in St. Louis. Hence the entire family of Eliot was devoted to the tenets of Unitarianism. Eliot's father Henry Ware Eliot (1814-1919) was a successful businessman and a painter too. His mother Charlotte Champe Stearns (1843-1930) exercised a deep, complex and life-long influence on her son.

The Unitarian Church believes that God is just one entity, and this may be seen as counter to Trinitarianism which looks upon God as three persons in one being. The Unitarians perceive Christ not as God but as 'son of God', hence the Saviour, because he was inspired by God in his moral teachings.

Right from his early childhood Eliot trained to become a poet. At the age of ten he brought out eight issues of his own magazine *Fireside*. It contained 'Fiction, Gossip, Theatre, Jokes and all interesting things, including verses (loose imitations of Lewis Carroll), adventure stories, and a "Kook's Korner"'. Even while studying at Smith Academy (1898 to 1905), he contributed short stories and poems for the *Smith Academy Record*. In 1905, he went to Milton Academy, to prepare for his entrance to Harvard University. He entered Harvard in 1906. At Harvard, teachers like Irving Babbitt and George Santayana deeply influenced him. Under their influence he started advocating classicism and tradition as opposed to romanticism, liberalism and the notion of progress. He began to study Sanskrit, Pali and Indian Philosophy.

He drew inspiration from late-nineteenth-century English poets - John Davidson and Ernest Dowson. The Scottish poet James Thomson's poem *The City of Dreadful Night* left an indelible mark on Eliot's poetic career. During his second year at Harvard Eliot began to read Baudelaire and learnt the possibility of the art of juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. From 1908 Eliot started reading Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. He was also introduced to the French poets of the nineteenth century. It was a new feeling and a sort of revelation for Eliot. The poetry of Stephane Mallarme and Jules Laforgue taught him an economy of expression and an uncompromising effort to find his own poetic voice. Above all, it was Dante who exercised the most persistent and deepest influence on Eliot's poetry. From Dante, Eliot came to know that the poet should be 'the servant of his language, rather than the master of it.'

Eliot received his BA in 1909 and in 1910 he received his MA. In October 1910 he left for Paris to read French literature and philosophy for a year. Eliot wrote his dissertation on F.H. Bradley (1864-1924). In 1914 Eliot was awarded a Sheldon travelling fellowship. In July he went to the University of Marburg in Germany to attend a summer course. The First World War was imminent, which made Eliot move to London. In London he met Pound in September 1914 and showed him the manuscript of 'Prufrock'. In June 1915 Eliot married Vivien (or Vivienne) Haigh-Wood. Soon after marriage the couple faced financial constraints; it was during this time that Eliot took up the job as a schoolmaster at High Wycombe Grammar School. After some time he found it very boring. In 1917 he gave it up for a post in the foreign department at Lloyds' Bank in the City of London. To supplement his income, he also started giving extension lectures on Modern French Literature, Victorian Literature and also on Elizabethan Literature. Some of these lectures formed a substantial part of *The Sacred Wood*. He died in 1965.

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## 2.1.10 The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

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*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse  
 A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
 Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
 Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo  
 Non toruo vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,  
 Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

*Let us go then, you and I,  
 When the evening is spread out against the sky  
 Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,*

*The muttering retreats  
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
 Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
 Of insidious intent*

*To lead you to an overwhelming question ...  
 Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
 Let us go and make our visit.*

5

10

*In the room the women come and go  
 Talking of Michelangelo.*

*The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, 15  
 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,  
 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, 20  
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.  
 And indeed there will be time  
 For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
 Rubbing its back upon the window-panes; 25  
 There will be time, there will be time  
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
 There will be time to murder and create,  
 And time for all the works and days of hands  
 That lift and drop a question on your plate; 30  
 Time for you and time for me,  
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
 And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

*In the room the women come and go 35  
 Talking of Michelangelo.  
 And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair — 40  
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")  
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —  
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")*

<i>Do I dare</i>	45
<i>Disturb the universe?</i>	
<i>In a minute there is time</i>	
<i>For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.</i>	
<i>For I have known them all already, known them all:</i>	
<i>Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,</i>	50
<i>I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;</i>	
<i>I know the voices dying with a dying fall</i>	
<i>Beneath the music from a farther room.</i>	
<i>So how should I presume?</i>	
<i>And I have known the eyes already, known them all—</i>	55
<i>The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,</i>	
<i>And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,</i>	
<i>When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,</i>	
<i>Then how should I begin</i>	
<i>To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?</i>	60
<i>And how should I presume?</i>	
<i>And I have known the arms already, known them all—</i>	
<i>Arms that are braceleted and white and bare</i>	
<i>(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)</i>	
<i>Is it perfume from a dress</i>	65
<i>That makes me so digress?</i>	
<i>Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.</i>	
<i>And should I then presume?</i>	
<i>And how should I begin?</i>	
<i>Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets</i>	70
<i>And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes</i>	
<i>Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...</i>	
<i>I should have been a pair of ragged claws</i>	
<i>Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.</i>	
<i>And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!</i>	75
<i>Smoothed by long fingers,</i>	
<i>Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,</i>	
<i>Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.</i>	
<i>Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,</i>	

*Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? 80*  
*But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,*  
*Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,*  
*I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;*  
*I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,*  
*And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, 85*  
*And in short, I was afraid.*  
*And would it have been worth it, after all,*  
*After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,*  
*Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,*  
*Would it have been worth while, 90*  
*To have bitten off the matter with a smile,*  
*To have squeezed the universe into a ball*  
*To roll it towards some overwhelming question,*  
*To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,*  
*Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"— 95*  
*If one, settling a pillow by her head*  
*Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;*  
*That is not it, at all."*  
*And would it have been worth it, after all,*  
*Would it have been worth while, 100*  
*After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,*  
*After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—*  
*And this, and so much more?—*  
*It is impossible to say just what I mean!*  
*But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen: 105*  
*Would it have been worth while*  
*If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,*  
*And turning toward the window, should say:*  
*"That is not it at all,*  
*That is not what I meant, at all." 110*  
*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;*  
*Am an attendant lord, one that will do*  
*To swell a progress, start a scene or two,*  
*Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,*

<i>Deferential, glad to be of use, Politic, cautious, and meticulous; Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse; At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— Almost, at times, the Fool.</i>	115
<i>I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.</i>	120
<i>I do not think that they will sing to me. I have seen them riding seaward on the waves Combing the white hair of the waves blown back When the wind blows the water white and black. We have lingered in the chambers of the sea</i>	125
<i>By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown Till human voices wake us, and we drown.</i>	130

(Source: T. S. Eliot. *Selected Poems*. India. Rupa & Co. 1992)

‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ was begun at Harvard in February 1910, and the final version was assembled in Munich in July-August 1911 from a number of fragments written over the past year. It was published in the Chicago magazine *Poetry* in June 1915 through the mediation of Ezra Pound. Eliot met Pound in London in September 1914 and later sent him *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* along with some of his other poems. It was later printed as a 12 book pamphlet in 1917 titled *Prufrock and Other Observations*.

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### 2.1.11 Glossary and Annotations

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**Etherized:** It has clinical as well as romantic connotations. ‘Ether’ was used for anesthetics, and ‘ethereal’ has romantic associations. Notice the strange juxtaposition of meanings that Modernism can do.

**An overwhelming question:** Prufrock’s intended proposal to the lady he is to visit, also a question concerning the actual meaning of Prufrock’s life.

**Michelangelo:** Great Italian sculptor, painter and poet.

**Works and days;** A poem by Greek writer Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C) a contrast between the world of the peasant and the corrupted society in which Prufrock lives.

**A dying fall:** an echo of Duke Orsino's words in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* I, i. The voices of Prufrock and the women are submerged beneath the music and repetitive conversation.

**Butt-ends:** The butts or ends of smoked cigarettes.

**The eternal footman:** A parodic allusion to John Bunyan's (1622-88) *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian hopes to receive God's recognition of his goodness.

**Nor was meant to be:** Here is an echo of the opening line of Hamlet's soliloquy when he contemplates suicide: 'To be, or not to be'. (III,i). An echo of Dante's words: 'I am not Aeneas am not Paul'.

**Full of high sentence:** A reference to the Clerk of Oxford in the General Prologue (line 306) of *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343? -1400). It means full of sentiments and talks.

**Fool:** A court jester in Elizabethan drama. Eliot here refers to Yorick, the court jester in *Hamlet*.

**Shall I part my hair behind?:** A reference to the autobiography *Ushant* (1952), by Conrad Aiken, where he speaks of a fellow friend at Harvard who dressed unconventionally with his hair parted behind. In Prufrock's context, it implies his tussle between the desire to flaunt a personality in dress and appearance, and

**Do I dare to eat a peach?:** Peaches were considered indigestible, according to Elizabeth Schneider ( 1910). Here it probably refers to the solitary pleasures of the experience of taste

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## 2.1.12. Paraphrase and Critical Analysis

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### □ PARAPHRASE

#### ➤ EPIGRAPH

The Epigraph is an answer by Count Guido da Montefeltro (1223-98) in Dante's *Inferno* xxvii, 61-6,. 'If I thought my answer to one who ever could return to the

world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee'. Guido was punished for his treacherous advice on earth to Pope Boniface. When Dante requests Guido to reveal his identity, 'so may thy name on earth maintain its front', he does so because he firmly believes that like him Dante is also eternally damned and has no possibility of returning to earth.

### **Lines 1-3**

*LET us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;*

- It's not clear who Prufrock is singing to, but the title gives us a hint. Love songs are usually sung to people you're in love with, so it's a safe bet that Prufrock is addressing someone he loves.
- Because these were more traditional times, we'll assume this "someone" is a woman. Also, just to liven things up a bit, let's pretend that we, the readers of the poem, are the woman he loves. Feel free to giggle now if you want.
- Prufrock tells us the time of day that we're taking this trip: evening. But, this is not your ordinary evening: this "evening" is "spread out against the sky like a patient etherised upon the table."
- The image compares the evening sky to a patient strapped to an operating table and given ether, a kind of anesthetic, to numb the pain of the surgery that is about to happen.

### **Lines 4-7**

*Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:*

- Prufrock repeats his invitation for us to come along with him. Now, usually when we go on a walk with someone, especially someone we love, we try to pick someplace romantic – a moonlit beach, a tree-lined avenue, that sort of thing. Not Prufrock. He's going to take us through "half-deserted streets," where people walk around "muttering" to themselves.
- These are the kind of streets that are filled with "cheap hotels" where one might stay for one night only as a last resort.

- Actually, these are the kind of restaurants that have “sawdust” on the floor to clear up all the liquor that people are spilling as they start to get drunk. It’s also littered with oyster-shells that no one bothers to clean up. It is dirty.
- Eliot is sending us a lot of small signals in the first section. “Half-deserted” makes the streets sound pretty sketchy, and “one-night cheap hotels” only adds to this impression. “Oysters” are an aphrodisiac, which hints at the lust and sexual affinity of the modern people. Prufrock has taken us on a stroll through the seedy red-light district, where prostitutes and vagrants hang out.
- The epigraph, which comes from Dante’s *Inferno* shows, we’re in a different kind of hell – the underbelly of a modern city.

### Lines 8-12

*Streets that follow like a tedious argument*

*Of insidious intent*

*To lead you to an overwhelming question ...*

*Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”*

*Let us go and make our visit.*

- The streets twist and turn like a “tedious argument.” It’s an argument with “insidious intent” – the streets are so confusing it’s as if they were trying to trick us into getting lost.
- Prufrock is also being “insidious” by trying to trick us into taking a walk through the seedy part of town.
- We could even go a step further and say that both the streets and Prufrock resemble Guido da Montefeltro, who tried to fool God (see “Epigraph”).
- The streets are leading somewhere, however. They lead “to an overwhelming question,” a question of huge and possibly life-altering significance.

### Lines 13-14

*In the room the women come and go*

*Talking of Michelangelo.*

- Women are entering and leaving a room talking about the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo. For one thing, the women must be pretty high-class to be talking about Renaissance art, but their repeated action of “coming and going” seems surprisingly pointless.
- Eliot loves those Italians. The quote is adopted from a poem the 19th century

French writer Jules Laforgue, but that doesn't really help us figure out what it means here.

- Eliot includes sneaky references to Dante *everywhere*? Well, Dante's Hell features a lot of really smart people who repeat utterly pointless physical gestures over and over again in small, cramped spaces.

Finally, these lines have an incredibly simple, singsong rhyme that could get really annoying if one had to listen to it for a long time. It sounds like a nursery rhyme, which totally does not fit with the intellectual subject of famous painters.

### **Lines 15-22**

*The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.*

- It appears that the poem is back to talking about the “half-deserted streets” from stanza I.
- The streets are filled with a “yellow fog,” which sounds really nasty, actually. This detail might allow us to take a look at the location of the poem.
- Eliot was really interested in England, and he moved there before this poem was published. The capital of England is London, which gets really foggy. So maybe we're in London. Around the beginning of the 20th century, London was a really modern city that also had some of the roughest, seediest neighbourhoods anywhere.
- This fog seems pretty acrobatic. It has a “back” and a “muzzle,” which sounds like either a dog or a cat. Also, it “licks” things and makes “sudden leaps.” The poet is comparing the quiet, sneaky, and athletic movement of the fog to a common housecat. The fog is wandering around the streets like a cat wanders around a house.
- Finally, the fog gets tired and “curls” around the city houses to “fall asleep” like a cat would curl around something smaller, maybe the leg of a table or chair.

- It is a “soft October night,” which means the poem is set in autumn.

### **Lines 23-25**

*And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;*

- Here, the phrase “there will be time” refers to a poem called “To His Coy Mistress” by the seventeenth century English poet Andrew Marvell.
- Prufrock, however, uses the reference to “time” in exactly the opposite way. He thinks there’s plenty of time for delays and dwindling.
- Just like in Marvell’s poem, Prufrock addresses himself to a “mistress,” someone he “loves,” but here it is Prufrock, and not the mistress, who is being “coy.”

### **Lines 26-34**

*There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

- He keeps repeating that “There will be time,” as if he hasn’t quite convinced himself, or his lover.
- In the next line, he says there’s “time for all the works and days of hands.” Here is an allusion. *Works and Days* was the name of the name of a work written by the Greek poet Hesiod. It’s poem about the importance of working for a living and not living a lazy a pointless existence.
- Prufrock seems to refer to individual body parts instead of whole. So far we have “faces” and “hands.”
- But no, we still do not understand what the question is.
- There’s also time for “indecisions,” for not deciding things.

**Lines 35-36**

*In the room the women come and go*

*Talking of Michelangelo.*

- These lines seem to “come and go” from the poem just like the women they describe.

**Lines 37-39**

*And indeed there will be time*

*To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”*

*Time to turn back and descend the stair,*

- There’s still plenty of time to do all the important things Prufrock wants to do, except now he is second-guessing himself.
- The setting gets more specific, too. We might imagine him standing outside the upstairs room his “love” is in. He paces back and forth and tries to decide whether to ask his big question. “Do I dare?” he wonders. But no, he does not dare. He turns around and heads back downstairs.

**Lines 40-44**

*With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—*

*[They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”]*

*My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,*

*My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—*

*[They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”]*

- Prufrock has a big bald spot. He’s probably a middle-aged man, or at least close to it.
- Also, he seems worried about what others will say about him and his bald spot and his thin arms and legs.
- His only attractive features, are his clothes. He has a nice coat and necktie, which he wears according to the fashion of the time. He is not a trend-setter, rather, he’s a trend-follower.
- One can recall that Guido da Montefeltro was also worried about his reputation, even though it didn’t matter because he was already in hell.

**Lines 45-48**

*Do I dare*

*Disturb the universe?*

*In a minute there is time*

*For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.*

- Prufrock does not want to rock the boat or “disturb the universe.” That would involve taking a risk, and Prufrock will never take risks.
- But he still insists (again) that he has plenty of time. In other words he has starting to sound pretty kooky, like a broken record. He insists that everything could change “in a minute” – if only he could make a decision.
- But things can also change back again in another “minute,” once he “revises” the decision he made.

### **Lines 49-54**

*For I have known them all already, known them all:—*

*Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,*

*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;*

*I know the voices dying with a dying fall*

*Beneath the music from a farther room.*

*So how should I presume?*

- Prufrock says he has heard voices “dying” or fading away when music starts to play in a “farther room.” He lives through other people.
- The phrase “dying fall” is, another literary reference, this time to Shakespeare’s famous play, *Twelfth Night*. In the first scene of the play, a lovesick count named Orsino is listening to music that has a “dying fall.” The music reminds him of his love for one of the other characters.
- In this poem, however, it is as if Prufrock were overhearing the “voices” of another couple – maybe Orsino and his love? – in another room, which get covered up by yet another room even “farther” away.
- It is a tricky image, we know, but the point is that Prufrock can only experience love at second- and third-hand. If Orsino’s love is the real thing, then Prufrock’s is just a copy of a copy of a copy.
- Finally, he asks, “So how should I presume?” To “presume” is to take for granted that something is the case. The speaker of Andrew Marvell’s *To His Coy Mistress* presumes that his mistress wants to be with him. Prufrock too assumes too much.

### **Lines 55-56**

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,*

- Here Prufrock goes with the body parts again – this time it is “the eyes. He is trying to cover up his fear. However he is not very successful.

### **Lines 57-61**

*And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
And how should I presume?*

- He has started to confuse his sense of language. He just told us that he has “already” known the eyes that would formulate him, but now he talks as if this event has not happened yet. He imagines himself “sprawling on a pin” and put, “wriggling,” on a wall.
- He’s referring to the practice, in his time, where insects that were collected by scientists were “pinned” inside a glass frame and hung on a wall so they could be preserved and inspected.
- The image of a man tied down and “wriggling” might also remind you of the very first lines of the poem, when the evening was “spread out” like a patient on the operating table.
- The “butt-ends” could refer to any kind of end – the little odds and ends of his daily life, the evenings he spent, etc. But it is also the word people use for the end of a cigarette, the part that does not get smoked. Prufrock is comparing his life to a used-up cigarette.

### **Lines 62-64**

*And I have known the arms already, known them all—  
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]*

- Prufrock here sees women merely as “arms,” and he uses the same repetitive phrase about how he has “known them all.”
- He sounds tired and bored, but he seems pretty excited about the arm in line sixty-four. This is probably the arm of the woman he invited on a walk (the “you” of the poem).

- If they did go for a walk through half-deserted streets, it would make sense to see her arm under the “lamplight.” The soft, “light brown hair” makes this arm different from all the other ones and would seem to contradict his claim to have seen *all* the arms. These lines show Prufrock’s essential contradictory nature.

### **Lines 65-66**

*It is perfume from a dress  
That makes me so digress?*

- Prufrock admits that he has been “digressing,” or wandering away from the main point.
- He blames his digression on the scent of a woman’s perfume. For a man that claims to have known all the women, he is still fairly preoccupied with all things feminine.

### **Lines 67-69**

*Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.  
And should I then presume?  
And how should I begin?*

- Lots of arms. It reminds us of Dr. Seuss’s “Green Eggs and Ham.” He still has not told us what that something is. He does not even know where to “begin” talking about it.

### **Lines 70-72**

*Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?*

- Here Prufrock wonders how to “begin” to talk about that difficult subject. This is the story of his “days and ways” from line 60, and it begins “I have gone at dusk through narrow streets.”
- He is basically taking us back to the beginning of the poem. The most interesting new detail he has to offer us is that he saw “lonely men” smoking pipes out of their windows.
- Some people bring the party with them wherever they go; Prufrock brings loneliness with him.

### **Lines 73-74**

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.*

- Here is another image of Prufrock himself. It might also be the most accurate self-evaluation that Prufrock offers in the entire poem.
- The crab is the perfect image of Prufrock, because it seems suited to a single over-riding goal: self-protection.

### **Lines 75-78**

*And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!  
Smoothed by long fingers,  
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,  
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.*

- Prufrock continues to confuse the past, present, and future. He winds the clock back to the afternoon and then plays it forward to the evening, which is when we started reading the poem.
- The afternoon and evening are “sleeping,” much as the cat-like fog was asleep outside the house in line 22. He is wondering if he should “wake” the day up somehow, say, by asking (cough, cough) a certain question? But he is hesitant because the day seems so peacefully asleep, as if it were being “smoothed by long fingers.”
- This image of the fingers makes us think of petting a cat, but it may remind one of something different. The evening is “asleep” and “tired” – nothing is happening. But it might also be “malingering,” or pretending to be tired.

### **Lines 79-80**

*Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?*

- Now “tea” is over. In line 34, he hadn’t had tea yet, but now he’s digesting all the sweet and tasty things he consumed.
- Prufrock is feeling so lazy, in fact, he is not sure he has the “strength” to ask the “overwhelming question,” which would produce a big decision or a “crisis.”

### **Lines 81-83**

*But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,  
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;*

- Prufrock does not want to be confused with a prophet.
- In the Bible, the prophet John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus, dies after the stepdaughter (Salome) of King Herod asks for his head on a platter.
- Prufrock is not sure what he is trying to say – he may just be feeling sorry for himself.

### **Lines 84-86**

*I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.*

- He continues to mope around and feel sorry for himself. He already feels as if his best days are behind him, like a candle that flickers and goes out.
- In the old days (even older than Eliot's poem), a "footman" was like a butler who would help rich people do things. One of the things a footman would do is to hold the coat as one got in a carriage or entered a house.
- But this footman is not so friendly. He is the eternal Footman – "death" – and if he is holding your coat, it means you are probably about to enter some place that you won't come out of again.
- Prufrock has another rare moment of honesty when he admits to being afraid.

### **Lines 87-93**

*And would it have been worth it, after all,  
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
Would it have been worth while,  
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,*

- Time in the poem continues to play tricks on us. Now Prufrock talks as if he has already passed up on his opportunity to do that important thing.

- He starts this big long thought about whether “it would have been worth it,” which he won’t finish until the end of the stanza.
- It seems that even more eating and drinking have been going on, as well as “some talk of you and me”.
- He talks about “biting off the matter,” as if it were something he could eat, like his precious marmalade (a kind of jam). “The matter,” we assume, is the important thing that he meant to discuss so many lines ago.
- He compares the effort it would require to take on “some overwhelming question” to squeezing the entire universe into a ball.

### Lines 94-95

*To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”–*

- Prufrock compares his task of asking the question to Lazarus coming back from the dead.
- In the Bible, a rich man named Dives dies and is sent to Hell. Around the same time, a poor man named Lazarus dies and is sent to Heaven. Dives asks the prophet Abraham to please send Lazarus back to earth to warn his brothers to mend their ways or they’ll end up in Hell. But Abraham refused: ‘if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead’.
- The epigraph comes from a poem about another man who, unlike Dives, *did* make it back from Hell to tell warn people about sin. His name was Dante Alighieri, the poet.
- But Prufrock is no Lazarus, nor is he a Dante. He is more like Dives, the man who never escapes from his terrible situation.

### Lines 96-98

*If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
Should say: “That is not what I meant at all.  
That is not it, at all.”*

- Prufrock finally completes the sentence, “Would it have been worth it, after all,” from the beginning of the stanza. Clearly Prufrock thinks that, no, it would not have been worth it. So, he thinks, it is a good thing he never tried or risked anything.
- He never asked the question, because he was too afraid of getting rejected. So he will never know if that’s what she “meant”.

**Lines 99-104**

*And would it have been worth it, after all,  
Would it have been worth while,  
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor –  
And this, and so much more? –  
It is impossible to say just what I mean!*

- He wonders if it would have been worth it if after him and his love have experienced all of these nice but trivial pleasures of everyday, middle-class life, including “sunsets,” “novels,” and “teacups” – but he can not finish his thought.
- Prufrock is right about one thing: he is totally incapable of saying what he means.

**Lines 105-110**

*But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:  
Would it have been worth while  
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
And turning toward the window, should say:  
“That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant, at all.”*

- Ah, now he comes up with the right words to say what he means. It is as if the words locked in his “nerves” were being projected by a “magic lantern” onto a screen for him to read.
- In a typical Prufrock-fashion, even the right words are disappointing. It is just another image of a woman sitting on a couch or a bed and saying she has been misunderstood.
- Once again, it is implied that he does not think asking her would have been worth the risk of rejection.
- But, once again, he will never know.

**Lines 111-119**

*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,*

*Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.*

- Here is a reference from Shakespeare.
- In *Hamlet*, the title character is an indecisive man, much like Prufrock has been for most of the poem. Hamlet vacillates. Like Prufrock, Hamlet is a coward who talks too much. But now Prufrock says he is not like Hamlet, after all.
- Prufrock compares himself to a minor character in the play, one of the “attendants” who serve the king. We think he’s talking about Polonius.
- In *Hamlet*, Polonius is the father of Ophelia, the heroine, and everyone respects him because he always takes the cautious route and acts like “an easy tool.”
- Polonius talks a lot– he uses fancy words (“high sentence”) and proverbs – but in the end, he is kind of a dullard. As Prufrock so cautiously puts it, he is “almost ridiculous” and almost like “the Fool.”
- With this recognition, Prufrock has finally arrived at a pretty honest assessment of himself.

### **Lines 120-121**

*I grow old ... I grow old ...  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

- Prufrock has disguised the passage of time, he can no longer hide the fact that he’s getting older and older. He blew his chance to ask the question, and now he is like the man who stays at a party too long, except that the party is his own poem.
- Because he already failed to make one big decision, he is going to pretend he is an assertive, confident man by making a bunch of comically minor decisions. Rolling up the trouser is a major marker of his minor decision.

### **Lines 122-123**

*Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.*

- Parting one’s hair behind was considered “daringly bohemian” at the time.
- Prufrock is still trying to make all kinds of tiny decisions, now that he has

missed his big chance. As always, he is interested in the small pleasures of food and fashion, like the peach and the white flannel trousers.

**Line 124**

*I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.*

- Prufrock sees some mermaids.

**Line 125**

*I do not think that they will sing to me.*

- Even the mermaids won't sing to him. Prufrock lacks self-confidence.

**Lines 126-128**

*I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.*

- Of all the things Prufrock claims to have seen, are the mermaids.
- These mermaids look like they are surfing on the waves with their tails. The only troubling sign is that the waves have “white hair,” which makes us think of old people.

**Lines 129-131**

*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

- This is kind of an “it was all a dream” ending, but even weirder.
- Prufrock brings “us” back into the picture, saying that we have been hanging out in the ocean with him.
- The word “chambers” has two meaning here: it can refer to small cramped spaces, or it can refer to rooms, especially bedrooms.
- Prufrock has spent significant amounts of time lurking outside of rooms and imagining women who are wrapped in shawls and laying on pillows. We do not know who the “sea-girls” are, but they do not seem quite as majestic as the mermaids.
- The “human voices” may remind us of the “voices with a dying fall” from line 52.

- It could signal that Prufrock has truly grown insane, or that his “true self” is really more crab-like than human, or that, yes, he has been dreaming the whole time.

### ➤ CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The landscape of the poem may be the neurotic modern Boston city which resembles Dante’s medieval *Inferno*. The lines comprising the dedication at the beginning of the poem are from *The Divine Comedy (Purgatorio XXI, 133-6)* by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). Eliot here pays tribute to his friend Jean Verdenal, who was Eliot’s fellow lodger in Paris in 1910-11. Dante is being conducted through the Inferno and Purgatory by the spirit of the Roman poet Virgil, where they meet another poet Statius, in the fifth circle of the Purgatory. Statius pays his homage to Virgil. Virgil then reminds him that both of them have no existence, they are but empty shades. In answer to that Statius says: ‘Now canst thou comprehend the measure of the love which warms me toward thee, when I forget our nothingness, and treat shades as a solid thing’. Eliot quotes Statius’ answer in the dedication.

“Prufrock” displays the two most important characteristics of Eliot’s early poetry. First, it is strongly influenced by the French Symbolists, like Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire. Following the footsteps of the Symbolists, Eliot is here schematic, insistent on the conscious use of hard, direct, and precise imagery (the yellow smoke and the hair-covered arms of the women are two good examples of this). Eliot creates Prufrock: with the intention to assimilate the fragmentary and the contingent which Baudelaire had identified as the sign of modernity into a tradition. He creates Prufrock as the moody, urban, isolated-yet-sensitive thinker. In the poem he is a bundle of voices rather than a character. Eliot makes Prufrock engaged in role-playing like a ventriloquist. Voices crop up sometimes from within himself, sometimes, as it were, out of nowhere.

The second defining characteristic of this poem is its use of fragmentation and juxtaposition. Eliot sustained his interest in fragmentation and its applications throughout his career, and his use of the technique changes in important ways across his body of work. The detached, apparently disconnected images are only emotionally and psychologically (rather than logically) linked and look-like film-montage. Eliot’s use of bits and pieces of formal structure suggests that fragmentation of the implicit framework dissolves into images which in their turn, are refracted into a spectrum of levels, media or hallucinations of multiple meaning. The cultivated discourse of the

upper-class drawing room [ Talking of Michelangelo] represents a homogeneous world rather than a particular woman—we are introduced to the world of tea, cakes, ices, bracelets, skirts, small talks, tall talks, various kind of talks, eyes, arms, voices, novels. The women’s cultured language is so formidable that Prufrock never gets an opportunity to sing his song. The ‘room’ in which women talk suggests monologism, while the ‘streets’ suggests dialogism.

The poem ends with the Prufrock assigning himself a role in one of Shakespeare’s plays: he is no Hamlet, but he may yet be useful and important as “an attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress, start a scene or two...” By wearing the bottoms of his trousers rolled and by parting his hair behind, Prufrock is denying the conventional role in society. He is dramatizing himself and still playing the role of a dandy. “Prufrock” ends with a devaluation of its hero, although it exalts its creator. Or does it? The last line of the poem is rather ambivalent in nature—that when the world intrudes, when “human voices wake us,” the dream is shattered: “we drown.” With this single line, Eliot dismantles the romantic notion of Prufrock’s reverie. We feel rather disturbed as mermaids usually drown their lovers, and Prufrock remains silent about it. Is it a reverie of escape or a sincere articulation of the modern man’s buried life? It remains as a jigsaw puzzle. It offers only a temporary respite. There are ambivalent suggestions of both drowning and waking. For the modern man and for the modern century there is no possible escape, either way he is drowned, while dreaming of escape or while trying to be awoken listening to the human voices.

### ➤ THE TITLE

Eliot was greatly influenced by Kipling’s title “The Love Song of Har Dyal”. He had seen the name Prufrock-Littau, furniture wholesalers on advertisements in St. Louis. Eliot was struck by this rather absurd name. Hence the title ‘The love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ is a kind of mockery of an individual possessing this unromantic, absurd name who should want to sing of love. This suggests that the poem is not a conventional love song in the Elizabethan or Romantic tradition. The name compounded of ‘prude’ and ‘frock’ brings with it connotations of prudishness, prudence, prurience, primness and dandyism. The title also suggests Prufrock’s social class.

### ➤ Significance of the Epigraph

You have already gathered the literal meaning of the Epigraph in the earlier section. What exactly do you think is its significance in the context of the poem? The

Epigraph in Prufrock gives hints of the central meaning or the message of the poem. There is a contrast between the serious epigraph from Dante's *Inferno* and the lighter tone of Prufrock's love song announced in the title. This mixture of levity and seriousness is to be found in the entire poem that follows. What strikes is that we have just been told that the poem is a love song of a character called Prufrock, in the epigraph we are given the words of another character, Guido da Montefeltro, a man condemned to hell in a prison of flame for his treacherous advice on earth to Pope Boniface. Guido confides the shame of his miserable life to Dante only because he believes that Dante will never return to earth to report what he says. You should at once be hard set in thinking about the nature of the so-called love song in the present poem. You will soon discover the similarity of the situations in which Prufrock and Guido are cast by their respective authors. Both are in hell. Prufrock finds himself in a situation, in a society, which is like hell for him and believes, like Guido, that there is no way out. Here lies the significance of the epigraph at an ideational level - the instant shock it registers in the reader's mind as one approaches Eliot's poem, is a deliberate effect.

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### **2.1.13 Treatment of Form and Content**

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Prufrock" is a variation on the dramatic monologue, a type of poem popular with Eliot's predecessors. Dramatic monologues are similar to soliloquies in plays. Robert Browning made it a popular art form. In the poem we notice the three essential characteristics of a dramatic monologue. Firstly, they are the utterances of a specific individual (not the poet) at a specific moment in time. Secondly, the monologue is specifically directed at a listener or listeners whose presence is not directly referenced but is merely suggested in the speaker's words. Lastly, the primary focus of a dramatic monologue is the development and revelation of the speaker's character. Eliot modernizes the form by removing the implied listeners and focusing on Prufrock's fragmented and elusive role, one who is unsure of his selfhood.

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### **2.1.14 Eliot's Idea of the Modern Man and his Society**

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Modern man suffers from an impoverishment of emotional vivacity. He lives according to the rules of the empty social conventions of a modern society and those of a debauched culture. Modern man's life is sordid as well as sensual. He is to some extent aware of his isolation and depravation. He is entangled in a corrupt, decaying,

modern society. All of these features, however, could be categorized into three major groups. Each group, in turn, would show a series of subsidiary relating problems which then would make a whole entity. The duplicity of man, lack of communication among men, and man's isolation are three basic predicaments of modern man, making him more and more alienated, isolated and unhappy, although, these motifs are common to Eliot's poetry. Let us now look at them closely in the context of the poem that we have taken up in this unit.

The sense of duplicity within the modern man is a major motif in Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. In this poem the protagonist Prufrock is helplessly caught in a ceaseless web between his own desire to live by himself and the obligation to submit to the social conventions. In his book, *The American T. S. Eliot*, Eric Sigg affirms that Eliot depicts the duplicity between the "warning elements within a single soul". This duplicity makes Prufrock suffer helplessly. The two selves, that is, the personal and the social, have to tolerate each other (188-9). Prufrock, the representative of the modern Man, has a different self to put forward. This self as Eliot expresses is not real but artificial that should be prepared in order to meet the people of this debauched society:

There will be time, there will be time to prepare  
a face to meet the faces that you meet (Lines 26-27).

Modern man, in order to be accepted by others, tries to mould himself according to the hollow norms of the modern society. Joseph Conrad says: "We can at times be compelled into a mysterious recognition of our opposite as our true self"<sup>19</sup>. Modern man is nevertheless, instinctively and naturally a creature different from what he appears in the public. It is palpable, for example, in his getting bored with his fellowmen as soon as they try to penetrate to his personal life. In this sense modern man is a hypocrite, a trickster. Man again has a sense of duplicity regarding his own self. He suffers in the society yet he is reluctant, actually incapable, to do something about it. Modern man is therefore psychologically handicapped. He is unable to take the much needed actions.

The idea of duplicity in its both aspects, within the man and between the man and society, has a general impact on him. Hugh Kenner in his *The Invisible Poet* specifies that the conflict between Prufrock, who stands for the modern man, and himself and also his conflict with the society "condemns him to boredom and passivity". He considers man's role in the society no more than that of a fool. The fact is expressed, explicitly, in the poem where Prufrock is analyzing himself as:

“At times, indeed, almost ridiculous  
Almost, at times, the Fool” (lines 118-119).

As a result of this view, Prufrock retreats to his own self which would result in two other problems: his inability to communicate to others and also his isolation.

Lack of communication among men is another basic theme functioning in “The Love Song”. The idea is presented by Martin Scofield in *T.S. Eliot: The Poems*. He, however, puts an emphasis on “a positive relationship between a man and a woman. Nevertheless, Prufrock seems to be unable to communicate with all of those who are around him, both men and women. It is interesting, in the same manner that others are equally unable to have a positive relation with him. Thus, the idea of isolation can be studied from a communal point of view. Inability to communicate is common to the modern generation. Yet, the problem with Prufrock is that he is aware of this fact; others are not. Although it seems that others are having conversations as

“In the room the women come and go  
Talking Michelangelo” (Lines 13-14/35-36).

Talking about Michelangelo would be a kind of escape each speaker resorts to not to be touched by the other person’s real words about real life situation. The Michelangelo talk, in other words, is not a genuine way of communication since it does not penetrate to real alive people’s life. Tangible communication infiltrates the communicators’ mind and makes a way to their inner selves. Thus defined, there appears no sign of communication in the Michelangelo talk where some women would presumably maneuver over some already-known, stereotyped talk about Michelangelo who, in his turn, being an artist, is deliberately chosen by Eliot as a source of attraction to women. Thus he acts as an entertaining subject to talk about. Nevertheless, the women would, as the nature of such talks importunes, concentrate on out witting each other by putting across deeper familiarity with the artist and his works. They do not, however, get into real conversation about their real alive fellow people. This might have the same cause as Prufrock’s being reticent.

With the repetition of two lines, all in all, there are three places in the poem where Eliot refers to the lack of communication. Line 97 is repeated in line 110. Here one can observe that Prufrock is uncommunicative because he fears to be misinterpreted.

The fear of being misinterpreted is basic to Prufrock’s preference to be silent. This fear, as expressed in lines 97 and 110, results from the consciousness on the part

of Prufrock of the idea of lack of communication. In the two lines Prufrock imagines that he would be able to break the ice and talk to someone, a woman in this case, what would be the outcome of that? Prufrock believes it as being misinterpreted by the lady. She would say:

“That is not what I meant at all.  
That is not at all” (lines 97-98,109-110).

In this way Prufrock never tries a conversation and he remains silent.

There is also another cause for Prufrock’s silence. In lines 103 and 117 he explicitly alludes to the fact. Line 103 reads: “It is impossible to say just what I mean”! He seems to be willing to express what he has in his mind. Yet, he seems devoid of the means, hence words. Eliot carries on with this idea to line 117 where he briefly and beautifully summarizes Prufrock: “full of sentence, but a bit obtuse” (13). Lack of communication as a theme of modern man’s, Prufrock’s life, in turn, brings up the problem of isolation. As a result, he becomes more and more alienated; hence the affliction of the modern man.

The theme of isolation of the modern man is also central to Eliot’s “The Love Song”. Here, Eliot tries to show the fate of modern man as a creature isolated from the entire community. This man is unable to go to the public. As it was discussed earlier in the unit that man is struggling between two selves: Social self, that is, what he puts forward in community, and his own self, a being living by himself. In “The Love Song” these two seem to be at odds with each other. This oddity, by itself, implies that human relations are futile and useless as well. Man should retreat to the remote distances of his mind. The poem, as a whole, affirms the idea. The poem is a thus monologue not a conversation. “The Love Song”, being a monologue, is again a symptom of Prufrock’s isolation. In this sense, all of the actions take place in the speaker’s mind. There is no actual action. “Walking at dust through narrow streets”, “coming from the dead”, “disturbing the universe”, even such minute actions of “scuttling across the floors of silent seas” and other references to action, interspersed throughout the poem, are fake and false actions taking place in the remote corners of Prufrock’s imagination. He does nothing. He is far removed from the actual world to perform an action. He is isolated. He cannot enjoy being with others or if he can, it’s so painful to him. Others’ experience is no better. G.B. Harrison in his book *Major British Writers*, describe these people as “people whose pleasures are so sordid and so feeble that they seem almost sadder than their pains”.

In “The Love Song” Prufrock’s isolation is reported in different ways. In a series of lines one can observe that Prufrock considers himself a man who stands out of the community. He fails to put forward his thoughts. He looks at people from outside of their groups. This can be traced in lines 42, 44, 49, 55 and 63. Except for the lines 42 and 44 in the remaining lines Prufrock is addressing the people. He alludes to different parts of their bodies.

“For I have known them all already, known them all” (Line 49)

“And I have known the eyes already, known them all” (Line 55)

“And I have known the arms already, known them all” (Line 62)

A close study shows that Prufrock, through naming the parts of the body, emphasizes that neither of them appeal to him as a whole. Neither could compensate for his isolation. Sexual connotations are evident. The idea of isolation, however, finds a new dimension in lines 42 and 44. In these lines Prufrock shows himself conscious of the people around him. He believes that they look at him questioningly. They are fault finding. The most terrible scene takes place when they, Prufrock imagines it, begin to talk about his physical deficiencies. His hair and his arms as well as his legs are the targets of their criticism.

“They will say: ‘How his hair growing thin!’” (Line 42)

“They will say: ‘How his arms and legs are thin!’” (Line 44)

This sense of consciousness about the surroundings is described as a hindrance to coming to an understanding of the surroundings. *The McGraw-Hill Guide to English Literature* affirms the idea “The consciousness presented in the poem is an intensely anxious and important one in that the speaker is unable to draw conclusions about anything”. He is nervous about that. He thinks that he is under their scrutiny. Thus, he feels more isolated from them. He, consequently, gets to the point that finds “the chambers of the sea” the only suitable place for him to dwell in (line 129). D.E.S. Maxwell in an essay, entitled “The Early Poem,” in the book *Critics On T.S. Eliot* states that, “Prufrock... never penetrates beyond ‘the cups, the marmalade, the tea’ to a conclusion either with the ladies in the poem or with his surroundings.

Duplicity, lack of communication, and isolation are three major predicaments from which Prufrock suffers in “The Love Song”. The society seems to have a share in that. Yet, Prufrock, the representative of the modern man, himself, seems to be responsible for his sufferings. That is because everything happens As a result, he becomes more and more alienated; hence the affliction of the modern man.

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## 2.1.15 Comprehension Exercises

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### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

1. How is 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' a modernist poem?
2. What specific images does Eliot use to communicate the speaker's isolation and frustration in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'?
3. Describe 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as a Dramatic Monologue.
4. Comment on the use of irony in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.

### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

1. How do Guido da Montefeltro and the epigraph from Dante's *Inferno* fit with the rest of the poem? How is Prufrock like Guido? How are they different?
2. The poem ends with Prufrock drowning with his love in the ocean. Is this ending real or some kind of dream? How does it relate to the rest of the poem?
3. Who does Prufrock address his song to? How much do we know about this person?

### ● Short Questions: 6 marks

1. In the opening line, the speaker states, "Let us go then, you and I." Who is the *you* here?
2. The speaker (Prufrock) compares the sunset to a "patient etherised upon a table." Why is the sunset compared to some hospital patient who has been anesthetized and is waiting for an operation?
3. What are "one-night cheap hotels" and "sawdust restaurants." ?
4. Who was Michelangelo?

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## 2.1.16 Activity for the Learner

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Modernism as you understand, is a very embracing phenomenon, the crux of which is extremely difficult to comprehend within a single Unit. For catering to your deeper reading interests, you may look up the following books:

Davies's, Alistair. *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Modernism*. Harvester Press.1982.

Levin, Harry. *What Was Modernism? repr in Refractions: Essays in Comparative Literature*. London. Oxford University Press. 1966.

Yeats, W.B. *Autobiographies*. Papermac. 1980.

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### 2.1.17 Summing Up

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Both the poems we have discussed in this unit are examples of deviation from the norm, or from usual reader expectations, both are ruthless in their rejection of the past, and are iconoclastic in nature. The world is seen through the artist's inner feelings and mental states. The themes and vantage points are chosen to question the conventional view use of myth and unconscious forces rather than motivations of conventional plot. The poems are open-ended works, not finished, nor aiming at formal perfection. The subject is often an act of writing itself and not the ostensible referent. In that sense, you need to be on your guard while reading such poetry, so that you distinguish between the ruptures and parallelisms both, of form and content, to use terms from conventional artistry.

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### 2.1.18. Comprehensive Reading List

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- Ackroyd, Peter, *T. S. Eliot*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984.
- Bergonzi, Bernard. *T. S. Eliot*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- Donoghue, Denis. *Yeats*. Fontana/Collins, 1971.
- Ellmann, Richard and Feidelson, Charles, jr, (eds), *The Modern Tradition: Background of Modern literature*. New York and London, 1965.
- Eilmann, Richard. *Yeats: The Man and the Mask*. Faber and Faber, 1961
- Ford, Boris ( ed), *The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Volume 7: The Modern Age*. Harmondsworth, 1961
- Hone, J.M. *W. B Yeats. 1865-1939. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: St. Martin's, 1962.
- Jeffares, A. N. *Yeats: Man and Poet*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.
- Leavis, F. R., *New Bearings in English Poetry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964.
- Southam, B. C., *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems Of T. S. Eliot*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., London: Faber 7 Faber, 1981.
- Stallworthy, J. *Between the Lines: Yeats' Poetry in the making*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Stewart, J.M. *Eight Modern Writers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Tate, Allen, ed., *T. S. Eliot: the Man and His Work*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1967.
- Unterecker, J. *A Reader's guide to Wiliam Butler Yeats*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959.
- Wilson, F.A.C. *W. B. Yeats and Tradition*. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

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## **Unit-2 □ Rupert Brooke: The Soldier Wilfred Owen: Strange Meeting**

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### **Structure:**

- 2.2.0 Introduction**
- 2.2.1 Rupert Brooke and War Poetry**
- 2.2.2 Rupert Brooke and the Sonnet**
- 2.2.3 Text of The Soldier**
- 2.2.4 Glossary and Annotations**
- 2.2.5 Critical Understanding of The Soldier**
- 2.2.6 Title and Theme**
- 2.2.7 Structure and Style**
- 2.2.8 Summing Up**
- 2.2.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.2.10 Wilfred Owen and War Poetry**
- 2.2.11 Text of Strange Meeting**
- 2.2.12 Glossary and Annotations**
- 2.2.13 Critical Understanding of Strange Meeting**
- 2.2.14 Title and Theme**
- 2.2.15 Structure and Style**
- 2.2.16 Summing Up**
- 2.2.17 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.2.18 Comprehensive Reading List**

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### **2.2.0 Introduction**

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In Module 1, you have read at length on the impact of the World War(s) on British culture in general and literature in particular. This Unit seeks to introduce you to the genre of War poetry, by taking up two poets who showed quite diametrically

opposed views to the First World War, to which they were integrally related. In due course, this Unit will

- introduce you to Rupert Brooke, a poet writing during the first world war, and one of the earliest twentieth-century writers to earn a name for himself as a war poet (a description that could apply to any one writing in verse about war, but which is, even now, associated greatly with those writing during World War I and II)
- to consider how he used the sonnet, a verse form with a rich literary history, to write about war
- to examine in detail what is perhaps his most famous war poem, the sonnet **The Soldier**
- introduce you to Wilfred Owen, one of the most famous, and perhaps the finest, of poets writing during the First World War
- to survey in brief his war poetry, which in terms of theme, treatment and style constitutes a corpus of some of the most important creative responses to the destructive horrors of war
- to examine in detail **Strange Meeting**, considered to be one of his most representative and complex poems.

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## 2.2.1 Rupert Brooke and War Poetry

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Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915) was an Englishman who has been described as a “Georgian” poet, writing as he did in an era ruled by George V, and being one of the literary figures to feature in the five-volume verse anthology *Georgian Poetry* (1912-1922). He also had associations with the Bloomsbury group of intellectuals that included Virginia Woolf. Brooke was in his time something of a literary celebrity, his good looks adding to his poetic achievements, though the quality and value of the latter has subsequently been the subject of much scrutiny and debate. It is possible that his pre-war poetry, with its dreamy romanticism, would not by itself have ensured Brooke’s place in later anthologies.

But then came the First World War, and like many of his age and class, Brooke volunteered to enlist. He joined the Royal Navy in 1914, but did not get to see much action: in April 1915, two days before the Gallipoli campaign, he died at the age of 28, of sepsis from an infected mosquito bite. His posthumous elevation to the level

of national hero was largely on account of the series of five war sonnets written and published as *1914*, which reflect the innocence and idealism with which many Englishmen joined the First World War. These attributes, combined with the patriotic willingness to sacrifice self for country, characterised Rupert Brooke as a war poet, and constituted one of the two polarities between which World War I poetry ranged. At the other polarity would be those writers who, often as a direct result of having actually been in battle, saw the horrors of war and the inadequacy of conventional views glorifying war. These writers are perhaps best represented by Wilfred Owen, who will be studied later in this unit.

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## 2.2.2 Rupert Brooke and the Sonnet

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Brooke's *1914* (which contains *The Soldier*, the poem you are about to study in detail) is a series of five sonnets. Accordingly, this section will at first take a brief look at the sonnet form. With its 14 lines, sectional divisions and limited rhymes, the **sonnet** as a verse form is quite easy to identify. It has also been a poetic vehicle with which many English poets have experimented, from the sixteenth century onwards. Elsewhere in your study material (in EEG Paper 2, for example) you have also studied the characteristic features of the sonnet, and will remember that the most common variants are the Italian (or Petrarchan) form, with its octave-sestet division and five rhymes, and the English (or Shakespearean) kind, with three quatrains and a concluding couplet, and seven rhymes.

What makes a study of Rupert Brooke's war sonnets interesting is that he occasionally experiments with the verse structure. A poem might, for example, simultaneously display characteristics of both the Italian and the English sonnet forms. At the same time, his choice of war as a subject is also a kind of extension of the scope of the sonnet, though we have seen different ways in which other English poets from Shakespeare onwards have done the same.

In this connection, you might look up another sonnet by Rupert Brooke, though this does not concern war. It is titled *Sonnet Reversed*. Does the title suggest anything to you about what the poem could be like? You can find the poem online here:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43715>

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### 2.2.3. Text of The Soldier

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And now let us take a close look at the poem *The Soldier*. The text has been taken from *The Poetry of the First World War: 'Never Such Innocence'* edited by Martin Stephen, London, Everyman, 1993, page 54. The words/phrases in bold are explained in the section that follows the text provided.

#### **The Soldier**

*If I should die, think only this of me:*

*That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by the suns of home.*

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.*

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### 2.2.4 Glossary and Annotations

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**corner of a foreign field:** The soldier-speaker imagines that he might die in a foreign country, and refers to his grave in the land where he might lie buried. Incidentally, Brooke died in April 1915, and was buried in Skyros, a Greek island, and hence literally a “foreign field”.

**England:** a space occupied by an Englishman's mortal remains, and in that sense English space. (This is an example of the figure of speech known as **synecdoche**.)

**In that rich earth a richer dust concealed:** When the buried soldier's body has decomposed, and turned to soil, it mixes with the dust of the foreign country. Being a loyal Englishman, the speaker believes the dust that his body has turned into, has

enriched the dust of the foreign country. (The phrase “**richer dust**” may be considered an example of **euphemism** as well as **hyperbole**, both figures of speech.)

**bore:** past tense of “bear”, in the sense of “give birth to”

**body:** the focus in this section is on the physical person, just as the next section deals with his spirit

**blest:** a variant of “blessed”, here meaning “given special favour”

**shed away:** cast off or discarded

**a pulse... Gives somewhere back:** when the dead soldier’s body has disintegrated, his innermost essence returns to the Divine Being and exists as a “pulse” or beat that retains its Englishness, having brought along all the pleasant experiences of an English life

**dreams happy as her day:** England is seen as an ideal place; where days are pleasant, as are its people’s thoughts and dreams. (The phrase contains an example of a **simile**.)

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## 2.2.5 Critical Understanding of The Soldier

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The poem seems to be an utterance of a soldier who imagines meeting his death in battle, away from home. He does not, however, express sadness or fear at the possibility that he might die. He rather considers it worthwhile, since he will be sacrificing his life for the sake of his country. What gives this poem its distinctive quality is the speaker’s insistence that his national identity will be preserved even after he is dead. This is the idea that is developed in the first section of the poem. Thus, the grave in which the soldier’s corpse lies buried, eventually to turn into dust, will be a space that represents England, containing as it does English remains, even if it is in a foreign land. As if to emphasize this Englishness, the speaker conjures up an image of the soldier before his death: a physical presence growing up in English conditions which seem both elemental and idyllic. Air, water and the fiery sunlight all nurture and develop the Englishman; with the elements so mixed in him that, rather as Shakespeare’s Mark Anthony (in the play *Julius Caesar*) said about Brutus, Nature might point to the soldier as a perfect specimen of an ideal man. Or to put it perhaps more accurately, a perfect specimen of an ideal Englishman.

The second part of the poem carries the idea a step further. Whereas earlier the

focus had been on the Englishman's corporeal or physical identity, the later section deals with his inner essence, or what is at the "heart" or spiritual core of a person. This innermost essence, according to the speaker's belief, will be united after death, with what he calls "the eternal mind", and others might refer to as God, or a supreme and immortal Divine Being. The idea here seems to be that, after death, an individual's spirit merges with that of the Divine Being. However, even in such a situation, the speaker's Englishness will be asserted. Death is seen as a process whereby all negative qualities are "shed away" or overcome, and what remains is only the good and imperishable. To the speaker, this implies all the factors that have nurtured his English existence, so that what his spirit "gives... back" or surrenders to the Divine Being are memories of experiences under "an English heaven".

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### 2.2.6. Title and Theme

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Most anthologies reprint this poem simply as **The Soldier**. However, according to The First World War Poetry Digital Archive, this poem initially was titled **The Recruit**, and was published in a January 1915 edition of the periodical *New Numbers*. It was the fifth in a series of war sonnets published under the general title *1914*, which of course is the year in which World War I broke out. Accordingly, the poem may be also referred to as *1914: The Soldier*. This version of the title indicates that it was composed during the first year of the WW1, and might in fact be a useful pointer that the soldier-speaker of the sonnet is more likely to be a fresh recruit than a war-weary veteran. It might also account for the youthful idealism of the lines. Such idealism (and its supporters) would, as the war dragged on, come in for increasing criticism.

The theme, as stated by the soldier-speaker, seems to be that for a loyal Englishman (or warrior), even death is an opportunity to assert his patriotism, since wherever he dies, the area occupied by his dead body will effectively be English space. The repeated mention of Englishness, the references to burial and death in a foreign land, all serve to locate the speaker in a specific time and space, but overall the sentiment may be seen as a recasting of what was once considered an acceptable sentiment concerning death in battle: it is worthwhile to die for one's country. (Or, in the words of the Roman poet Horace, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*" You might want to find out what exactly these words mean in English, and which English poet has used the first four words of the quote as a title for one of his poems.)

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## 2.2.7. Structure and Style

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This poem is structured as a sonnet and, as has been mentioned, was part of a sequence of sonnets concerning war, published in 1914. Elsewhere in your reading material (EEG Paper 2 Module 2, for example) there are discussions of the sonnet that you might look up as you study the structure of this poem. The theme of the poem is that the soldier-speaker's English identity and character will be preserved even after death. Notice how the two-part division of the Italian sonnet form is used by Brooke to focus separately on the external body (in the octave) and the internal being (in the sestet). Interestingly, however, the rhyme scheme of the octave is not typical of the Italian variant, but is more suggestive of its English/Shakespearean counterpart.

Refer to what has been said about the sonnet form, here and elsewhere in your reading material, to determine the answers to the questions in the following checklist, with regard to the poem being discussed:

- 1. How many rhymes does the octave contain?
- 2. What is the rhyme scheme of the octave?
- 3. Is this usual for a sonnet using an octave-sestet division?
- 4. How many rhymes are there in this sonnet?

A tendency to experiment with divergent impulses may be noted in the language of the poem as well. For a poem that belongs to the early modern era, a word such as “blest” recreates an archaic, idyllic, almost Biblical effect, which might appear out of place in a poem about war. And Brooke's choice of *given-heaven* rhymes might seem less than perfect in terms of matching vowel sound, and closer to the par-rhymes of Owen, as you will see when you study the latter's versification in the next section/unit. However, the degree to which Brooke experiments is inconsiderable when compared to the techniques used by Owen.

### Key to checklist

- 1. Four
- 2. ababcdcd
- 3. No; the usual rhyme scheme for the octave would be abbaabba
- 4. Seven

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## 2.2.8. Summing Up

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Here are a few points concerning what this section has covered. Included is **one observation that is NOT true**. Strike out the incorrect one, and you will be left with a concise summing up. (Match your choice with that in the key provided.)

- Rupert Brooke’s war poetry, in general as well as in this poem, reflects an innocence and idealism
- **The Soldier** is from a collection of three sonnets published under the general title *1914*
- Despite its title, the poem makes no actual mention of war
- **The Soldier** is about a protagonist for whom even death is an opportunity to assert his patriotism
- The poem is a sonnet with an octave-sestet division

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## 2.2.9. Comprehension Exercises

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### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

- a) What picture of a patriotic soldier emerges from your reading of Rupert Brooke’s sonnet? Is this depiction, in your opinion, likely to match a portrayal of a modern-day soldier?
- b) Consider how Rupert Brooke uses the sonnet form to develop his sentiments in “The Soldier”, and examine whether he strictly follows existing traditions, or adapts them to suit his own purposes.
- c) It has been suggested that Brooke’s skillful use of language makes dying for one’s country sound like a great privilege. With reference to the text, do you think this claim is justified?

### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

- a) “[T]hink only this of me...” Discuss, with close textual reference, what the soldier, in the octave of the sonnet, would like others to think.
- b) What does the protagonist in “The Soldier” have to say about “this heart”?
- c) The speaker in Brooke’s sonnet is an Englishman. Examine how the poem asserts the soldier’s Englishness.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

- a) Examine the rhyme scheme used by Brooke in “The Soldier”. What is the metrical pattern used here?
- b) Explain what the poet means by: “...there’s some corner of a foreign field/  
That is forever England.”
- c) Identify three figures of speech in the poem and explain any two of them.

**\*Odd one out in the Summing Up section**

“**The Soldier** is from a collection of three sonnets published under the general title *1914*”. Actually the poem is one of a sequence of five sonnets, not three.

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## **2.2.10. Wilfred Owen and War Poetry**

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Like Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918) is a much anthologized English war poet who fought for his country and died young. But the differences between the two are perhaps more significant than their points of similarity.

Unlike Brooke, who was a published poet even before enlisting, Owen had only a few poems published in his lifetime. He wrote little verse of importance till he joined the war in 1915. Whereas Brooke did not actually see much action, Owen was a soldier for more than three years, was decorated for bravery, and eventually died in action a week before World War I ended. He is now almost exclusively remembered for the poems that were largely shaped by his experience of the horrors of war. These affected him as both a person and a poet, turning him from a shy, sensitive introvert into a battle-scarred warrior who could respond as the situation demanded, yet was deeply disturbed by what war did to people in mind and body. His poetic technique also changed, turning his verse from something faintly romantic and sensuous to a vehicle that stylistically and powerfully echoed the discord of a world at war all around him.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Owen’s war poetry is his preoccupation with what he calls “the pity of war”. This phrase occurs in the poem you are about to study in detail, but is also found in the lines of a preface that he had drafted for a volume of poems he planned to publish:

“My subject is war, and the pity of war.”

The word “pity” here conveys a sensitivity to the agony and anguish of those who fought in war, but goes beyond, seeing all the suffering and destruction as a tragic waste of humanity. Such an attitude was in sharp contrast to the idealistic glorification of war that characterized much of war poetry, at least during the initial stages of World War I. (An example of such a view might, for example, emerge from your reading of Brooke’s *The Soldier*. And an example of what might be seen as Owen’s rejoinder to simplistic praises of the glories of war would be his poem *Dulce et Decorum Est*.)

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### 2.2.11 Text of Strange Meeting

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Let us now take a close look at the poem **Strange Meeting**, which was composed probably in the last year of Owen’s life, and published after his death. The text of the poem is taken from *The Norton Anthology of Poetry, Third Edition* (1983) page 1035. The words/phrases in bold are explained in the section that follows the text provided.

#### **Strange Meeting**

*It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars had grained.  
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.  
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.  
With a thousand fears that vision’s face was grained;  
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,  
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
“Strange friend,” I said, “here is no cause to mourn.”  
“None,” said that other, “save the undone years,  
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,*

*Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something had been left,  
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:  
To miss the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,  
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  
"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned  
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
Let us sleep now. . . ."*

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## 2.2.12. Glossary and Annotations

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**profound:** an inspired choice of word, this suggests both “deep” and “significant”. The reader immediately registers that there is something particularly significant about this tunnel descent

**granites:** very hard rocks

**titanic:** great in terms of scale; the reference may be to the world war as well as to all great wars in history

**groined:** hollowed out

**encumbered:** burdened, by the uniforms and equipment the soldiers wear, but also maybe under the weight of traumatic experiences

**fast:** a word suggesting deeply occupied, or taken up by

**bestirred:** roused or awakened

**probed:** explored, examined

**grained:** marked

**flues:** airshafts

**Strange friend:** There appears to be an **oxymoron** here, friends are obviously “familiar” rather than “strange” people, but this phrase indicates a major paradox addressed by the poem. War divides people into enemy camps; people who might otherwise be not just friends, but brothers or twins in terms of nature/temperament

**save the undone years:** except the years taken away or reduced by death

**braided hair:** hair tied in plaits; a physical attribute that represents tame beauty, along with the eyes mentioned earlier

**richier than here:** more earnestly than is possible here

**The pity of war:** Owen’s famous phrase is, by his own admission, the subject of his poetry. The pity lies in the fact that war provides occasions for the display of man’s inhumanity to man: which hurts both those who die as a result, and those who kill and live with the responsibility and the guilt

**distilled:** left in its purest, undiluted form

**trek:** move away

**vain citadels:** proud cities, or in a broader sense, aggressive countries

**too deep for taint:** so well-entrenched that it cannot be falsified

**stint:** limit or limitation

**cess:** the word originally refers to a tax; here it might be used in the associated sense of “burden” or “curse”

**Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were:** in other words, these men have suffered, not physical pain from a wound, but mental trauma

**I am the enemy you killed, my friend:** the central **paradox** in the poem. How can an enemy be a friend? The answer obviously is that narrow political enmity comes in the way of broader, more universal, human ties

**through me as you jabbed:** an example of **inversion**, a figure of speech where the usual grammatical order or words is reversed. The normal order would be “as you jabbed (that is, thrust with your bayonet) through me”

**parried:** blocked or defended

**loath:** unwilling, possibly because the soldier is weary of fighting and killing

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### 2.2.13 Critical Understanding of Strange Meeting

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The poem begins with a narrator who is probably a soldier, since he tells us that he escaped “out of battle”. Note however that this is preceded by “It seemed...” so this not a real retreat but a dream vision, or one imagined. Throughout the poem, the atmosphere is dreamlike and inconsistent, now lacking detail and logic, now coming sharply into focus. Note also that the soldier-narrator’s movement involves a descent, suggesting both a psychological journey into the depths of the subconscious and also a journey into some underworld or hell.

The narrator travels along a dark tunnel which has been carved out by the ravages of war, yet paradoxically offers protection from the destruction currently raging overhead. He comes across clusters of soldiers who are either unaware or inanimate. He examines them closely, and one of them jumps up, and with an expression of pity and distress seems to recognize the narrator. This, as we learn later, is because the narrator has killed him in battle the day before.

The speaker so far is surprised to note that the other soldier has a faced lined with pain, for he assumes that this place, far removed from the war raging elsewhere, should have no cause for sorrow. The other soldier responds, and with his words the narrator seems to disappear from the poem, never to return, for he neither speaks again nor makes his presence felt.

The dead soldier says his sorrow is on account of death taking away his chances to lead a full life, to love and feel, and more importantly, to inspire others with hope and ideals. His laughter might have taught other people to laugh, and similarly his tears could have moved others to sorrow. His own sorrow has been generated by his experience of “the pity of war”: the realization that killing in action connects a slayer

and his victim, who do not know one another, yet who might be so similar as to be friends. Though the dead soldier has realized this truth, he cannot communicate this to other men as he is no longer alive. So some soldiers continue to count the supposed gains of victory, while others prepare to retaliate. Either way, people die, and nations who trigger destruction continue to regress. Owen presents here a powerful image of chariot wheels clogged by the blood of the slain, as the dead soldier laments that he might have brought relief and shared the truth about war, had he been alive. The dead soldier now reveals that he has been killed in battle, only the day before, by the poet-narrator.

The poem ends on a disquieting note, without a sense of proper closure. What happens to the narrator? Why are the words of the other soldier left unfinished, as indicated by the ellipsis? And when the soldier says “Let us sleep now...” what kind of sleep is indicated: the sleep of death? Or a more literal sleep? Either way, there is no guarantee that this slumber is restful. Remember, this soldier seemed asleep when the narrator first came upon him, yet he suddenly sprang up to address the narrator and to warn him of the tragic waste of war. Perhaps this is the lasting impression the poet intended to leave us with. This would be in consonance with Owen’s declaration in another part of that draft of a preface: that all a poet can do is to warn people.

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## 2.2.14 Title and Theme

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The title of the poem echoes a line from a poem by Shelley, who (along with Keats) was a major literary influence, at least in the early part of Owen’s poetic career. Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam* contains the line: “Gone forth whom no strange meeting did befall.” and Owen’s choice of title for the poem we are studying is an exact replication of the phrase “strange meeting”. The word “strange” here is a hint that the meeting or encounter described in the poem is not perhaps as realistic as it is metaphorical. In fact, some critics feel it might be an experience in a dream (or nightmare); others think that it is about a psychological journey, within a speaker’s mind.

Even in terms of theme, Owen may have been influenced by Shelley, who claimed *The Revolt of Islam* was an expression of what he called the “precariousness” of his life, and that it was animated by feelings similar to those communicated by a dying man. There is a sense of the same in Owen’s poem, which depicts a meeting

with an enemy soldier who in a larger sense, as a fellow human being, is a friend, yet has been killed out of compulsions that disregard the bonds of human brotherhood. The poem is thus clearly an exploration of “the pity of war”.

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## 2.2.15 Structure and Style

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In structure, the situation recreated in this poem might remind you of a poem by Siegfried Sassoon (who was a war-poet and a major influence on Owen), titled *The Rear-Guard*. There too a soldier travels along a tunnel, while a battle rages overhead, and mistakes a dead soldier for one asleep. But if Owen takes the germ of the idea from Sassoon, his extension of the situation and his treatment give the work a distinctive and unforgettable quality.

Owen impresses with his use of forceful language, and images that challenge rather than colour the reader’s imagination, but are undeniably striking. Witness lines such as these:

“I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.”

He resorts to alliteration, or the repetition of the same consonants in syllables close together, in constructions such as “*might many men*” or “*boil bloody*”; and onomatopoeia, where the sound of the word matches its sense, as in “*thumped*” and “*moan*”. All this charges the language with vigour and emphasis.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Owen’s poem is a technical virtuosity that was startling in its time and went on to influence profoundly the work of many who followed him. He discarded conventional patterns of rhythm and rhyme, with their associations of regularity and harmony, as inappropriate devices by which to express the chaos of a world torn apart by war; and in their place he popularized alternative devices. These include para-rhyme, where pairs of words have the same (or similar) consonants but different vowel sounds; either over single syllables, such as in *laughed/left*, or more, as in *mystery-mastery*. This creates a sense of discordance to ears used to full rhyme. Owen also used internal rhyme and assonance, which involve the repetition of vowel sounds within sentences but not at the ends of lines, as in “*knew you*”. All these create unfamiliar auditory patterns that counter the expectation of familiar cadences and rhythms.

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## 2.2.16 Summing Up

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Here are a few points concerning what this section has covered. Included is **one observation that is NOT true**. Strike out the incorrect one, and you will be left with a concise summing up. (Match your choice with that in the key provided.)

### You have learnt that

- Wilfred Owen's earlier verse was more romantic and sensuous than his war poetry.
- The experience of the realities of war changed Owen as a person as well as a poet.
- The poem **Strange Meeting** was written soon after World War I began
- The poet's major concern is with "the pity of war".

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## 2.2.17 Comprehension Exercises

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### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

- a) With reference to the poem being discussed, show how Owen communicates "the pity of war".
- b) Examine how Owen uses language and technique to great effect in his recreation of the horrors of war.
- c) How far would you agree with the view that Owen's response to war is anti-romantic?

### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

- a) Recreate after the speaker in the poem his nightmarish descent, right up to the time he speaks to his "strange friend".
- b) Which sections of this poem suggest that the two soldiers, though on opposing sides, might essentially be the same kind of person?
- c) What is para-rhyme? Examine a few occurrences of para-rhyme in this poem and suggest what Owen achieves by his use of these.

### ● Short Questions: 6 marks

- a) Briefly explain the pattern of rhyme and rhythm in the poem.
- b) Identify three figures of speech in the poem and explain any two of them.

c) How would you explain the phrase “the pity of war” in your own words?

**\*Odd one out in the Summing Up section**

“The poem *Strange Meeting* was written soon after World War I began.” The poem was in fact written towards the end of the war.

**Activity for the Learner**

Based on your reading of the two poems, you could take up the following activities with help from your counselor

Elsewhere in your study material there are discussions that focus on the sonnet as a verse form, examining how it blossomed in England during the Renaissance and evolved in later centuries. An interesting point to note about the sonnet is that, during the First World War (as well as at other times), this form was adapted and used to write about war. We have already seen that Rupert Brooke himself wrote a series of sonnets on the subject. It might be rewarding for you look for other examples of poets composing war sonnets in English. Wilfred Owen, the other war poet you will study in detail, is a name that springs readily to mind in this connection. Here is a link to a handful of sonnets (and sonneteers) of the First World War: <http://www.sonnets.org/wwi.htm>

Wilfred Owen died in 1918, at the age of 25. A number of poets in English literature have died young, their lives and careers cut short by mortality. If John Keats is perhaps the most famous of such terminated talents, Thomas Chatterton, is a lesser known example, though he died even younger.

It is sobering to note how many English poets lost their lives in a world war, while still in their twenties. You might prepare a list of your own, and go through a poem or two by each poet you identify. Would the following make it to your list? Keith Douglas, Julian Grenfell, Sidney Keyes, Ewart A. Mackintosh, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles H. Sorley. Decide why (or why not). Were they all casualties of the First World War?

In this connection you may wish to look up a poem by Archibald Macleish beginning “The young dead soldiers do not speak...” which was written by an American poet during the Second World War, but which may refer to all young lives lost while fighting in any war. Here is a link to the poem:

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-young-dead-soldiers-do-not-speak/>

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## 2.2.18 Comprehensive Reading List

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David Roberts (ed), *Out In the Dark: Poetry of the First World War*. UK. Saxon Books, 2013.

Jon Silkin, *Out Of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. UK. Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.

Jon Stallworthy (ed), *The New Oxford Book of War Poetry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. UK. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Martin Stephen (ed), *Poems of the First World War: 'Never Such Innocence'*. London. Everyman, 1993.

John Lehmann, *Rupert Brooke: His Life and His Legend*. London. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980.

Timothy Rogers, *Rupert Brooke: A Reappraisal and Selection*. London. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.

Candace Ward (ed). *World War One British Poets: Brooke, Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg and Others*. New York, Dover Publication, 1997

Dominic Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography* UK. Phoenix (Orion), 2003

Jon Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen*. USA, OUP, 1993

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## **Unit-3 □ Philip Larkin: Church Going Seamus Heaney: Digging**

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### **Structure:**

- 2.3.0 Introduction**
- 2.3.1 Post 1950s British Poetry – Social Background**
- 2.3.2 ‘The Movement’ as a Literary Development**
- 2.3.3 Literary Bio-Brief of Philip Larkin**
- 2.3.4 Text of Church Going**
- 2.3.5 Glossary and Notes**
- 2.3.6 Paraphrase and Critical Appreciation**
- 2.3.7 Title and Theme**
- 2.3.8 Structure and Style**
- 2.3.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.3.10 Seamus Heaney and the Irish Literary Scene**
- 2.3.11 Literary Bio-Brief of Seamus Heaney**
- 2.3.12 Text of Digging**
- 2.3.13 Glossary and Notes**
- 2.3.14 Paraphrase and Critical Appreciation**
- 2.3.15 Title and Theme**
- 2.3.16 Structure and Style**
- 2.3.17 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.3.18 Summing Up**
- 2.3.19 Activity for the Learner**
- 2.3.20 Comprehensive Reading List**

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### **2.3.0 Introduction**

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There was no towering figure like W. B. Yeats or T. S. Eliot in the post-1950s English literary scene. The poetry of the fifties lacks the vivacity and patriotic fervour

of the First World War poets like Rupert Brooke or the critical bent of one like Wilfred Owen. It is devoid of the socialist preoccupations of the Left-Wing poets like W. H. Auden or Stephen Spender. The poetry of this period reflect on the post-Second World War void and depression. The remarkable poets of this period have sincerely tried to overcome this depression through the medium of their poetry.

In this unit we will deal with two famous poets of post-1950s English literature—Philip Larkin and Seamus Heaney.

Before introducing the poets, we will focus on the literary scene of England and Ireland in the 1950s to situate Larkin and Heaney, respectively, against their literary backgrounds. In the light of these, the given texts will be analysed.

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### **2.3.1 Post 1950s British Poetry: Social Background**

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As you have learnt in Module 1, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the major setback from which Britain suffered was the disintegration of the British Empire. It not only affected the socio-political structure but also the entire British sensibility. A sense of void and frustration came to pervade the literary works of this period, irrespective of the genre of writing. The years after the Second World War saw the rise of the USA as the most dominant economic and cultural force of the world. Simultaneously there was a decline in the British power and Britain had to reconsider its position in the international scene. At the national level too there were significant political changes, which in turn came to affect economic and cultural aspects of life. There was an upsurge in the literary productions from the ‘Third World’ which began to broaden up the range of ‘English Literature’ and presently the term ‘Literatures in English’ is preferred to ‘English Literature’.

But when the arena of ‘Literatures in English’ was broadening up from the literary influx of erstwhile colonies, Britain was trying to maintain its ‘Britishness’ in literature and culture. When the British political authorities were busy in constructing the ‘cultural welfare state’ in the 1950s, one of their chief ambitions was to celebrate the native British Culture. Imperialism had been a major part of the British identity for over two centuries. In the aftermath of the disintegration of the empire, widespread provincialism was boosted up, which rejected the international and concentrated on the national and local.

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### 2.3.2 ‘The Movement’ as a Literary Development

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You have already been introduced to the term ‘Movement Poets’. Before our discussion on Philip Larkin we will consider the features of Movement Poetry, because Larkin was closely associated with this group. The term ‘The Movement’ designates a group of poets and novelists whose rational, anti-romantic and empirical writings marked a new tendency in post-Second World War English poetry. The manifesto of ‘The Movement’ was Robert Conquest’s ably edited anthology *New Lines* (1956), which included the poems of nine distinguished poets and novelists of the fifties- Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, D.J. Enright, Elizabeth Jennings, John Holloway and Robert Conquest. Blake Morrison in his seminal book *The Movement* (1980) refers to Larkin, Amis and Wain as “the nucleus of the Movement”. The chief features located in the works of the Movement poets are:

- art of restraint in articulation
- insistence on rationalism
- allegiance to traditional poetic forms
- maintaining regularity of metrical patterns
- rejection of incomprehensible language, and
- concentration on local flavour

The Movement was actually a counter movement against three poetic movements of the first half of the twentieth century: against the **Modernist** experimentations of the 1920s poets, against the **Socialist** preoccupations of the 1930s poets, and against the **neo-Romantic** exuberance of the 1940s poets.

Critics have divergent opinions regarding Larkin’s degree of allegiance to the Movement. Actually a poet of Larkin’s stature cannot have restricted himself to some typical characteristic features. Larkin’s poetry bears allegiance to the Movement but at times moves beyond it.

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### 2.3.3 Literary Bio-brief of Philip Larkin

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Philip Arthur Larkin was born on 9 August 1922 to Sydney Larkin and Eva Larkin in Coventry, England. He was educated at King Henry VIII School, Coventry,

and at St. John's College, Oxford. At the initial stage of his career, Larkin worked in several libraries and finally became the librarian of Brynmor Jones Library in Hull. Larkin's poetic anthologies include *The North Ship* (1945), *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974). This famous poet also tried his hand in novel and the successful outcome was *Jill* (1946), a novel which describes the life of a working class boy of Lancashire. Larkin edited *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* (1973). He had a keen interest in jazz and produced a volume of essays, *All What Jazz* (1970). Larkin died of cancer on 2 December, 1985.

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### 2.3.4 Text of "Church Going"

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*Once I am sure there's nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door **thud** shut.  
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat **organ**;  
And a tense, musty, **unignorable silence**,  
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off  
My **cycle-clips** in awkward reverence,  
  
Move forward, run my hand around the **font**.  
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new –  
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.  
Mounting the **lectern**, I peruse a few  
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce  
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.  
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door  
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,  
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.  
  
Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,  
And always end much at a loss like this,*

*Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,  
When churches fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep  
A few cathedrals chronically on show,  
Their **parchment**, plate and pyx in locked cases,  
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.  
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?  
  
Or, after dark, will dubious women come  
To make their children touch a particular stone;  
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some  
Advised night see walking a dead one?  
Power of some sort or other will go on  
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;  
But superstition, like belief, must die,  
And what remains when disbelief has gone?  
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,  
  
A shape less recognizable each week,  
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who  
Will be the last, the very last, to seek  
This place for what it was; one of the crew  
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?  
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,  
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff  
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and **myrrh**?  
Or will he be my representative,  
  
Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt  
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground  
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt  
So long and equably what since is found*

*Only in separation - marriage, and birth,  
And death, and thoughts of these - for which was built  
This special shell? For, though I've no idea  
What this accoutered frowsty barn is worth,  
It pleases me to stand in silence here;  
  
A serious house on serious earth it is,  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,  
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.  
And that much never can be obsolete,  
Since someone will forever be surprising  
A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
And gravitating with it to this ground,  
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,  
If only that so many dead lie round.*

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### 2.3.5 Glossary and Notes

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Line 2: thud - a sound produced when a heavy object hits something

Line 6: organ - a musical instrument like piano

Line 7: unignorable silence –unusual silence as there was nobody inside the church when the speaker went there

Line 9: Cycle-clips - bands that people wear around their ankles while cycling to stop their trousers getting caught in the chain

Line 10: font – a large receptacle in a church that holds water for baptismal ceremonies

Line 13: lectern – podium/platform from which priests read out holy verses in the church

Line 25: parchment – material made from animal skin used in the past for writing

Line 44: myrrh – a sticky substance with a sweet smell that comes from trees and is used to make perfumes

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### 2.3.6 Paraphrase and Critical Appreciation

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**Church Going** reflects the spiritual vacuity of the frustrated, depressed post-Second World War Western man. The poem begins with the detached, almost cynical attitude of the speaker. The speaker casually enters an empty church. As he is not wearing any hat, he takes off his bicycle-clips to show formal reverence. Moving aimlessly in the church, he mounts the lectern and reads a few pages from the Bible. He feels as if the words are mocking him.

The speaker introspectively muses on the condition of the church in future when visitors would stop coming to the church. He envisions the ruination of the church building which would be exposed to the rains and would become the grazing place for sheep. Then he considers an alternative possibility. Some obscure women might visit the abandoned church to cure their sick children. But what would happen to the church when superstition would also come to an end?

The speaker tries to conjecture about the last person who would pay a visit to the church. He might be a person who is weary with life and would come to the church for solace. Or he might be a person who would want to gain some knowledge from the church ceremonies. Finally, the speaker realizes that the church is “a serious house on serious earth”. Some people, though a little few, would visit the church for its spiritual atmosphere which would instigate the inner compulsions of the visitors. If for no other reason, some people would visit the church to see the graves in the churchyard to gain the essential knowledge about mortality of human beings.

**Church Going** is a contemplative, thought-provoking poem. The poem captures the oscillating mind of the speaker. He does not personally believe in religion and ritualistic observances but thinks that churches would continue to exist to provide spiritual solace to suffering humanity. Deeply troubled with the spiritual vacuity of his age, the poet desperately tries to find a solution to the problem.

We can locate some of the Movement features in **Church Going** in its sceptical outlook towards religion and its ironical treatment of the church rituals. But the poem moves beyond the Movement territory in its broader concern for the suffering humanity.

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### 2.3.7 Title and Theme

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In **Church Going**, Larkin considers the relevance of religious belief and rituals from a modern speaker's perspective. The poet focuses on the significance of the church in our present day society, how it was like in the past and what it would become in the future. The speaker discusses the utility of going a church when religious belief is in question.

To consider the appropriateness of the title we have to discuss the theme of the poem. The poem is about the speaker's personal feeling in a particular situation. Going a church, the speaker minutely observes the floor, roof, font and lectern and muses on the relevance of religious belief and ritualistic observations in this secular age. He envisions the dilapidated condition of the church in future when belief as well as disbelief would come to an end. The poem is not about the ruination of a particular church but in its broader concern, it speaks about the decay of Christianity. Though the poem begins with the speaker's casual visit to a church, it raises many thought-provoking questions regarding the necessity of religion. Considering from this perspective, the title is apt and comprehensive.

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### 2.3.8 Structure and Style

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Larkin's **Church Going** is a well-structured poem. In this, Larkin follows the Movement agenda of composing poems in traditional stanza pattern. The poem comprises seven stanzas; each stanza breaks up into nine lines. The minute description of the church building draws attention. The description of the speaker at the beginning of the poem, 'hatless', taking off his 'cycle-clips in awkward reverence', creates a half-serious half-hilarious mood. Gradually the detached observer becomes involved in the 'serious' atmosphere of the church. Larkin has presented a highly philosophical poem in a simple language amenable to common readers.

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### 2.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

- a. Write the chief features of Movement poetry. Do you consider Philip Larkin a Movement poet?
- b. Attempt a critical appreciation of Larkin's poem "Church Going".

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

- a. Justify the title of Larkin's "Church Going".
- b. Make a critical analysis of the images in "Church Going".

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

- a. Explain with reference to the context:
  - i. "But superstition, like belief, must die, / And what remains when disbelief has gone?"
  - ii. "A serious house on serious earth it is, / In whose blent air all our compulsions meet, / Are recognized, and robed as destinies."
- b. Write a short note on the symbolism of the 'church' in the poem.

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### **2.3.10 Seamus Heaney and the Irish Literary Scene:**

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Robert Lowell considers Seamus Heaney "the greatest Irish poet since Yeats". Heaney's poems portray the rural landscape of Northern Ireland. He also deals with the troubles and turmoil which plagued his country during his young adulthood. Heaney has focused on Irish society, cult, and history. He has dealt with the life of the 'bog people'. He was so much assertive of his Irish identity that when his poems were included in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* (1982) he refuted in *An Open Letter* (1983) that 'My anxious Muse...Has to refuse/ The adjective',—concluding 'British, no, the name's not right'(qtd. in Carter and McRae 447).

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### **2.3.11 Literary Bio-brief of Seamus Heaney**

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Seamus Heaney was born on April 13, 1939 on a family farm in Northern Ireland, about 30 miles northwest of Belfast. He was the first child of Margaret and Patrick Heaney. As a child, Heaney was impressed by the verse of Wordsworth and developed a profound love for nature. Later as an adolescent he was deeply moved by the intensity of G.M. Hopkins's poems. When he was studying in Queen's university, Belfast, (1957-1962), he was influenced by the works of Robert Frost and Ted Hughes. Heaney's professional career is very bright. During 1962-63 he taught at St. Thomas's Secondary School in Belfast, from 1963 to 1966 he was a Lecturer in English at St. Joseph's College and finally from 1985 to 2006 he taught at Harvard University. During 1985-2006 he served as the Oxford Professor of Poetry at

Harvard. He has authored over 20 volumes of poetry and criticism and edited some famous anthologies. Some important volumes of poetry by Heaney are: *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *The Spirit Level* (1995). Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. He is the second Irish poet after W.B. Yeats to win this prestigious prize. Being influenced by Yeats, Heaney dealt with Irish myths and legends. His translation of *Beowulf* (1999) brought him great appreciation and critical acclaim. The poet passed away in 2013.

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### 2.3.12 Text of “Digging”

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*Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.  
Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into the gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down  
Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.  
The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.  
By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.  
My grandfather cut more turf in a day.  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up*

*To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.*

*The cold smell of potato mould, the **squelch** and slap  
Of **soggy** peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through loving roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.*

*Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.*

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### 2.3.13 Glossary and Notes

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line 2: squat- short and fat, unattractive

line 2: snug- warm, comfortable and protected

line 10: lug- a part of something that sticks out, used as a handle or support

line 18: bog- wet, soft land formed of decaying plants

line 25: squelch- to make a wet sucking sound

line 26: soggy- wet and soft

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### 2.3.14 Paraphrase and Critical Appreciation of “Digging”

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**Digging** is one of the most anthologised poems of Seamus Heaney. The poem is included in Heaney's first volume of poetry, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). The poem captures the rural landscape of Northern Ireland, portrays the family members of the poet and throws light on some larger issues relating to the nation. Analyzing this poem, Carter and McRae in *The Routledge History of Literature in English* observe:

He (Heaney) digs into his own memory, into the lives of his family, into the past of Irish history and into the deeper levels of legend and myth which shape the character of the people of his country. Heaney attempts to go beyond the terrible daily events of life in Northern Ireland to discover the

forces beneath the history of that country which might restore hope and comfort. But he does not hide the deep-rooted tribal passions of revenge and honour which endure in contemporary society (446).

The poem is autobiographical in nature. The first person speaker of the poem can be easily identified with Seamus Heaney. Heaney begins the poem with a familiar image of himself, pen in hand:

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

The poet's linking the pen to the gun reminds us of the political turmoil Ireland had to face at the first half of the twentieth century.

The poet's father and grandfather were potato farmers. In his imagination the poet could hear the echo of his predecessors digging the ground with a spade. The middle stanzas of the poem are full of Heaney's family reminiscences. He could visualize his father "Stooping in rhythm through potato drills / Where he was digging." When as a child he used to carry the milk-bottle to his grandfather he would see him "Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods / Over his shoulder, going down and down / For the good turf."

But the poet has "no spade to follow men like them." So he decides to 'dig' with his pen:

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

The pen that replaces the spade becomes the poet's tool. This metaphor is highly significant. On the one hand, it connects the poet's trade with his predecessor's trade with two different instruments (pen and spade) and thus maintains the tradition. On the other hand, it suggests a shift from agriculture to culture. In this context, Helen Vendler observes that an Irish child had to grow up between the offers of two instruments: the spade and the gun, in extension, between 'agricultural tradition' and 'Republican militarism'. Heaney has successfully woven the experiences of his childhood, the reminiscences of his family members and the grave issues relating to the nation in this poem.

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### 2.3.15 Title and Theme

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The title of Seamus Heaney's poem **Digging** is suggestive. Heaney digs into his own memory, into the depths of his own Irishness. The poet's decision to 'dig' with his 'squat pen' suggests the act of writing through which he wants to unearth his past and explore the historical roots of his nation.

The poem **Digging** deals with the poet's relationship with his family, the profession of his father and grandfather and the vocation of the poet. It initially relates the poet's vocation to the inherited tradition of his family and finally connects it to the tradition of his nation.

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### 2.3.16 Structure and Style

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The poem **Digging** deals with the poet's reminiscences of his childhood days, his family and country. This is a relatively short poem in free verse. It breaks up into stanzas of two to five lines. The images in this poem deserve appreciation. They appeal to the sensory perception of the readers. The images of the poet's father and grandfather digging with spade focus on the rhythm of the agricultural life in Ireland. The act of 'digging' is the fulcrum of the poem. This image is deeply suggestive since it not only throws light on the poet's family history but also explores the historical roots of his nation. At the same time the poem captures the scenic beauty of rural Ireland in a simple, sensuous language.

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### 2.3.17 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

- a. Attempt a critical analysis of Seamus Heaney's "Digging".
- b. How does Heaney's poem "Digging" reflect on the poet's family history and explore the historical roots of his nation?

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

- a. Attempt a critical note on the title of Seamus Heaney's "Digging".
- b. Write a critical analysis on the imagery of "Digging".

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

- a. Explain with reference to the context:
  - i. “By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.”
  - ii. “Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests  
I’ll dig with it.”
- b. Write a short note on the use of the two instruments pen and spade as metaphors.

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### **2.3.18 Summing Up**

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- i. This unit discusses the socio-political background of Post-1950 British poetry
- ii. It introduces Philip Larkin and situates him in the tradition of Movement poetry
- iii. This unit analyses Larkin’s poem “Church Going” in detail including the title, theme and structure
- iv. This unit introduces Seamus Heaney to the students
- v. It situates Heaney to his Irish background
- vi. This unit analyzes Heaney’s poem “Digging” in details, concentrating on the title, theme and structure
- vii. Finally it provides comprehension exercises on both the poems

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### **2.3.19 Activity for the Learner**

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For a comprehensive view on Larkin’s poetry we would suggest you to read Larkin’s poems “The Whitsun Weddings”, “An Arundel Tomb”, “Ambulances”, “Next, Please”, “At Grass”, “Going”, etc.

For a comprehensive view on Heaney’s poetry you can read Heaney’s poems “Personal Helicon”, “Tinder”, “Bone Dreams”, “Punishment”, “The Harvest Bow”, etc.

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### 2.3.20 Comprehensive Reading

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## Module-3

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### Unit-1 □ D.H. LAWRENCE: *SONS AND LOVERS*

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#### Structure:

- 3.1.1 Introduction
- 3.1.2 The Novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: An Overview
- 3.1.3 D.H Lawrence: His Fictional World
- 3.1.4 Locating *Sons and Lovers* in the Lawrence canon
- 3.1.5 Characters: A Sneak Peek
- 3.1.6 Chapter-wise Critical Summary
- 3.1.7 Analysis of Major Characters
- 3.1.8 Human Relationships in *Sons and Lovers*
- 3.1.9 Symbolism
- 3.1.10 Classifying *Sons and Lovers* as a Novel
- 3.1.11 Summing Up
- 3.1.12 Comprehension Exercises
- 3.1.13 Suggested Reading

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#### 3.1.1 Introduction

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Published in 1913, *Sons and Lovers* is D.H. Lawrence's third novel, and one of the landmark novels of the twentieth century. In the forty odd years between the publication of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), the last novel that you studied, and *Sons and Lovers*, the English novel developed in certain major respects. It would not be enough to only point out that Hardy was a Victorian novelist while Lawrence was modern. While that is true, what we also need to remember is that there are some striking continuities that we may detect between Hardy and Lawrence and again, there are certain aspects in which Lawrence brings something fresh and new to the English novel. Both Hardy and Lawrence are concerned with the 'undefinable', the 'unanalysable' and the 'unresolved'. However, changes in attitudes, in society, in science, in beliefs in these forty years brought about many innovations in the form and content of novels.

*Sons and Lovers* is an intense and emotionally charged account of the coming of age of the novel's hero Paul Morel, drawing heavily from Lawrence's own experiences. Apart from being a vivid rendering of personal relationships, *Sons and Lovers* is also famous for its depiction of working class life in the mining town of Bestwood, Nottinghamshire, a thinly disguised portrait of Lawrence's own hometown Eastwood. Like many of Lawrence's other writings, this novel too depicts the abject conditions of the small mines of Nottinghamshire and is informed by Lawrence's denunciation of industrialisation and his nostalgia for an older pre-industrial England. In the following pages, we will try to explore the various facets of Lawrence's first major novel and attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the text in its various aspects as a **bildungsroman**, a **family chronicle**, and a **psychological examination of love and sexuality**.

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### 3.1.2 The Novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: An Overview

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As you know, despite the popularity of poetry, it was the novel which was the most dominant form of literary production in the Victorian Age. Novels were the chief source of entertainment for the burgeoning middle class of England. It is interesting to note here that during the Victorian Era, the population of England more than doubled, from 14 million to 32 million.

For this ever growing population, many different varieties of novels were written during the Victorian Age, for instance the novel of manners by William Makepeace Thackeray, the humanitarian and reformist novels of Charles Dickens, novels relating to social problems by Elizabeth Gaskell, romantic and Gothic novels by the Bronte sisters, novels exploring the genre of nonsense by Lewis Carroll, adventure novels by Robert Louis Stevenson, crime novels by Arthur Conan Doyle, the bildungsroman and exotic novels by Rudyard Kipling and Oscar Wilde and so on. A detailed study and analysis of these writers is important to understand the breadth and variety of the Victorian novel but is beyond the scope of this brief account.

While the early and mid Victorian novels are characterised by a dominant sense of moral and social ethic and an identification of the authors as observers of the particular age to which they belonged, the late nineteenth century is characterised by movements like realism, naturalism and aestheticism. The influence of certain major

nineteenth century thinkers like Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Karl Marx (1818–1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) led to sweeping social and intellectual changes and laid the foundation of the modern age. The powerful ideas of these thinkers led to a questioning of several social, economic and religious beliefs that had hitherto been entrenched in the Victorian mindset.

The Victorian era also witnessed some significant improvements in technology. The Industrial Revolution changed in a big way how people lived, worked, and traveled. These improvements in technology provided a number of unprecedented opportunities to the English people but they also led to a major upheaval in terms of how people lived and dealt with the world around them. This change was complicated further by the growth of the working classes. The growth of industrialism led to the creation of spectacular wealth but it also created an unbridgeable schism between the haves and the have-nots. These transitions from a predominantly pastoral lifestyle to one dominated by the urban milieu of the city, coupled with the changing dynamics between different social classes became one of the chief concerns of many writers including Lawrence.

With regard to the novel, the last decades of the nineteenth century are dominated by Thomas Hardy. Hardy was a Victorian realist whose important novels include *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895/6). All his novels were set in the fictional region of Wessex and explored the themes of fate and suffering. He was a trenchant critic of many Victorian social institutions. In one of Hardy's most controversial novels, *Jude the Obscure*, the author provides a dramatic depiction of the stranglehold that the outdated divorce laws can have on people. In the same novel Hardy also criticizes the exclusivity of university admission norms and their discrimination on the basis of class.

**With relation to Lawrence, the important point to remember about Hardy is the fact that he is often considered to be Lawrence's spiritual father and many of the tendencies he explored in his novels find full maturation in Lawrence's works.**

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### 3.1.3 D.H Lawrence: His Fictional World

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Novelist, poet, playwright, critic, painter and travel writer, David Herbert

Lawrence rose from very humble origins to become one of the most influential as well as controversial literary figures of the twentieth century. Lawrence was born on September 11, 1885, in the small mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire, the fourth child of his parents. His father, Arthur John Lawrence, worked as a coal miner in one of the many small mines that dotted the Nottinghamshire landscape, whereas his mother, Lydia Lawrence née Beardsall belonged originally to the middle class and was a former school teacher. When her fortunes fell after her marriage, she began supplementing her husband's income by working from home as a lace maker. It is from his intellectual and ambitious mother that Lawrence inherited his love for books as well as his desire to rise above his working class origins. As a child, he was a shy, reserved boy, a misfit among his social peers, but was academically good enough to be first boy in the history of Eastwood to win a County Council scholarship to the Nottingham High School. Thus we may bear in mind, as Raymond Williams points out that the important thing to remember about Lawrence's social responses to industrialization was that he was not merely a witness to it as a child, but someone who was caught in its processes, and it was no small miracle that he was able to break out of its shackles and fashion a literary career for himself, though it might have seemed obvious enough in retrospect.

Lawrence began working as a clerk for a surgical goods manufacturer in 1901, but quit soon after, following his brother Ernest's sudden death due to a skin disease. This was followed by his stint as a student teacher at the British School in Eastwood. It was here that he met a young woman named Jessie Chambers, a farmer's daughter who became his close friend and intellectual companion, and who was controversially portrayed as Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. Jesse encouraged Lawrence to pursue writing seriously and submitted a collection of his poems to Ford Madox Ford, who subsequently published them in the *English Review* in 1909. In 1911, Lawrence's first novel *The White Peacock* was published, a year after his mother's death. By this time Lawrence had passed out from Nottingham University College and was writing frequently. In 1912 he met Frieda von Richthofen, the wife of his professor Ernest Weekly, and fell in love with her. Frieda left her husband and three children, and they eloped to Bavaria and then to Austria, Germany and Italy. They were married on July 13, 1914.

He published his first play, *The Daughter-in-Law*, in 1912. A year later, he published his first volume of poetry: *Love Poems and Others*. In 1912, Lawrence's second novel *The Trespassers* also appeared, and then in 1913, his first major novel,

the heavily autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* was published. Lawrence was very confident about this third novel of his, about which he asserted in a letter to his publisher Edward Garnett, “It is a great tragedy, and I tell you I’ve written a great book. It’s the tragedy of thousands of young men in England .... Read my novel – it’s a great novel. If you can’t see the development – which is slow like growth – I can.” (Letters I, pp.476-77).

Lawrence continued to write furiously, and in 1914 was published his critically acclaimed collection of short stories entitled *The Prussian Officer*. His fourth novel, *The Rainbow* was published in 1915, describing the experiences of two sisters growing up in the north of England. The character of Ursula Brangwen was partly based on Lawrence’s teaching colleague in Nottingham, Louis Burrows, with whom he was briefly engaged. The novel explicitly dealt with sex and was banned on the charges of alleged obscenity. These were trying times for Lawrence as about a thousand copies of his novel were burnt on a magisterial order and his paintings were also confiscated from an art gallery. This was also a time when Lawrence and his wife were unable to obtain passports as Frieda was not only German but also a cousin of the famous “Red Baron” Von Richthofen, and was thus viewed with great suspicion. They were suspected to be spies for the Germans and were expelled from Cornwall in 1917. The Lawrences were not permitted to emigrate until 1919, after which they travelled many parts of the world. Still, in spite of such hardships, Lawrence published four volumes of poetry during this period - *Amores* (1916), *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1919), *New Poems* (1918) and *Bay: A Book of Poems* (1919).

In 1920 was published his next major novel, *Women in Love*, considered to be a sequel to *The Rainbow*. This novel additionally grapples with the theme of homosexuality too, and it is around this time that Lawrence is alleged to have had a homosexual liaison with a Cornish farmer named William Henry Hocking. In a letter written during 1913, he writes, “I should like to know why nearly every man that approaches greatness tends to homosexuality, whether he admits it or not ...” He goes on to recollect, “I believe the nearest I’ve come to perfect love was with a young coal-miner when I was about 16.”

In the 1920s Lawrence and Frieda travelled extensively around Europe, New Mexico, and Mexico in a period he later described as his “savage pilgrimage”. He continued writing prolifically, but it is only with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), his

last major novel, again heavily censored and censured for its erotic subject matter, that he approached the fame and reputation of his acclaimed earlier novels.

Following various bouts of illnesses including malaria, Lawrence died of tuberculosis on March 2, 1930, in Vence, France.

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### **3.1.4. Locating *Sons and Lovers* in the Lawrence canon**

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*Sons and Lovers* (1913) is Lawrence's first major novel. Initially titled *Paul Morel*, it is a deeply autobiographical novel that traces the unhappy marriage of Paul's parents, the "warm and hearty, but unstable" Walter Morel, and the "clever, ironical, delicately moulded" Gertrude. (Letters I. p.190), and the effect it has on the children, particularly on Paul. As he grows up, he is inevitably and unconsciously drawn towards his mother and, simultaneously, develops a hatred for his father. This close bond with his mother gradually assumes Oedipal overtones and stunts Paul's emotional response towards other women in his life, thus leaving him unable to have fulfilling relationships with them, though he does attempt to break free from his mother's emotional prison.

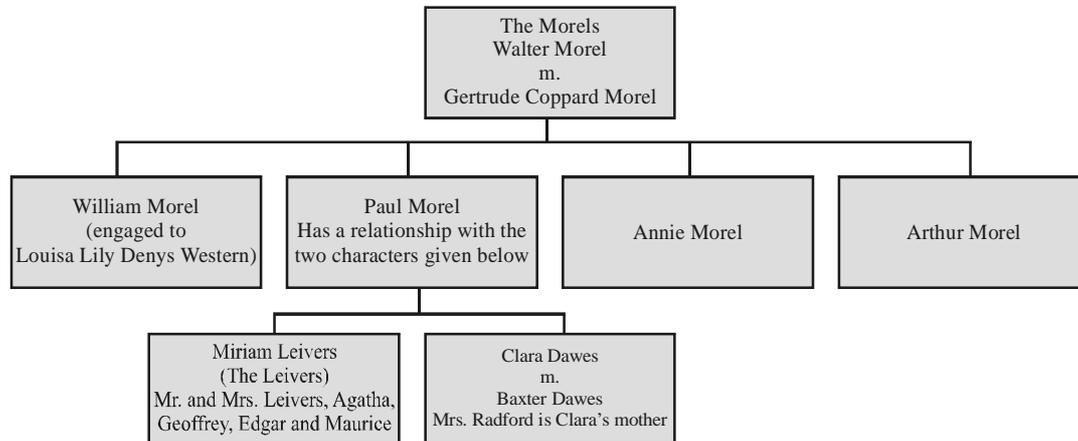
The actual process of writing the novel proved to be difficult and full of interruptions for Lawrence. He began working on it in September 1910, coinciding with the closing stages of his mother's illness, only to discontinue it. In March 1911, still grieving his mother's death, he resumed a new draft which was also abandoned. He tried yet again in November 1911, and it was almost a year later, in late autumn 1912, when, after having met Frieda, and after extensive revisions suggested by his editor Edward Garnett, he finally finished the novel and changed the title from *Paul Morel* to the more meaningful *Sons and Lovers*. The deeply personal and disturbing nature of his work was evident to him and he wrote to Garnett, "It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England," (*Letters i.* 476).

*Sons and Lovers* marks a culmination of Lawrence's early phase as a novelist and along with *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921), it remains one of his mostly highly regarded works. In terms of his style, this is a novel where we find a coalescing of the realistic narration of the traditional novel with the nuanced approach of the modern psychological novel.

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### 3.1.5 Characters: A Sneak Peek

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### 3.1.6 Chapter-wise Critical Summary

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#### ➤ **Book –I: Chapter – 1: The Early Married Life of the Morels**

Chapter-1 introduces the Morels – Walter and Gertrude, and their two children William and Anne. Gertrude is pregnant with her third child. We also get a glimpse of an unhappy marriage. Gertrude had married beneath her, and the stark differences between her and Walter are now beginning to crack open their relationship. Walter is spirited and physical, while Gertrude reserved, puritanical and intellectual. This chapter also gives the book its sense of place – Bestwood, a little Nottinghamshire town that is a thinly veiled representation of Lawrence’s own native village of Eastwood. The opening lines – “‘The Bottoms’ succeeded to ‘Hell Row’” – create the ambience of a domestic and pre-industrial mining town. The strong maternal bond that William has with Gertrude is highlighted when he is proud and happy that his attractive mother accompanies him to the wakes, but when she leaves, though he still stays back, somehow he doesn’t feel as happy anymore. Later he brings two egg cups that he won as prize, as a gift for her. The chapter ends with a violent quarrel between the Morels that crystallizes their mutual hatred.

#### **Chapter – 2: The Birth of Paul, and Another Battle**

There is a two-directional contradictory movement in this chapter. The marital

discord between the Morels reaches a crescendo, with growing quarrels between them on the one hand, and on the other hand, this chapter depicts the birth of the Morels' third child Paul, who will later of course, become the protagonist of the story. Things come to such a pass between Gertrude and Walter Morel that they both develop a hard bitterness against each other and their relationship reaches a point of no-return. While Walter is clearly the aggressor, and the one who causes so much trouble for his wife, in terms of their spirit however, Gertrude emerges far stronger than her husband. Once when she had left home with her children in exasperation as Walter had kicked William, Gertrude looks at Paul's innocent baby face and realizes, "in some far inner lace of her soul, that she and her husband were guilty." And so, she pledged "With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved."

### **Chapter – 3: The Casting Off of Morel – The Taking on of William**

Morel suffers from an inflammation of his brain due to which he is incapacitated, and for a while, he is unable to go to the mines. During this financially strained period of his convalescence however, Mrs. Morel slowly begins to realize that she can fend for herself even when Morel, the breadwinner of the house, is bedridden and incapacitated. This leads to a subtle and gradual shift in their equation. Thus while the frequent and violent quarrels between them abates substantially, it also means that Gertrude begins to love Walter lesser and lesser. This growing distance between them is coterminous with their first born William growing up into a competent and strong young lad. There is a crucial occasion in the chapter when Gertrude puts her foot down and does not let Walter thrash William on the basis of complaints from a neighbour. This casting off of Walter Morel both in the sense that she no longer felt dependent on him and also her growing fondness and preference for William to fill up her life provides the title of this chapter. But crucially the chapter ends with William having got a job in London and his impending departure from Bestwood. Mrs. Morel's intense and almost passionate dependence upon her elder son foreshadows her relationship with Paul later in the novel. Also, their fourth child Arthur is born.

### **Chapter – 4: The Young Life of Paul.**

The heavily autobiographical portrait of Paul Morel emerges in this chapter. It is a picture of an overly sensitive, artistic boy who has trouble fitting into the coarse environment of Bestwood. He shares an intense bond with his mother, and the oedipal overtones of this relationship are very clearly delineated from this chapter

onwards. He is initially dependent upon his sister Annie, which in a way, foreshadows his dependence upon his mother later in the novel. In fact, this childhood portrait of Paul is significant in its anticipation of many of his traits that will become apparent later on. In a curious incident, Paul accidentally breaks Annie's doll. Instead of being apologetic to Annie, Paul becomes strangely destructive and proposes to burn the broken doll as a sacrificial rite. In a way, Paul will continue to hate those whom he hurts. There is an instance in this chapter where Paul goes to collect his father's salary from the mining company's office but recoils from the masculine physicality of the interaction there. With the money coming in from William at least in these early days, the Morels move out from the Bottoms to a pleasanter house on top of a hill. William arrives from London, laden with gifts, but the domestic harmony is short lived. Quarrels between the Morels continue and at one point William threatens to beat up his father if he touches his mother again. Though this flashpoint is diffused by Gertrude, yet Lawrence succeeds in showing different dimensions of the same event, in that she may seek to control this father-son rivalry for some kind of emotional fulfilment or compensation. Walter Morel realizes his increasing isolation within the family but he reacts perversely by becoming even more coarse than before.

#### **Chapter – 5: Paul Launches into Life**

Walter Morel injures his foot and is hospitalized. With him away, the house seems to be a haven of exceptional peace and harmony for Gertrude and the children. Presently, Paul is fourteen and his mother asks him to search for a job in the advertisements in the local newspapers. Paul and his mother go to Nottingham for a job interview at the office of a surgical appliances manufacturer. Throughout this chapter, there are references to Paul's extreme shyness and oversensitivity. The journey to Nottingham with his mother is satisfying and happy, though there are minor problems. Lawrence hints at the amorous overtones in their relationship. As Mrs. Morel takes money out of her purse, Paul watches her carefully, and the narrator describes how "his heart contracted with pain of love for her". Again, on the train, "he was sensible all the time of having her opposite him. Suddenly their eyes met, and she smiled to him – a rare, intimate smile, beautiful with brightness and love. Then each looked out of the window." And again, even more directly, they "walked down Station Street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together." Meanwhile, Paul gets the job and begins working as a "Spiral" – someone who was required to translate French letters of orders and requisitions into English. Though he is very shy to begin with, after a while, he gets along fine and enjoys himself at work, though the long hours and unsanitary working conditions make him sick and pale.

## **Chapter – 6: Death in the Family**

William brings Lily Weston home but it is an unsuccessful trip, as nobody really likes her, nor does she feel comfortable with them. Due to the presence of Lily, there is a change in the equation between William and Mrs. Morel – the latter now relying more on Paul, and feeling more and more distant from William. She seems unable to forgive or accept the presence of another girl in his life. Later, Mrs. Morel proposes to visit Wiley Farm, where the Leivers Live Like Paul, Miriam too is shy and sensitive, but she will bring out a complicated response in Paul later on. William and Lily come back for a second trip to Bestwood, and though William still plans to marry her, there are cracks in their relationship. William prophetically predicts that if he were to die, she would not waste too much time remembering him. Later in October, when William comes home again, alone, his health begins to deteriorate. Within days of his return to London, a telegram reaches Mrs. Morel informing her of William's failing health. He dies suddenly of pneumonia and a skin infection called erysipelas. For the first few months, Mrs. Morel is in a state of shock after such a sudden bereavement and seems to withdraw from life, but when Paul too, falls ill with pneumonia, she is jolted back to life. She nurses him back to health and from now onwards, her life is rooted in Paul.

## **➤ Book –II: Chapter – 7: Lad-And-Girl Love**

This chapter also marks the beginning of Book – II of the novel, a phase where Paul will come into his own and rightfully become the 'hero' of the book. With William's death he becomes the centre of Mrs. Morel's life. At the same time, he becomes closer to Miriam and her mother, Mrs. Leivers. The resultant tension in Paul's characterization where he is pulled in different directions becomes the central focus of the novel, and it is for us to witness what choices Paul makes from here on. Miriam's sexual inhibitions are also explored in this chapter repeatedly. Once when she takes Paul to the family swing, though he soars in freedom, she finds it impossible to let go and surrender herself into Paul's hands. Although Paul will feel inspired by Miriam and also attracted by her, it is this inhibition which will mar their relationship in course of time. Her natural intensity towards most things around her will stifle Paul, and also scare Mrs. Morel that if she does not stop Miriam's growing closeness with Paul, she will not only "suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left" but also, more importantly, usurp her position in his life. During their trip to the Mablethorpe Cottage by the seaside, both Gertrude and Annie scorn her. On

their walk back to the cottage, Paul is filled with desire for Miriam, but he senses something in her that prevents him from kissing her or expressing his feelings for her in any way. Thus while he feels intensely attracted to her, he is also repelled by her and craves to go back to his jolly family that brings out his normal happy self.

### **Chapter – 8: Strife in Love**

Clara Dawes is introduced briefly in this chapter. Paul runs into her and Miriam and is immediately struck by her beauty. Miriam notices his attraction for the older and stronger Clara, but later, Paul evasively criticizes her for being badly dressed. As the title of the chapter suggests, the tension in the Paul-Miriam relationship heightens in this chapter. They are both drawn to each other but are held back by a strange and strong kind of inhibition and are unable to be physically intimate. In Paul's case it is the fierce jealousy and possessiveness of his mother that renders him unable to break free from it. On the evening when Miriam comes to visit him, though Paul forgets the bread in the oven because he was busy flirting with the earthy Beatrice, yet it is Miriam who is blamed for his carelessness by Mrs. Morel. In one of the most overtly oedipal scenes of the novel, Mrs. Morel accuses him of being obsessed with Miriam. Paul pleads by claiming that he only likes to talk to Miriam but does not love her. They embrace closely and Paul passionately kisses Mrs. Morel on her throat, and she kisses him back. Walter Morel enters and sneers at their closeness, and father and son are about to come to blows, which is prevented only by Mrs. Morel's suspiciously timely fit of fainting. This chapter also shows Lawrence's warmth and respect towards the common miners and their activities in the reckoning scene, where Walter Morel and the other miners of his stall divide the money among themselves with utmost honesty despite being poor and needy.

### **Chapter – 9: Defeat of Miriam**

Yet another sequence of events resulting in the same unconsummated passion between Paul and Miriam is recorded in this chapter. Lawrence is possibly trying to show how, whatever might be the reasons, this relationship is doomed. Paul torments Miriam by telling her that they should not meet too often but then the very next week he proposes marriage to Miriam. But she refuses, sensing that he is doing so only under duress, because he is concerned that it may not be socially acceptable to be spending so much time together without marrying each other. This chapter marks the beginning of the end of the Paul-Miriam relationship. In an effort to test Paul, Miriam tempts him by getting him to meet the attractive Clara, because she believes

at heart, that Paul's need for her is greater than such temptations. But their relationship flourishes before her very eyes as they meet frequently at Willey Farm, after Clara's initial haughtiness and Paul's resultant discomfort. After this Paul withdraws from Miriam even more. This chapter also presents Annie's marriage with Leonard and Arthur's courtship of Beatrice Wyld. After Annie's marriage, the Morels are very lonely, leading Paul to feel even more responsible for his mother's happiness and emotional well being.

### **Chapter – 10: Clara**

Paul wins the first prize in the prestigious winter exhibition held at the Nottingham Castle. Mrs. Morel is overjoyed and deems it to be as much her success as Paul's. Mr. Morel too is happy and awed by Paul's success but his feeling of being an outsider in his own family will be compounded after this event, as Mrs. Morel will pull out all stops to push Paul upwards into the middle class. Paul however idealistically believes that it is the working class which has the vital life force and human warmth. Meanwhile Arthur marries Beatrice Wyld after she becomes pregnant. One day Paul visits Clara at her mother, Mrs. Radford's house, and is shocked to learn that Clara is a menial lace weaver. He encounters Clara's vulnerability for the first time and that opens another dimension in their relationship. He insists on helping her get her supervisory job back at Jordan's. But though she becomes closer to Paul, the other shop girls resent her and cut her out of their plans of gifting Paul a box of paints. Clara feels hurt that she did not even know that it was Paul's birthday and later sends him a book of poetry. Paul is deeply moved by the gift, more so because he knows she has gone beyond her means to buy it. Later on one of their walks, Clara confides in Paul about the story of her marriage but Paul sympathises with her husband Baxter as much as he does with Clara. Clara too, on the other hand, tells Paul that Miriam desires him but it is he who never approached her directly for a relationship, and kept her in a limbo of platonic idealism.

### **Chapter – 11: The Test on Miriam**

This is a chapter that brings the sexual incompatibility of Paul and Miriam to the fore. With the advent of spring, Paul is back to Miriam. On a stormy evening, when Paul and Miriam are together, he loves the dark as he feels the individual is dissolved into an eternal being. But Miriam hates it and fears that the damp and cold will make Paul feel sick. Later when they are alone together in Miriam's grandmother's cottage, Paul is transfixed by Miriam's beauty. They play man and wife with gay abandon,

but on each occasion of their love making, Miriam feels as if she should offer her body as an act of sacrifice or duty to Paul because he wants her, and not because she feels any desire herself. Just like Paul, she too is deeply affected by her mother and is reacting as a result of her sexually repressive indoctrination. After this, though Paul feels he should be loyal to Miriam, and that he belongs to her in some way, he sees her less frequently. In a significant and symbolic moment, Paul goes out into the garden and is intoxicated by the smell of the white lilies but he is somehow unable to touch them, analogous to his relationship with Miriam. But he plucks one of the purple irises without much thought and promptly returns indoors and announces to his mother that he is leaving Miriam. They exchange bitter words between them, each feeling utterly let down by the turn of events.

### **Chapter – 12: Passion**

Financially and artistically, Paul is prospering. Emotionally, after leaving Miriam, he goes straight to Clara. Once they go on an outing to the river Trent. Though the narrator does not explicitly describe it, they make love, signaled by the fact that Clara's carnation corsage is crushed. However, despite his relationship with Clara, he still visits Willey Farm, as he feels himself to be a part of their family. Very insensitively, Paul discusses his affair with Miriam without caring how she might be feeling after having an affair with him so recently. They discuss various relationships – Paul believes that unlike Baxter Dawes, he knows how to awaken passion in Clara. When Miriam tries to reason that they may be incompatible just as his own parents were, Paul again flares up and says that even if for a short while, there was passion in his parents' marriage. Later, Clara comes to visit the Morels. Strangely, Mrs. Morel is cordial with Clara, possibly because she does not mind allowing her son's physical needs as long as she controls him emotionally. Suddenly, Miriam also drops in at the Morels'. Both Mrs. Morel and Clara are critical of her, but Paul guiltily tries to be nice to her. A few days after this incident, Paul and Clara are late in returning from the theatre and decide to spend that night at Mrs. Radford's place where Paul watches a naked Clara and shares intense moments of intimacy with her.

### **Chapter – 13: Baxter Dawes**

Paul runs into Baxter Dawes in a pub and the two almost come to blows. The simmering tension continues at work too, where Baxter ends up assaulting Mr. Jordan, who was trying to save Paul. But when Paul is called as a witness in court, he upsets Mr. Jordan by saying that his rivalry with Baxter is due to Clara. After

being initially upset with him, Clara falls even more strongly in love with Paul. But Paul now begins to drift apart from Clara, telling his mother that all women were out to claim his soul. While Clara looks for permanence and commitment in the relationship, Paul's needs are more specifically sexual. Paul encounters Baxter twice more in the chapter and during the latter he is knocked unconscious by Baxter. When Paul regains consciousness, ironically he feels a strange kind of wonderment, almost akin to his feelings after lovemaking. While Paul convalesces with a broken shoulder, both Miriam and Clara visit him, but he seems indifferent to both. After a few days, Paul goes on a vacation with his friend, but when he returns he finds his mother seriously ill with a possibly cancerous tumour in her stomach. Paul is terrified about what the future holds for him.

#### **Chapter – 14: The Release**

Paul visits Baxter in a hospital in Sheffield where he is recovering from typhoid. Despite their bitter and violent past, the two men share a deep unspoken bond. While Baxter sympathizes with Paul about his mother's illness, Paul can feel Baxter's sorrow on losing Clara. Later when Paul tells Clara about the ailing Baxter, she is ridden by guilt and accuses him of never having loved her as much as Baxter did. Meanwhile Mrs. Morel is dying a slow painful death with stomach cancer, though she is contented with Paul's success. Paul though, is deeply distressed to witness his mother's terminal illness from such close quarters. There is a fluidity in the equations shared by the main characters at this point. While Mrs. Morel lay dying, Baxter was recuperating. Clara was getting closer to her former husband and moving away from Paul, and finally, Baxter and Paul were becoming close friends. As the months pass, Mrs. Morel's condition deteriorates rapidly until she only seems to be a pair of large eyes. Unable to bear witnessing her pain anymore, Paul, along with Annie, crush all the morphine pills at home and give it to Mrs. Morel. With Mrs. Morel's death, not only is the anchor of Paul's life gone but also his strongest controlling factor. Paul finally breaks up with Clara, who vows to build a better future with Baxter.

#### **Chapter – 15: Derelict**

After his mother's death and his break with Clara, there is nothing really left for Paul at home, or at work. The Morel household breaks up, Walter Morel leaves to stay with a friendly family in Bestwood while Paul drifts to Nottingham and takes lodgings there. A depressed Paul analyses that only art or marriage and children can bring him back to a certain degree of normalcy. But he is unable to paint anymore

and wonders if there is anyone who would be right for him as a partner in marriage. One day he meets Miriam at church. Though they are old friends and Miriam had been a spiritual anchor for him in the past, he knows now that they are not suited for each other. Miriam still believes that Paul belongs to her and will eventually come back to her but Paul goes away. As Paul walks down in the dark night he is aware of his existence as a miniscule part of a much larger whole. While his tiny presence may not matter much, yet he does exist. Paul remembers his mother and calls out for her but he knows that she has diffused into nothingness now. In an ambiguous movement, Paul quickly turns away from the darkness and heads towards the “faintly humming, glowing town, quickly”. This ending may be read either as one of hope, or of despair, depending upon our assessment of Paul’s character.

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### **3.1.7 Analysis of Major Characters**

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#### **✓ Paul Morel**

Paul is the third of the Morel children in *Sons and Lovers*, and an autobiographical portrait of Lawrence himself. In many ways the chief focus of the novel is the coming of age of Paul Morel, and it has often been alternately described as a *bildungsroman* or a *kunstlerroman*. As a child the sensitive Paul has difficulty assimilating with the rough and tumble of the masculine world of the Bestwood collieries. At home, he is deeply affected by the marital discord between his parents. This leads him to form a strange mixture of sympathy, love and dependence upon his stern, disciplinarian mother Gertrude Morel. But this bond is so very overpowering a presence in Paul’s life that he is unable to sustain independent relationships with other women towards whom he is attracted. It is through Paul that his mother seeks to realise her dream of moving socially upward. Although he begins as a shy child, he gains social confidence as he grows up, particularly after he begins working in an office. This new found confidence, coupled with his growing interest in art, leads him on for intellectual stimulation and company to Miriam Leivers and her mother Mrs. Leivers. But his mother strongly disapproves of his relationship with Miriam, whom she feels threatened by. Faced with a choice, Paul unceremoniously rejects the emotional and spiritual Miriam and falls back upon his mother. With Clara too, Paul shares a predominantly sexual bond. The oedipal theme of the novel is one of its central strands, and one that defines Paul’s character. He feels for his mother as one might feel for a lover, and this streak in him incapacitates him from forging fresh linkages.

His relationship with his father is fraught with bitterness and hatred. Paul squarely blames him for his mother's misery, and even implores her on occasion not to share the same bed with him. It is only after his mother's death that he finds himself bereft of her anchoring presence in his life. Whether he chooses to drown in his sorrow for his mother or whether he moves on to explore a new life has been left open to interpretation.

#### ✓ **Gertrude Morel**

Married to Walter Morel, Gertrude Morel is the mother of the five Morel children. She is intensely attracted to Walter in her youth and marries him for passion. But within months of her marriage, she is contemptuously informed by Walter's mother that he has lied to her and he neither owns the house they live in, nor makes as much money as he has given her to believe. The marriage soon spirals downwards into a mess and Walter turns into an abusive alcoholic. Things come to a pass when in a fit of rage, Walter throws a heavy wooden drawer at his wife which causes a deep gash in her forehead. He immediately sobers and tries to make amends but it is too late by then. Gertrude walks out of her home and though she has no option but to come back the next morning, the night spent outside her home has been epiphanic in that she realises that she should live for her children. Looking at the infant Paul, she realises that it is her duty to look after him and care for him even if she has grave differences with her husband. After this Gertrude gradually and irretrievably withdraws from her husband and devotes all her energies to the upbringing of her children, particularly her two sons William and Paul. She pins all her hopes initially on William, who grows up to be a strapping, handsome young man with all the social vitality and love for dancing of his father. But when he moves away to London, marries and then shockingly dies, Mrs. Morel slowly turns all her energies and affections to Paul. She lives her dreams through Paul and there are several instances throughout the novel that she treats him like a lover. So when he is attracted to Miriam, Mrs. Morel strongly disapproves. Lawrence has interestingly chosen the name Gertrude as it echoes the name of Hamlet's mother, thus once again, suggesting the same erotic overtones as existed between Hamlet and his mother.

#### ✓ **Walter Morel**

Walter Morel comes across as a strong but contradictory character who is alternately brutal and tender with his family. Lawrence's description of the young Walter Morel is of an instinctual and unrestrained handsome man, to whom the

reserved Gertrude is irresistibly attracted. Gertrude describes him as a man whose “flame of life” “flowed from off his flesh like the flame from a candle”. This is the Walter Morel who, as a sensuous young man, is ready and so pleasant with everybody. But as the marriage becomes more embittered, Walter turns increasingly brutal and anti social, resorting to violence, abuse and alcoholism. Consequently, his sons, particularly Paul, is wary and resentful of him and treats him as an outsider. There are instances of Morel’s tenderness towards his family as he potters around the house doing odd jobs. During such times, his children gather around him warmly and these are occasional instances of domestic harmony that the novel is peppered with. One of the keys to Morel’s character is his attitude towards authority, which he found hateful. Thus whenever Morel is left unfettered, it is his natural tender self that is seen. On the other hand, whenever he feels compelled by any kind of authoritarian or controlling figure, he explodes into bitterness and violence. Many of his arguments with Gertrude also take this trajectory. Thus, Lawrence’s attitude towards Walter Morel’s character is ambiguous. While the narrative makes it quite clear that Walter Morel is extremely abusive and brutal, yet it also suggests that there are redeeming shades to his nature, and that his violence often stems from his inability to handle dominating behaviour rather than any innate cruelty.

#### ✓ **William Morel**

William, the eldest of the Morels, is Mrs. Morel’s first son and lover. As William grows up, Gertrude first pins all her hopes on him. Strikingly similar to his father, William is handsome, athletic, hardworking and social. He works initially as a clerk in the Bestwood Co-operative Society office, but later moves to Nottingham, and then to London, with a lucrative job at a lawyer’s office. In London, William gets engaged to the pretty but shallow Lily. Though he soon realizes his folly, yet he feels obliged to marry her as he is obligated to honour his commitment. This trait in William sets him as a foil to Paul, who will prove himself to be a non conformist, unaffected by social conventions. At such a juncture of William’s life, he suddenly falls ill, and mysteriously dies of pneumonia and the rare disease erysipelas. It is under such circumstances that a shocked and bereaved Mrs. Morel turns all her attention towards her second son Paul, who now takes William’s position in her life.

#### ✓ **Miriam Leivers**

In a certain sense, *Sons and Lovers* may be said to be an exploration of Paul Morel’s relationship with three women who play pivotal roles in his life. The first

of these women is of course Gertrude Morel, Paul's mother. The second woman whom Paul encounters and who has a lasting influence on his life is Miriam Leivers. Miriam is the first young woman Paul is attracted to. She is a shy, sensitive and romantic girl, who lives in the neighbouring Wiley Farm. She is attracted by Paul's intellectual and his artistic talent, which she steadfastly encourages. Paul too feels inspired by Miriam's interest in his art and it leads him to be more confident about his abilities. She is also the first person who causes Paul to move away from his mother. This expectedly causes a great deal of resentment in Gertrude Morel, who feels challenged in her emotional control over Paul, for which she never forgives Miriam. There are obvious repercussions on the Paul-Miriam relationship. Mrs. Morel is openly jealous of Miriam and satirically observes that Miriam seems to want to absorb all of Paul for herself and finds it abnormal. Paul too, almost reflecting his mother's constant resentment of Miriam, feels stifled by her intense spirituality and her emotional over dependence on him. After being interminably confused about Miriam eventually Paul rejects her with a cruelly worded letter where he describes her as a mystic nun, whom he is spiritually aligned to, but with whom he cannot ever be capable of physical intimacy.

#### ✓ **Clara Dawes**

Towards the close of the Miriam episode, Paul begins to turn towards Clara Dawes. This coincides with Mrs. Morel's realisation after Paul's rift with Miriam that it will not be possible for her to hold on to her son's affections exclusively. Clara, Baxter Dawes's estranged wife and a member of the Suffragette movement, she is Lawrence's portrayal of the New Woman. Frankly sensual, forthright and a woman of this world, Clara is diametrically opposed to Miriam. It is due to Clara's influence that Paul is able to shake off his own physical awkwardness. But even with her, Paul is unable to give himself completely, and he confesses as much to his mother when he says that he would never be able to do so completely as long as she was alive. When his mother dies, he realises that has never learnt to live without her, and so, in a sense, he has never learnt to live. The relationship with Clara too inevitably ends. As the feminist critic Kate Millet has pointed out, Lawrence seems to use the women in this novel as instruments to show Paul's growth as a character, and he seems to discard them arbitrarily. If Miriam helped Paul delve into his spiritual and artistic capabilities, Clara freed him from his physical and sexual hesitation. But having served this purpose, Paul seems unable to forge a full-fledged relationship with her, or with any other woman. In the end, unable to find the

commitment she desires from Paul, Clara goes back to her husband, Baxter, with whom she pledges to build a strong relationship.

✓ **Annie Morel**

Paul's older sister. When their mother lies dying toward the end of the novel, she and Paul decide to give her an overdose of morphine.

✓ **Arthur Morel**

Paul's younger brother and the youngest of the Morel sons. He is handsome but immature. He recklessly joins the army only to leave it soon.

✓ **Louisa Lily Denys Western**

Lily is the vain and materialistic girlfriend of William Morel. She comes to visit the Morels and stays with them for a while, but her arrogance puts William off. After his death, she soon forgets about him and moves on with her life.

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### **3.1.8. Human Relationships in *Sons and Lovers***

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Like all of Lawrence's other novels, *Sons and Lovers* too, is essentially a novel of human relationships. From the unhappy marriage of the Morels to the oedipal overtones of the Paul-Gertrude relationship and Paul's resultant inability to successfully handle relationships with other women in his life, the central focus of the novel rests in the minute explication of these personal relationships among its characters. In order to understand the dynamics of the various human relationships that are portrayed in the novel, you must keep in mind some of Lawrence's basic ideas about relationships. For Lawrence a new form of human consciousness could only be achieved on the basis of authentic human relationships. To that end, he had radically different views from the conventional mores of his times. He was a strident critic of traditional Victorian moral and ethical values

Lawrence's depiction of relationships is informed by his understanding of sexuality, religion and philosophy. Drawing his beliefs from his readings of Schopenhauer, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Ernst Haeckel, Lawrence saw a fundamental duality between flesh and spirit, and he believed that human relationships are hampered by social and religious strictures. In 1915, Lawrence published a volume of six essays entitled *The Crown*, that encapsulated his philosophical ideas about human nature and relationships.

For Lawrence human life is split between a conscious rational essence and an unconscious, biological (natural) existence. Lawrence placed his trust on instinct as the fundamental governing principle of all human relationships and emphasized on the importance of sexual relationship as an important means towards an authentic union between man and woman. It is through a fulfilling sexual relationship, according to Lawrence, that man may attain a sense of human dignity. Thus a fulfilling physical relationship can lead to a sense of self actualization and act as a solution against the dehumanising and impersonal modern civilization.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence not only tackles a Freudian oedipal relationship between Paul and his mother, he also portrays Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara, on the corresponding planes of spirit and flesh. In his frank treatment of sexuality in man-woman relationships, he was undoubtedly influenced by Thomas Hardy, who broke new ground in Victorian fiction with his articulation of sexuality and the unconscious. While Hardy still employed indirect and veiled narrative strategies, Lawrence took this legacy forward and was much more forthright and direct in his depiction of sexual relationships in many of his novels, including *Sons and Lovers*. In doing so, Lawrence rejected the doctrines of the traditional Christian religion and may be said to be one of the precursors to the sexual revolution of the twentieth century.

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### ***3.1.9 Symbolism in Sons and Lovers***

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A symbol may be defined as a literary device that contains several layers of meaning, often concealed at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbol is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning. As a novelist, Lawrence is known for his deft handling of symbols that imbue his stories with a more complex and deeper meaning, as we may note in this novel too.

In the first chapter, when William proudly gifts his mother the two blue egg cups that he has won in the fair, it is a symbol of his reverential love for his mother and his anxious need to please her. Mrs. Morel is indeed very happy with the delicate egg cups. This is followed soon after by a drunken Walter Morel coming home with a gingerbread for his wife, but it of course leaves her unaffected, thus depicting Morel's inadequacy in pleasing his wife.

Once the Morels move to Scargill Street, the ash-tree beside their house stands for the sinister and dark aspects of life. It is symbolic of the dark, mysterious forces of nature which are the foreboders of tragedy in human-life. It is symbolic of the disharmony that exists between the husband and wife in the Morel family. Although Mrs. Morel is very fond of the ash tree, the children are terrified of it. The persistent bickering of the parents becomes a terror for the children, who lying awake upstairs are unable to coherently apprehend as to what would happen ultimately. The tree becomes a symbol of the inner terror of children who strike and moan inwardly. It also prophesies the future doom which is to beset the Morel family.

The Swing at Willey Farm is symbolic of the vacillating relationship between Paul and Miriam. The forward and backward movement of the swing stands for the moments of their emotional and spiritual union only to be followed by their inability to hold on to each other for a very long time. While Paul enjoys swinging with abandon, Miriam is unable to let go of herself, which seems to suggest a degree of frigidity that Paul will later accuse her of. Miriam's inability to relax is also suggested when she is afraid to feed the hens in Wiley Farm although Paul assures her that it will not hurt her.

Natural images and symbols abound in the novel. One evening, when Paul and Miriam are on a walk together, they witness a large orange moon behind them. Both Paul and Miriam are aroused by the sight of the moon. But though Miriam is also deeply affected, still Paul fails to get across to her. Thus the orange moon becomes a symbol of aroused passion in Paul. Mrs. Morel too once witnesses a "blinding August moon" when she is locked out of the house by Walter just before the birth of Paul. Mrs. Morel feels herself melting away in the moon light along with the child. Later when she is allowed into the house again, she smiles seeing her face smeared with the pollen dust of lilies. The yellow dust is symbolic of Nature's benediction for both Gertrude and the unborn Paul and it also suggests their oneness with the natural order of things.

One of the major symbols in this novel is the ubiquitous use of flowers. Often they are used to prefigure events that will occur very soon after the appearance of the flower. For example, a black flower is described before the death of William, clearly symbolising the death and grief that is about to enter into the Morel family. In the same way, red and white flowers are described usually before romantic moments of physical union. Another important flower symbol occurs in the scene where Clara,

Paul and Miriam are walking together in a field with its many “clusters of strong flowers” which they begin to pick. Paul chooses his flowers scientifically and objectively. He has a spontaneous and direct contact with the flowers. Miriam picks the flowers reverentially yet she seems to suck out the life from them. Her bunches thus lack elegance. But Clara does not pick them at all, boldly declaring that flowers are not to be picked at all because it kills them.

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### 3.1.10 Classifying *Sons and Lovers* as a Novel

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#### ➤ As a Psychological Novel

One of the dominant impressions we form of *Sons and Lovers* is that it is a typical example of both psychological as well as autobiographical fiction. Paul’s oedipal relationship with his mother forms the core of the novel around which the rest of the story is fleshed out. The term ‘oedipus complex’ derives from Sigmund Freud’s theory that the child, especially the male child, is sexually attracted to his mother, but represses this strong emotion. This repression however, is never complete and finds expression later in life. In *Sons and Lovers*, we find Paul being enamoured of his mother Gertrude, as one would be of a lover. In keeping with the autobiographical note in Lawrence’s fiction, this relationship is modelled on Lawrence’s own experiences. In ‘*A Personal Record*’, Jessie Chambers, upon whom the character of Miriam is based, quotes Lawrence as having said about his mother, “I’ve loved her like a lover. That’s why I could never love you”. This is in fact corroborated by Lawrence’s own letter to his publisher and friend, Edward Garnett, where he often wrote about this strong bond with his mother. It is in fact so overpowering an affinity that he is unable to form wholesome, fulfilling relationships with any other women. As a child, Paul is deeply in awe and admiration of his mother. Even when he grows up and feels attracted towards other women, he is in constant need of his mother’s approval. His relationship with Miriam is thwarted chiefly because he does not get this approval. It is different in the case of Clara, since it is chiefly a physical relationship more than anything else. When Mrs. Morel dies, Paul is left unmoored, and finds himself at a crossroads. The open ending of the novel has been variously interpreted in term of either a negation or an affirmation. We might choose to read it as the latter as one of the strands of the novel has been to trace Paul’s emotional crisis stemming from his complicated relationship with Gertrude Morel, and her

death provides him with an opportunity to break free of her psychological stranglehold and redefine his own selfhood and identity. The last lines are positive and affirmative:

“His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the *darkness*, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, *glowing* town, *quickly*.” (Emphasis mine)

These last lines clearly spell out a message of growth, hope and moving ahead for Paul.

### ➤ As a Bildungsroman

Bildungsroman is a German word which means “novel of education” or “novel of formation.” *Sons and Lovers* has been considered to be a classic example of this genre in the twentieth century.

Some characteristics of a typical specimen of this genre are the following:

- the growing child in these novels is often orphaned or fatherless — if not literally, then metaphorically
- the journey from the home is often a journey away from provinciality
- money or financial independence are important factors
- many protagonists are tested not only by their new surroundings, or by money, but also by love — many times a pure love is contrasted to a destructive/unhealthy one
- the central obstacle in many such novels is contained within the protagonist himself
- most protagonists experience some sort of epiphany, where a moment of clarity helps them break through their delusions and changes them, either spiritually or in terms of their conduct, or both
- the ending is often ambiguous, ambivalent, or lacks decisive closure
- many Victorian *bildungsroman* were considered at least partly autobiographical  
(<http://web.stanford.edu/~steener/su02/english132/Bildungsroman.htm>)

Of course, some novels of this genre follow these parameters more faithfully than others. Essentially, a *bildungsroman* is a “novel of formation” or “education” which follows the development of the protagonist’s mind and character in the passage from childhood through various experiences (usually involving a

spiritual crisis) into maturity and the recognition of his/her role in the world. Considered in the light of these parameters, it is clear that the journey of Paul Morel from childhood to maturity follows this trajectory of the bildungsroman.

Paul's struggles are manifold- social, economic, emotional and spiritual. Egged on by his mother, he aspires to break out of the mining town of Bestwood and has no intention of following his father's footsteps in his mining profession. Apart from his school, Paul learns from various sources. He is tutored in French and German by the local minister, Mr. Heaton; coached in composition by his brother William; encouraged in his art by his mother; and self-taught when it comes to literature. But the path to the fulfilment of his desire to become an artist and to seriously earn from it is not easy. He begins by working in a dingy Nottingham firm translating French letters into English, but finds satisfaction in painting. In this he finds ardent support and inspiration from Miriam, with whom he shares his knowledge of and enthusiasm for art and literature. The novel progressively shows Paul's growth and success as an artist and this leads Paul to take himself more seriously in his painting.

In its core, a bildungsroman consists of a quest for identity. The novel portrays three central relationships in Paul's life – with his mother, with Miriam Leivers and with Clara Dawes. While his mother functions as his emotional anchor, it is with Miriam that he discovers companionship and the pleasure of interacting with someone his own age. But his relationship with Miriam was doomed from the moment his mother became hostile about it. When he meets Clara, he sheds his earlier physical hesitation and achieves sexual consummation for the first time. Each of these relationships takes him further in his spiritual growth. *Sons and Lovers* has been criticised for focussing on Paul's character at the cost of all these other characters, but we may remember here that it is inherent in the format of the bildungsroman to have characters other than the protagonist in 'instrumental' rather than 'independent' functions.

In his essay 'Sons and Lovers as Bildungroman', critic Richard D. Beards comments that there are "four distinct trials which the Bildungsroman protagonist must traditionally master - vocation, mating, religion and identity". He defines these as the four axes through which the protagonist matures. Paul has a distinct sense of religion. He explains the nature of his religious belief in an argument with Miriam: "It's not religious to be religious. ... I reckon a crow is religious when it sails across the sky. But it only does it because it feels itself carried to where it's going, not

because it thinks it's being eternal'. The crow's lack of consciousness, its utter passivity - "it feels itself carried to where it's going" – corresponds to Paul's (and Lawrence's) sense of the religious as opposed to Miriam's.

Finally, as the novel concludes, though it is left open ended, yet we may discern that Paul has worked through various emotional and spiritual crises, and that the distant twinkling lights of the city are symbolic of the way ahead for him.

### ➤ **As a Working Class Novel**

Lawrence's novels provide a rare insider's view of working class life in the English Midlands. The backdrop of the pre-industrial small colliery town of Bestwood is portrayed with extraordinary attention to historical and geographical detail, as this was the kind of mining community Lawrence himself grew up in. In fact, *Sons and Lovers* has often been regarded as the first working class novel in English.

The novel opens with a very evocative description of the Bottoms, where the Morels live. Both Although Walter Morel works as a coal miner, his wife Gertrude aspires to break out of this world and dreams that her sons will carve a better future for themselves away from the mines. Having come from the genteel middle class herself, Gertrude has never been able to adjust to her altered conditions, and after the first flush of marriage got over, she has always felt alienated by her surroundings. Walter Morel, on the other hand, stands as a representative of the working classes, embodying many of their characteristic features, such as a robust spontaneity, warmth and physical energy. Lawrence vividly portrays minute details of the typical routine of a miner – there are descriptions of the dire working conditions inside the pits, the food that Morel takes along with him, and of the utter exhaustion he feels after a day's work. He also accounts for the finances of the coal miners – how money was divided within the family, scenes of collecting money at the company office, dividing of the pay among the four butties and of the compensation he receives when he is injured. We may therefore find an accurate description of life in a turn of the century coal mining town that Bestwood was.

Considering the very different backgrounds to which the Morels belong, the outlines of a class battle are drawn within the Morel household and every confrontation between Walter and Gertrude is inevitably also tinged and complicated by this consciousness of mutual difference. Gertrude places all her hopes first on William, and then when he dies, on her second son Paul, and she considers her ambition for her sons as also a kind of vindication for her lifelong struggle in a bitter marriage.

The plot of this novel may thus be seen as operating on a dual plane – one tracing the web of relationships centred around Paul, and the other presenting a faithful portrait of working class life in the Midlands, and of the way some young men strive to break out of their life in the collieries. In the Morel family, William is the first to do so, when he secures a well paying job in London and becomes something of a gentleman. After his death, Paul charts his own trajectory as an artist and the novel concludes with him standing at the crossroads of his small town past and a possible and indeed, probable future in the city.

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### 3.1.11 Summing Up

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- *Sons and Lovers* occupies a unique position in D.H. Lawrence's work as it has variously been considered to be the last of his early novels or the first of his mature works.
- The novel deals with many themes that were considered radical in its time, celebrated most of all for its handling of the **oedipal relationship** between Paul and Gertrude Morel. This attachment takes on such pathological proportions that it affects all his other relationships with women of his own age, and even as the novel ends, Paul knows that he has not been able to break out of this bond that has alienated him and left him incapable of all other relationships
- The novel may also be considered a **bildungsroman** as it depicts the coming-of-age of Paul Morel, tracing his journey from his birth upto his adulthood, when he is ready to step into the wider world.
- One of the aspects of the novel that has unfailingly been pointed out by all critics is the **autobiographical** nature of the novel. Most of the characters have equivalents in Lawrence's own life, with Paul Morel being a faithful self portrait of Lawrence himself.
- But what one must remember is that although Paul acts as the **narratorial mouthpiece** and though the narrator seems to speak from Paul's point of view, there is enough evidence in the action of the novel that complicates and undercuts this privileging of Paul's point of view. One such instance that is often cited is Paul's rejection of Miriam. Though he cruelly breaks off all ties with her saying that she is too spiritual for him, Clara sets him right and points out that Miriam was like any other woman, and it was Paul who failed to take the relationship forward. Also, although Paul is completely sympathetic

towards his mother and the narrative too depicts the domestic abuse meted out to Gertrude, there are enough instances in the story that present the predicament of Walter Morel, who finds himself isolated in his own house by a cold and reserved spouse who does not understand him and of whom he is plainly afraid.

- Thus both the Morels are alternately agents and victims of abuse. It is this **nuanced and layered tonality** the novel has that allows for **multiple perspectives** to coexist in the same narrative. The more we discover these nuances in the novel, the more enhanced our pleasure in reading this text becomes.

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### 3.1.12 Comprehension Exercises

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- **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How can we see *Sons and Lovers* as a working class novel? Discuss.
2. Does *Sons and Lovers* deal with the Oedipus Complex? Justify your opinion with a close reading of the text.
3. Consider *Sons and Lovers* as a Bildungsroman.
4. Write a note on the women characters of *Sons and Lovers*.
5. Discuss *Sons and Lovers* as an autobiographical novel.
6. Comment on *Sons and Lovers* as a novel about human relationships.
7. Write a note on the inter relationship of class and sexuality in *Sons and Lovers*.
8. Write a note on Lawrence's use of symbols in *Sons and Lovers*.

- **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Write a note on the character of Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*.
2. Why do you think the Morel marriage was so unhappy? Who was more to blame? Discuss.
3. Was Walter Morel a bad man? Give your opinion and substantiate it with examples.
4. Describe Paul's relationship with his mother.
5. Write a short note on the character of William Morel.

6. Write a note on the character of Miriam Leivers.
7. Was the Paul-Clara relationship based on love or passion? Discuss.
8. Would you say Gertrude Morel was a good mother? Discuss.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What didn't Gertrude know about Walter? Do you think she was sorry she had married him? Why?
2. Why do you think Morel cuts off William's hair? Why does that upset Gertrude so much?
3. Why was Gertrude opposed to William marrying Lily Western? Was she jealous or actually concerned about her son's future life?
4. Would you say Paul was cruel to Miriam? Give instances.
5. Why did Mrs. Morel not approve of the relationship between Paul and Miriam?
5. Describe the death of Gertrude Morel.

**Activity for the Learner**

While the chapter summaries in this Unit provide you an idea of the novel, you must read the full text.

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### 3.1.13 Suggested Reading

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**Primary Text :** *Sons and Lovers*, Worldview Critical Editions. Ed. Ashok Celly Bell, Michael. *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

Bloom, Harold, ed. *D. H. Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers'*. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.

Draper, R. P., ed. *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

Farr, Judith, ed. *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of 'Sons and Lovers'*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Leavis, F. R. *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1955.

Spilka, Mark. *The Love Ethic of D. H. Lawrence*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.

Sumner, Dorothy. *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. *The English Novel: Form and Function*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1953.

Williams, Raymond. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970.

Worthen, John. *D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979.

<http://web.stanford.edu/~steener/su02/english132/Bildungsroman.htm>

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## **Unit-2 □ Joseph Conrad: The Lagoon Somerset Maugham: The Lotus Eater**

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### **Structure:**

- 3.2.0 Introduction**
- 3.2.1 The Short Story: Evolution as a Genre**
- 3.2.2 Joseph Conrad: A Literary Bio-Brief**
- 3.2.3 The Lagoon – Text**
- 3.2.4 Glossary and Annotations**
- 3.2.5 Discussion and Analysis**
- 3.2.6 Symbolism and Imagery**
- 3.2.7 Conrad’s Narrative Style**
- 3.2.8 Significance of the Title**
- 3.2.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.2.10 Somerset Maugham: A Literary Bio-Brief**
- 3.2.11 The Lotus Eater – Text**
- 3.2.12 Glossary and Annotations**
- 3.2.13 Discussion and Analysis**
- 3.2.14 Symbolism and Imagery**
- 3.2.15 Maugham’s Narrative Style**
- 3.2.16 Significance of the Title**
- 3.2.17 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.2.18 Summing Up**
- 3.2.19 Comprehensive Reading List**

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### **3.2.0 Introduction**

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In this Unit you will be acquainted in brief with the genre of the Short Story and then it will be followed up with two modern specimens by remarkable 20<sup>th</sup> century exponents of the genre. If you look at your syllabus analytically, you will see that

while all other forms of literature have existed since fairly long, the short story is a relatively later development. This is not to say that as a prose genre, it is a kind of ‘little sister of the novel’. In fact, history says that many fiction writers have begun their literary careers with the short story, for it imbues them with the sense of unity that is so much the essence of fictional art. The Unit will in course, acquaint you with the aspects one needs to keep in mind when reading a short story.

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### **3.2.1 The Short Story: Evolution as a Genre**

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In searching the origins of stories, classical history would take us back to the very beginnings of civilization – to Hesiod, who showed how the founding myths were invented to explain the existence of the world and how it came to be peopled by human beings. Renaissance understandings of the European tradition would take us back to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* or to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, while Oriental history would talk of the Persian queen Scheherazade’s stories to King Shahryar. Besides, there are tales from the *Panchatantra*, *Aesop’s Fables* and of course the *Bible* – that great storehouse of lore. Thus across cultures, the story telling instinct is an old one.

But when we are looking specifically at the Short Story as a genre, we are actually trying to locate a movement from the spoken word to the written in the course of its shaping up. The task of definitively ascertaining who wrote and published the first truly modern short story is however a difficult one. This is because, as we said earlier, the cultural history of the published short story is relatively recent; in fact, it is only a few decades longer than that of cinematography. It had always existed in an informal, oral tradition, but never found a real publishing forum until the rise of mass middle class literacy in the West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This in turn provided a market for magazines and periodicals which gave the short fiction autonomy of space. The ready reception of the new form proved that readers had for long been in search of a medium that could express small but by no means insignificant aspects of their lives at the ‘turn of a screw’. On the part of the writers too, it was a worthwhile discovery that they now had a powerful literary tool on their hands. As proof that the story telling and receiving ability had always been inherent in the human imagination, Boyd mentions the classic and timeless short stories that Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and Ivan Turgenev were writing in the early

to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of this era the form had been nearly perfected by the Russian master story teller Anton Chekhov.

Unlike other literary types, it is not quite possible to outline an explicitly British history of the short story. This is because though Walter Scott's story 'The Two Drovers' published in *Chronicles of the Canongate* in 1827 has been widely accepted as the beginnings of the literary canon and it did inspire the likes of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, it was followed up more in other lands like France, Russia and of course America. In France the art of the short story was firmly established in 1829-31 with the magazine publication of a dozen *contes* by Merimee, Balzac and Gautier. Experimental works like the pastoral freshness of Daudet, the meticulous objectivity of Flaubert or the naturalism of Maupassant however took some more time to mature. In Russia too, the beginnings of imaginative work in short prose fiction was done by Pushkin and then followed up by Gogol and Turgenev. In contrast with this, after the beginnings by Scott, the short story hardly had much following in Britain all along the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the novel was in its heyday. All the great story writers we have had around this time were thus non – British, like Flaubert and Maupassant, Melville, Poe and Chekhov. In fact it was in reading Hawthorne that Poe came up with his famous definition of a short story as a narrative that "can be read at one sitting." Clearly Poe was focussing on the singularity of effect and that basically remains the hallmark of a gutsy short story. It was only with Robert Louis Stevenson in the 1880's that Britain took to writing short stories seriously and consistently. We come across a long list of writers like Herbert George Wells (1866-1946), Arnold Bennet (1867-1931), the American born Henry James (1843-1916) and of course, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936).

**The Short Story:**

**Exponents outside Britain**

**France:**

**Honore de Balzac, 1799 – 1850**

**Prosper Merimee, 1803 – 1870**

**Theophile Gautier, 1811 – 1872**

**Gustave Falubert, 1821 – 1880**

**Alphonse Daudet, 1840 – 1897**

**Guy de Maupassant, 1850 – 1893**

**Russia:**

**Alexander Pushkin, 1799 – 1837**

**Nikolai Gogol, 1809 – 1852**

**Ivan Turgenev, 1818 – 1883**

**America:**

**James Fennimore Cooper, 1789 - 1851**

**Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1804 – 1864**

**Edgar Allan Poe, 1809 - 1849**

The credit for making a cult of the short story must however go to Anton Chekov who did away with manipulative plot structures, abandoned any judgmental stand on characters and sought neither climaxes nor neat narrative resolutions to his stories. A Chekov short story would therefore just be out there in the middle, standing out as a neat piece of realistic life. Most short story writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been Chekhovian, or inspired by Chekov. James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield or Raymond Carver — all owe their debt to him.

From the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, a tonal shift is again evident – if the pre-Chekov models were ‘event-plot’ stories (to borrow the term from William Gerhardie) and the Chekhovian ones were ontological (presenting life in its bare essentials stripped of compulsions of plot or propriety); then the modernist short story is often baffling in its range. In it we find the use of techniques like the ‘suppressed narrative’ (where the meaning to be discovered lies beneath the apparently simple text), the poetic/mythic (where the story comes close to lyric poetry and thus becomes difficult to understand) and the biographical (where stories tend to deal with factuality or even become non-fictional in intent). There could be endless such categories and this only goes on to prove that the short story is indeed a dynamic form.

Coming to the present context, we shall now try to place Joseph Conrad as a writer in perspective and then follow it up with a detailed reading of your syllabised text.

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### **3.2.2 Joseph Conrad: A Literary Bio-brief**

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You will be surprised to know that for someone who wrote not less than sixteen novels individually (apart from the ones he wrote collaboratively, besides his unfinished work) and numerous short stories in English, Joseph Conrad was born far away from England, in one of the Ukrainian province of Poland. He was born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in 1857 to Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewa Bobrowska, and it is important that his father was a writer, translator, political activist, and would-be revolutionary. Poland was then under Russian Tsarist rule, and Conrad’s father was exiled in Northern Russia where he died when Joseph was barely twelve years old. He thus had a chequered childhood, being brought up by an uncle, and having a great desire to be a seaman right from his teens.

Never a great student at school, the only subject that seemed to interest the young

Joseph was Geography. Without even completing secondary school, at sixteen he was sent to Marseilles in France for a career at sea. But by then, he was well read in Polish Romantic literature; knew a fair degree of French, German, Latin and Greek; and had a working knowledge of History, Geography and even Physics. Having spent nearly four years on French ships, Conrad joined the British merchant marine where he grew in rank from crew member to captain. He became a naturalised British citizen in 1886.

It is his long career as a sea voyager that forms the basis of most of the fictional work of Joseph Conrad. This is evident right from his first novel *Almayer's Folly*, which has an authentic Malayan setting. Michael Thorpe, the editor of *Modern Prose*, rightly extols Conrad as “a teller of exciting stories whose appeal was enhanced by the exotic and romantic settings of his Malayan tales”, of which “The Lagoon” is a very early example. However, we also need to keep in mind that to pin down Conrad as just a teller of stories of maritime adventure would be a gross misjudgment of his potential. To look beyond his Malayan experiences, one has to see his depictions of Africa in *An Outpost of Progress* and *Heart of Darkness* for instance, both novels that show a conflict between the Eurocentric world and their colonial dominions. In his own words in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad aspired “by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel... before all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your desserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand – and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.”

In 1896, he finally gave up his maritime career, settled in London and lived a quiet but industrious life that was devoted to writing out of his greatly active previous life. Conrad breathed his last on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1924 and was interred at the Canterbury Cemetery, where his grave stone was adorned with befitting words from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*:

Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life, doth greatly please.

For those of you who are interested to know more about the life, works and controversies that surround Joseph Conrad, the following link could be useful:

<https://www.biography.com/people/joseph-conrad-9255343>

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### 3.2.3 “The Lagoon”: Text with Publication Details and Glossary

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As a short story, “The Lagoon”, which is one of Conrad’s earliest works, combines elements of realistic history, the spirit of adventure, the vital human emotions of passion and remorse, and of course an intense romanticism. It was written by Conrad in 1896 and first published in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1897. The story was later collected in *Tales of Unrest* which appeared in 1898. Conrad in fact claims it to be his first short story. It is Conrad’s shortest composition involving five thousand seven hundred words. Broadly, the setting of the story is in an Indonesian rain-forest and the major characters present are Arsat, a young Malay; his wife, Diamelen; and the White Man who weaves the narrative thread. The absent presence of Arsat’s brother, who gave his life for the sake of Arsat and his love forms an important backdrop of the story.

#### The Lagoon

*The white man, leaning with both arms over the roof of the little house in the stern of the boat, said to the steersman—*

*‘We will pass the night in Arsat’s clearing. It is late.’*

*The Malay only grunted, and went on looking fixedly at the river. The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, somber and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final. Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head. The churned up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man’s canoe, advancing up stream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had for ever departed.*

*The white man, turning his back upon the setting sun, looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach. For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east - to the east that harbours both light and darkness. Astern of the boat the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world.*

*The steersman dug his paddle into the stream, and held hard with stiffened arms, his body thrown forward. The water gurgled aloud; and suddenly the long straight reach seemed to pivot on its center, the forests swung in a semicircle, and the slanting beams of sunset touched the broadside of the canoe with a fiery glow, throwing the slender and distorted shadows of its crew upon the streaked glitter of the river. The white man turned to look ahead. The course of the boat had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the overhanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.*

*The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and somber walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.*

*The men poled in the shoaling water. The creek broadened, opening out into a wide sweep of a stagnant lagoon. The forests receded from the marshy bank, leaving a level strip of bright-green, reedy grass to frame the reflected blueness of the sky. A fleecy pink cloud drifted high above, trailing the delicate coloring of its image under the floating leaves and the silvery blossoms of the lotus. A little house, perched on high piles, appeared black in the distance. Near it, two tall nibong palms, that seemed to have come out of the forests in the background, leaned slightly*

over the ragged roof, with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads.

The steersman, pointing with his paddle, said, 'Arsat is there. I see his canoe fast between the piles.'

The polers ran along the sides of the boat glancing over their shoulders at the end of the day's journey. They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house, and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom they long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil, who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done?

So they thought, throwing their weight on the end of their long poles. The big canoe glided on swiftly, noiselessly and smoothly, towards Arsat's clearing, till, in a great rattling of poles thrown down, and the loud murmurs of 'Allah be praised!' it came with a gentle knock against the crooked piles below the house.

The boatmen with uplifted faces shouted discordantly, 'Arsat! O Arsat!' Nobody came. The white man began to climb the rude ladder giving access to the bamboo platform before the house. The juragan of the boat said sulkily, 'We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water.'

'Pass my blankets and the basket,' said the white man curtly.

He knelt on the edge of the platform to receive the bundle. Then the boat shoved off, and the white man, standing up, confronted Arsat, who had come out through the low door of his hut. He was a man young, powerful, with a broad chest and muscular arms. He had nothing on but his sarong. His head was bare. His big, soft eyes stared eagerly at the white man, but his voice and demeanor were composed as he asked, without any words of greeting—

'Have you medicine, Tuan?'

*'No,' said the visitor in a startled tone. 'No. Why? Is there sickness in the house?'*

*'Enter and see,' replied Arsat, in the same calm manner, and turning short round, passed again through the small doorway. The white man, dropping his bundles, followed.*

*In the dim light of the dwelling he made out on a couch of bamboos a woman stretched on her back under a broad sheet of red cotton cloth. She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips were partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression - the absorbed, contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die. The two men stood looking down at her in silence.*

*'Has she been long ill?' asked the traveler.*

*'I have not slept for five nights,' answered the Malay, in a deliberate tone. 'At first she heard voices calling her from the water and struggled against me who held her. But since the sun of to-day rose she hears nothing - she hears not me. She sees nothing. She sees not me - me!'*

*He remained silent for a minute, then asked softly—*

*'Tuan, will she die?'*

*'I fear so,' said the white man sorrowfully. He had known Arsat years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger, when no friendship is to be despised. And since his Malay friend had come unexpectedly to dwell in the hut on the lagoon with a strange woman, he had slept many times there, in his journeys up or down the river. He liked the man who knew how to keep faith in council and how to fight without fear by the side of his white friend. He liked him - not so much perhaps as a man likes his favorite dog - but still he liked him well enough to help and ask no questions, to think sometimes vaguely and hazily in the midst of his own pursuits, about the lonely man and the long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes, who lived together hidden by the forests - alone and feared.*

*The white man came out of the hut in time to see the enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift and stealthy shadows that, rising like a black and*

*impalpable vapor above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight. In a few moments all the stars came out above the intense blackness of the earth, and the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night-sky flung down into the hopeless and abysmal night of the wilderness. The white man had some supper out of the basket, then collecting a few sticks that lay about the platform, made up a small fire, not for warmth, but for the sake of the smoke, which would keep off the mosquitos. He wrapped himself in his blankets and sat with his back against the reed wall of the house, smoking thoughtfully.*

*Arsat came through the doorway with noiseless steps and squatted down by the fire. The white man moved his outstretched legs a little.*

*'She breathes,' said Arsat in a low voice, anticipating the expected question. 'She breathes and burns as if with a great fire. She speaks not; she hears not - and burns!'*

*He paused for a moment, then asked in a quiet, incurious tone—*

*'Tuan ... will she die?'*

*The white man moved his shoulders uneasily, and muttered in a hesitating manner—*

*'If such is her fate.'*

*'No, Tuan,' said Arsat calmly. 'If such is my fate. I hear, I see, I wait. I remember ... Tuan, do you remember the old days? Do you remember my brother?'*

*'Yes,' said the white man. The Malay rose suddenly and went in. The other, sitting still outside, could hear the voice in the hut. Arsat said: 'Hear me! Speak!' His words were succeeded by a complete silence. 'O! Diamelen!' he cried suddenly. After that cry there was a deep sigh. Arsat came out and sank down again in his old place.*

*They sat in silence before the fire. There was no sound within the house, there was no sound near them; but far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distance with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased. The land and the water slept invisible, unstirring and mute. It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but the glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain, through the black stillness of the night.*

*The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death - of death near, unavoidable and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him - into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.*

*A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. He stirred like a man waking up and changed his position slightly. Arsat, motionless and shadowy, sitting with bowed head under the stars, was speaking in a low and dreamy tone.*

*'... for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend's heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writing may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!'*

*'I remember,' said the white man quietly. Arsat went on with mournful composure.*

*'Therefore I shall speak to you of love. Speak in the night. Speak before both night and love are gone - and the eye of day looks upon my sorrow and my shame; upon my blackened face; upon my burnt-up heart.'*

*A sigh, short and faint, marked an almost imperceptible pause, and then his words flowed on, without a stir, without a gesture.*

*'After the time of trouble and war was over and you went away from my*

country in the pursuit of your desires, which we, men of the islands, cannot understand, I and my brother became again, as we had been before, the sword-bearers of the Ruler. You know we were men of family, belonging to a ruling race, and more fit than any to carry on our right shoulder the emblem of power. And in the time of prosperity Si Dendring showed us favour, as we, in time of sorrow, had showed to him the faithfulness of our courage. It was a time of peace. A time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle talks and foolish squabbles between men whose bellies are full and weapons are rusty. But the sower watched the young rice-shoots grow up without fear, and the traders came and went, departed lean and returned fat into the river of peace. They brought news too. Brought lies and truth mixed together, so that no man knew when to rejoice and when to be sorry. We heard from them about you also. They had seen you here and had seen you there. And I was glad to hear, for I remembered the stirring times, and I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there - in the house.'

He stopped to exclaim in an intense whisper, 'O Mara bahia! O Calamity!' then went on speaking a little louder.

'There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me: "Open your heart so that she can see what is in it - and wait. Patience is wisdom. Inchi Midah may die or our Ruler may throw off his fear of a woman!" ... I waited! ... You remember the lady with the veiled face, Tuan, and the fear of our Ruler before her cunning and temper. And if she wanted her servant, what could I do? But I fed the hunger of my heart on short glances and stealthy words. I loitered on the path to the bath-houses in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women's courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood still before our lips: so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. The time passed swiftly ... and there were whispers amongst women - and our enemies watched - my brother was gloomy, and I began to think of killing and of a fierce death. ... We are of a people who take what they want - like you whites. There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love and strength and courage. My brother

said, "You shall take her from their midst. We are two who are like one." And I answered, "Let it be soon, for I find no warmth in sunlight that does not shine upon her." Our time came when the Ruler and all the great people went to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight. There were hundreds of boats, and on the white sand, between the water and the forests, dwellings of leaves were built for the households of the Rajahs. The smoke of cooking-fires was like a blue mist of the evening, and many voices rang in it joyfully. While they were making the boats ready to beat up the fish, my brother came to me and said, "To-night!" I made ready my weapons, and when the time came our canoe took its place in the circle of boats carrying the torches. The lights blazed on the water, but behind the boats there was darkness. When the shouting began and the excitement made them like mad we dropped out. The water swallowed our fire, and we floated back to the shore that was dark with only here and there the glimmer of embers. We could hear the talk of slavegirls amongst the sheds. Then we found a place deserted and silent. We waited there. She came. She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea. My brother said gloomily, "Go and take her; carry her into our boat." I lifted her in my arms. She panted. Her heart was beating against my breast. I said, "I take you from those people. You came to the cry of my heart, but my arms take you into my boat against the will of the great!" "It is right," said my brother. "We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We should have taken her in daylight." I said, "Let us be off;" for since she was in my boat I began to think of our Ruler's many men. "Yes. Let us be off," said my brother. "We are cast out and this boat is our country now - and the sea is our refuge." He lingered with his foot on the shore, and I entreated him to hasten, for I remembered the strokes of her heart against my breast and thought that two men cannot withstand a hundred. We left, paddling downstream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday. The boats floated, clustered together, in the red light of torches, under a black roof of smoke; and men talked of their sport. Men that boasted, and praised, and jeered - men that would have been our friends in the morning, but on that night were already our enemies. We paddled swiftly past. We had no more friends in the country of our birth. She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face; silent as she is now; unseeing as she is now - and I had no regret at what I was leaving because I could hear her breathing close to me - as I can hear her now.'

*He paused, listened with his ear turned to the doorway, then shook his head and went on.*

*'My brother wanted to shout the cry of challenge - one cry only - to let the people know we were freeborn robbers that trusted our arms and the great sea. And again I begged him in the name of our love to be silent. Could I not hear her breathing close to me? I knew the pursuit would come quick enough. My brother loved me. He dipped his paddle without a splash. He only said, "There is half a man in you now - the other half is in that woman. I can wait. When you are a whole man again, you will come back with me here to shout defiance. We are sons of the same mother." I made no answer. All my strength and all my spirit were in my hands that held the paddle - for I longed to be with her in a safe place beyond the reach of men's anger and of women's spite. My love was so great, that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown, if I could only escape from Inchi Midah's spite and from our Ruler's sword. We paddled with fury, breathing through our teeth. The blades bit deep into the smooth water. We passed out of the river; we flew in clear channels amongst the shallows. We skirted the black coast; we skirted the sand beaches where the sea speaks in whispers to the land; and the gleam of white sand flashed back past our boat, so swiftly she ran upon the water. We spoke not. Only once I said, "Sleep, Diamelen, for soon you may want all your strength." I heard the sweetness of her voice, but I never turned my head. The sun rose and still we went on. Water fell from my face like rain from a cloud. We flew in the light and heat. I never looked back, but I knew that my brother's eyes, behind me, were looking steadily ahead, for the boat went as straight as a bushman's dart, when it leaves the end of the sumpitan. There was no better paddler, no better steersman than my brother. Many times, together, we had won races in that canoe. But we never had put out our strength as we did then - then, when for the last time we paddled together! There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the hiss of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak. The sun was high. The heat clung to my back like a flame of fire. My ribs were ready to burst, but I could no longer get enough air into my chest. And then I felt I must cry out with my last breath, "Let us rest!" "Good!" he answered; and his voice was firm. He was strong. He was brave. He knew not fear and no fatigue ... My brother!'*

*A rumor powerful and gentle, a rumor vast and faint; the rumor of trembling leaves, of stirring boughs, ran through the tangled depths of the forests, ran over the starry smoothness of the lagoon, and the water between the piles lapped the slimy timber once with a sudden splash. A breath of warm air touched the two men's faces and passed on with a mournful sound - a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth.*

*Arsat went on in an even, low voice.*

*'We ran our canoe on the white beach of a little bay close to a long tongue of land that seemed to bar our road; a long wooded cape going far into the sea. My brother knew that place. Beyond the cape a river has its entrance. Through the jungle of that land there is a narrow path. We made a fire and cooked rice. Then we slept on the soft sand in the shade of our canoe, while she watched. No sooner had I closed my eyes than I heard her cry of alarm. We leaped up. The sun was halfway down the sky already, and coming in sight in the opening of the bay we saw a prau manned by many paddlers. We knew it at once; it was one of our Rajah's praus. They were watching the shore, and saw us. They beat the gong, and turned the head of the prau into the bay. I felt my heart become weak within my breast. Diamelen sat on the sand and covered her face. There was no escape by sea. My brother laughed. He had the gun you had given him, Tuan, before you went away, but there was only a handful of powder. He spoke to me quickly: "Run with her along the path. I shall keep them back, for they have no firearms, and landing in the face of a man with a gun is certain death for some. Run with her. On the other side of that wood there is a fisherman's house - and a canoe. When I have fired all the shots I will follow. I am a great runner, and before they can come up we shall be gone. I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman - that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands." He dropped behind the canoe. The prau was coming. She and I ran, and as we rushed along the path I heard shots. My brother fired - once - twice - and the booming of the gong ceased. There was silence behind us. That neck of land is narrow. Before I heard my brother fire the third shot I saw the shelving shore, and I saw the water again: the mouth of a broad river. We crossed a grassy glade. We ran down to the water. I saw a low hut above the black mud, and a small canoe hauled up. I heard another shot behind me. I thought, "That is his last charge." We rushed down to the canoe; a man came running from the hut, but I leaped on him, and we rolled together in the mud. Then I got up, and he lay still at my feet. I don't know whether I had*

killed him or not. I and Diamelen pushed the canoe afloat. I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him. I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat, then leaped in myself. When I looked back I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing round him. He shouted, "I am coming!" The men were close to him. I looked. Many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said, "Take your paddle," while I struck the water with mine. Tuan, I heard him cry. I heard him cry my name twice; and I heard voices shouting, "Kill! Strike!" I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice - and I never turned my head. My own name! ... My brother! Three times he called - but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten - where death is unknown?"

The white man sat up. Arsat rose and stood, an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire. Over the lagoon a mist drifting and low had crept, erasing slowly the glittering images of the stars. And now a great expanse of white vapor covered the land: flowed cold and gray in the darkness, eddied in noiseless whirls round the tree-trunks and about the platform of the house, which seemed to float upon a restless and impalpable illusion of a sea; seemed the only thing surviving the destruction of the world by that undulating and voiceless phantom of a flood. Only far away the tops of the trees stood outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a somber and forbidding shore - a coast deceptive, pitiless and black.

Arsat's voice vibrated loudly in the profound peace.

'I had her there! I had her! To get her I would have faced all mankind. But I had her - and—'

His words went out ringing into the empty distances. He paused, and seemed to listen to them dying away very far - beyond help and beyond recall. Then he said quietly—

'Tuan, I loved my brother.'

A breath of wind made him shiver. High above his head, high above the silent sea of mist the drooping leaves of the palms rattled together with a mournful and expiring sound. The white man stretched his legs. His chin rested on his chest, and he murmured sadly without lifting his head—

*'We all love our brothers.'*

*Arsat burst out with an intense whispering violence—*

*'What did I care who died? I wanted peace in my own heart.'*

*He seemed to hear a stir in the house - listened - then stepped in noiselessly. The white man stood up. A breeze was coming in fitful puffs. The stars shone paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space. After a chill gust of wind there were a few seconds of perfect calm and absolute silence. Then from behind the black and wavy line of the forests a column of golden light shot up into the heavens and spread over the semicircle of the eastern horizon. The sun had risen. The mist lifted, broke into drifting patches, vanished into thin flying wreaths; and the unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazzlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as if it had left the earth for ever. The white man, standing gazing upwards before the doorway, heard in the hut a confused and broken murmur of distracted words ending with a loud groan. Suddenly Arsat stumbled out with outstretched hands, shivered, and stood still for some time with fixed eyes. Then he said—*

*'She burns no more.'*

*Before his face the sun showed its edge above the tree-tops, rising steadily. The breeze freshened; a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer - to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. Arsat's eyes wandered slowly, then stared at the rising sun.*

*'I can see nothing,' he said half aloud to himself.*

*'There is nothing,' said the white man, moving to the edge of the platform and waving his hand to his boat. A shout came faintly over the lagoon and the sampan began to glide towards the abode of the friend of ghosts.*

*'If you want to come with me, I will wait all the morning,' said the white man, looking away upon the water.*

*'No, Juan,' said Arsat softly. 'I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing - see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death - death for many. We were sons of the same mother - and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now.'*

*He drew a long breath and went on in a dreamy tone.*

*'In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike - to strike. But she has died, and ... now ... darkness.'*

*He flung his arms wide open, let them fall along his body, then stood still with unmoved face and stony eyes, staring at the sun. The white man got down into his canoe. The polers ran smartly along the sides of the boat, looking over their shoulders at the beginning of a weary journey. High in the stern, his head muffled up in white rags, the juragan sat moody, letting his paddle trail in the water. The white man, leaning with both arms over the grass roof of the little cabin, looked back at the shining ripple of the boat's wake. Before the sampan passed out of the lagoon into the creek he lifted his eyes. Arsat had not moved. In the searching clearness of crude sunshine, he was still standing before the house, he was still looking through the great light of a cloudless day into the hopeless darkness of the world.*

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### 3.2.4 Glossary and Annotations

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**Clearing:** An open space in a forest where there are no trees.

**Malay:** Native of the Malay peninsula in Southeast Asia.

**Poised:** To grunt means to make short low sound in the throat (especially to show that you are in pain).

**Somber:** Dark, sad.

**Nipa:** Palm trees of Asia with leaves that can be used to make a roof. Palm trees of Asia with leaves that can be used to make a roof.

**Eddies:** Circular movement of air or water.

**Bewitched:** Under magic spells.

**Paddles:** A short pole with a wide part at one or both ends that you use for moving a small boat.

**Churned-up:** Milky, cloudy.

**Frothed:** If water froths, a mass of small bubbles appears on the surface.

**Portals:** Doors, gateways.  
**Expanse:** Area, vastness.  
**Enticed:** Charmed.  
**Astern:** At the back.  
**Discordant:** Inharmonious.  
**Gurgled:** Bubbled, sloshed.  
**Pivot:** To streak means to turn, to spin around.  
**Slanting:** Diagonal.  
**Streaked:** Marked, splashed.  
**Prow:** Pointed front part of a boat.  
**Lair:** Den, whole, nest.  
**Tortuous:** Winding, twisted.  
**Creepers:** Climbing plant.  
**Oozed out:** Came out of.  
**Maze:** labyrinth.  
**Invincible:** Unconquerable.  
**Fleecy:** Like a wool coat of a sheep.  
**Propitiate:** Appease.  
**Wayfarers:** A person who travels from one place to another (usually on foot).  
**Juragan:** Captain, master.  
**Sampan:** Small flat-bottomed boat with a cabin.  
**Rafters:** sloping pieces of wood that support a roof.  
**Conflagration:** Fire, blaze.  
**Impalpable:** Non-existent, shadowy.  
**Vapour:** Mist, fog.  
**Abysmal:** Dreadful, appalling.  
**Squatted:** Crouched.  
**Fitful:** Broken; disturbed.  
**August:** Noble, worthy of respect.  
**Ignoble:** Shameful, dishonourable.

**Plaintive:** Sad, melancholic, mournful.

**Imperceptible:** Unnoticeable, invisible.

**Loitered:** Waited.

**Rajahs:** Malayan chiefs.

**Embers:** A piece of wood that is not burning but is still red and hot after the fire has died.

**Entreated:** Ask, beg, implore.

**Skirted:** Go around; avoid.

**Sumpitan:** Malayan blowgun which discharges poisonous darts.

**Slimy:** Greasy.

**Cape:** Peninsula.

**Prau:** Swift Malayan boat.

**Shelving:** Deserted.

**Undulating:** Surging, rising and falling.

**Rippling:** Waving, wrinkling.

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### 3.2.5 Discussion and Analysis

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➤ **SETTING:**

If you go by historical details of the background, chronologically the text can be located somewhere at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and after the Malay kingdoms of Wajo, Soping, Boni, and Si Dendring had fought extensive wars over who should succeed as Rajah of Si Dendring. The story widely addresses the colonised South Asia by the Europeans. However, Conrad's presentation covers diverse aspects of the European mindset, an instance of which you will have found in his presentation of the White Man in this story.

From the very names of characters and outlines of places described, you can get a feel that Conrad's "The Lagoon" has a setting that can broadly be located somewhere in Southeast Asia. More particular details if probed, will place the tale on the Malay Peninsula or in the Malay Archipelago, on a river that flows eastward to the ocean. Like alternating camera angles as you see in films, the river then passes through a creek which flows inland through the dense forest and finally the action settles on a small house in a lagoon.

But you must remember that an understanding of “The Lagoon” would hardly be complete merely by identifying the geographical locale. Notice how adroitly Conrad weaves human emotions that are perfectly analogous to the natural setting that he describes. The exuberant sensuous imagery - the strange tropical setting, the mystery of elements, light and darkness- Joseph Conrad, in his short-story “The Lagoon” describes and transmits impressionistically, the dramatic story of a man surprised by his own act of cowardice, a man divided between loyalty to his own blood and the object of his love interest. The question therefore is, why does Conrad meticulously weave such a setting?

As you must have read and found in the story above, this man, Arsat is pervaded by a blockaded feeling towards himself because he had failed to act when the occasion demanded a stern decision making of him. In choosing to run away with his beloved, leaving his own flesh and blood brother at the hands of the enemy, he had missed the chance to rightful action. Yet what was rightful from one perspective would have cost him the loss of his love for a lifetime. In escaping with his love Diamelen, to live in the “shadows of the lagoon”, Arsat, has had to undergo great psychological torment both at the moment and ever after in life. - his own psychological, subconscious guilty conscience. It is to embody this torment which gains a cosmic nature in the story that Conrad makes a very deliberate use of the setting. Notice the very opening lines of the story which start with an intense description of nature, pervaded by motionlessness; yet the calm that is inscribed is not one of tranquillity. The impression is of a waterscape that has its own spell, as if frozen in time and out of the world:

At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, somber and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final.

The riverine setting thus is the most compulsive aspect about “The Lagoon”. The play of light and darkness, caused by the thick growth of trees and the intermittent

rays of the sun glistening on the waters becomes a wonderful metaphor of alternating mental states and levels of consciousness. As the story advances, you realize that this eerie silence is not just an external description of the setting; it comes to encompass the life of Arsat who has had to choose this out of the world place to both nurture his dear got love, and also undergo his penance for what he looks upon as an act of filial betrayal. Notice also how the white man, arriving in a canoe at Arsat's clearing, is symbolically a figure from the outside world and from a different faith, who looks upon Arsat in a way that is different from the perception of the Malay and the other steersmen who perceive Arsat not as one of them. Notice that the place where Arsat lives is not even a proper house or hut, the white man calls it 'clearing', which would mean just an open space in the forest without trees. This differential is also brought out by Conrad by suggesting a ripple that disturbs the apparent calm of the setting:

Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semi-circle above his head. The churned up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man's canoe, advancing up stream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making, seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had for ever departed.

In "The Lagoon", however, the journey occurs but the trouble is that nobody is either 'really' dead or living, only absent, away from life and action. Below the level of setting, the writer is concerned with mental processes and the dramatic experience of a human being, Arsat. Contrasted with all this dark imagery we have 'glimpses' of light - ..."the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven" - because nature is free to watch impassively, the torments that assault mankind. The creek widens, the forest recedes as soon as the white man's canoe reaches the 'lagoon'. The exotic, remote setting, the superabundant imagery is basic to convey the atmosphere for this story of isolation and failure.

#### **Activity for the Learner**

The text of the story is pervaded by such instances of the physical setting becoming metaphorical of the human condition presented. In fact, the very title is significant in this regard. Identify and explain such signification with help from your counselor. Apply the Victorian cultural critic John Ruskin's term Pathetic Fallacy to explain this aspect of Conrad's story. You could also study such descriptive instances in other works of fiction by Conrad.

➤ **CHARACTERS:**

**The White Man**

At the very beginning of the story we find the white man as a traveller on the boat to Arsat's clearing. He is a wanderer who "looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach". The story starts and ends with him. He is a European who serves as the witness to Arsat's tragedy. The White Man or Tuan is the prototype of the cross cultural male connection. He is the patient listener who helps the story to be told and thereby becomes integral in the process of storytelling. The story started with the White Man entering Arsat's dwelling, going through the narration of love, betrayal, remorse and death and then moving out the next morning. He rarely retorts to the narration and is found to be emotionless in his reaction. He never consoled Arsat. Probably he accepted his tumultuous fate and tragedy. The next morning he boarded his sampan and moved out of the lagoon. Though he invited Arsat to come on board but he never insisted. He is more of a recorder or observer of emotional stances and also seems rather detached from the world of action. He witnessed the death but remained passive and unaffected. He seems to be performing the role of the chorus of the Greek tragedy. His distanced remarks against Arsat's narration make him the symbolic chorus.

Conrad seems to create a contrast of characters between Arsat and the White Man. He appears to be a thwart to Arsat. With the death of Diamelen he remained unmoved. This shows that he is aware of the inevitable tragedy of human beings and has accepted it with dignity. You must take note of the fact that the white man's perception of Arsat is never narrowly Eurocentric; he views the suffering and torment of the latter as that of an individual *per se*. Arsat's process of realizing the conflict between his utopia and dystopia flows with the arrival of the white man to the lagoon. With the white man's presence, the complexity of the story in-between utopia and dystopia is revealed. Therefore, even though Conrad's short story does not create a direct utopian or dysoptian mood, Arsat's past and present with the process he undergoes makes such a reading possible. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the blend of utopia and dystopia in the colonial framework of "The Lagoon". Starting with the comparison of what lagoon as a dwelling represents for Arsat and the white man, Arsat's realization process of his utopia's transformation into dystopia through the white man's arrival will be thoroughly observed.

At the very beginning of the story, Conrad focuses on the atmosphere rather than on the sequence of events. Even though the reader is made aware that there will be two main characters; the white man, titled as Tuan in advance, and Arsat, he leads the reader to focus on the atmosphere of the story. As the White Man and his companions arrive with their boat, he declares that they will pass the night at Arsat's dwelling, however the reader is not yet aware what kind of a dwelling it is. Eventually the atmosphere is described:

**The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final.**

The white man embodies the generalization of binaries to the society which Arsat resists, nevertheless; there is no peace in the white man's world, as well. He has a prominent influence on Arsat's becoming aware of his own recurring dystopian life which is impossible to reverse. This similarity in both Arsat's and the white man's dystopian condition is revealed by the white man's own words responding to the remorse that Arsat has in his heart for his brother. "His chin rested on his chest, and [the white man] murmured sadly without lifting his head: "We all love our brothers". The agony and the empathy that the Whiteman feels in his heart as well as his dystopian perception from the very beginning of the story that he is well aware of this reality, nevertheless; it is through his arrival that Arsat reaches this awareness.

### **ARSAT**

"The Lagoon" is the tragedy of the Malayan native named Arsat. Arsat is the disarming psychological revelation that inevitably elicits an implicit admission of a powerful validation of the East. He is the central figure of the story which deals with his tragic suffering from love and death. He lives on with a feeling of guilt, undergoes nemesis in the form of loss of love, and finally promises to bounce back.

To the native polers of the white man's canoe, the dark skinned Arsat is the embodiment of the 'Father of Evil'. The protagonist is presented in a mysterious way; the person lived in isolation in a disturbingly looking lagoon. He shared the

lagoon with his beloved Diamelen and maintained a distance with his native folks, the reasons behind which are adequately clear in the story. He was thought to be practicing evil spirit and hence the boatman of the White Man avoided staying in the lagoon. Conrad has given Arsat all the heroic characteristics of a South Asian native. He was brave, sincere, devoted and spontaneous. He was the saviour of his locality from foreign aggression. He was not only gallant but was a man of compassion, love and honesty.

In frenzy he fell in love with Diamelen who was a subordinate of the mistress of the ruling authority. Arsat had teamed up with his brother to run an elopement with Diamelen – an act of whose dire consequences the brothers were well aware. This brought in tragedy and doom for the hero. He had to compromise with the life of his brother who was caught up by the guards, and Arsat had to make a choice between standing by his brother and escaping with his love to be with Diamelen. He was not a purposive brother who played with the sentiments of his brother. Rather he loved him dearly. He was wont to stand by his brother, but failed in order to protect Diamelen, as he rightly defends himself when he says: “I wanted peace in my own heart”. He was mad about his brother but momentarily lost his rationale and ever since he has been repenting and groaning. His tragedy is multi-layered: he lost his brother, the thought of betrayal haunts him, he now loses his beloved for whom he disrupted his past existence and he lost his soul. He has nothing but to lament the cruel power of death as he sighs: “And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten – where death is unknown”. In grandeur he isn’t challenging the conventional tragic hero but his life is anyone’s lament. His irreversible tragedy vibrates in the concluding words of the story – “He stood lonely in the searching sunshine, and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions”.

Arsat’s life, both in the account of the omniscient narrator and in his own recollections that form the story within the story, grows out of mysterious atmosphere of water, forest, darkness and mist. He lives in Nature with Nature and at the mercy of Nature without the benefit of medicine that may have saved Diamelen’s life. The hut he rebuilt on the lagoon is made of the reed that grows along the water edge. Every event of his exiled life is tinged by the natural sounds and colours of the eerie setting. Arsat’s journey from a make-believe world of passionate fulfillment to a forlorn state of disillusion reaches a watershed with the nightmarish end of Diamelen’s

life. For the rest of his life Arsat could well be living with the psychological consequences of turpitude. The ‘Father of Evil’ undergoes a transformation in the uplift promised by the realization of guilt and preparedness for penance. Perhaps this realization of guilt is the moment of enlightenment in Arsat’s life.

### **DIAMELEN**

Diamelen was the choice and life of Arsat. She is also virtually the scapegoat of the tragedy. She is found to be trapped for five days and the last days of her life. She was a servant to one of the Raja’s women. She fled in a boat at night and travelled as far as she could with Arsat. Interestingly, the story does not give any details of the life of marital bliss of Arsat and Diamelen; it begins when she is in the throes of painful death – presumably from malarial fever, and it is only in Arsat’s recollection that the tale of their passionate escape is narrated. In the present of the story, we are told that she has had to suffer for five days before submitting herself in the hands of cold death.

In artistic terms, Diamelen is a pivotal non-participant in a story that revolves round her capture and possession. Her qualities imply nonexistence – she is silent, motionless, unseeing, unhearing because she has been defined by Arsat more as an object than a subject. In her wordlessness and powerlessness, Diamelen shares traits with Kurtz’s African mistress in Conrad’s famous novella *Heart of Darkness*, and as in that novel, here too the author makes eloquent use of silence in the figure of the female protagonist. Or should we at all call her protagonist! She lies on her deathbed as helplessly as when she sat in the canoe during her abduction. Arsat appears to be prepared for what he considers to be ‘his’ rather than Diamelen’s fate. Like an Eastern logician he is conscious of the allegorical role he has been playing by internalizing the history of his community. For him, objective reality exists insofar as it supplies the object of his love. Around Diamelen, Arsat’s fantasies take shape only to meet with final denial of will and dissolution of images.

### **Arsat’s Brother**

Arsat’s brother is both straight-forward and composite. He is the positive and negative strength of Arsat. He is the muse of his brother’s decision to elope with Diamelen, and so he continued to protect his brother’s love at the cost of his own life. He jumped into the tragedy without thinking twice. He was adamant to bring happiness to his brother without estimating the consequences. He is the supporting

hero of this story. Arsat's brother has been presented as flawless in terms of love and compassion and the beauty of the human mind. He is the misfit in a society which failed to comprehend the free will of its best and passionate people, subduing them to the tyranny of an oppressive state force. His death signifies the loss of the ethos of an entire community of faithful, warrior people. It is just that his tragedy is irreversible, and that he is forbidden to stand by his brother and Diamelen.

### **SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

**The Juragan:** is the boatman of the white man's boat. His resentment at having to spend the night near Arsat's clearing makes evident the feelings of animosity that the local people bear towards Arsat. The latter is a rebel against accepted societal norms on the one hand, and his life as a recluse has identified him with powers of the dark on the other.

**Rajah:** is the ruler of the place where the story is set.

**Inchi Midah:** is the woman of the Malayan Rajah, and by Arsat's account, a cunning and dominating woman. Diamelen was her domestic, and later becomes the integral character of the story on whom the entire tragedy and complication in Arsat's life is based.

**Rajah Warriors:** are the people who pursued Arsat, Arsat's brother and Diamelen. It was in fending them in order to ensure a safe passage for Arsat and Diamelen that Arsat's brother lost his life.

#### **➤ As a tale of Passion and Remorse**

Joseph Conrad's short story "The Lagoon" is set in a typical Malayan environment, beset with mystery and eeriness. The place of action of the story is a lagoon, deemed ghostly and avoided by local inhabitants in fear. In such a setting, rather exotic one, Conrad sets the theme of his story, which is intimately related to human passion and frustration, human remorse and suffering.

As a short story, "The Lagoon" has a specific importance for its precisely pointed human theme which has a universal appeal. This theme is all of a human tragedy, built around three moral elements betrayal, remorse and retribution that follows the act of betrayal after the doer's deep remorse for his failing, in a setting somewhat uncanny.

Arsat's deep passion of love changed the course of his life. Even the story ends

with a stark note of tragedy, sin has its retribution. Arsat could not live in love, far from the valley of death. The nemesis visited him in the form of death and took away his love - Diamelen. His ingratitude as he feels, in the form of his faithlessness to his brother leading to desertion in the face of death, could not ensure peace and love for him. The grim illusions of the world were all too vivid to him - "He stood lonely in searching sunshine, and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illustrations."

The story of Arsat's life is deeply moving. It is made particularly so by the moral question involved here. The story suggests a moral dilemma - to choose between love and duty. Arsat was confronted with such a dilemma to run away with his lady love to a place of peace and safety, or to rush for his brother's help and die with him. That of course, would lead to dire consequences for Diamelen, though this thought is not seen to cross Arsat's mind. His passion for love and life was strong enough to lead him to forsake his duty to his dying brother and to run away with his Diamelen to a land, free from the threat of death. But the sense of moral default remained with him. He could not get peace in his mind. He could not live away death in the bosom of his love. The moral dilemma seems almost the nemesis in the poignant tragedy of Arsat, one who loved too well, longed passionately for his love and lost all with the sad remorse to pick him constantly for his act of betrayal.

Arsat's tragedy came inevitably. His tragedy was the frustration of his pining hope and piercing vision of love in the valley of life. Diamelen died and a note of deep despair echoed as Arsat exclaimed helplessly, 'She burns no more'. He could see nothing in the dumb darkness of his deep distress. Confronted with profound sorrow of life and the rude blow of death, he realized the utter vanity of his wishes and the hard truth of an illusory world - "There is no light and peace in this world: but there is death - death for many."

Though a short story and a rather long one at that, "The Lagoon" contains a precise theme of immense human interest. The theme of human aspiration and frustration, human hope and despair, constitutes a deep tragedy that has a universal appeal.

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### **3.2.6 Symbolism and Imagery**

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"The Lagoon" abounds in symbols and imagery, which creates the ambience of the story that Conrad, aimed at. The weird setting, the dimness of essentials,

luminosity and obscurity makes the short-story impressive. The inner dilemma of the protagonist who ran towards his doom is invested with the feeling of his act of cowardice – a man who is ripped between his brother and beloved. Conrad artistically embedded his story with imagery and symbols which created the atmosphere of sombre silence and the stillness of the environment and further complicated the position of the protagonist by infusing agony, dejection, hopelessness and *hamartia*.

“The Lagoon” gets further complicated with the usage of story-within-the-story. Arsat’s anecdote of affection and brotherly disloyalty is outlined carefully by the observant and participant in the form of the White Man. The emotionless hearing of the White Man compared to the pain and trauma of Arsat symbolizes universal tragedy of the human society which is painted in the form of the lagoon which itself is a dominant image throughout the story which further symbolizing the tragic fate.

The setting of the lagoon is symbolic to the illusory nature in which human beings participate in the zone of the unknown. The setting unveils the devastating fate of mankind. The place is engrossed in sounds and darkness not treaded by the common, thereby acting as the symbolic gothic element in the story. The lagoon also acts as the symbol of malevolence, a harmful power, belligerent and yet vibrant. The tragic plot itself is symbolically paralleled by the mysterious setting of fate and destiny. The atmosphere is full of premonitions which get intensified by the immobility of the forest and water. The stillness is the symbolic artifact which parallels Arsat’s loneliness, tragic fate and loss of love. The image of darkness symbolizes the darkness of Arsat’s heart devoid of hope and aspiration towards life. The constant comparison between darkness and light is the reverberating echo of Arsat’s crying heart. The soaring eagle symbolizes the last journey of Diamelen as the soul leaves the body behind and transcends earthly pain and misery.

The characters in the story also perform a symbolic function. They in close coordination with the natural setting complement each other. Arsat symbolizes love and repentance. Diamelen represents rather the ideal of life to be pursued by human beings. The White Man is the symbolic chorus, scrutinizing, commenting and performing impassively.

A reader of “The Lagoon” will readily connect such passages with Conrad’s images of stars streaming “ceaseless and vain,” reflected in the lagoon, darkness “oozing” from between trees, writhing ten- drills, creepers and roots, and with the “world of illusions” mentioned in the final sentence of the tale. The writer conveys

that we are entering a region -Arsat's mind - where action has stopped: ... seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed. The "river" is personified as: ... the wandering hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon flows straight to the east - to the east that harbors both light and darkness. The river, a way to reach his mind, his subconscious, hesitates and seeks a way out. The east, with its connotation of mystery and exoticism, is where one finds both/darkness of the subconscious life, of sin, and light for consciousness and reasoning. The mind longs for liberation from darkness but the journey continues, and in this gloomy setting we only hear: The repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skimmed along over the smooth water and lost itself.

We can see an analogy with this trip along the river in "The Lagoon" with Classical mythology, where the river Styx separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. In "The Lagoon", however, the journey occurs but the trouble is that nobody is either "really" dead or living, only absent, away from life and action. Below the level of setting, the writer is concerned with mental processes and the dramatic experience of a human being, Arsat. Contrasted with all this dark imagery we have "glimpses" of light - ..."the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven". We enter Arsat but through the white man "in the dim light of the dwelling". With this dim light imagery, the writer conveys that we are going to learn more about Arsat; that the shadows are letting in some light that clarifies how and why he went to live alone in that "ghostly" lagoon. In the hut, we watch Diamelen's death agony: her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. Diamelen is unconscious and Arsat is in despair: She hears nothing - she hears not me. Arsat cannot live with the idea that Diamelen is abandoning him, and sense(see: eyes; hear: lips) imagery is repeated to show that, after she dies, only the conscious world will be left for him alone to face. And Arsat realizes this. Red and dark imagery - Life and Death - portrays, very dramatically, the parting daylight as Diamelen's parting from life:

**The enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift *and* stealthy shadows, rising like a black and impalpable vapor above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight.**

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### 3.2.7 Conrad's Narrative Style

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Conrad believed that the short form of writing gives the writer to showcase his or her style and in his *Letters*, I Conrad wrote: "It takes a small-scale narrative (short-story) to show the master's hand". "The Lagoon" is narrated in the third-person which enables the narrator to interpret the minds of the characters dexterously. Conrad has skillfully manipulated the usage of imagery and symbolism to craft his story and give it the required dimension. The story within the story has been skillfully woven which creates the gloomy ambience and the dark environmental spirit of the setting. In one of the stories (the main narrative), the White Man is found in conversation with Arsat and in the framed narrative, he further becomes the audience to Arsat's narration of the story of love and deceitfulness.

As the story progresses we are introduced with long statements narrated by Arsat where he describes the death of his brother and Diamelen's escape from the clutches of the Rajah's men. Arsat is made to use first person narration and the turn taking between first and third person makes the story more appealing and provides wider angle to the narration. The third-person point of view enables the narrator to be an observer and report as the third party. The same order is followed in Arsat's narration as he reports to the white man and the reader. This created a connecting triumvirate among the reader, the white man and Arsat.

The narrative has been combined with the somber setting of the story while depicting Diamelen's death. By using the flashback technique, Conrad juxtaposes the elopement which finally led to the loss of Diamelen and initially to the death of Arsat's brother. The story reaches the climax when Arsat decides to avenge the loss of his family. The narrative style is descriptive in nature specially the description of the vibrant setting with all the visions and resonances of the jungle and river. In the narration of "The Lagoon", Conrad extensively uses imagery and symbolism to paint the setting and the characters through the suggestiveness of the words. This incorporation of images indicates that the foundation of actuality is unpredictable and the anxiety of it keeps fluctuating, compelled to never resurface. Truth is here problematised by misapprehensions and the narrative nullifies the stereotypical dictum of life and understanding.

In "The Lagoon" there are two distinct separate strands of narrative – the narrative of the main character Arsat is embedded in an external narrator's narrative.

The story can be divided into the external narrator's narrative, which begins and ends the story and Arsat's narrative. Conrad makes the external narrator's narrative give the description of the physical setting, and it is indeed less dynamic compared to the intensity of the protagonist's narration. This narrative relates to the journey of the white man up the creek to Arsat's clearing. The slowness of the journey is underscored by the detailed description of the scene. Conrad is also in no hurry to introduce us to Arsat, for even when the white man arrives at the clearing, Arsat does not appear immediately. When he emerges from his hut, he exchanges as few words as possible with the white man until he is about to tell his story which is said through Arsat's narration. The external narrator's narrative resumes on the completion of Arsat's story with a description of the coming of the dawn, Arsat's grief, and the departure of the white man.

The external narrator's narrative is most adjectivally dense. Conrad is creating a setting that holds and dominates the two characters and he does it by adding detail to detail in the form of optional adjectives, significant numbers of them occurring simultaneously. Conrad is concerned with fundamental immobility, and any movement – action or event – is no more than a ripple on the surface. Arsat is overcome by this immobility. There is a low frequency of action clauses where happenings are initiated by the volition of a human agent and a high frequency of event clauses, particularly of clauses relating physical events, where occurrences just happen.

Taking the story as a whole, the external narrator's narrative is much longer while the matrices of Arsat's narrative are dominant. The English spoken by the Malay is not affected by interferences from the grammatical structures of the Malay language, but an English as imagined by an Englishman ignorant of linguistics, language – teaching and Malay.

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### **3.2.8 Significance of the Title**

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A 'stretch of salt water parted from the sea by the low sandbank' equates to the title of the story which is *The Lagoon*. The geographical location is common to the Asian region and aptly matching with the Malayan region. The title is appropriately rendered because the story is setting specific and the lagoon is just a symbolic representation of the proceedings of the plot of the story. The entire theme is set against a depressing, sluggish and bizarre looking lagoon which holds the tragedy of the characters.

The lagoon is the place where action is performed. It is the escape abode of Arsat and Diamelen. The lagoon accommodates the white man to start the story and the narrative thrives in the lagoon as the story is shared with the white Man. It is the opening and ending of the story encompassing the emotions, aspirations, sacrifice and love bearing the characters and humanity as a whole. The lagoon acts as the death fort for Diamelen and the tragedy and the sorrow are transferred onto Arsat who has nothing but to grieve his dual loss in the form of Diamelen and his brother. The background of the narrative and the point of action are both hosted in the lagoon.

The description of the lagoon which is characterized by darkness, somber mood, despair, repentance, frustration, illusory world and the vagueness of emotional existence aptly justify the title. The haunting nature of the place is representative of the ambitionless throttle of mankind. The lagoon and the hero of the story seem synonymous. The visual of the lagoon is the inner mind and conscience of Arsat. The lagoon is isolated and distant which again is symbolic of Arsat's personal loneliness and separation from population.

The lagoon also has symbolic suggestiveness to the interior structure of the characters' mind. The ecological images run according to human condition and a stark matured semblance is found in the portrayal of the emotions and the environment.

The word lagoon from the Spanish word 'laguna' means a 'stretch of salt water parted from the sea by the low sandbank'. It implies the enclosed sea water, within the ridge of some rock or sand. This is quite common in Asiatic countries and particularly in the Malayan region. The idea of the enclosure also metaphorically fits in to describe the hemmed in nature of the existence of Arsat in course of the story.

Conrad's story has the precise title 'The Lagoon'. This is mainly because of the Malayan setting of the story. The entire theme is set against a gloomy, stagnant and weird looking lagoon. The main event centres round this lagoon, for the hut of Arsat, hero of the story, is shown situated by its shallow side. The white man entered the lagoon to pass the night in Arsat's place and heard there the latter's story of love and repentance. The tragedy of the tale – Diamelen's death and Arsat's realization of the stark illusion of the world – was enacted on the lagoon. The very appearance of the lagoon – its gloom and ghostly aspect seems to be in keeping with the tragic theme of the story.

There is yet another point from which 'The Lagoon' seems appropriate as a title. The lagoon implies a detached stretch of water from the main. The hero of the story Arsat too led a detached isolated life in an old hut by the side of the lagoon. He wanted to live in love away from the main current of the world around him. The title of the story is related to the environment as well as the hero's life. It has in fact, a symbolic suggestiveness and well bears out the brooding, gloomy spirit of this tragic tale.

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### **3.2.9 Comprehension Exercises**

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Analyze the character of Arsat. Is he the hero of the story?
2. Justify the title of the story.
3. Would you consider "The Lagoon" as a tale of passion and remorse? Discuss with close textual references.
4. Comment on Conrad's narrative technique in "The Lagoon".

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Trace the change in Arsat's character.
2. What role does the White Man perform in "The Lagoon"?
3. Discuss the imagery and symbolism used in "The Lagoon".
4. How does the setting of Conrad's story become an important thematic device?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What are the points of view of view employed by Conrad in "The Lagoon"?
2. Briefly describe the scene of Arsat's escapade with Diamelen.
3. What is the reaction of the White Man's boatmen when they are forced to spend the night in the lagoon? Why?
4. How does Arsat's brother contribute to the development of the story.

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### 3.2.10 Somerset Maugham: A Literary Bio-brief

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William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was born in the British Embassy in Paris, on January 25, 1874. He was the sixth and youngest son of Robert Ormond Maugham and Edith Mary Snell. At the age of eight he lost his mother and at the age of ten he became an orphan. He was sent to England to live with his uncle, the Vicar of Whitstable. He received his education at King's School, Canterbury, and Heidelberg University. For next six years he studied medicine at St. Thomas Medical school in London, and qualified in 1897 as a doctor but abandoned medicine after the success of his first novels and plays. His first novel was *Liza of Lambeth* (1897). Soon he became a playwright and wrote successful plays like *A Man of Honour* (1903) and *To Sheppey* (1933). His autobiographical novel *Of Human Bondage* (1915) is considered by many to be his masterpiece. His other popular works include *Cakes and Ale*, *The Moon and Six Pence* and *Razor's Edge*. His philosophy of life as a resigned atheist is explained in *The Summing Up* (1938) and man's innate goodness and intelligence is reflected in *A Writer's Notebook* (1949).

In 1921 Maugham came out with the first collection of short stories—*The Trembling of a Leaf*. A number of Maugham's short stories have been filmed. *Quartet* (1948) consisted of four stories introduced by the author. His stories numbering over two hundred are the finest products of his inexhaustible traveller's mentality. As a traveller, he wrote, "I filled notebooks with descriptions of places and persons and the stories they suggested...I kept my eyes open for character, oddness, personality...I learnt very quick when a place promised me something and then I waited till I got it. Otherwise I passed on".

"The Lotus-Eater" is based on the legend of the lotos-eaters in Homer's *Odyssey*. Lotos is the Greek word for lotus. Lotos-eaters are those who lived in the lotos-land enjoying a life of indolent ease. Maugham's story is all about the life of Thomas Wilson whose impractical decision led to his tragic end. Wilson, a bank manager in London, lived in the drudgery of office work after the tragic death of his wife and daughter years back. On his chance visit to Capri, he got so enamored of the scenic beauty of the place that he decided to spend the rest of his life there. He left his job, sold his assets, and bought his annuity for twenty-five years. In this unit we are going to read about him.

The story in this unit is, interesting for its novelty of theme, peculiarity of the character of Wilson, for its symmetrical pattern, and for its dramatic end. It embodies a common mood and a common philosophy of life. It is a tragic tale of a man who makes a wrong choice for a life of ease and indolence in the beauties of nature strikes a common chord in the hearts of all.

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### 3.2.11 The Text

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*Most people, the vast majority in fact, lead the lives that circumstances have thrust upon them, and though some repine, looking upon themselves as round pegs in square holes, and think that if things had been different they might have made a much better showing, the greater part accept their lot, if not with serenity, at all events with resignation. They are like train-cars travelling forever on the selfsame rails. They go backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, inevitably, till they can go no longer and then are sold as scrap-iron. It is not often that you find a man who has boldly taken the course of his life into his own hands. When you do, it is worth while having a good look at him.*

*That was why I was curious to meet Thomas Wilson. It was an interesting and a bold thing he had done. Of course the end was not yet and until the experiment was concluded it was impossible to call it successful. But from what I had heard it seemed he must be an odd sort of fellow and I thought I should like to know him. I had been told he was reserved, but I had a notion that with patience and tact I could persuade him to confide in me. I wanted to hear the facts from his own lips. People exaggerate, they love to romanticize, and I was quite prepared to discover that his story was not nearly so singular as I had been led to believe.*

*And this impression was confirmed when at last I made his acquaintance. It was on the Piazza in Capri, where I was spending the month of August at a friend's villa, and a little before sunset, when most of the inhabitants, native and foreign, gather together to chat with their friends in the cool of the evening. There is a terrace that overlooks the Bay of Naples, and when the sun sinks slowly into the sea the island of Ischia is silhouetted against a blaze of splendour. It is one of the most lovely sights in the world. I was standing there with my friend and host watching it, when suddenly he said:*

*"Look, there's Wilson."*

*"Where?"*

*"The man sitting on the parapet, with his back to us. He's got a blue shirt on."*

*I saw an undistinguished back and a small head of grey hair, short and rather thin.*

*"I wish he'd turn round," I said.*

*"He will presently."*

*"Ask him to come and have a drink with us at Morgano's."*

*"All right."*

*The instant of overwhelming beauty had passed and the sun, like the top of an orange, was dipping into a wine-red sea. We turned round and leaning our backs against the parapet looked at the people who were sauntering to and fro. They were all talking their heads off and the cheerful noise was exhilarating. Then the church bell, rather cracked, but with a fine resonant note, began to ring. The Piazza at Capri, with its clock tower over the footpath that leads up from the harbour, with the church up a flight of steps, is a perfect setting for an opera by Donizetti, and you felt that the voluble crowd might at any moment break out into a rattling chorus. It was charming and unreal.*

*I was so intent on the scene that I had not noticed Wilson get off the parapet and come towards us. As he passed us my friend stopped him.*

*"Hulloa, Wilson, I haven't seen you bathing the last few days."*

*"I've been bathing on the other side for a change."*

*My friend then introduced me. Wilson shook hands with me politely, but with indifference; a great many strangers come to Capri for a few days, or a few weeks; and I had no doubt he was constantly meeting people who came and went; and then my friend asked him to come along and have a drink with us.*

*"I was just going back to supper," he said.*

*"Can't it wait?" I asked.*

*"I suppose it can," he smiled.*

*Though his teeth were not very good his smile was attractive. It was gentle and kindly. He was dressed in a blue cotton shirt and a pair of grey trousers, much*

creased and none too clean, of a thin canvas, and on his feet he wore a pair of very old espadrilles. The get-up was picturesque, and very suitable to the place and the weather, but it did not at all go with his face. It was a lined, long face, deeply sunburned, thin-lipped, with small grey eyes rather close together and light, neat features. The grey hair was carefully brushed. It was not a plain face, indeed in his youth Wilson might have been good-looking, but a prim one. He wore the blue shirt, open at the neck, and the grey canvas trousers, not as though they belonged to him, but as though, shipwrecked in his pyjamas, he had been fitted out with odd garments by compassionate strangers. Notwithstanding this careless attire he looked like the manager of a branch office in an insurance company, who should by rights be wearing a black coat with pepper-and-salt trousers, a white collar, and an unobjectionable tie. I could very well see myself going to him to claim the insurance money when I had lost a watch, and being rather disconcerted while I answered the questions he put to me by his obvious impression, for all his politeness, that people who made such claims were either fools or knaves.

Moving off, we strolled across the Piazza and down the street till we came to Morgano's. We sat in the garden. Around us people were talking in Russian, German, Italian, and English. We ordered drinks. Donna Lucia, the host's wife, waddled up and in her low, sweet voice passed the time of day with us. Though middle-aged now and portly, she had still traces of the wonderful beauty that thirty years before had driven artists to paint so many bad portraits other. Her eyes, large and liquid, were the eyes of Hera and her smile was affectionate and gracious. We three gossiped for a while, for there is always a scandal of one sort or another in Capri to make a topic of conversation, but nothing was said of particular interest and in a little while Wilson got up and left us. Soon afterwards we strolled up to my friend's villa to dine. On the way he asked me what I had thought of Wilson.

"Nothing," I said. "I don't believe there's a word of truth in your story."

"Why not?"

"He isn't the sort of man to do that sort of thing."

"How does anyone know what anyone is capable of?"

"I should put him down as an absolutely normal man of business who's retired on a comfortable income from ill-edged securities, I think your story's just the ordinary Capri tittle- little."

*“Have it your own way,” said my friend.*

*We were in the habit of bathing at a beach called the Baths of Tiberius. We took a fly down the road to a certain point and then wandered through lemon groves and vineyards, noisy with cicadas and heavy with the hot smell of the sun, till we came to the top of the cliff down which a steep winding path led to the sea. A day or two later, just before we got down my friend said:*

*“Oh, there’s Wilson back again.”*

*We scrunched over the beach, the only drawback to the bathing-place being that it was shingle and not sand, and as we came along Wilson saw us and waved. He was standing up, a pipe in his mouth, and he wore nothing but a pair of trunks. His body was dark brown, thin but not emaciated, and, considering his wrinkled face and grey hair, youthful. Hot from our walk, we undressed quickly and plunged at once into the water. Six feet from the shore it was thirty feet deep, but so clear that you could see the bottom. It was warm, yet invigorating.*

*When I got out Wilson was lying on his belly, with a towel under him reading a book. I lit a cigarette and went and sat down beside him.*

*“Had a nice swim?” he asked.*

*He put his pipe inside his book to mark the place and closing it put it down on the pebbles beside him. He was evidently willing to talk.*

*“Lovely,” I said. “It’s the best bathing in the world.”*

*“Of course people think those were the Baths of Tiberius.” He waved his hand towards a shapeless mass of masonry that stood half in the water and half out. “But that’s all rot. It was just one of his villas, you know.”*

*I did. But it is just as well to let people tell you things when they want to. It disposes them kindly towards you if you suffer them to impart information. Wilson gave a chuckle.*

*“Funny old fellow, Tiberius. Pity they’re saying now there’s not a word of truth in all those stories about him.”*

*He began to tell me all about Tiberius. Well, I had read my Suetonius too and I had read histories of the Early Roman Empire, so there was nothing very new to me in what he said. But I observed that he was not ill read. I remarked on it.*

*“Oh, well, when I settled down here I was naturally interested, and I have plenty of time for reading. When you live in a place like this, with all its associations, it seems to make history so actual. You might almost be living in historical times yourself.”*

*I should remark here that this was in 1913. The world was an easy, comfortable place and no one could have imagined that anything might happen seriously to disturb the serenity of existence.*

*“How long have you been here?” I asked.*

*“Fifteen years.” He gave the blue and placid sea a glance, and a strangely tender smile hovered on his thin lips. “I fell in love with the place at first sight. You’ve heard, I dare say, of the mythical German who came here on the Naples boat just for lunch and a look at the Blue Grotto and stayed forty years; well, I can’t say I exactly did that, but it’s come to the same thing in the end. Only it won’t be forty years in my case. Twenty-five. Still, that’s better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.”*

*I waited for him to go on. For what he had just said looked indeed as though there might be something after all in the singular story I had heard. But at that moment my friend came dripping out of the water very proud of himself because he had swum a mile, and the conversation turned to other things.*

*After that I met Wilson several times, either in the Piazza or on the beach. He was amiable and polite. He was always pleased to have a talk and I found out that he not only knew every inch of the island but also the adjacent mainland. He had read a great deal on all sorts of subjects, but his speciality was the history of Rome and on this he was very well informed. He seemed to have little imagination and to be of no more than average intelligence. He laughed a good deal, but with restraint, and his sense of humour was tickled by simple jokes. A commonplace man. I did not forget the odd remark he had made during the first short dial we had had by ourselves, but he never so much as approached the topic again. One day on our return from the beach, dismissing the cab at the Piazza, my friend and I told the driver to be ready to take us up to Anacapri at five. We were going to climb Monte Solaro, dine at a tavern we favoured, and walk down in the moonlight, for it was full moon and the views by night were lovely. Wilson was standing by while we gave the cabman instructions, for we had given him a lift to save him the hot dusty walk, and more from politeness than for any other reason I asked him if he would care to join us.*

*"It's my party," I said.*

*"I'll come with pleasure," he answered.*

*But when the time came to set out my friend was not feeling well, he thought he had slaved too long in the water, and would not face the long and tiring walk. So I went alone with Wilson. We climbed the mountain, admired the spacious view, and got back to the inn as night was falling, hot, hungry, and thirsty. We had ordered our dinner beforehand. The food was good, for Antonio was an excellent cook, and the wine came from his own vineyard. It was so light that you felt you could drink it like water and we finished the first bottle with our macaroni. By the time we had finished the second we felt that there was nothing much wrong with life. We sat in a little garden under a great vine laden with grapes. The air was exquisitely soft. The night was still and we were alone. The maid brought us *bel paese* cheese and a plate of figs. I ordered coffee and *strega*, which is the best liqueur they make in Italy. Wilson would not have a cigar, but lit his pipe.*

*"We've got plenty of time before we need start," he said, "the moon won't be over the hill for another hour."*

*"Moon or no moon," I said briskly, "of course we've got plenty of time. That's one of the delights of Capri, that there's never any hurry."*

*"Leisure," he said. "If people only knew! It's the most priceless thing a man can have and they're such fools they don't even know it's something to aim at. Work? They work for work's sake. They haven't got the brains to realize that the only object of work is to obtain leisure."*

*Wine has the effect on some people of making them indulge in general reflections. These remarks were true, but no one could have claimed that they were original. I did not say anything, but struck a match to light my cigar.*

*"It was full moon the first time I came to Capri," he went on reflectively. "It might be the same moon as tonight."*

*"It was, you know," I smiled.*

*He grinned. The only light in the garden was what came from an oil lamp that hung over our heads. It had been scanty to eat by, but it was good now for confidences.*

*"I didn't mean that. I mean, it might be yesterday. Fifteen years it is, and when I look back it seems like a month. I'd never been to Italy before. I came for my*

summer holiday. I went to Naples by boat from Marseilles and I had a look round, Pompeii, you know, and Paestum” and one or two places like that; then I came here for a week. I liked the look of the place right away, from the sea, I mean, as I watched it come closer and closer; and then when we got into the little boats from the steamer and landed at the quay, with all that crowd of jabbering people who wanted to take your luggage, and the hotel touts, and the tumbledown houses on the Marina and the walk up to the hotel, and dining on the terrace - well, it just got me. That’s the truth. I didn’t know if I was standing on my head or my heels. I’d never drunk Capri wine before, but I’d heard of it; I think I must have got a bit tight. I sat on that terrace after they’d all gone to bed and watched the moon over the sea, and there was Vesuvius with a great red plume of smoke rising up from it. Of course I know now that wine I drank was ink, Capri wine my eye, but I thought it all right then. But it wasn’t the wine that made me drunk, it was the shape of the island and those jabbering people, the moon and the sea and the oleander in the hotel garden. I’d never seen an oleander before.”

It was a long speech and it had made him thirsty. He took up his glass, but it was empty. I asked him if he would have another strega.

“It’s sickly stuff. Let’s have a bottle of wine. That’s sound, that is, pure juice of the grape and can’t hurt anyone.”

I ordered more wine, and when it came filled the glasses. He took a long drink and after a sigh of pleasure went on.

“Next day I found my way to the bathing-place we go to. Not bad bathing, I thought. Then I wandered about the island. As luck would have it, there was a festa up at the Punta di Timberio and I ran straight into the middle of it. An image of the Virgin and priests, acolytes swinging censers, and a whole crowd of jolly, laughing, excited people, a lot of them all dressed up. I ran across an Englishman there and asked him what it was all about. “Oh, it’s the feast of the Assumption,” he said,” at least that’s what the Catholic Church says it is, but that’s just their hanky-panky. It’s the festival of Venus. Pagan, you know. Aphrodite rising from the sea and all that.” It gave me quite a funny feeling to hear him. It seemed to take one a long way back, if you know what I mean. After that I went down one night to have a look at the Faraglioni by moonlight. If the fates had wanted me to go on being a bank manager they oughtn’t to have let me take that walk.”

“You were a bank manager, were you?” I asked.

*I had been wrong about him, but not far wrong.*

*“Yes. I was manager of the Crawford Street branch of the York and City. It was convenient for me because I lived up Hendon way. I could get from door to door in thirty-seven minutes.”*

*He puffed at his pipe and relit it.*

*“That was my last night, that was. I’d got to be back at the bank on Monday morning. When I looked at those two great rocks sticking out of the water, with the moon above them, and all the little lights of the fishermen in their boats catching cuttlefish, all so peaceful and beautiful, I said to myself, well, after all, why should I go back? It wasn’t as if I had anyone dependent on me. My wife had died of bronchial pneumonia four years before and the kid went to live with her grandmother my wife’s mother. She was an old fool, she didn’t look after the kid properly and she got blood-poisoning, they amputated her leg, but they couldn’t save her and she died, poor little thing.”*

*“How terrible,” I said.*

*“Yes, I was cut up at the time, though of course not so much as if the kid had been living with me, but I dare say it was a mercy. Not much chance for a girl with only one leg. I was sorry about my wife too. We got on very well together. Though I don’t know if it would have continued. She was the sort of woman who was always bothering about what other people’d think. She didn’t like travelling. Eastbourne was her idea of a holiday. D’you know, I’d never crossed the Channel till after her death.”*

*“But I suppose you’ve got other relations, haven’t you?”*

*“None. I was an only child. My father had a brother, but he went to Australia before I was born. I don’t think anyone could easily be more alone in the world than I am. There wasn’t any reason I could see why I shouldn’t do exactly what I wanted. I was thirty-four at that time.”*

*He had told me he had been on the island for fifteen years. That would make him forty-nine. Just about the age I should have given him.*

*‘I’d been working since I was seventeen. All I had to look forward to was doing the same old thing day after day till I retired on my pension. I said to myself, is it worth it? What’s wrong with chucking it all up and spending the rest of my life down here? It was the most beautiful place I’d ever seen. But I’d had*

*a business training, I was cautious by nature. "No," I said, "I won't be carried away like this, I'll go tomorrow like I said I would and think it over. Perhaps when I get back to London I'll think quite differently." Damned fool, wasn't I? I lost a whole year that way.'*

*"You didn't change your mind, then?"*

*"You bet I didn't. All the time I was working I kept thinking of the bathing here and the vineyards and the walks over the hills and the moon and the sea, and the Piazza in the evening when everyone walks about for a bit of a chat after the day's work is over. There was only one thing that bothered me: I wasn't sure if I was justified in not working like everybody else did. Then I read a sort of history book, by a man called Marion Crawford it was, and there was a story about Sybaris and Crotona. There were two cities; and in Sybaris they just enjoyed life and had a good time, and in Crotona they were hardy and industrious and all that. And one day the men of Crotona came over and wiped Sybaris out, and then after a while a lot of other fellows came over from somewhere else and wiped Crotona out. Nothing remains of Sybaris, not a stone, and all that's left of Crotona is just one column. That settled the matter for me."*

*"Oh?"*

*"It came to the same in the end, didn't it? And when you look back now, who were the mugs?"*

*I did not reply and he went on.*

*"The money was rather a bother. The bank didn't pension one off till after thirty years' service, but if you retired before that they gave you a gratuity". With that and what I'd got for the sale of my house and the little I'd managed to save, I just hadn't enough to buy an annuity to last the rest of my life. It would have been silly to sacrifice everything so as to lead a pleasant life and not have a sufficient income to make it pleasant. I wanted to have a little place of my own, a servant to look after me, enough to buy tobacco, decent food, books now and then, and something over for emergencies. I knew pretty well how much I needed. I found I had just enough to buy an annuity for twenty-five years."*

*"You were thirty-five at the time?"*

*"Yes. It would carry me on till I was sixty. After all, no one can be certain of living longer than that, a lot of men die in their fifties, and by the time a man's sixty he's had the best of life."*

*“On the other hand no one can be sure of dying at sixty,” I said.*

*“Well, I don’t know. It depends on himself, doesn’t it?”*

*“In your place I should have stayed on at the bank till I was entitled to my pension.”*

*“I should have been forty-seven then. I shouldn’t have been too old to enjoy my life here, I’m older than that now and I enjoy it as much as I ever did, but I should have been too old to experience the particular pleasure of a young man. You know, you can have just as good a time at fifty as you can at thirty, but it’s not the same sort of good time. I wanted to live the perfect life while I still had the energy and the spirit to make the most of it. Twenty-five years seemed a long time to me, and twenty-five years of happiness seemed worth paying something pretty substantial for. I’d made up my mind to wait a year and I waited a year. Then I sent in my resignation and as soon as they paid me my gratuity I bought the annuity and came on here.”*

*“An annuity for twenty-five years?”*

*“That’s right.”*

*“Have you never regretted?”*

*“Never. I’ve had my money’s worth already. And I’ve got ten years more. Don’t you think after twenty-five years of perfect happiness one ought to be satisfied to call it a day?”*

*“Perhaps.”*

*He did not say in so many words what he would do then, but his intention was clear. It was pretty much the story my friend had told me, but it sounded different when I heard it from his own lips. I stole a glance at him. There was nothing about him that was not ordinary. No one, looking at that neat, prim face, could have thought him capable of an unconventional action. I did not blame him. It was his own life that he had arranged in this strange manner, and I did not see why he should not do what he liked with it. Still, I could not prevent the little shiver that ran down my spine.*

*“Getting chilly?” he smiled. “We might as well start walking down. The moon’ll be up by now.”*

Before we parted Wilson asked me if I would like to go and see his house one day; and two or three days later, finding out where he lived, I strolled up to see him. It was a peasant's cottage, well away from the town, in a vineyard, with a view of the sea. By the side of the door grew a great oleander in full flower. There were only two small rooms, a tiny kitchen, and a lean-to in which firewood could be kept. The bedroom was furnished like a monk's cell, but the sitting-room, smelling agreeably of tobacco, was comfortable enough, with two large armchairs that he had brought from England, a large roll-top desk, a collage piano, and crowded bookshelves. On the walls were framed engravings of pictures by G. F. Walls and Lord Leighton. Wilson told me that the house belonged to the owner of the vineyard who lived in another collage higher up the hill, and his wife came in every day to do the rooms and the cooking. He had found the place on his first visit to Capri, and taking it on his return for good had been there ever since. Seeing the piano and music open on it, I asked him if he would play.

'I'm no good, you know, but I've always been fond of music and I get a lot of fun out of strumming.'

He sat down at the piano and played one of the movements from a Beethoven sonata. He did not play very well. I looked at his music, Schumann and Schubert, Beethoven, Bach, and Chopin. On the table on which he had his meals was a greasy pack of cards. I asked him if he played patience.

'A lot.'

From what I saw of him then and from what I heard from either people I made for myself what I think must have been a fairly accurate picture of the life he had led for the last Fifteen years. It was certainly a very harmless one. He bathed; he walked a great deal, and he seemed never to lose his sense of the beauty of the island which he knew so intimately; he played the piano and he played patience; he read. When he was asked to a party he went and, though a trifle dull, was agreeable. He was not affronted if he was neglected. He liked people, but with an aloofness that prevented intimacy. He lived thriftily, but with sufficient comfort. He never owed a penny. I imagine he had never been a man whom sex had greatly troubled, and if in his younger days he had had now and then a passing affair with a visitor to the island whose head was turned by the atmosphere, his emotion, while it lasted, remained, I am pretty sure, well under his control. I think he was

determined that nothing should interfere with his independence of spirit. His only passion was for the beauty of nature, and he sought felicity in the simple and natural things that life offers to everyone. You may say that it was a grossly selfish existence. It was. He was of no use to anybody, but on the other hand he did nobody any harm. His only object was his own happiness, and it looked as though he had attained it. Very few people know where to look for happiness; fewer still find it. I don't know whether he was a fool or a wise man. He was certainly a man who knew his own mind. The odd thing about him to me was that he was so immensely commonplace. I should never have given him a second thought but for what I knew, that on a certain day, ten years from then, unless a chance illness cut the thread before, he must deliberately take leave of the world he loved so well. I wondered whether it was the thought of this, never quite absent from his mind, that gave him the peculiar zest with which he enjoyed every moment of the day.

I should do him an injustice if I omitted to state that he was not at all in the habit of talking about himself. I think the friend I was staying with was the only person in whom he had confided. I believe he only told me the story because he suspected I already knew it, and on the evening on which he told it me he had drunk a good deal of wine.

My visit drew to a close and I left the island. The year after, war broke out. A number of things happened to me, so that the course of my life was greatly altered, and it was thirteen years before I went to Capri again. My friend had been back sometime, but he was no longer so well off, and had moved into a house that had no room for me; so I was putting up at the hotel. He came to meet me at the boat and we dined together. During dinner I asked him where exactly his house was.

"You know it," he answered. "It's the little place Wilson had. I've built on a room and made it quite nice."

With so many other things to occupy my mind I had not given Wilson a thought for years; but now, with a little shock, I remembered. The ten years he had before him when I made his acquaintance must have elapsed long ago.

"Did he commit suicide as he said he would?"

"It's rather a grim story."

Wilson's plan was all right. There was only one flaw in it and this, I suppose, he could not have foreseen. It had never occurred to him that after twenty-five years

*of complete happiness, in this quiet backwater, with nothing in the world to disturb his serenity, his character would gradually lose its strength. The will needs obstacles in order to exercise its power; when it is never thwarted, when no effort is needed to achieve one's desires, because one has placed one's desires only in the things that can be obtained by stretching out one's hand, the will grows impotent. If you walk on a level all the time the muscles you need to climb a mountain will atrophy. These observations are trite, but there they are. When Wilson's annuity expired he had no longer the resolution to make the end which was the price he had agreed to pay for that long period of happy tranquility. I do not think, as far as I could gather, both from what my friend told me and afterwards from others, that he wanted courage. It was just that he couldn't make up his mind. He put it off from day to day.*

*He had lived on the island for so long and had always settled his accounts so punctually that it was easy for him to get credit; never having borrowed money before, he found a number of people who were willing to lend him small sums when now he asked for them. He had paid his rent regularly for so many years that his landlord, whose wife Assunta still acted as his servant, was content to let things slide for several months. Everyone believed him when he said that a relative had died and that he was temporarily embarrassed because owing to legal formalities he could not for some time get the money that was due to him. He managed to hang on after this fashion for something over a year. Then he could get no more credit from the local tradesmen, and there was no one to lend him any more money. His landlord gave him notice to leave the house unless he paid up the arrears of rent before a certain date.*

*The day before this he went into his tiny bedroom, closed the door and the window, drew the curtain, and lit a brazier of charcoal. Next morning when Assunta came to make his breakfast she found him insensible but still alive. The room was draughty, and though he had done this and that to keep out the fresh air he had not done it very thoroughly. It almost looked as though at the last moment, and desperate though his situation was, he had suffered from a certain infirmity of purpose. Wilson was taken to the hospital, and though very ill for some time he at last recovered. But as a result either of the charcoal poisoning or of the shock he was no longer in complete possession of his faculties. He was not insane, at all events not insane enough to be put in an asylum, but he was quite obviously no longer in his right mind.*

*"I went to see him," said my friend. "I tried to get him to talk, but he kept looking at me in a funny sort of way, as though he couldn't quite make out where he'd seen me before. He looked rather awful lying there in bed, with a week's growth of grey beard on his chin; but except for that funny look in his eyes he seemed quite normal."*

*"What funny look in his eyes?"*

*"I don't know exactly how to describe it. Puzzled. It's an absurd comparison, but suppose you threw a stone up into the air and it didn't come down but just stayed there..."*

*"It would be rather bewildering," I smiled.*

*"Well, that's the sort of look he had."*

*It was difficult to know what to do with him. He had no money and no means of getting any. His effects were sold, but for too little to pay what he owed. He was English, and the Italian authorities did not wish to make themselves responsible for him. The British Consul in Naples had no funds to deal with the case. He could of course be sent back to England, but no one seemed to know what could be done with him when he got there. Then Assunta, the servant, said that he had been a good master and a good tenant, and as long as he had the money had paid his way; he could sleep in the woodshed in the cottage in which she and her husband lived, and he could share their meals. This was suggested to him. It was difficult to know whether he understood or not. When Assunta came to take him from the hospital he went with her without remark. He seemed to have no longer a will of his own. She had been keeping him now for two years.*

*"It's not very comfortable, you know," said my friend. "They've rigged him up a ramshackle bed and given him a couple of blankets, but there's no window, and it's icy cold in winter and like an oven in summer. And the food's pretty rough. You know how these peasants eat: macaroni on Sundays and meat once in a blue moon."*

*"What does he do with himself all the time?"*

*"He wanders about the hills. I've tried to see him two or three times, but it's no good; when he sees you coming he runs like a hare. Assunta comes down to have a chat with me now and then and I give her a bit of money so that she can buy him tobacco, but God knows if he ever gets it."*

*"Do they treat him all right?" I asked.*

*"I'm sure Assunta's kind enough. She treats him like a child. I'm afraid her husband's not very nice to him. He grudges the cost of his keep. I don't believe he's cruel or anything like that, but I think he's a bit sharp with him. He makes him fetch water and clean the cow-shed and that sort of thing."*

*"It sounds pretty rotten," I said.*

*"He brought it on himself. After all, he's only got what he deserved."*

*"I think on the whole we all get what we deserve," I said. "But that doesn't prevent its being rather horrible."*

*Two or three days later my friend and I were taking a walk. We were strolling along a narrow path through an olive grove.*

*"There's Wilson," said my friend suddenly. "Don't look, you'll only frighten him. Go straight on."*

*I walked with my eyes on the path, but out of the corners of them I saw a man hiding behind an olive tree. He did not move as we approached, but I felt that he was watching us. As soon as we had passed I heard a scamper. Wilson, like a hunted animal, had made for safety. That was the last I ever saw of him.*

*He died last year. He had endured that life for six years. He was found one morning on the mountainside lying quite peacefully as though he had died in his sleep. From where he lay he had been able to see those two great rocks called the Faraglioni which stand out of the sea. It was full moon and he must have gone to see them by moonlight. Perhaps he died of the beauty of that sight.*

(Complete Short Stories of Somerset Maugham, Volume II. Doubleday & Company, 1952)

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### 3.2.12 Glossary and Annotations

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**Round pegs in square:** Person not fitted for their places

**Piazza:** Public square

**Silhouetted :** Appearance of person or thing as seen against light

**Morgano's:** Morgano is the owner of an inn. The place is named after its owner

**Sauntering;** Walking idly

**Donizetti:** Italian composer

**Espadrilles:** Light canvas shoe

**Hera:** Wife of Zeus, the God Heaven in Greek mythology

**Gift-edged securities:** Investments considered safe

**Tiberius:** Emperor Tiberius (14 A.D. to 37 A.D). Tiberius Gracchus Roman Tribune of the middle of the second century B.C.

**Suetonius:** historian

**The early roman Empire;** the Roman empire was established by Augustus Caesar after his victory in the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Then came Tiberius (14 A.D.—37 A.D.), Caligulada, Claudius, Nero (54-64 A.D.), the five Antomimes—mercus Aurelius ( 161-180 A.D).

**Cicadas:** Winged insects

**Macaroni;** Flour paste formed into long tubes

**Bel paese cheese:** Mild creamy Italian cheese

**Marseilles:** A town in France

**Pompeii:** A town in Italy, ruined by an eruption from Vesuvius

**Paestun:** A place in Italy

**Quay:** A place for loading and unloading vessels

**Marina:** Road along the sea-beach

**Acolytes:** Church Officers

**Consers:** Vessels for burning incense

**Aphrodite:** Greek goddess of love, fertility, beauty

**Faraglioni:** the two rocks of the name

**Eastbourne:** a sea-side resort in Sussex

**Marian Crawford** (1854-1909) : an Anglo-American historical novelist

**Sybaris:** A Greek city notorious for the pleasure-loving self-indulgence

**Crotona:** An Italian city of hard-working people

**Mugs:** Simpleton

**Annuity:** annual income from investments.

**C. F. Watts and Lord Leighton:** Watts (1817-1904) and Leighton (1830-96) were painters of Greek mythological subjects, whose works were much in vogue during the late Victorian period

**Beethoven:** A celebrated German composer

**Sonata:** Instrumental composition in three or four movements for a solo voice

**Schumann:** Robert Alexander Schumann (1810-56), a German composer

**Schubert, Franz Peter** (1797-1828): Austrian composer noted for lyrical melody

**Bach: Johann Sebastian** (1685-1750): German composer, supreme organist of the time

**Chopin, Frederick Francois** (1810-39): Polish composer, pianist

**Chance cut the thread:** Chance as fate cut the thread of life. The Greeks believed that life is spun out of thin thread

**War broke out:** It refers to World War 1 (1914-18). It was war between Germany and allied forces of England, Russia etc.

**Atrophy:** Waste away for lack of nourishment

**Brazier:** a pot for hot coal

**You threw a stone up into air and it did not come down:** Wilson's abnormal condition is compared to a stone thrown in the air and stuck there

**The British Consul:** British agent residing in Naples

**Rigged him up:** Provided him with

**Scamper:** quick run

**Once in a blue moon:** rarely

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### 3.2.13 Discussion and Analysis

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Maugham's story deals with a modern lotus eater, and his unusual choice to live in Capri in the midst of natural beauty with an annuity for twenty-five years. The author came to Capri near Naples and stayed with his friend. He heard of Thomas Wilson and was introduced to him once by his friend. Gradually, intimacy grew and

he came to know of his unusual, rather odd conduct of leaving his job and buying an annuity for twenty-five years in order to live in languorous ease in the midst of nature in Capri.

Wilson was a bank manager of the Crawford Street branch of the York and City and lived a dull humdrum life. His wife and daughter died early, and he lived a lonely life. He was sick and

**“I think on the whole we get what we deserve, but that does not prevent its being rather horrible”.**

tired of the conventional life of normal duties. His visit to Capri during a vacation was a turning point in his life. It completely changed his attitude and course of life. He was so mesmerized by the natural surrounds of Capri that he resolved to settle down there permanently. He resigned his post, collected all his assets and bought an annuity for twenty-five years. He began to live a carefree life in Capri. Leisure and complete freedom from cares and anxieties were the sole desires of his life. He had a modest peasant’s cottage in a vineyard with a view of the sea. His sitting room was comfortable with arm-chairs, piano and crowded book-shelves. He lived thriftily, but with sufficient comfort. He had nice food, smoked tobacco, read good books, and spent his time in playing on the piano, playing patience, reading books, viewing the beauty of nature. He sought felicity in the simple and natural things. Like the lotos-eaters, he wanted to rest from work and enjoy leisure with some common comforts.

His tragedy came after twenty-five years. He had no income. He could not bring himself to commit suicide as he had professed earlier. He spent some days on loans which were granted to him because of his honest living there for twenty-five years. He could hang on this way for something over a year. Then he could get no credit: his landlord gave him notice to leave the house. He made a vain attempt to kill himself. He was ill and after his recovery, he became insane. His servant Assunta gave him shelter and food. However, it was a ramshackle shelter and very meager food. Assunta’s husband resented the cost of his keeping. He made a vain attempt to commit suicide by lighting a brazier of charcoal in a closed room. He became ill, and after his recovery became insane. Neither the Italian authorities nor the British consul at Naples agreed to deal with his case. Wilson went about the hills. The writer went to Capri again after ten years found him hiding behind an olive tree. He behaved like a hunted animal. After six years of this abject miserable living, he died. He was found one morning on the mountain side. He went there at night perhaps to see the moon-lit beauty of the mountains. “Perhaps he died of the beauty of that sight”, there are the author’s last words on Wilson.

Thomas Wilson in Maugham's "The Lotus Eater" is not a tragic character in this sense. He deserved his sufferings and humiliations for the odd choice he made. These sufferings were foreseen: he himself visualized them. He bought an annuity for twenty-five years for enjoying life and leisure in the midst of nature in Capri. The thought of the future after the expiry of the annuity haunted him, but he smothered it in zest with which he enjoyed every minute of his day. The misery and humiliations were inevitable for him for the odd choice he made. He deserved all these things. He had to pay the penalty for this unwise choice by these sufferings. His choice was unwise from the worldly standpoint, but he made the choice out of his zest of life and passion for nature.

His intense zest for life, outweighed the worldly considerations and he made an utterly unwise choice without thinking for the future. He chose what he thought conducive to his happiness. He did not like to live like common men in a commonplace humdrum manner.

**Let us now quickly go through the events of this exceptional story:**

- The author hears about Thomas Wilson:  
Most people live a conventional life. However, there are people who chose sometimes choose unusual ways of life. Wilson was one such person. The writer heard of him, but wanted to hear the facts of his life from his own mouth.
- The author meets Wilson:  
The opportunity came to the writer when he went to Capri in Naples and made acquaintance with Wilson at Piazza. Wilson was sitting on a parapet. The author's friend introduced Wilson to him. Wilson was reserved, but polite. A few days later, the author and his friend saw Wilson again during the bath. On another occasion, the author asked Wilson to join him and his friend at Anacapri where they would climb Monte Solaro, dine at a tavern and walk down in the moonlight.
- Wilson told his story:  
The author's friend fell ill on the day of their journey to Anacapri. The author went with Wilson. They enjoyed the day together by climbing the mountain, admiring the mesmerizing natural scenery and enjoying the drink. They drank wine. Under the influence of wine, Wilson related the story of

his life. Wilson came to Capri fifteen years ago. He was a bank manager. His life was normal and routine bound. His wife and daughter were dead. He lived a lonely life. He was thirty-four at that time. He decided to resign. He bought an annuity for twenty-five years and came to settle here. He however did not regret his decision. He had spent fifteen years of perfect happiness and had ten years more. He had his money's worth.

- The author visited Wilson's house:

While they parted, Wilson invited the author to visit his house. It was a peasant's cottage in a vineyard with a view of the sea. There were two small rooms, a small kitchen and a lean-to for keeping firewood. The sitting room was equipped with comfortable arm-chairs, piano and crowded book-shelves.

- Wilson faces the ultimate tragedy:

The author left the place. The World War started and the author had various preoccupations. He again visited Capri thirteen years after. He put up in a hotel. His friend came to see him. He told him that he was now staying in the little cottage where Wilson lived. The author was reminded of Wilson and his life. From his friend he came to know the grim end of Wilson's life.

- Wilson's death:

The author felt that Wilson got what he deserved. But Wilson's life was horrible. He met Wilson while he and his friend were strolling along a narrow path. But he hid behind an olive tree. He watched them, but could not face them. After enduring this miserable existence for six years, he died. He was found one morning on the mountain side lying peacefully. Probably he went to his favourite spot at night to enjoy the moonlit beauty of the mountains one last time.

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### **3.2.14 Symbolism and Imagery**

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“The Lotus Eater” is a symbolic short story. Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to represent ideas or facts. The predominant symbols used in “The Lotus Eater” are those of the moon and moonlight, which may symbolize calmness, tranquility, peacefulness. From a distance the moon looks beautiful but in reality it is quite harsh. The moon also symbolizes irrationality (lunar – lunacy).

“On my last night, I went for a walk to see the Bay of Naples **by moonlight**. It was a **full moon** that night – the same as it is now. And it was on that **walk in the moonlight** that I made my decision.”

“It had been a **full moon** the night before. Wilson had **died in the moonlight**.”

Through the use of symbolism, Maugham makes use of imagery whose application is not fantastical or far-fetched but can be easily related to the mundane. The imagery of the lotus-eater which continues throughout the length of the story, symbolically represents uniquely leading one’s life in a social set-up and fulfilling purposes which are uncommon interests to the common man.

There are various related imageries to explain the difficulties and adversities life tests one with. “He has grey hair and his face was burnt brown by the sun.” In the same strain, human relationships and ties are weighed against circumstances. “My wife had died of bronchial pneumonia four years before and the kid went to live with her grandmother my wife’s mother. She was an old fool, she didn’t look after the kid properly and she got blood-poisoning, they amputated her leg, but they couldn’t save her and she died, poor little thing.”

Different aspects of the human life test the strength of the human mind starts failing in the face of circumstances. Different aspects of the human life test the strength of relationships and that of human mind—— not only material, but also the emotional and the religious. The difference of purpose and the strength of Wilson’s intentions are tested by time. Wilson is more occupied with the sublime and forgets the practical aspects of life. According to Wilson true satisfaction can be obtained only when it springs forth from the essential self. The short story is a dark depiction of the condition of a man who was oblivious of the needs of daily life. His failure to understand the life, hardships and disillusionment during his course of journey of life make him the modern Lotus Eater.

#### **Activity for the Learner**

With help from your counselor, carefully study the images of an idyllic life of langour that Maugham uses in the story. Town-country binary, good food, wine, music for example, are some of these. Examine how they all combine in Wilson to give a picture of a life that is highly unrealistic by conventional standards.

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### 3.2.15 Maugham's Narrative Style

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Maugham is a great short story writer. He has written a good number of stories which have tremendous appeal to the modern readers. His manner was based on the nineteenth century French writer, Maupassant. Verisimilitude and a detached and straightforward narrative method are his distinguishing characteristics. According to him the bare narrative is as important as the telling of the story. He tells his story in a direct straightforward manner. His narrative is brisk and smooth without being obscured by abstruse and confused prose style.

“The Lotus-Eater” has an easy and smooth narrative style. The narrative flows in a limpid manner holding the reader's attention to the end. The author begins with a general remark that most people like to go the conventional way. But there are men who make unusual bold choices and thus leave an impact on our minds. Then he speaks of Thomas Wilson and his desire to meet him. The author does not state his unusual life all at once. He reveals it in course of the narrative, thus keeping the readers curious and eager. He tells how he meets and strikes up an acquaintance with Wilson on the Piazza in Capri. He describes the man, his appearance and his dress. He meets occasionally and then invites him to a party at Anacapri. There Wilson tells his own life and his choice of settling in Capri in the lush natural beauty. Captivated by the natural beauty of the place, he gave up his job, collected his assets and bought an annuity for twenty-five years. He would live there in indolent enjoyment of the place for twenty-five years. He had already spent fifteen years and he has another ten years to go. He has no care for what will happen to him after the expiry of the annuity. He is a commonplace man intent on his happiness. But the author is interested in him because of his fate after ten years. He may deliberately take leave of the world. Thus the author keeps the readers interested in the fate of the man.

The end of the story is thus full of surprise and suspense. Wilson could not commit suicide. He lived a miserable life, but retained his lively interest in Nature till the end. He died while enjoying the moon-lit mountains at night.

The easy and straightforward narrative is helped on by the simple unobtrusive prose style. His prose is conversational and colloquial. It is unlike the prose of Conrad which is confused and obscure or the prose of James Joyce which is steeped in mysticism and symbolism. It is a matter-of fact prose enlivened now and then by flashes of imagination and humour. In the description of natural beauty, he shows imagination, but he controls his emotions and exuberance. “There is a terrace that

overlook the Bay of Naples, and when the sun sinks slowly into the sea of Ischia is silhouetted against a blaze of splendor”. Describing the man, he remarks, “Notwithstanding this careless attire he looked like the manager of a branch office in an insurance company”. His prose is, however, marked by clichés like ‘once in a blue moon’, ‘round pegs in square holes’, ‘call it a day’, etc. Inventive writers like Joyce and Conrad would avoid these clichés and make their prose more evocative and suggestive through symbols and images. Maugham’s similes are often very commonplace. “They are like tram cars travelling for ever on the self same rails.”

It is, however, his brisk narrative style and simple unobtrusive prose that make for the popularity of Maugham’s stories with the modern readers.

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### **3.2.16 Significance of the Title**

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Homer in his *Odyssey* gives a description of the Lotos Land. It is a land of sensuous and indolent enjoyment. Lotos is the Greek word for lotus. Lotos-eaters are those who lived in the lotos-land enjoying a life of indolent ease. They ate a flowery food and lived a life of dreamy languorous ease. There is a reference to it in Book IX of Homer’s *Odyssey*. At the end of the Trojan War Ulysses, King of Ithaca wandered through the seas with his mariners in the course of their homeward journey. On the tenth day he got at the land of the lotos-eaters. The passage in Homer runs thus: “But on the tenth day we set foot on the land of lotos-eaters who ate a flowery food. So we stepped ashore and drew water, and straight-way my company took their mid-day meal by the swift ships. Now when we had tasted meat and drink I sent forth certain of my company to go and make search what manner of men they were, who live upon the earth by bread and I chose out two of my fellows and send a third with them as herald. Then straightway they went and mixed with the men of the lotos-eaters, and so it was that the lotos-eaters devised not death for our fellows but gave them fruit of the lotos to eat. Now, whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of lotos, had no more wish to bring tidings not to come back, but there he chose to abide with the lotos-eating men, ever feeding on the lotos and forgetful of their homeward way”.

Maugham’s story deals with a modern lotus eater. His lotus land is Capri. Thomas Wilson came to Capri during one of his summer holidays and was captivated by the beauty of its mountains, seas and surroundings. He bathed in the sea, joined the festivals there, wandered about the island enjoying the beauty of moon-lit mountains. The charms of the island possessed his mind and he resolved to settle

there. He was only thirty-five, a widower who had lost his only daughter. He lived a lonely humdrum life. The bounties of Nature enchanted him and he yielded to its fascinations. He resigned his job, collected his assets and bought an annuity for twenty-five years. He made an unusual choice. He came to Capri, took a small smug peasant's cottage and began to live there in indolent enjoyment of the beauties and pleasures of life there. He did not care what would happen to him when the annuity expired about twenty-five years. He led a carefree indolent comfortable life for twenty-five years. Like the mariners of Ulysses, he had eaten the fruit of the lotus-land of Capri and was drugged into complete forgetfulness about the future. He lived in the present with his indolence, pleasures and comforts in the blissful world of Nature. He had a sad and tragic end. But the author is concerned with his life of ease and languor which he preferred to a life of dull drudgery, and this preference links him with the lotus-eaters. The story is reminiscent of Tennyson's Choric Song—"The Lotus-Eaters".

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### **3.2.17 Comprehension Exercises**

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#### **● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How does Somerset Maugham weave myth and contemporaneity in his short story *The Lotus-Eater*?
2. How would you assess the character of Wilson in *The Lotus Eater* in the light of the story of his life and his observations on leisure?
3. Show how Somerset Maugham makes use of narrative art to highlight the theme of pastoralism that changes the life of an otherwise urban man.

#### **● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. What is the significance of the title of the short story *The Lotus Eater*?
2. "I don't know whether he was a fool or a wise man". Estimate the character of Thomas Wilson in the light of this observation.
3. What impact does the concluding line of Somerset Maugham's short story *The Lotus Eater* leave on you as a reader?

#### **● Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Why was the persona of the narrator so curious to meet Thomas Wilson?
2. How long had Wilson survive after his annuity ran out?

3. What does Maugham say about the vast majority of people? To what are they compared?
4. In which year did the author meet Thomas Wilson? How was the world at that time?

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### 3.2.18 Summing Up

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From your reading of these two short stories, you should be in a position to think about:

- The emergence and maturity of the short story as a genre
- The importance of narrative modes and character construction in building up climactic situations
- The range and variety of concerns that can be addressed within a short space of narrative length
- The significance of beginnings and endings, which are remarkably different from those of the genre of the novel.

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### 3.2.19 Activity for the Learner

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With help from your counselor, try and read other stories by these writers as also translations of other European writers mentioned at the outset. For your own interest, you could try reading short stories in your mother tongue and in other Indian vernaculars that are widely translated into English. On such reading, you should be in a position to make comparative studies as to how short stories can capture the essence of lived lives and different cultures.

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### 3.2.20 Comprehensive Reading List

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## **Unit-3 □ George Bernard Shaw: ‘Freedom’ George Orwell: ‘Shooting an Elephant’**

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### **Structure:**

- 3.3.0 Introduction**
- 3.3.1 G.B Shaw: Non-Dramatic Literary Career**
- 3.3.2 Text of ‘Freedom’**
- 3.3.3 Annotations**
- 3.3.4 Critical Analysis**
- 3.3.5 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.3.6 George Orwell: A Literary Bio-Brief**
- 3.3.7 ‘Shooting an Elephant’ – Text with Annotations**
- 3.3.8 Critical Analysis**
- 3.3.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.3.10 Summing Up**
- 3.3.11 Activity for the Learner**
- 3.3.12 Comprehensive Reading**

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### **3.3.0 Introduction**

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In this Unit you will read two non-fictional prose pieces by two of the greatest thinking writers and critics of different aspects of British modernity – George Bernard Shaw and George Orwell. Both the pieces date around the same time – 1936, which, if you see in the history section in Module 1, was the period just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, when England’s colonial domination had reached its zenith. While Shaw’s work is a critique of the very notion of freedom from an epistemological stand-point that will make you think of the plight of the common man in England, Orwell presents a picture of the coloniser in the colony that is worth pondering over.

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### **3.3.1 George Bernard Shaw: Non-Dramatic Literary Career**

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George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July 1856, in Dublin to Protestant parents

George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elisabeth Shaw. He had a troubled childhood. His father was a drunkard, there was little money for his education, so Shaw had to quit his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day school at the age of fourteen. At the age of fifteen, he started to work as a junior clerk. In 1876, he went to London to join his mother and sister. In London, his mother was trying to eke out a living giving music lessons. In 1884, Shaw joined the Fabian Society, a middle-class socialist group. The Fabian Society wanted to reconstruct 'society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities'. Shaw wrote many of their pamphlets including *The Fabian Manifesto* (1884), *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (1893), *Fabianism and the Empire* (1900) and *Socialism for Millionaires* (1901).

In 1895, Shaw became the drama critic of the Saturday review. In 1898, he married Charlotte Payne-Townshend and settled at Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire. In 1892 he wrote *Widower's Houses*. The unpleasant plays were followed by 'Pleasant Plays' like *Candida*, *John Bull's Other Island*. Other plays like *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1898) *Man and Superman* (1902) *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), and *Pygmalion* (1913). In 1914 he wrote *Common Sense About War*. His other plays include *Heartbreak House* (1919) and *Saint Joan* (1923). In his own words he was less an artist than 'a social reformer and doctrinaire first, last, and all the time'. He fascinated and delighted his audience by his astounding vitality and abounding comic sense. His plays made people think by compelling them to laugh. He was awarded Nobel Prize in 1952. He accepted the honour but refused the money. For this Unit however, it is his non-dramatic career that we are more interested about.

His later writings included *The Crime of Imprisonment* (1992), *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* (1928) and *Everybody's Political What's What* (1944). His ironic wit and endowed language made him not only a household name in Britain, but also a world figure. Apart from writing plays Shaw gave a number of talks and wrote essays on political and social topics. In the present piece "Freedom" which is actually a radio talk delivered in 1935, he takes recourse to the typical hard-hitting 'sermons' he gave at every opportunity throughout his life. It is however, incorrect to describe the speech as a sermon, a religious homily to the people. The speech is a witty exposition of what freedom means and a humorous exposure of the deceit and hypocrisy that underline the conception of freedom both in capitalistic and socialistic countries. Shaw insists: 'My conscience is the genuine pulpit article: it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to bring them to a conviction

of sin'. In *Freedom* he keeps his sting camouflaged behind a sly, impudent wit. He leaves no stone unturned to 'Find the right thing to say,' and he then says 'it with the utmost levity'. In a way "Freedom" echoes Rousseau's 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality'. Whereas Rousseau begins by distinguishing between two kinds of inequality, natural and artificial, Shaw in "Freedom" speaks of the same inequality caused by the society. He asserts that the English people were never free. From time immemorial the master class has enforced slavery upon the common people and has patronizingly called it freedom. He goes out of his way and asks the people of Britain to stop singing 'Rule Britannia', as Britons have for ever been slaves in the sense that the will of the ruling class has always been imposed upon them. Thus Shaw says with scathing humour that people better "call freedom by its old English name of leisure, and keep clamoring for more leisure and more money to enjoy it in return for an honest share of work".

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### 3.3.2 Text of Freedom

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(One of a series of B.B.C. radio talks, delivered 18 June 1935. *The Listener*, 26 June 1935. Reprinted in *Freedom*, London, 1936)

*What is perfectly free person? Evidently a person who can do what he likes, when he likes and where he likes, or do nothing at all if he prefers it. Well there is no such person; and there never can be any such person. Whether we like it or not, we must all sleep for one-third of our lifetime; wash and dress and undress; we must spend a couple of hours eating and drinking; we must spend nearly as much in getting about from place to place. For half the day we are slaves to necessities which we cannot shirk, whether we are monarchs with a thousand servant or humble labourers with no servants but their wives. And the wives must undertake the additional heavy slavery of child-bearing if the world is still to be peopled.*

*These natural jobs cannot be shirked. But they involve other jobs which can. As we must eat we must first provide food; as we must sleep we must have beds and bedding in houses with fireplaces and coals; as we must walk through the streets we must have clothes to cover our nakedness. Now, food and houses and clothes can be produced by human labor. But when they are produced they can be stolen. If you like honey you can let the bees produce it by their labour, and then steal it from them. If you are too lazy to get about from place to place on your own legs you can make a slave of a horse. And what you do to a horse or a bee you can also do to a man*

or woman or a child if you can get the upper hand of them by force or fraud or trickery of any sort, or even by teaching them that it is their religious duty to sacrifice their freedom to yours.

So beware! If you allow any person, or class of persons, to get the upper hand of you, they will shift all that part of their slavery to Nature that can be shifted on to your shoulders; and you will find yourself working from eight to fourteen hours a day when, if you had only yourself and your family to provide for, you could do it quite comfortably in half the time or less. The object of all honest Governments should be to prevent your being imposed on in this way. But the object of most actual Governments, I regret to say, is exactly the opposite. They enforce your slavery and call it freedom. But they also regulate your slavery, keeping the greed of your masters within certain bounds. When chattel slavery of the negro sort costs more than wage slavery, they abolish chattel slavery and make you free to choose between one employment, or one master, and another; and this they call a glorious triumph for freedom, though for you it is merely the key of the street.<sup>1</sup> When you complain, they promise that in future you shall govern the country for yourself. They redeem this promise by giving you a vote, and having a general election every five years or so.

At the election, two of their rich friends ask for your vote; and you are free to choose which of them you will vote for to spite the other—a choice which leaves you no freer than you were before, as it does not reduce your hours of labour by a single minute. But the newspapers assure you that your vote has decided the election, and that this constitutes you a free citizen in a democratic country. The amazing thing about it is that you are fool enough to believe them.

Now mark another big difference between the natural slavery of man to Nature and the unnatural slavery of man to man. Nature is kind to her slaves. If she forces you to eat and drink, she makes eating and drinking so pleasant that when we can afford it we eat and drink too much. We must sleep or go mad: but then sleep is so pleasant that we have great difficulty in getting up in the morning. And firesides and families seem so pleasant to the young that they get married and join building societies<sup>2</sup> to realize their dreams. Thus, instead of resenting our natural wants as slavery, we take the greatest pleasure in their satisfaction. We write sentimental songs in praise of them. A tramp can earn his supper by singing "Home, Sweet Home."<sup>3</sup>

*The slavery of man to man is the very opposite of this. It is hateful to the body and to the spirit. Our poets do not praise it: they proclaim that no man is good enough to be another man's master. The latest of the great Jewish prophets, a gentleman named Marx, spent his life in proving that there is no extremity of selfish cruelty at which the slavery of man to man will stop if it be not stopped by law. You can see for yourself that it produces a state of continual civil war—called the class war—between the slaves and their masters, organized as trade unions on one side and employers' federations on the other. Saint Thomas More<sup>4</sup>, who has just been canonized, held that we shall never have a peaceful and stable society until this struggle is ended by the abolition of slavery altogether and the compulsion of every one to do his share of the world's work with his own hands and brains, and not to attempt to put it on anyone else.*

*Naturally the master class, through its Parliaments, schools and newspapers, makes the most desperate efforts to prevent us from realizing our slavery. From our earliest years we are taught that our country is the land of the free, and that our freedom was won for us forever by our forefathers when they made King John sign Magna Charta<sup>5</sup>—when they defeated the Spanish Armada<sup>6</sup>—when they cut off King Charles's head—when they made King William accept the Bill of Rights—when they issued and made good the American Declaration of Independence—when they won the battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar on the playing fields of Eton—and when, only the other day, they quite unintentionally changed the German, Austrian, Russian and Ottoman empires into republics.<sup>7</sup>*

*When we grumble, we are told that all our miseries are our own doing because we have the vote. When we say: "What good is the vote?" we are told that we have the Factory Acts, and the Wages Board, and free education, and the New Deal<sup>8</sup>, and the dole; and what more could any reasonable man ask for? We are reminded that the rich are taxed a quarter, a third, or even a half and more, of their incomes; but the poor are never reminded that they have to pay that much of their wages as rent in addition to having to work twice as long every day as they would need if they were free.*

*Whenever famous writers protest against this imposture—say, Voltaire and Rousseau and Tom Paine in the eighteenth century, or Cobbett and Shelley, Karl Marx and Lasselle in the nineteenth, or atheists and libertines, murderers and scoundrels; and often it is made a criminal offence to buy or sell their books. If their*

disciples make a revolution, England immediately makes war on them and lends money to the other Powers to join her in forcing the revolutionists to restore the slave order. When this combination was successful at Waterloo, the victory was advertised as another triumph for British freedom; and the British wage slaves, instead of going into mourning like Lord Byron, believed it all and cheered enthusiastically. When the revolution wins, as it did in Russia in 1922, the fighting stops; but the abuse, the calumnies, the lies, continue until the revolutionized State grows into a first-rate military Power. Then our diplomatists, after having for years denounced the revolutionary leaders as the most abominable villains and tyrants, have to do a right turn and invite them to dinner.

Now though this prodigious mass of humbug is meant to delude the enslaved class only, it ends in deluding the master class much more completely. A gentleman whose mind has been formed at a preparatory school for the sons of gentlemen, followed by a public school and university course<sup>9</sup>, is much more thoroughly taken in by the falsified history and dishonest political economy and snobbery taught in these places than any worker can possibly be, because the gentleman's education teaches him that he is a very fine fellow, superior to the common run of men whose duty it is to brush his clothes, carry his parcels, and earn his income for him; and as he thoroughly agrees with this view of himself, he honestly believes that the system which has placed him in such an agreeable situation and done such justice to his merits is the best of all possible systems and that he should shed his blood, and yours, to the last drop in its defence. But the great mass of our rack-rented, underpaid, treated-as-inferiors, cast-off-on-the-dole workers cannot feel so sure about it as the gentleman. The facts are too harshly against it. In hard times, such as we are now passing through, their disgust and despair sometimes lead them to kick over the traces, upset everything, and have to be rescued from mere gangsterism by some Napoleonic genius who has a fancy for being an emperor, and who has the courage and brains and energy to jump at the chance. But the slaves who give three cheers for the emperor might just as well have made a cross on a British or American ballot paper as far as their freedom is concerned.

So far I have mentioned nothing but plain, natural and historical facts. I draw no conclusion, for that would lead me into controversy; and controversy would not be fair when you cannot answer me back. I am never controversial over the wireless. I do not even ask you to draw your own conclusions, for you might draw some very dangerous ones unless you have the right sort of head for it. Always remember that

though nobody likes to be called a slave, it does not follow that slavery is a bad thing. Great men, like Aristotle, have held that law and order and government would be impossible unless the persons, the people have to obey are beautifully dressed and decorated, robed and uniformed, speaking with a special accent, travelling in first-class carriages or the most expensive cars or on the best-groomed and best-bred horses, and never cleaning their own boots or doing anything for some common person to do it. And this means, of course, that they must be made very rich without any other obligation than to produce an impression of almost godlike superiority on the minds of common people. In short, it is contended, you must make men ignorant idolaters before they will become obedient workers and law-abiding citizens.

To prove this, we are reminded that although nine out of ten voters are common workers, it is with the greatest difficulty that a few of them can be persuaded to vote for members of their own class. When women were enfranchised and given the right to sit in Parliament, the first use they made of their votes was to defeat all the women candidates who stood for the freedom of the workers and had given them years of devoted and distinguished service. They elected only one woman—a titled lady of great wealth and exceptionally fascinating personality.<sup>10</sup>

Now this, it is said, is human nature; and you cannot change human nature. On the other hand, it is maintained that human nature is the easiest thing in the world to change if you catch it young enough, and that the idolatry of the slave class and the arrogance of the master class are themselves entirely artificial products of education and of a propaganda that plays upon our infants long before they have left their cradles. An opposite mentality could, it is argued, be produced by a contrary education and propaganda. You can turn the point over in your mind for yourself; do not let me prejudice you one way or the other.

The practical question at the bottom of it all is how the income of the whole country can best be distributed from day to day. If the earth is cultivated agriculturally in vast farms with motor ploughs and chemical fertilizers, and industrially in huge electrified factories full of machinery that a girl can handle, the product may be so great that an equal distribution of it would provide enough to give the unskilled labourers as much as the managers and the men of the scientific staff. But do not forget that when you hear tales of modern machinery enabling one girl to produce as much as a thousand men could produce in the reign of good Queen Anne, that this marvellous increase includes things like needles and steel pens, and matches, which we can neither eat nor drink nor wear. Very young children will eat

*needles and matches eagerly—but the diet is not a nourishing one. And though we can now cultivate the sky as well as earth, by drawing nitrogen from it to increase and improve the quality of our grass—and, consequently, of our cattle and milk and butter and eggs—Nature may have tricks up her sleeve to check us if the chemists exploit her too greedily.*

*And now to sum up. Wipe out from your dreams of freedom the hope of being able to do as you please all the time. For at least twelve hours of your day Nature orders you to do certain things, and will kill you if you don't do them. This leaves twelve hours for working; and here again Nature will kill you unless you either earn your living or get somebody else to earn it for you. If you live in a civilized country your freedom is restricted by the laws of the land, enforced by the police, who oblige you to do this, and not to do that, and to pay rates and taxes. If you do not obey these laws the courts will imprison you and, if you go too far, kill you. If the laws are reasonable and are impartially administered you have no reason to complain, because they increase your freedom by protecting you against assault, highway robbery, and disorder generally.*

*But as society is constituted at present, there is another far more intimate compulsion on you: that of your landlord and that of your employers. Your landlord may refuse to let you live on his estate if you go to chapel instead of to church, or if you vote for anybody but his nominee, or if you practice osteopathy, or if you open a shop. Your employer may dictate the cut, colour and condition of your clothes, as well as your hours of work. He can turn you into the street at any moment to join the melancholy band of lost spirits called the unemployed. In short, his power over you is far greater than that of any political dictator could possibly be. Your only remedy at present is the trade union weapon of the strike, which is only the old Oriental device of starving on your enemy's doorstep until he does you justice. Now, as the police in this country will not allow you to starve on your employer's doorstep, you must starve on your own—if you have one. The extreme form of the strike—the general strike of all workers at the same moment—is also the extreme form of human folly, as, if completely carried out, it would extinguish the human race in a week. And the workers would be the first to perish. The general strike is trade unionism gone mad. Sane trade unionism would never sanction more than one big strike at a time, with all the other trades working overtime to support it.*

*Now let us put the case in figures. If you have to work for twelve hours a day, you have no freedom at all. If you work eight hours a day, you have four hours a day to do what you like with, subject to the laws of the land and your possession of money enough to buy an interesting book or pay for a seat at the pictures, or, on a half holiday, at a football match, or whatever your fancy may be. But even here Nature will interfere a good deal; for if your eight hours work has been of a hard physical kind, and when you get home you want to spend your four hours in reading my books to improve your mind, you will find yourself fast asleep in half a minute, and your mind will remain in its present benighted condition.*

*I take it, then, that nine out of ten of us desire more freedom, and that this is why we listen to wireless talks about it. As long as we go on as we are—content with a vote and a dole—the only advice we can give one another is that of Shakespeare's Jago: "Put money in thy purse." But as we get very little money into our purses on pay day, and all the rest of the week other people are taking money out of it, Jago's advice is not very practical. We must change our politics before we can get what we want; and meanwhile we must stop gassing about freedom, because the people of England in the lump don't know what freedom is—never having had any. Always call freedom by its old English name of leisure; and keep clamouring for more leisure and more money to enjoy it in return for an honest share of work. And let us stop singing "Rule, Britannia,"<sup>11</sup> until we make it true. Until we do, let us never vote for a parliamentary candidate who talks about our freedom and our love of liberty; for whatever political name he may give himself, he is sure to be at bottom an anarchist who wants to live on our labour without being taken up by the police for it as he deserves.*

*And now suppose we at last win a lot more leisure and a lot more money than we are accustomed to. What are we going to do with them? I was taught in my childhood that Satan will find mischief still for idle hands to do.<sup>12</sup> I have seen men come into a fortune and lose their happiness, their health, and finally, their lives by it as certainly as if they had taken daily doses of rat poison instead of champagne and cigars. It is not at all easy to know what to do with leisure unless we have been brought up to it.*

*I will, therefore, leave you with a conundrum to think over. If you had your choice, would you work for eight hours a day and retire with a full pension at forty-five, or would you rather work four hours a day and keep on working until you are seventy? Now, don't send the answer to me, please: talk it over with your wife.*

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### 3.3.3 Annotations

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1. This is a variant of the phrase ‘key of the door’, which means the right to come and go as one pleases, after one has come of age. By making a subtle change to the phrase, Shaw perhaps implies the limited freedom that the ordinary worker has, of choosing between one employer or another. The inner meaning conveyed by the cryptic tone of his comment, is however that such change hardly makes any significant impact in the life of the worker.
2. Refers to organisations which advance loans at high rates of interest, so much so that it often takes a lifetime to repay. This makes it an aspect of ‘slavery’ or the lack of freedom, caused by the desire to set up homes without understanding its long-term implications.
3. The original lyrics of a very popular song which run like this:

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam  
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home  
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there  
Which seek thro’ the world, is ne’er met elsewhere  
Home! Home!  
Sweet, sweet home!  
There’s no place like home  
There’s no place like home!

The lyrics of the song are by the 19<sup>th</sup> century American actor and dramatist John Howard Payne, set to melody by the Englishman Sir Henry Bishop. As an interesting trivia, you might keep in mind that during the American Civil War, playing of the song was banned in Union Army camps, for it was too redolent of home and hearth and might therefore incite desertions.

4. Shaw’s reference here is to one of the basic ideas voiced by Thomas More (1478-1535) in his *Utopia*, which was originally written in Latin and translated into English only after his death.
5. The Magna Carta (The Great Charter in English) was a charter of liberties that King John of England was forced to accede to under threat of Civil War in 1215 AD. While it has undergone several alterations, the common Englishman is wont to believe that it remains one of the basic foundations

of jurisprudence in the land. For more on this, see the web link <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Magna-Carta>.

6. The outright defeat of the 'invincible' Spanish Armada in 1588 at the hands of the British naval forces led by Lord Charles Howard and Sir Francis Drake gave the England of Queen Elizabeth a world-wide name. It has hence remained a watershed not just in British military history, but also in the sense of national pride. For more details, log in to <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/spanish-armada-defeated>. In the present context however, Shaw's critique of such achievements is directed at how it has fostered a kind of demagogic rhetoric in the English national character, that is used by those in power to subdue the disempowered.
7. The reference here is to the consequences of the First World War (1914-18). While the UK and her allies won the war, and the countries Shaw mentions, did manage to overthrow monarchies, yet the reality is that such a development was neither intended. Nor approved by the victors – at least in cases of Russia and Turkey. However, the same demagoguery of the rhetoric of liberty that was pervasive, points to the element of hypocrisy in the character of England as a nation. You will need to assess Shaw's views on freedom in the light of these international developments to which he alludes time and again.
8. The factory Acts were designed to ensure proper working conditions, the Wages Boards to set up fair rates of pay and commensurate with working hours, while the Dole was a common term for Unemployment Pay. The New Deal was originally an American term that was applied to US President Roosevelt's schemes for social reconstruction in the 1930s. In the period of post-war reconstruction, similar social reforms were in vogue in England as well.
9. The reference here is to the system of paid education available in the private sector. It would be a costly affair afforded only by the wealthy, and was in sharp contrast with the system of state education that was more often than not, meant for the masses. Naturally, the approach to life as imparted through education, would be different in each sector. Shaw is here tracing the origins of the mental proclivity of imposing slavery and denying freedom in the very system of education.
10. The reference here is to Lady Astor, who was the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons in 1919. She took the Unionist seat of her

husband who had moved up to an inherited seat in the House of Lords. For more on the Astors, you may log in to <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lady-astor-becomes-mp>. It follows therefore that while the master class has this instinct of enforcing slavery and consequently withholding freedom, the working class too can often be its own obstacle in the path of freedom. The point here is that both the giving and the enjoying of freedom is more a state of the mind – whether of the individual, or of the collective unconscious.

11. This is the title of a ‘patriotic’ song, the refrain of which says that “Britons never, never, never will be slaves”.
12. Shaw is here referring to the poet Isaac Watts’ (1674-1748) verses and psalms that were popular among children of Shaw’s generation. His famous work *Divine Songs for Children* has this verse xxi “Against Idleness and Mischief” which runs:

How doth the little busy bee  
Improve each shining hour,  
And gather honey all day  
From every opening flower!

In works of labour or of still  
I would be busy too:  
For Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do.

You may also recall the saying, “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop”.

➤ **The who’s who that Shaw mentions in “Freedom”:**

**Karl Marx** (1818-1883): Economist, sociologist, historian and a revolutionary. He along with Friedrich Engels Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*. He also wrote *Das Kapital*.

**Voltaire** (1694-1778): The greatest of all French writers.

**Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778): French philosopher, writer and political theorist. He inspired the leaders of the French Revolution.

**Thomas (Tom) Paine** (1737-1809): English American writer and political pamphleteer.

**William Cobbett** (1763-1835): English, popular journalist, played an important political in the Industrial revolution.

**Ferdinand Lassale** (1825-1864): One of the founders of the German Labour movement.

**Vladimir Illich Lenin** (1870-1924): The leader of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and the architect and first head (1917-1924) of the Soviet state.

**Leo Trotsky** (1879-1940): An important leader in Russia's October Revolution in 1917.

**Iago**: The villain in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

(Compiled from 'Notes' to *Modern Prose* edited by Michael Thorpe and internet sources as mentioned)

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### 3.3.4 Critical Analysis

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Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style" says Bernard Shaw in his Preface to *Man and Superman*. His chief aim is to rouse the consciousness of the people about the situations in which they are placed. He exposes the sham and hypocrisy of the so-called democratic and socialistic professions in the basically capitalistic class structure of the society. Common people are lulled into a fond belief in the conventional morality and traditional values: "it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable", he says. In 'Freedom', he combines seriousness with laughter, philosophy with fun. Shaw is devastatingly frank and realistic as he goes along puncturing illusions and prejudices with fun and frolic.

He begins his essay in a light hearted manner. Men are slaves to necessities— they must sleep, wash, dress and women bear children. Men make slaves of others. Bees produce honey for us and horse is used for taking us from place to place. Men are cheated and made to work for eight to fourteen hours a day to provide for the family. The Governments, instead of checking this deceit, only collude to enforce slavery. Shaw builds up his arguments in a coherent structure. He preaches with exaggeration and overstatement, but these are meant for fun and irony. Shaw's irony is devastating when he says that men are made to believe that they are free because they have the right to vote. Democracy is the greatest irony. The master class through propaganda keeps the people in ignorance. They have been taught from childhood that England is a land of freedom. They refer to Magna Charta, Bill of Rights, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the execution of Charles I, the victories at Waterloo and Trafalgar. Factory Acts, Wages Boards, Free education and the New deal that

have been introduced to ensure the economic, political and cultural security of the people. However, the workers are made to pay rent from their wages, and they have to work more than they need.

The master class are also deluded—A gentleman who is educated at a public school and the university thinks that he is a superior man and the common men would serve him, he is satisfied with the status quo. Sometimes the agitated workers try to destroy the system. But then, they are coaxed back and they again surrender to the shrewd genius of the ruling class and finally end up accepting as their hero a leader who has histrionic skills. Shaw points out that the idolatry of the common people is at the root of their slavery and the dominance of the master class. Shaw gives one example of the idolatry of the common men. When women were given the right to vote, they defeated the women candidates who championed the cause of the workers. It is a matter of debate whether a different system of education and propaganda would change this arrogance of the aristocrats and the idolatry of the people. Moreover, there is the economic exploitation. Consumer goods are manufactured and basic needs of food and clothing are neglected. Consumer goods are enjoyed by the rich and the poor are deprived. Shaw humorously says that machines produce needles and needles are not eaten.

There is another restriction on freedom. The power of the landlord and that of the employer are dominant in a feudal capitalistic society. Common people have to live according to their wishes and whims. The general strike is not a very helpful weapon for obtaining the rights of the common people. Shaw indicates this in his characteristic paradoxical style.

So freedom according to Shaw is an illusion in the modern society. Man in the industrial age gets little or no leisure to enjoy books or other pastimes. Money is a prerequisite to enjoy leisure. Even if money is granted to workers, they would spend it in wine and other wayward activities. So men should think if he would work for eight hours a day and retire with a full pension, or he would work for four hours a day and go on working till seventy. The point is that in the modern socio-economic system, freedom is a dream. Common men have to think in terms of leisure which they can profitably utilize for intellectual pleasure.

➤ **Let us now try to grasp Shaw's points in a nutshell**

Let us now sum it up:

- Who is a free person?

A free person is one who can do what one likes. But there is no such person. Men are slaves to necessities. Women have the additional burden child-bearing.

- Jobs which men can shirk and how Governments make men slaves: Democracy i.e. the government by the people is the greatest hypocrisy.

- Slavery to nature and slavery to man:

Men are slaves to nature. Nature is kind. Man takes pleasure in slavery to Nature. But slavery of man to man is unpleasant. Man's domination over others is often cruel—it leads to class war between slaves and the masters.

- The master class deludes the people:

The master class through Parliament, schools, and newspapers tries to prevent men from realizing the slavery.

- Revolution is checked:

Great writers who champion the cause of the poor are described as atheists and libertines and scoundrels.

- The division between two classes in the society: This effort to delude the mass ultimately deludes the master class.

- Idolatry of the slave class and the arrogance of the masters:

The idolatry of the common people and the arrogance of the master class are the artificial products of education and propaganda.

- Freedom does not mean to do what one pleases; Man will have to do things at least for twelve hours a day to earn his living or to make others earn it for him.

- Individual liberty checked:

Shaw states further restrictions on liberty. The power of the landlord and the employer checks the individual liberty. Again, an employer may ask his employees to dress and work according to his wishes.

- Most people desire freedom:

The advice that Shaw gives is to keep money in the purse. But most of the people do not have enough money.

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### 3.3.5 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Why according to Shaw is any kind of freedom an anathema to modern society?
2. Comment on the style and structure of the essay Freedom

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. “They enforce your slavery and call it freedom”. Who are they? Show how Shaw brings out the paradox with his characteristic wit and humour.
2. “Though this prodigious mass of humbug is meant to delude the masses, it ends in deluding the master class much more completely.” What is the humbug referred to? How does it delude the master class?
3. How does Shaw indicate the idolatry of the slave class and arrogance of the master class? Can this be changed by country’s education and propaganda?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What does Shaw mean by “the key of the street” in his essay Freedom?
2. What are the choices before the workers today?
3. What are the different kinds of slavery that Shaw talks about in “Freedom”?
4. Why does Shaw ask the Britons to stop singing ‘Rule Britannia’?

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### 3.3.6 George Orwell: A Literary Bio-Brief

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George Orwell, whose real name was Eric Hugh Blair, was born in Motihari which was in the Bengal Presidency of India in 1903. His mother, Ida Mabel Blair spent her childhood in Moulmein Burma – the locale for this piece, where her father had certain ventures. Orwell was however taken to England when still a very small child, though in 1922 he came back at a mature age to serve as part of the imperial administration in Burma for five years. In 1929, he returned to England, took up diverse jobs of a teacher, a bookseller’s assistant and even as a tramp – all of which perhaps gave him the makings of the writer that he was to become in due course. Prior to this of course, he went to Eton in 1916 where he had the privilege of being taught by the likes of A. S. F Gow, Aldous Huxley and Steven Runciman. While Orwell made a mark with his linguistic flair, he never showed much interest in

academic studies and finally left Eton in 1921. It was his romantic ideas about the East that made the family decide upon a career in the Imperial Police for Orwell, and that is how he landed in Burma.

Orwell's first full length work of non-fiction, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), a record of 'low-life' based on first-hand experience, clearly shows his socialist tendencies voiced with strong moral authority. His next work *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) was a similarly moving account of the lives of miners in Northern England. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is a record of Orwell's disillusionments with Communist factions, acquired during his own experience of the Spanish Civil War in which he participated as a fighter on the Republican side.

Apart from his early works of fiction like *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidastra Flying* (1936) and *Coming Up for Air* (1939), Orwell is mostly remembered for his later works *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). An admirer of Jonathan Swift that he was, Orwell's mature work shows the use of a sharp and clean prose style which cuts deep. Though strongly committed to the Communist cause, the writer in him rose above party bias to make a mark as "a writer of exceptional integrity". (Michael Thorpe). The essence of Orwell's writing finds expression in his own words – "To write in plain, vigorous language, one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox". (qtd. In Michael Thorpe: 190)

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### 3.3.7 Text of "Shooting an Elephant"

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*In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people — the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.*

*All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically — and secretly, of course — I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that, you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos — all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in *saecula saeculorum*<sup>1</sup>, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.*

*One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism — the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful *in terrorem*.<sup>2</sup> Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone 'must'. It had been chained up, as tame elephants always are when their attack of 'must' is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout, the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had*

suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy, stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of 'Go away, child! Go away this instant!' and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie, almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelt the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and

meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant — I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary — and it is always unnerwing to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eight yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant — it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery — and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of 'must' was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes-faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I

*should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd — seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives', and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing — no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.*

*But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.*

*It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a*

toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives'; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim.

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole, actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick — one never does when a shot goes home — but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time — it might have been five seconds, I dare say — he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

*I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open — I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally, I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.*

*In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dash and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.*

*Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee<sup>3</sup> coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.*

1936

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George Orwell: 'Shooting an Elephant'

First published: *New Writing*. — GB, London. — autumn 1936.

Reprinted:

— 'Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays'. — 1950.

- ‘The Orwell Reader, Fiction, Essays, and Reportage’ — 1956.
- ‘Collected Essays’. — 1961.
- ‘The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell’. — 1968.

➤ **Annotations**

1. Meaning for generation after generation. The reference is obviously to prolonged colonial rule.
2. As a warning. Orwell’s initial response was to find a way that could frighten the elephant into leaving the locality where it was said to be on a rampage.
3. A colloquial term used to refer to Indians, mainly people from South India.

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### **3.3.8 Critical Analysis**

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On reading the essay, you realize it is an account of an imperial officer in the British colony of Burma. For the historical record, the British conquered Burma over a period of sixty-two years (1823-1886) during which time there were as many as three Anglo-Burmese wars. It was initially incorporated into the Indian Empire and continued to be administered as a province of India, till as late as 1937. You find evidence of this in the reference to Indians in Burma in Orwell’s essay. Post 1937, Burma became a separate, self-governing colony and remained so till it attained independence in 1948. You have learnt from the earlier section on Orwell’s life that he held the position of Assistant Superintendent in the British Indian Imperial Police in Burma in the 1920s, though this is not adequate proof to substantiate that the account of the shooting of the elephant is an autobiographical one. What is however sure is that it is a terse account of the nature of the colonial mission from an insider’s perspective.

More than the events described in “Shooting an Elephant”, it is the workings of the mind of the author, and the candid conversational style of narration that give the essay abiding importance. From the textual point of view, you can sum up the drift of happenings in the following way:

- The narrator, a colonial officer in Moulmein, a place in lower Burma that was known for the use of elephants for hauling logs in timber firms, receives report of an elephant having run wild and causing rampage.
- The narrator reaches the bazaar, armed with his paltry rifle, but the very sight of him with his ammunition raises hopes in the minds of the assembled natives that the elephant would now be undone.

- The elephant is sighted in the paddy fields, and the mob that enthusiastically follows the narrator is expectant that the animal will now be shot. More than the damage it has caused to human life and property, it is the expectation of the spectacle that seems to drive the Burmese locals.
- The narrator realizes that it is gradually becoming incumbent upon him to kill the animal, though he knows full well that no sanity warrants such an act.
- He shoots the elephant again and again, and the animal dies a painful death well after the last shot has been fired.
- It is reported that by end of day, the dead elephant has been skinned and its flesh done with – all that is left is the skeleton.
- Opinion was divided on the rightness of the act of killing, but in the face of an action taken by an imperial officer, there was little that the Indian owner could have done.

Having read the point-wise details above, if you go back to the text of the essay, you will find that this is only one half of what Orwell has written. The other half, and the more important one, is the account of the constantly running interiorized thoughts of the narrator – and these are thought of an individual instead of the narrator's public pose as an imperial officer.

From this second and more pervasive point of view, "Shooting an Elephant" is actually a modernist critique of the entire imperial mission from an insider's point of view. If you notice the very opening lines of the essay, you will find that Orwell is clearly demarcating the dividing lines between the narrator as an individual and as a part of the imperial machinery. So he knows full well the hatred that "large numbers of people" in Moulmein have for him, in his capacity as sub-divisional police officer of the town. The hatred of the coloured for the white skinned is a basic aspect – manifest in the treatment that a native dishes out to a European woman in the bazaars when she is alone. And when it is a government official like the narrator is, the obvious increase in the degree of hatred is understandable.

The split between the narrator's private and public selves is evident in Orwell's essay. As one who sees the workings of the imperial machinery from close quarters, the narrator realizes both the futility and the inhumanity of it all. You can find a similar introspective narration in the words of Marlow in Joseph Conrad's novella

*Heart of Darkness*, as he sees the workings of the colonial project in his journey up the Congo river.

In Orwell however, we have a clear picture of how the imperial venture destroys not just the conquered, but the conqueror as well. The entire essay is one long exposition of the fact of the inherent problem of hegemony – far from being in absolute control of situations, the conqueror is actually subject to the will of the conquered people in that the former’s actions are, more often than not, a violation of self-reason and performed with the only objective of saving face.

Once you understand this paradox, you will see that it is hardly the shooting of the elephant that is the main subject of the essay. Rather, it is possible to read “Shooting an Elephant” as an extended dialogue with the self, undertaken by an individual who is self-critical of the culture that he represents. It is also one long attempt at justifying the very cause of his existence, his profession, and the hollow sham of appearing as the representative of authority in the public eye.

With these pointers, and with help from your counselor, you should now be able to identify the double layer on which Orwell’s text operates. Notice particularly, the closing lines of the essay where the narrator, despite official sanction, is at pains to justify the act of cruelty to himself. It goes to such an extent that the fact of the elephant having killed a native, becomes a veritable instrument of ratifying the act of having shot the elephant.

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### 3.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Show how Orwell formulates a critique of imperialism in “Shooting an Elephant”.
2. How does Orwell’s narrative art become a rhetorical device in “Shooting an Elephant”?

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Give an account of the narrator’s impression of how the mob builds up psychological pressure to shoot the elephant.
2. How does the narrator balance his inherent questioning self with his justifying self on the issue of shooting the elephant?

3. “A white man mustn’t be frightened in front of ‘natives’; and so, in general, he isn’t frightened.” How does this statement become the key issue in “Shooting an Elephant”?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Give some instances from the text that show the general hatred of the native Burmese towards their European masters.
2. What actual damage had the elephant caused?
3. What do you think are the reasons behind the narrator’s thoughts that it was actually not necessary to kill the elephant?
4. What were the different reactions to the shooting of the elephant?

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### **3.3.10 Summing Up**

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In the two non-fictional prose pieces you have read in this unit, you will have noticed that the common element is that of discursive thoughts on the part of the writers – their ideas in the main question dominant ideas and value systems. While Shaw in “Freedom” questions the very existence of freedom among different sections of society, Orwell in “Shooting an Elephant” exposes the hollowness of the imperial enterprise. The interesting aspect in both these texts is that the criticisms are from writers who are themselves part of the society they are critiquing. This is one significant aspect of the modernist enterprise. In this sense of course, major novelists and poets of the Victorian period too have insistently questioned the dominant trends of the period. In the present context, what matters is the spirit of a genuine desire for the liberty and equality of all people – whether the master class or the governed, that drives both Shaw and Orwell.

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### **3.3.11 Activity for the Learner**

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If texts like these interest you, try reading other works of George Bernard Shaw and George Orwell. Consider particularly the fact that while Shaw was of Irish origin, Orwell was born in India and spent a part of his life in active service of British imperial interests. Consider if these facts have had some bearings on the way these writers thought and wrote out their iconoclastic works during their entire literary career.

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### 3.3.12 Comprehensive Reading

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## Module-4

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### Unit-1 □ George Bernard Shaw: *Pygmalion*

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#### Structure:

- 4.1.0 Introduction
- 4.1.1 Developments in English Drama since the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- 4.1.2 George Bernard Shaw's Modernism and Influence of Ibsen
- 4.1.3 Shaw's Theater of Ideas
- 4.1.4 *Pygmalion*: Introducing the Characters
- 4.1.5 *Pygmalion*: Plot Summary
- 4.1.6 *Pygmalion*: Detailed Act-wise Summaries
- 4.1.7 Themes and Issues
- 4.1.8 *Pygmalion* in Performance
- 4.1.9 *Pygmalion* in Popular Culture
- 4.1.10 Summing Up
- 4.1.11 Comprehension Exercises
- 4.1.12 Reading List

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#### 4.1.0 Introduction

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George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), born in a humble lower-middle class Protestant family in Dublin, remains one of the most revered pioneers of modernist British drama. Known for his radical political ideologies and satirical style, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. The Shavian coterie is marked by an innovative and seamless blending of social consciousness with sharp satirical comedy.

Throughout his extensive career spanning more than sixty years, Shaw has exhibited remarkable diversity in his plays. While studying Shaw's drama, you will notice certain key themes which appear recurrently in his works, such as, socialism, the hypocrisy of war, class conflicts within contemporary British society and a unique treatment of women characters. *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Mrs. Warren's*

*Profession* (1902), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Heartbreak House* (1919) are among his notable works.

In this unit, you will learn about Shaw's modernism, his dramatic style and his incessant engagement with sociopolitical issues of his day through the detailed reading of one of his most celebrated plays, *Pygmalion*. In a nutshell, the main objectives of this unit are:

- To briefly acquaint you with the historical trajectory of the development of English drama since the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- To prepare a comprehensive study on the modernist philosophies of George Bernard Shaw, with special references to the influence of Henrik Ibsen on him
- To help you understand the basic tenets of the dramatic ethos of George Bernard Shaw
- To offer you a detailed textual analysis of *Pygmalion* and critical readings of the diverse themes dealt with in the play
- To equip you to handle a variety of questions on the play by providing you with a detailed questionnaire
- To enable you to interrogate further into the various complex socio-cultural issues explored in the text – such as problems of language, class conflicts, gender roles and construction of identity etc. - by offering a list of selected secondary texts

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### 4.1.1 Developments in English Drama since the 18<sup>th</sup> century

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Drury Lane theater, 1775

After the prolific outpourings of sentimental and domestic dramas of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Britain saw a waning in the dramatic output in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rise of Romanticism redirected the collective literary effort of the nation towards poetry and, to a certain degree, to prose. However, that does not imply there was no dramatic production at all. In fact, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a rising demand for entertainment. Under **the Licensing Act of 1737**, Drury Lane and Covent Garden were the only two

theaters in London which were allowed to stage plays (*legitimate drama*). However, numerous non-patented (unauthorized) theaters cropped up and became immensely popular. The plays produced by such theaters were called *illegitimate drama*. The Romantic age saw a considerable rise of burlesque and melodrama, which were often accompanied by musical interludes. However, in the aftermath of the War of Independence in America (1776) and the French Revolution (1789), the real impetus behind the notable dramatic productions of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was driven by socio-political agendas. Political censorship and control over the theaters also greatly contributed to this decline in drama in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Celebrated Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats produced plays and lyrical dramas that were distinctly influenced by these historical events. William Wordsworth, for instance, wrote *The Borderers* (1796-97) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

**The Licensing Act, 1737 granted the Lord Chamberlain executive right to exert control over the Theaters, Companies and, consequently, the dramas staged in the playhouses. The Masters of Revel, or the official supervisors of all court entertainment, became direct subordinates of the Lord Chamberlain, who reserved the right to censor any plays produced during this time.**

wrote *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) in collaboration with Robert Southey. Both the plays were inspired by the French Revolution. Coleridge's next play *Osorio* (1797) was, incidentally, not approved for performance by R. B. Sheridan who was the

**CLOSET DRAMA refers to the plays that are not intended for the stage. They are designed to be read (by a single reader or a group of readers) rather than enacted. Some celebrated closet plays are *Samson Agonistes* (1671) by John Milton and *The Dynasts* (1903-08) by Thomas Hardy.**

manager of Drury Lane Theater. P.B Shelley's 1819 plays *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* were also similar products of the poet's deep faith in the ideals of democracy, equality and liberty upheld by the French Revolution. While *Prometheus Unbound* was a **closet drama**, *The Cenci* was specifically written for the stage. However, it was rejected by Covent Garden Theater. Neither Coleridge nor Shelley saw

much success as dramatists, though they produced plays throughout their career. John Keats produced historical plays such as *Otho the Great* (1819) and *King Stephen* (1819). Among the great Romantic poets of the time, only Lord Byron had direct

professional theatrical connections, as he was a part of the management committee at Drury Lane. However, while he produced successful poetic dramas like *Manfred* (1817) and *Cain* (1821), he did not create plays intended for the stage. Overall, there was a distinct preference for closet dramas during the Romantic age, as they were often utilized as poetic vehicles for the authors' revolutionary political and social ideologies.

Drama revived its popularity in the Victorian age (1837-1901). The infamous Licensing Act of 1737 was relaxed in 1843, but not repealed until 1968. This period saw the rise of great playwrights like Oscar Wilde, J.M Synge and George Bernard Shaw. This era is also marked by the pivotal Irish Literary Renaissance and the establishment of the famous Abbey Theater by Lady Gregory, W.B Yeats and Synge. There is a shift from the historical and closet dramas of the earlier decades to a more naturalistic mode of writing. The plays of this time often exhibit incisive social satire which reflects the modernist philosophies and social consciousness of these writers. Comedy and slapstick melodrama continued to attract its niche audience, though the stage was now being set for a new kind of drama for a new modern world.

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## 4.1.2 George Bernard Shaw's Modernism and Influence of Ibsen

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In Module 1, you have already learned about the historical context of the rise of modernism and the key aspects associated with the art produced during the modernist era. To understand and appreciate the developmental trajectory of modern theater, in particular, you need to know about the three great authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906); the Swedish dramatist - August Strindberg (1849-1912); and the Russian writer, Anton Chekov (1860-1904).

### Some Important Influences on Shaw

- Henrik Ibsen
- Karl Marx
- Henri Bergson
- Jean-Baptiste Lamarck
- Nietzsche

This trio of literary geniuses heralded the advent of modernism in Europe, which was later taken up by British writers such as George Bernard Shaw, J.M Synge, Sean O'Casey and John Galsworthy. Ibsen, in

particular, has been lauded by John Fletcher and James McFarlane as "the origin and impetus" of modern drama. A reading of the Shavian canon requires a close study of Ibsen's modernism, which exerted a foundational influence on Shaw. Ibsen's insistence on social freedom through individual emancipation created radically

subversive and rebellious characters. In Toril Moi's assessment, his plays use theatricality to highlight the moral and philosophical ambiguities of the modern society.

Shaw's utilizes Ibsen's brand of social realism for his own creative purposes as he attempts to understand and express the uncertainty of the modern world, rising from the fractured remains of the old order. Shaw's plays served as the model for dramatists throughout the modernist period and continued to exert significant influence even after his death. One crucial aspect of Shaw's modernism was, of course, his "Ibsenism". Incidentally, William Archer, a Scotsman and one of the earliest translators of Ibsen's plays, was a close compatriot and mentor of Shaw and played a critical role in his early career as a playwright.

In his 1891 essay, *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw pays tribute to the great modernist stalwart through a detailed critical reading of Ibsen's works. Another interesting instance of his fascination with Ibsen is witnessed in his play *The Philanderer* (1893), where he brings in two opposing groups of characters - "Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites" - and manipulates them into a novel and comic confrontation. In fact, along with *Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw authored two other critical volumes on Ibsen's works: *Our Theatres in the Nineties* and *The Prefaces*. Though it was Edmund Gosse, an English author and translator, who introduced the Norwegian playwright to the English readers and audience, critics like Javier Ortiz recognize Shaw as the "authentic exponent of Ibsen's message to the British public." By the 1890s, Ibsen's works gained favor with a group of English and Irish writers who were the proponents of the avant-garde 'New Theatre' of the 1880s.

Ibsen's "message" was one of progressive social remaking, assisted by his feminist and socialist ideologies. Shaw drew inspiration from Ibsen and re-hauled the romantic tropes of the conventional "well-made plays" English theater into his own innovative "theater of ideas". You can clearly discern Ibsen's influence in several key aspects of Shaw's drama. Take the example of *Candida*, for instance. It is clearly a counter-narrative to *A Doll's House*. *Candida* represents the Shavian version of the New Woman, which both draws from and contrasts against Ibsen's emancipated women characters such as Nora Helmer (*A Doll's House*, 1879) and Rebecca West (*Rosmersholm*, 1886).

Critically influenced by Marx, Shaw's socialist ideals, along with his affiliation with the Fabian Society from 1900-1913, firmly established him as an iconoclast who

prioritized utilitarianism over aesthetics. Shaw's socialist realism in his plays, therefore, had a very definite purpose. He sought positive and progressive social reforms. In 1976, Shaw famously claimed, "For art's sake alone I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence." Furthermore, Shaw invested his plays with the Irish disdain for class hierarchies, as evidenced by his ardent socialist and Fabian philosophies.

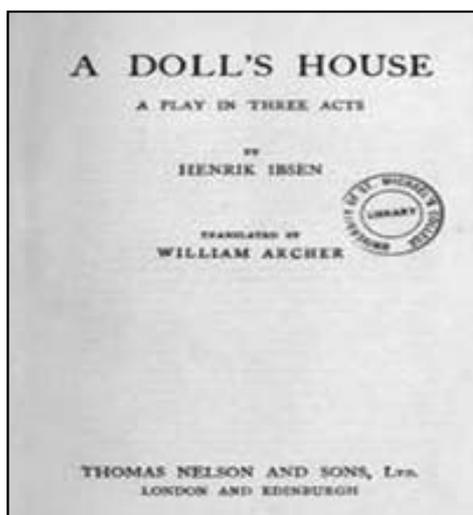
Shaw believed in a "scientific religion" - a post-Darwinian vision that he developed from the combined ideologies of significant 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers such as Henri Bergson ('Creative Evolution') and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (theory of Functional Adaptation) along with Schopenhauer ("will") and Nietzsche ('Superman'). Combining these various strands of thoughts, Shaw appropriated Bergson's idea of *élan vital* or life force and awaited the arrival of an ideal Nietzschean Superman (*Übermensch*). For Shaw, the life force exists both within and without human beings, and it is by harnessing the energy of the *élan vital* through the collective "universal will", that man can evolve into the Superman, who would replace God and herald a perfect world where all moral, social and metaphysical problems would cease to exist. This Shawian ideology is most prominently portrayed in *Man and Superman*.

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### 4.1.3 Shaw's Theater of Ideas

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In this section, we will talk briefly about Shaw's theater and the context in which it was created. William Archer's 1889 translation and production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* had already violated the complacency of the bourgeois English audience with its iconoclast heroine, Nora Helmer. Nora ruptured the Victorian ideal of the "angel of the home" by rejecting her husband and children in her quest for self-betterment. As you have learned in the earlier section, Shaw's 'theater of ideas' was born from this radicalization of the traditional English theater of "well-made plays" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (French: *la pièce bien faite*). It discarded dramatic conservatism in favor of a new kind of narrative that would accommodate the artist's growing need to express the problems



of a rapidly changing world. Similarly, in *Pygmalion* (subtitled “A Romance in Five Acts”) Shaw employs and subsequently deconstructs the conventional ideas and expectations associated with the term ‘romance’. He creates a clever narrative where appearance and reality are often manipulated and used interchangeably.

Shaw’s early plays can be broadly grouped into two categories. He published seven plays in two volumes, entitled *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant* in 1898. The first volume contained the ‘Plays Unpleasant’. It was comprised of *Widowers’ House* (1892), *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (written in 1893, but not performed until 1902 due to censorship) and *The Philanderer* (also written in 1893 and performed in 1902). Of these, *Widowers’ House* most directly exhibits Ibsen’s influence on Shaw. These morbidly satirical plays were followed by a second volume of four pleasant plays, namely *Arms and the Man* (the first of the ‘Pleasant’ plays), *Candida* (1897), *The Man of Destiny* (1897) and *You Can Never Tell* (1899).

The Plays Pleasant are marked by a gentle manner of narration and more or less ‘happy’ plot resolutions, as the name suggests. The ‘Unpleasant’ plays, on the hand, delivered a stringent critique against what Shaw perceived to be hypocrisy of the British audience, through his exploration of contemporary social problems. Originally, the early ‘pleasant’ plays intended to attract and appease the producers and audiences who were offended by his more caustic satires. Yet, in both cases, laughter is constantly threatened by a sense of unease; an unnerving quality pervades Shaw’s theater that reminds the audience of the inherent ambiguity in Shavian humor.

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#### **4.1.4 *Pygmalion*: Introducing the Characters**

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- ❖ **Henry Higgins:** Higgins is a scion of an upper-class family and a professor of phonetics who plans to conduct a social experiment involving Eliza Doolittle, a brash and impoverished flower girl. He resolves to transform the boisterous cockney girl into a fine lady fit for high society by teaching her to speak like one in three months. He is seen as an ardent academician who views people only as viable subjects for his theories and experimentations. He diligently documents his research with photographic materials. Higgins is the creator of Higgins’ Universal Alphabet, a phonetic tool with which he can identify different dialects. Though he belongs to a wealthy family and is a member of the high society, Higgins is, nevertheless, extremely critical of the rigid rules of polite society. His undertaking of Eliza Doolittle’s transformation can be seen as a mockery and transgression of such aristocratic

social codes. He is presented as a rude, at times immature, but well-meaning man. Higgins' preoccupation with his experiment blinds him to his own desire for Eliza and he is only brought to the realization when Eliza finally leaves him. He is the Shavian recreation of the mythic Pygmalion. [Refer to section **4.1.7: Themes and Issues**]

- ❖ **Eliza Doolittle:** Eliza Doolittle is a loud-mouthed cockney flower-girl, who catches Higgins' eye at the opening of the play while selling flowers on the streets of London on a rainy night. She does not fit the conventional mold of the romantic heroine. Her character serves as a foil to the romantic traditions of the "well-made plays" which is a significant aspect of Shaw's theater. She is a sassy, unpolished young woman who aspires to work in a flower shop but cannot get hired because of her unkempt appearance and flawed speech. She approaches Higgins and requests him to train her so that she can correct her speech. Initially, her character serves as a tool for Higgins' experiment. She retains some part of her old self by holds on to her sassiness but gradually loses her sense of identity as her transformation proceeds. She is often casually bullied and belittled by Higgins, but still desires his attention and admiration. Paradoxically, she gains respect in Higgins' eyes only when she finally becomes a self-sufficient woman who no longer requires him in her life. She is the Shavian version of the mythic Galatea. [Refer to section **4.1.7: Themes and Issues**]
- ❖ **Colonel Pickering:** Colonel Pickering is a retired military officer belonging to the upper class. He is a friend and colleague of Henry Higgins and shares the latter's love and talent for phonetics. He has authored a book called *Spoken Sanskrit*. He is a gentlemanly, sociable and compassionate man who serves as a foil to the unsocial, domineering and churlish Higgins. He is uniformly civil. His behavior to Eliza is courteous, even when she is a lowly flower girl. He participates in Higgins' experiment by betting money on it. He promises to cover the entire expense of the experiment if Higgins succeeds in transforming Eliza into a fine lady. However, while Higgins imparts the technical knowledge of phonetics to correct Eliza's flawed speech, it is Pickering's respectful attitude towards her that helps her gain a sense of self-worth and dignity.
- ❖ **Alfred Doolittle:** Alfred Doolittle is Eliza's father and an elderly but energetic man of lowly birth. He works as a dustman and speaks with a Welsh accent. He is shown to be a rapacious and greedy man, devoid of conscience. He accompanies Eliza when she arrives at Higgins' house and

proposes to sell her to Higgins for five pounds so that he may buy alcohol. His excesses, brashness and unapologetic greed appeal to Higgins' sense of humor and he laughingly asks Alfred to become a lecturer on moral reform, since he is an expert on middle-class morality. While, Alfred's lack of a moral compass is evident from his apathetic attitude to his daughter, he is peculiarly honest about himself. He lacks the trappings of civilized language and, therefore, lacks the deception and hypocrisy that is born of polite language.

- ❖ **Mrs. Higgins:** Mrs. Higgins is the mother of Henry Higgins, who loves her son but is not blind to his vagaries. She is a highborn woman and often dissuades Higgins from visiting her when she entertains guests. She disapproves of the Eliza Doolittle experiment and often treats Higgins and Pickering as thoughtless juveniles. She is clearly dubious about the outcome of the experiment and is justifiably worried about Eliza's future. Henry Higgins clearly sees his mother as a model of female excellence. While Higgins lacks self-awareness as he is immersed in his illusions of greatness, Mrs. Higgins is shown to be highly perceptive and practical.
- ❖ **Freddy Eynsford-Hill:** Freddy is a pleasant but weak-willed young man, who is dominated by his mother and sister. The Eynsford-Hills are of genteel birth. But with their dwindling finances, they are struggling to uphold their image of gentility in order to fit into the upper-class society. Henry Higgins summarily dismisses Freddy as a "fool". He falls in love with Eliza and courts her when she enters the polite society. In Shaw's controversial prose sequel, he marries Eliza. [Refer to section **4.1.8: Pygmalion in Performance**]
- ❖ **Mrs. Pearce:** Mrs. Pearce is Henry Higgins' housekeeper. She is charged with Eliza's care when she first arrives at his house. She is clear-sighted and intelligent and foresees the problems that would arise for the Eliza after the experiment is over. She is sympathetic to Eliza from the very beginning.

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### **4.1.5 Pygmalion: Plot Summary**

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A group of people take shelter at St. Paul's church in Covent Garden on a rainy summer night where Eliza Doolittle, an impoverished Cockney girl, is selling flowers. Mrs. Eynsford-Hill is present, along with her daughter, and she is waiting for her son, Freddy, who has gone to call to a cab. Eliza enters into an altercation with Freddy who has bumped into her and scatters her wares. Colonel Pickering

enters. She tries to convince the Colonel to buy flowers. He politely declines but offers her some money. Eliza is warned by bystanders that there is a man behind her who is noting down everything she says. The man turns out to be Henry Higgins, a famous professor of phonetics. He is capable of figuring out people's birthplaces from their accents. Higgins boasts that he can transform the sassy and graceless Eliza into a lady within months, by helping her acquire polite speech and social graces that can fool the London society into believing that she is a duchess. It turns out that the Colonel, himself a noted linguist, has come to London with the sole purpose of meeting Higgins.

The next day, Eliza comes to Higgins' home and requests him to give her lessons which would improve her speech and help her get a job in a flower shop. Higgins makes fun of her, but eventually agrees, as the idea of remaking Eliza into a 'duchess' intrigues and challenges him. Colonel Pickering also excitedly participates in the project by wagering that he would bear the expense of the experiment if Higgins can fulfill his claim within the stipulated time. He instructs Mrs. Pearce to give Eliza a bath and get her new clothes. Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's greedy and alcoholic father, comes to Higgins' house and offers to trade Eliza to him for five pounds which he intends to spend on drinks. Higgins, amused by the man's caustic views on life and society, gives him the money after bantering with him for a while. While leaving, Doolittle sees Eliza, who is now bathed and clean, but cannot recognize her.

Eliza's training begins. After a few months of learning proper ways of speaking, Eliza faces two trials. In the first, she is formally introduced to the Eynsford-Hills at Mrs. Higgins' house on her 'receiving day'. Freddy is immediately attracted to Eliza, though he does not recognize her as a flower girl he had bumped into at Covent Garden. Her painstakingly correct yet inappropriate speech causes some bewilderment as well as amusement among the assembled guests. In this humorous episode, Eliza narrates the death of her aunt in rigidly correct English, but it contains explicit details that belie the apparent politeness of her speech. Mrs. Higgins, who disapproves of the Eliza Doolittle experiment, warns Higgins and Colonel Pickering that Eliza is not ready for society.

The next phase of the plays opens with the two gentlemen returning from a party with Eliza. They are in high spirits and in a self-congratulatory mood as they have successfully passed off Eliza as a Duchess at the Ambassador's garden party. This

was the second trial. They contribute their success solely to their knowledge of phonetics and ignore Eliza's own efforts in the matter. Eliza realizes that since the experiment is now over, her future is uncertain. She fears that she will have to return to her previous pitiable existence. She becomes angry at Higgins and throws his slippers at him. Higgins does not understand the cause of Eliza's anger and suggests that she may now marry someone. Eliza returns all her clothes and jewelry and Higgins assures her that they all belong to her now.

Next morning, Higgins arrives at his mother's house to look for Eliza who has run away. He is extremely worried. An enraged Alfred Doolittle follows Higgins. It is revealed that Higgins had falsely boasted to someone about Mr. Doolittle's aptitude as the "most original moralist" and a deceased millionaire had left all his money to him in a trust. Mrs. Higgins is hiding Eliza from Higgins and Colonel Pickering and scolds them for their cavalier treatment of her feelings. Eliza enters the drawing room and warmly thanks Colonel Pickering for his respectful behavior to her. She is, however, unforgiving towards Higgins and threatens that she would abandon him to work for a rival phonetician. Higgins tries to convince her to return with him. But she declines. In the end, however, it is uncertain which path Eliza would follow, since she has been inducted into the ways of the upper-class, has a newly gained sense of self-respect and independence and also a prospective groom in the besotted Freddy.

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#### **4.1.6 *Pygmalion*: Detailed Act-wise Summaries**

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##### **✓ Act 1 Summary**

On a stormy summer night in London, several people are caught in the heavy rains and gather under a portico of St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden. Among the assembled people, are Mrs. Eynsford-Hill, her daughter, Clara and her son, Freddy. Freddy is a weak-willed young man, who is bullied by his mother and sister into looking for a taxi for them in the rain. He bumps into a flower girl and scatters her wares. Surprisingly, the young woman addresses him by his name and exclaims: "Nah, then, Freddy: look wh'y' gowin', deah." Mrs. Eynsford-Hill is morbidly curious to find out how a lowly flower girl knows Freddy's name. The flower girl – Eliza – demands recompense for the ruined flowers, and Mrs. Eynsford-Hill pays her despite Clara's protests. It is then revealed that Eliza calls all men by generic names like Freddy or Charlie.

Eliza encounters Colonel Pickering – “an elderly gentleman of amiable military type” – who has arrived under the portico for shelter, and tries to sell her flowers. He refuses to buy them, as he has no change. Eliza persists. At this point, a nearby hawker brings Eliza’s attention to a strange man who had been taking note of all that she does and says. Afraid of being mistaken as a prostitute soliciting a prospective client, Eliza self-defensively exclaims: “I am a good girl, I am.” Her loud claims that she is allowed to sell flowers there draws the crowd’s attention. The man taking notes interjects at this point and asks Eliza to “shut up”. He is Professor Higgins, an expert on phonetics, and the notes he had taken is a shorthand transcript of Eliza’s cockney speech.

Colonel Pickering and the other people present begin to question Higgins about the specifics of his talents. Higgins demonstrates his aptitude by accurately identifying the birth place and residence of people based on their accents. The Colonel reveals himself as an enthusiast of phonetic skills and languages, and claims that he trains people in proper speech so that they may elevate their social ranks. Higgins then boasts that he can transform Eliza into a duchess in three months: “in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador’s garden party.” Colonel Pickering then introduces himself as the author of *Spoken Sanskrit* and as “a student of Indian dialects” to Higgins, the author of *Universal Alphabet*. It turns out that they are admirers of each other’s works and that Pickering has come to England specifically to meet Higgins and the latter had planned a journey to India to meet the colonel. As they are about to depart together for supper, engrossed in their mutual interest, Eliza interrupts them and asks for money for rent, Higgins is skeptical about her claim but nevertheless pays her with some coins. This unexpected gain allows Eliza to take the taxi brought by Freddy, only to find that his mother and sister have abandoned him.

### ✓ Act II Summary

The second act opens at Higgins’ laboratory at Wimpole Street at 11 a.m. next morning. Higgins discusses his work with Colonel Pickering, demonstrating the use of various recording devices and phonetic tools for scientific experimentations such as a phonograph, laryngoscope, ‘tiny brogan pipes with bellows’, as Shaw specifies in his stage directions to the scene. Colonel Pickering admiringly compliments Higgins’ on his work. At this point, Mrs. Pearce interrupts their discussions to inform Higgins that a young woman has come to meet him. She refers to the woman as

“quite a common girl [...] Very common, indeed.” She chidingly reproves Higgins: “but really you see such queer people sometimes—you’ll excuse me, I’m sure, sir.”

Eliza, the flower girl, enters in an odd, but moderately clean outfit. Higgins dismisses her from the outset and asks her to leave. Eliza refuses to be bullied. Higgins’ recognizes her and is irritated by her presence. He rudely claims that “She’s of no use” as he has already learned all about her “Lisson Grove lingo”. His behavior to Eliza is contrasted against Colonel Pickering’s sympathy. Eliza had been struck by Higgins’ claim that he can transform her into a duchess and wants to take speaking lessons from him so that she may get a job at an upscale flower shop and be “a lady”. Higgins’ dismissive attitude to Eliza can also be attributed to the fact that he makes no distinction between classes or genders, as Shaw mentions in his stage direction.

With innate politeness, Colonel Pickering respectfully addresses Eliza as “Ms. Doolittle” and offers her a seat. She offers Higgins a shilling (twenty-five cents) an hour for lessons. This is a very small sum of money, but Higgins realizes that, for Eliza, the amount is indeed significant. He considers her request. Colonel Pickering is also intrigued and wagers that if Higgins can fool the high society into believing that Eliza is a duchess at the Ambassador’s garden party, then he will bear all costs of the experiment. The scene vacillates between the conversations among these three characters as Higgins alternately berates and makes fun of Eliza, she threatens to leave him and Colonel Pickering tries to mediate. Higgins offers to host Eliza at his home for six months, where she will be trained in proper speech and polite manners. He instructs Mrs. Pearce to take her for a bath and provide her with clean clothing. Higgins estimates that he can turn Eliza from a “draggletailed guttersnipe” into a Duchess in “six months—in three if she has a good ear and a quick tongue.”

Mrs. Pearce asks Higgins to be conscious of his manners as a young woman is staying with them. She wonders what would befall Eliza at the end of the experiment. Colonel Pickering, concerned for Eliza’s virtue, conscientiously, inquires after Higgins’ motives and intentions. Higgins reveals that he has never had many private interactions with women because they become a bother and a “damned nuisance” when they enter a man’s life. He claims to be a “confirmed old bachelor”.

At this point, Alfred Doolittle arrives to purportedly save his daughter from ruining her honour. However, instead of protesting, Higgins tells Doolittle to take away Eliza at once. Alfred Doolittle is flustered since he does not want her back but only intends to extort money from Higgins. He wants five pounds to spend on

alcohol. When Colonel Pickering berates him for having no morals, he says: “What’s a five-pound note to you? What’s Eliza to me?” He identifies himself as one of the “undeserving poor” and cynically expounds on middle-class morality. Doolittle’s Welsh accent and his brash dishonesty fascinate and amuse Higgins. He gives him the money.

Eliza enters wearing a clean blue kimono. Alfred cannot recognize his daughter and is surprised to find her look so good. Eliza warns the men that her father must have come for money that he would waste on drinks. She wants to show off her new clothes to the neighborhood but is chided by Higgins for her vanity. The men agree that they have undertaken a tough job.

### ✓ Act III Summary

The scenes open in Mrs. Higgins’ drawing room. Higgins visits Mrs. Higgins, his mother, on her receiving day or “at-home day”. Mrs. Higgins is displeased with Higgins’ sudden arrival as she deplors his lack of polite graces and social manners. “Nonsense,” Higgins impatiently remarks, “I know I have no small talk; but people don’t mind.” In fact, Higgins had promised his mother that he would not appear before her guests. Higgins explains his wager with Colonel Pickering. He tells Mrs. Higgins that he has invited the subject of his experiment - a girl he had “picked up” – and wants her to observe how and what she speaks. Mrs. Higgins is reluctant to receive an impoverished commoner in her drawing room. Now, do you remember the Eynsford-Hills from Act 1? The parlor maid enters and informs them of Mrs. Eynsford-Hill’s arrival, along with Miss Clara Eynsford-Hill. Higgins vaguely remembers their accents from their encounter at Covent Garden but cannot exactly recall them. They are soon followed by Colonel Pickering and Freddy Eynsford-Hill. Higgins is excited to get a large audience to showcase and gauge Eliza’s improvement.

Eliza is announced by the parlor maid. She greets everyone with painstakingly accurate “How do you do”-s. She proceeds to make torturously pedantic conversation: for instance, in response to “Do you think it will rain?” she replies, “The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation.” She exhibits her carefully-tutored speech with great success until Mrs. Eynsford-Hill brings up the topic of influenza which propels her into an involved diatribe about an aunt’s death from flu. Her old cockney accent re-emerges and she inadvertently reveals embarrassing details of her past life such as Alfred’s alcoholism. Freddy,

already besotted with Eliza, mistakes her stilted attempts at genteel conversation as the “new small talk” and is deeply impressed by her.

Freddy offers to walk Eliza home, but she intends to take a taxi. Like Freddy, his sister Clara is also extremely impressed with Eliza and attempts to emulate her unusual speech. After the guests have departed, Mrs. Higgins scolds Higgins, saying that Eliza would never learn to be genteel if she lives in his crude and graceless company. She inquires after Eliza’s living situation with him and sarcastically calls the two men “a pair of pretty babies playing with [their] living doll”. After Higgins and Colonel Pickering have left, Mrs. Higgins angrily mourns their idiocy and exclaims “men! men!! men!!!” in an exasperated expletive.

#### ✓ Act IV Summary

The act opens in Higgins’ house at midnight after the ambassador’s garden party where he has introduced and convincingly passed Eliza off as a duchess to the assembled attendees with resounding success. The scene opens as Higgins and Colonel Pickering congratulate themselves on the successful completion of the experiment, though Pickering has lost their original bet. They are excited about their triumph. Eliza enters the room. She is well-dressed but “she is tired: her pallor contrasts strongly with her dark eyes and hair; and her expression is almost tragic.” She is “brooding and silent.” Her depressive mood goes unnoticed by Higgins and Colonel Pickering as they continue to talk excitedly about the garden party. Higgins looks for his slippers and Eliza silently goes out of the room to bring them. She places them at his feet. Higgins is surprised by the sudden appearance of his slippers, as he has not noticed Eliza returning with them. It is almost as though he doesn’t even register her presence. Higgins exclaims, “Thank god, it’s over”, which causes Eliza to flinch “violently; but they take no notice of her”.

They ignore Eliza completely and discuss her performance without including her in the conversation. When Colonial Pickering claims that Eliza didn’t seem nervous at all at the party Higgins says:

“Oh, she wasn’t nervous. I knew she’d be all right. No, it’s the strain of putting the job through all these months that has told on me. It was interesting enough at first, while we were at the phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. If I hadn’t backed myself to do it I should have chucked the whole thing up two months ago. It was a silly notion: the whole thing has been a bore.”

As Higgins goes on complaining to Colonel Pickering about how tiresome the whole duration of the experiment has been, “Eliza’s beauty turns murderous.” Colonel Pickering, however, expresses his enjoyment in the charade and Eliza’s competence in carrying it off successfully. He decides to retire for the night, followed by Higgins.

Eliza loses her temper at their dismissive attitude towards her and throws herself on the floor in anger. Higgins re-enters looking for his slippers. Furious, she hurls them at him. Shocked at this burst of violence, he pulls her up from the floor. Eliza angrily calls him a selfish brute and asks - “Why didn’t you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it’s all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you?” Argument ensues. Eliza expresses doubt and fear about her future now that the experiment is over. She asks: “What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What’s to become of me?” Higgins callously dismisses her concerns: “What does it matter what becomes of you?” Then he tries to pacify her by saying that she can either get married or she may open a flower shop. Eliza tells Higgins that she wishes he had left her where she was.

Eliza eventually calms down and asks if her clothes belong to her or Colonel Pickering who has paid for them. She says that she does not want to be accused of thievery if she keeps them for herself. Higgins tells her that everything except the jewels (which were rented) belonged to her. She takes off her jewelry and gives them to Higgins for safe-keeping. She also returns a ring Higgins has gifted to her. Enraged, he throws it into the furnace. Eliza, frightened, covers her face and implores him to not hurt her. Higgins feels wounded and angry at her behavior and he leaves the room after calling her a “heartless guttersnipe”. Eliza is triumphant in achieving this small victory over Higgins.

#### ✓ Act V Summary

The scene is set in Mrs. Higgins’ house. The parlor maid announces the arrival of Higgins and Colonel Pickering and informs Mrs. Higgins that they are telephoning the police downstairs. Higgins enters, frantic and “in a state”. He is looking for Eliza who has left his home without informing him and has come back to collect her clothes in the morning. Higgins is upset at Mrs. Pearce for letting her leave without his knowledge. Mrs. Higgins supports Eliza’s right to leave if she wishes so, and Higgins counters by saying that he cannot find anything since Eliza took care of his appointments and such.

Colonel Pickering enters. He informs Higgins that the police inspector is suspicious of their motives and has “made a lot of difficulties” instead of helping them. Mrs. Higgins reprimands them for their childishness and for thoughtlessly setting the police after Eliza.

The maid announces the arrival of Alfred Doolittle. He enters, dressed magnificently in fashionable clothes. Alfred is enraged at Higgins and accuses him of having ruined his life and for having “Tied [him] up and delivered [him] into the hands of middle-class morality”. It is revealed that Higgins had jokingly referred to Doolittle as “the most original moralist at present in England” to a wealthy American who wanted to donate five million pounds to Moral Reform Societies. On Higgins’ reference, he contracted Doolittle to speak on moral matters for the Wannafeller Moral Reform World League for an annuity of three thousand pounds. He claims his life has been burdened with “middle-class morality” and has forced him to discard his careless, irresponsible ways. Higgins and Doolittle quarrel as each claim ownership over Eliza. Mrs. Higgins summons Eliza and asks Doolittle to step outside on the balcony so that she is spared the shock of seeing her father so transformed.

Eliza enters. Colonel Pickering pleads with Eliza to return. She thanks him for his courteousness towards her. She claims that it was his gentlemanly and chivalrous behavior that taught her to respect herself and to become more ladylike. He contrasts Higgins dismissive attitude with the Colonel’s attentive politeness:

“[...] the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she’s treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.”

Higgins warns that she will “relapse” in a matter of weeks without his guidance. Doolittle enters. Eliza is deeply shocked by her father’s altered appearance. He informs Eliza that he is going to St. George’s church to marry her stepmother, who has also fallen victim of middle-class morality. Doolittle invites Mrs. Higgins and Colonel Pickering to attend his wedding as well. They leave to get ready.

An argument ensues between Eliza and Higgins. He claims that he is equally rude to everyone and therefore cannot be particularly accused of treating Eliza badly. He offers to adopt her as his daughter or, alternatively, to marry her off to Pickering. His blindness to Eliza’s true feelings angers her and she disclaims any wish to marry

Pickering and even Higgins, who is closer to her age. Eliza casually refers to Freddy who regularly sends her love letters. Higgins is annoyed. She further enrages him by claiming that she'd marry Freddy and take up a position as an assistant with Professor Nepean, who is Higgins' professional rival. Perversely, Higgins is deeply impressed by Eliza's show of spirit which attracts him more than her submissiveness:

“You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than sniveling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn't it? [Rising] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.”

Mrs. Higgins comes to take Eliza to the wedding. Before leaving, Higgins reverts back to his old self and asks her to order some ham and cheese, a pair of reindeer gloves and a tie to “match that new suit”. She responds by rudely asking him to buy them himself and leaves. The play ends with Higgins jovially informing his mother that “she'll buy 'em all right enough”. However, it is uncertain whether Eliza will ultimately follow his directive (which will indicate her reconciliation with Higgins) or not.

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#### 4.1.7 Themes and Issues

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- **The Title of the Play:** The title of the play is famously derived from the tenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which features a sculptor from Cyprus named Pygmalion. He crafts an ivory statue of a woman which embodies his vision of ideal femininity and beauty. Pygmalion is so enamored by the perfection of his own creation that he falls in love with it. He passionately prays to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who is moved by his devotion and brings the statue to life, in the form of a beautiful woman. Pygmalion names his beloved Galatea and marries her. They later bear a son named Paphos. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Pygmalion*, 1770; a play), Johann Wolfgang Goethe (*Pygmalion*, 1767; a poem) and Franz von Suppé (*Die Schöne Galathee*, 1865; an opera) have also utilized the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea in their works.

Shaw appropriated the myth to serve certain very specific purposes. While Alfred Doolittle remains Eliza's biological “creator”, she is presented in the play as Higgins' “creation” - in the sense that he gives “birth” to a new/better version of her. This betterment is, of course, a social elevation, achieved through stringent lessons in polite speech and manners. Unlike the classical myth, the characters do not

find happiness in love and matrimony. Instead, it is Higgins' treatment of her that drives Eliza away and propels her to seek self-respect and independence. Eliza, incidentally, is truly brought to life, only when she rejects the control and authority of her male creator, Higgins. These digressions from the classical Greek myth allow Shaw to create a narrative that subverts the traditional expectations of a romantic comedy or a fairy tale, by implicating both the creator and creation in the complicated questions surrounding ownership and agency.

- **Romance:** In section 4.1.3, you have already briefly learned about Shaw's Theater of Ideas and the subversive treatment of 'romance' in his plays. Shaw's *Pygmalion* is subtitled 'A Romance in Five Acts'. The term 'romance' is used to highlight the play's deviations from the traditional ideas associated with the label. In his infamous prose sequel to the play, Shaw claims that the term indicates an improbable or a fantastical situation (such as Eliza's transformation from a commoner to a lady) and has nothing to do with love.

Unlike, Ovid's myth, the play does not end with matrimony, nor does it offer a satisfactory resolution of the conflict between Shaw's Pygmalion (Higgins) and Galatea (Eliza). The traditional fairy tale structure is disrupted in the end as Eliza's love for Higgins is left unspoken and unfulfilled. While there are clear indications in the play about Higgins' affection towards his "creation", he makes no discernible effort to establish a romantic relationship with Eliza. Though he tries to lure her back with promises of adopting her as a "daughter" and even quarrels with Alfred Doolittle about his ownership over Eliza, he never confesses his love for her.

Higgins is no perfect hero: he is harsh, unfeeling and lacking in empathy. He is a "confirmed old bachelor", conspicuously devoid of social graces. Similarly, Eliza, with her brash tongue and lowly antics, disrupts the stereotype of a romantic heroine. She is enraged by Higgins' dismissal of Eliza's own effort at re-creating herself and assumes that her transformation is a product of his genius only. Moreover, her active pursuit of socio-economic advancement also belies the passivity associated with women protagonists in traditional romances. Thus, while the 'rags to riches' story does have elements of a fairytale romance, the uncertainty and poignancy of the ending operates as a discordant reminder of Shaw's infamous ambiguity about love and marriage. The title sets up the audience for failure. The matrimonial expectation suggested by the title is thwarted in the ending as Eliza destroys the masculine fantasy of a silent, submissive helpmate.

- **Women and Gender Roles:** The Shavian heroines are notorious for subverting masculine expectations by conforming to the traditional tropes which attempt to appropriate women as the stereotypical ‘angels of the hearth’, who are perpetually submissive and silent. The evolution of Shaw’s women characters, from Elizabeth Warren to Candida to Eliza Doolittle to Joan of Arc, show an increasing demand for greater social mobility and freedom. Shaw championed the cause of women’s liberation by creating heroines who reject the institutional imposition of inferiority by challenging prescribed gender roles. From Raina’s naïve romanticism and hero-worship, Candida’s marital compromise with Morell to Eliza Doolittle’s vocal rejection of male patronage and domination, the development of Shaw’s heroines clearly exhibit his impatience with the unequal institution of marriage.

Critics believe that Shaw’s attitude towards women had been coloured by his complex relationship with his mother. Disappointed by her husband’s alcoholism and the overall financial struggles of the Shaw family, Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw withdrew emotionally from both her husband and her son, lavishing her affections on her two daughters instead. Shaw’s eagerness for his mother’s approval and love and her emotional distance from his affected own history with women. Shaw’s mother, incidentally, left her husband and her unhappy marriage to settle with a music teacher named Vandeleur Lee. Eliza, too, leaves Higgins and her doomed love for him in search of a more fulfilling future. Shaw’s cynicism towards women is reflected in Higgins’ misogyny: “I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance.” Higgins’ relationship with his mother is indicative of this autobiographical influence as Shaw molds his women according to the model set by his mother. Interestingly, in Act III, Higgins says to Mrs. Higgins: “Oh, I can’t be bothered with young women. My idea of a lovable woman is something as like you as possible.”

Reportedly, Shaw wrote the character of Eliza Doolittle specifically with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in mind. He was, at the time, romantically involved with the actress. However, there is much controversy regarding Shaw’s sexuality, since, despite his many high-profile love affairs, his forty-five-years long marriage was chaste and devoid of sexual contact. Shaw’s rejection of sexual relationships can be seen as an inherent distrust or fear of women. This is borne out by his treatment of women in his plays as well his tendency to idealize women. He envisioned his ideal woman as “the huntress”, suggestive of a kind of predatory femininity that preys on men. His wariness about sex is clearly exhibited in the following remark by Shaw:

“The quantity of Love that an ordinary person can stand without serious damage is about 10 minutes in 50 years.” Nevertheless, Shaw remains staunch in his support for women’s progress and liberation.

It is interesting to note that Eliza’s own sense of self-hood and identity is a product of her induction into the masculine realm of “proper speech” by Higgins, who trains her to be “a lady”. Moreover, even her nascent but strong sense of self-respect is a product of male validation, derived from Colonel Pickering’s politeness towards her. However, Higgins’ attempt to establish his ownership over Eliza as his self-proclaimed ‘creation’ (“I’ll make a woman out of you”) is rejected by her and she embarks on a quest for independence and self-validation. Eliza’s own strength of character is made evident in her choice to utilize her polite education to create an identity for herself. She leaves her ‘creator’ behind and becomes her own creation. Furthermore, Eliza’s volubility thwarts the masculine fantasy of female submission and silence represented by Ovid’s Galatea as well as the matrimonial expectation suggested by the deceptively innocuous title.

- **Class and Social Hierarchies:** Class is a defining element in *Pygmalion*. You have already read about Shaw’s socialist ideologies in the earlier segment on Shaw’s modernism. Socialism is a political ideology that envisions and aims to achieve a classless society. Shaw’s own plays reflect the deeply segregated social system and class hierarchies of Victorian England. Higgins’ attitude to the characters shows him to be equally dismissive of all characters. Colonel Pickering, in contrast, is equally polite to all. Higgins, Mrs. Higgins and Colonel Pickering represent the moneyed upper class. Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins’ parlour maid represent the servant class.

However, the main difference between the classes, as portrayed in *Pygmalion*, seems to be language and money. The rapid industrialization since the 18<sup>th</sup> century had already led to the growth of a middle class, who held considerable economic power. Birth was no longer enough to ensure a person’s status. The Eynsford-Hills are representative of the declining gentry class, struggling to survive on the fringes of upper-class society. Alfred Doolittle’s elevation from a low born dustman to a rich middle-class man is achieved solely through an influx of money and the assumption of a mantle of morality. Eliza’s own transformation, on the other hand, leaves her oddly stranded without a particular class she could belong to. Her lack of finances does not allow her to fully become an upper-class lady and her newly acquired civility and social know-how leaves her unfit for the lower class. While both Alfred

Doolittle and Eliza gain a social mobility, through money and language respectively which allow them to climb the social ladder, they are no longer comfortable in their own skin and are unsure of their own identities. Eventually, Eliza realizes that her transformation has only isolated her and robbed her of a sense of belonging. This is the crux of Shaw's piercingly ironic take on class in *Pygmalion*.

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#### **4.1.8 *Pygmalion* in Performance**

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*Pygmalion* was first performed in German (translated by Siegfried Trebitsch) at Hofburg Theater in Vienna in 1913. It premiered in London in 1914 at His Majesty's Theater with Herbert Beerbohm Tree playing Henry Higgins and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Eliza. Eliza's unpolished language and lack of respectability created quite a stir among the audience. *Pygmalion* was undeniably a hit. However, Tree, who was also the stage manager, subsequently altered the ending without consulting Shaw, to appease the audience. He portrayed a more romanticized resolution between Eliza and Higgins. Shaw vehemently protested the alteration of the ending and fought to reinstate his original ending till 1938, when *My Fair Lady* was being filmed. Shaw was reportedly horrified and enraged at Tree's alternate ending during the 100<sup>th</sup> screening of the play in which Higgins throws a bouquet of roses to Eliza from a window. He had angrily exclaimed: "Your ending is damnable; you ought to be shot."

From the very first screening of *Pygmalion*, audience and directors alike have disagreed with Shaw and conspired to recreate an ending which would unite the two as lovers. In fact, in order to protect the integrity of the play and Shaw's feminist ideology, he appended a prose sequel to the 1916 edition of *Pygmalion* entitled "What Happened Afterwards". This sequel blasts the audiences' expectation of a marriage between Higgins and Eliza. Shaw explains that the term "romance" in the title indicates the improbability of the events unfolding (such as Eliza's transformation from a flower girl to a lady) and not a fairy tale story of love and romance. He is disinterested in such "happy endings" and will not allow smart, young and beautiful Eliza to end up with Higgins, who is more than twenty years older than her. He does not wish to appease the sentimentality of people.

In Shaw's sequel Eliza marries Freddy who adores her. Colonel Pickering helps them set up a flower shop. The rigid concepts associated with class are challenged here as Freddy, a well-born man, enters trade, which is looked down upon by the

upper class. However, due to the young couple's inexperience, the colonel is often obliged to rescue them financially. Higgins spitefully enjoys Freddy's failures. However, they implement new strategies such as hiring help and introducing food items in their wares and, through their perseverance, the business gradually becomes profitable. Eliza remains a regular presence at Wimpole Street and in Higgins' life. Though her interest in Higgins is still there, she maintains a prudent emotional distance from him. Her affection for Freddy and Colonel Pickering remains steady. Her relationship with Higgins and Alfred Doolittle remain strained. As Shaw succinctly puts it, "Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: his relation to her is too godlike to be altogether agreeable."

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#### **4.1.9 *Pygmalion* in Popular Culture**

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The earliest cinematic rendering of the play came in 1938. Shaw wrote the screenplay for the film, but the director covertly changed the ending into a romantic uniting of Higgins and Eliza. Ironically, Shaw won an Oscar for this movie. *Pygmalion* has inspired multiple theatrical and cinematic spin-offs, the most well-known being the 1956 eponymous Broadway musical featuring Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews which in turn inspired the equally famous 1964 Audrey Hepburn starrer film *My Fair Lady*. Both these productions had opted to forego Shaw's intended ending, replacing it with reconciliation between Eliza and Higgins. Both these adaptations were immensely popular. In fact, the musical went on to set a record as the longest running show in the history of musical theater.

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#### **4.1.10 Summing Up**

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*Pygmalion* remains one of the most beloved and frequently staged plays among Shaw's coterie. As the play's controversial production history proves, there was a general discomfort about the ending of the play which points towards the deep-rooted gender bias in society that Shaw was targeting. The image of a woman rejecting the attractions of romance and the comfort of a marriage was a subversive statement that did not sit well with the majority of the audience. At a time when women still did not have the right to vote, the idea of a heroine like Eliza, who rejects the life of silent obedience and compromise expected from women and chooses to prioritize her self-respect over love, caused considerable discomfort. The alteration of the ending by subsequent directors and actors shows a repeated attempt to transform Shaw's feminist vision of women's liberation into a lukewarm, fairy tale "romance".

- *Pygmalion* recounts a low-born, impoverished woman's journey to personal and economic freedom.
- Though the title of the play emphasizes the role of the male creator – “Pygmalion” – it is Shaw's Galatea who is the true protagonist of the play.
- Eliza Doolittle escapes the shackles of class and conventional gender roles to emerge as a stronger individual who does not require masculine validation or support (in Shaw's sequel, Freddy and Eliza remain equal partners in their business and marriage).
- The root of disparity among classes is shown as being mainly economical. As Alfred Doolittle's elevation from a poor dustman to a wealthy moralist proves, in matters of social mobility, money trumps birth and familial lineage.
- Eliza carries the echoes of Ibsen's Nora. She embodies the Shavian ideal of the strong and spirited 'New Woman', who eschews the burden of societal expectations and, thereby, subverts societal oppression.

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#### 4.1.11 Comprehension Exercises

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##### ● Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks

1. Describe Eliza Doolittle's character with reference to her evolution in the course of the play.
2. Examine the character of Henry Higgins. Comment on his relationship with Eliza Doolittle.
3. Examine the character of Colonel Pickering. Comment on his relationship with Eliza Doolittle.
4. Comment on Shaw's treatment of gender roles in his play *Pygmalion*.
5. Critically comment on the title of Shaw's *Pygmalion*. How does Shaw appropriate Ovid's myth in his play?

##### ● Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks

1. Analyze Henry Higgins' role as 'Pygmalion' in Shaw's eponymous play.
2. Examine and analyze two minor women characters in *Pygmalion*. Critically discuss their reaction to and effect on (if any) Eliza.
3. Comment on the character of Alfred Doolittle?

4. In Act V, Alfred Doolittle says that he has been ruined at “the hands of middle-class morality”. Discuss the significance of this statement.
5. Comment on the ending of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Where did the Eliza, Higgins and Colonel Pickering first meet?
2. What is the subtitle of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*?
3. Can *Pygmalion* be categorized as a ‘romance’? State reasons for your answer.
4. Who does Eliza finally marry? Why do you think Eliza marries this person?

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### **4.1.12 Comprehensive Reading**

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1. G.B Shaw and Nicholas Greene. *Pygmalion*. Penguin Classics, 2003. Print.
2. Harold Bloom, *George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.
3. Christopher Innes ed. *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
4. Gareth Griffith. *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
5. Donald P Costello and Bernard Shaw. *The Serpent’s Eye: Shaw and the Cinema*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965.

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## **Unit-2 □ JOHN OSBORNE: *LOOK BACK IN ANGER***

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### **Structure:**

- 4.2.0 Introduction**
- 4.2.1 John James Osborne: A Literary Bio-brief**
- 4.2.2 Osborne and Drama**
- 4.2.3 The Well Made Play, Kitchen Sink Drama and *Look Back in Anger***
- 4.2.4 Sources and Background**
- 4.2.5 Introducing the Characters**
- 4.2.6 Summary with Critical Analysis**
- 4.2.7 Analysing the Plot / Structure /Key Issues in the Major Scenes**
- 4.2.8 The Angry Generation in Different Genres**
- 4.2.9 Themes and Critical Approaches**
- 4.2.10 Title of the Play**
- 4.2.11 Symbols and Images in Look Back in Anger**
- 4.2.12 Summing Up**
- 4.2.13 Comprehension Exercises**
- 4.2.14 Suggested Reading List**

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### **4.2.0 Introduction**

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This unit will introduce you to a play written by John James Osborne, born Dec. 12, 1929, London, Eng.—died Dec. 24, 1994, Shropshire, in fact one of the most powerful of the post war plays (the Second World War). After reading this unit you should be able to:

- note the development of trends in twentieth century English theatre
- understand how the dramatist used his source materials to mould a play that has relevance to the present time while trying to portray post-World War II England.
- the age of the ‘angry young man’

John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* as a perfect critique of the twentieth-century British society, the problem of the passing of time and the changing of eras.

- observe how John Osborne found a form that captured the shapeless attitude and dissatisfaction of the audience in 1956 England and gave it voice.
- the disillusionment with post-war England and continuing inequality

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### 4.2.1 John James Osborne: A Literary Bio-brief

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John James Osborne, born on December 12, 1929 in Fulham, South West London, was an English playwright, screenwriter, actor and critic of the British Post-war Establishment. His father Thomas Godfrey Osborne was a commercial artist and copywriter. His mother, Nellie Beatrice Grove Osborne, was a barmaid in pubs. The death of his father in 1941 when he was a young boy left a great impact on John. Osborne's childhood was spent in near poverty and he suffered from regular prolonged illnesses. The insurance amount left by his father was his only hope for financing his private education at Belmont College, a minor public school in Devon. Osborne attended state schools till twelve; he was awarded a scholarship to attend a minor private school, St. Michael's College, in Barnstaple, Devon. In 1943 while he was 16 he entered school but was expelled from the school in 1945. He hit back the headmaster who slapped him for listening to a forbidden broadcast by Frank Sinatra. He went home to his mother in London after that and briefly tried trade journalism and went on doing a series of jobs writing copy for various trade journals.

He took interest in theatre while working as a tutor for children, and toured with a repertory company. He involved himself as a stage manager and joined acting, with Anthony Creighton's provincial touring company. He made his stage debut in March, 1948, in Sheffield and for the next seven years made the rounds of provincial repertory theatres as an actor. His first play, *The Devil Inside Him*, was written in 1950 with his friend and mentor, Stella Linden was produced in Huddersfield. His second play *Personal Enemy* was written with Anthony Creighton. *Personal Enemy* was staged in regional theatres produced in Harrogate in 1955. His next play *Look Back in Anger* was staged in 1956 as the third production of the newly formed English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre. The success of *Look Back in Anger* changed the life of Osborne and he came to have a highly successful career as playwright. In 1958, Osborne and director Tony Richardson founded Woodfall

Film Productions and produced motion pictures versions of some of Osborne's plays. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* ushered in a new movement in British drama and made him known as the first of the "Angry Young Men." He married Pamela Lane. His next play, *The Entertainer*, was written with Laurence Olivier. Both *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* were adapted for film. Following *The Entertainer*, Osborne continued to have a productive career, writing seventeen more stage plays, eleven plays for television, five screen plays and four books, including two volumes of autobiography.

Osborne was one of the first writers to address Britain's purpose in the post-imperial age. He was the first to question the point of the monarchy on a prominent public stage. During his peak (1956–1966), he helped make contempt an acceptable fact, and argued for the cleaning perception of bad behaviour and bad taste, combining harsh truthfulness with devastating wit. Osborne died in Clun, Shropshire, England, on December 24, 1994

To know more about John Osborne read the following books

⇒ **Read-**

Osborne, John (1982). *A Better Class of Person: An Autobiography*

Patricia D. Denison, ed. *John Osborne: A Casebook*

Taylor, John Russell, ed. *John Osborne: "Look Back in Anger," A Casebook*. 1968. London: Macmillan, 1987.

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## 4.2.2 Osborne and Drama

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'Come with us, Larry and me, to the National,' [Tynan] had said to me earlier. 'And make history.' 'Thank you,' I replied. 'I've already made it.' (John Osborne, *Damn You, England*, 155)

Both the British theatre and the British Empire were in a state of confusion during the decade of the 1950s. With the loss of African colonies, the independence of India, the Marshall Plan of US aid to the reconstitution of Western Europe that gave financial strength but robbed Britain of its pride, and above all, the formation of the Commonwealth of Nations by the London Declaration of 1949 - the British Empire was all but shrinking. Besides, the futile attempts to demonstrate national virility represented by the disastrous Suez adventure of 1956 was a humiliating experience for England. During 1945, the Labour Party led by Clement Atlee won

victory over the Tories and ended the class system. Prosperity for all was the hope of the people. However, such aspirations were short lived, resulting in the return of the Conservatives led by Winston Churchill to power in 1951. The Church of England, too, was out of contact with the daily lives of most Englishmen. London theatre in 1955 was commercial theatre and became “a vast desert” producing emotionally suppressed, middle-class plays, all set in drawing rooms with no talents. The Arts Council of Great Britain formed after World War II to support the arts nationwide was of not much help due to limited funds.

While war and suffering exploded around the nation, the theatre continued to reflect a tiny segment of society, and ignored the rest. The twentieth century British drama reacted to the anarchy that had surrounded the post-war England in all respects: political, social, psychological, economical. Plays produced during that time were light comedies, farces, and mysteries—including Agatha Christie’s *The Mouse Trap*- a successful production. London theatre remained a middle-class; middle-aged theatre. Theatre houses were under the control of a small number of commercial organizations, preferring commercially successful plays. The prosecution and censorship threat from the Lord Chamberlains office was another danger to theatre. Homosexuality in Britain was considered as a serious criminal offence was not legalised in Britain. Therefore, any work talking about it was under threat of censorship. For example, in 1952, both Rodney Ackland’s *The Pink Room* and Terence Rattigan’s *The Deep Blue Sea* were censored from The Lord Chamberlain’s Office, as both had strong homosexual themes. Most of the writers, actors and directors that dominated the theatrical scene in the early 1950s were in fact gay, but because of the social and commercial climate were forced to produce and perform habitually straight characters. Peter Brook comments,

“The theatrical scene, both within London and within many touring enterprises was dominated by works that “represented the safe middle-class milieu and world-view aspirations of the audiences that would come to see them”.

#### ➤ **Decline of the popularity of theatre**

- The increasing gulf between the British society’s interests and the work shown on stage there caused a rift between the public and the stage.
- Advent of television and its popularity had a direct effect upon the number of theatre goers.
- Cinema had also become a well-established form of popular entertainment,

- Many of the grand Victorian Theatres were converted into cinemas.
- Cinema tickets were cheaper and affordable to the lower classes

The desolate picture of Britain's theatre started to change with the socio-political changes and with the new vibration that signalled the way for John Osborne's theatrical explosion in May 1956. Osborne's drama initiated a cultural moment of the Angry Young Man. He captured the state of mind of Britain in the 1950s at the individual level. The play turned Osborne from a struggling playwright into a wealthy and famous angry young man and won him the Evening Standard Drama Award as the most promising playwright of the year.

Alan Sillitoe writes, 'John Osborne didn't contribute to the British theatre: he set off a land-mine called *Look Back in Anger* and blew most of it up' (quoted, Taylor 1968, 185). The old dramatists perished and replaced by new dramatists speaking for a generation who had for so long been silent. The theatre was changed by *Look Back in Anger*, and that it was destroyed by it.

⇒ **Note** - End of British Empire – an inward-looking Britain

**Read more –**

**Rusinko, Susan. *British Drama, 1950 to The Present*, Twayne, 1989.**

This book offers a brief view of developments in British both leading up to and after *Look Back in Anger*.

Taylor, John Russell. *The Angry Theatre*, Hill and Wang, 1969.

Taylor's book deals with the movement in theatre from the production of *Look Back in Anger* to 1968 and examines playwrights who were encouraged and influenced by Osborne.

Elsom, John. *Post-War British Theatre*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976,

Elsom, John. *Post-War British Theatre Criticism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981

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### **4.2.3 The Well Made Play, Kitchen Sink Drama and *Look Back in Anger***

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Starting from 1950's till the 1970's British theatre saw the rise of one of the most important movements: the **Kitchen Sink drama**.

- In Kitchen Sink Theatre – writers wanted to convey the language of commonplace discourse and to surprise with its straightforwardness. Osborne used one-room flat in England, a space where the sleeping area, living area, and kitchen are the same room. The room represents the lower- working class social status of the characters. In this play the kitchen is turned into a kind of public forum, a space of debate and discussions, dominated by male intruders, the characters Jimmy and Cliff. According to Michelene the relationship between sink and psyche is critical to this play as to many others of the time. At one level it is a very clear class statement about the nature of the world represented on stage but on “another level it is the relationship between sink, psyche and gender which is also important. Whose world, dilemmas, emotions, story, is it we are following?”

British theatre before the staging of *Look Back in Anger* followed the model of Victorian dramas, comedies and classical plays. The Victorian plays dealt mostly with polite themes from the late 19th and early 20th century. The idea of the Kitchen Sink drama was a great exposure for British theatre. They have many characteristics that distinguished them as a break from the forms of theatre that went before them. These dramas gained famous in twentieth century British culture for their undaunted anger and criticism directed towards the social, political, and economic establishment, the plays were also important for the way they portrayed the most unforgettable aspects of domestic life.

#### ✓ **Characteristic of Kitchen Sink dramas**

- They gave social message or ideology. This ideology was most often leftist.
- The settings were almost always working class.
- They bring the real lives and social inequality of ordinary working class people to the stage.
- Portrays people - caught between struggles of power, politics, work and social homogenization.

Osborne’s play depicts the raw emotions and living conditions of the working class. This style of theatre was given the name “Kitchen Sink” because of its emphasis on the core domestic issues and sensitive lives of commonplace people.

*Look Back in Anger* gave a voice to the cultural dislocation felt by Britain in this period, ‘to a frustrated, disenfranchised constituency of lower-middleclass, first generation graduates of post-war British education policies’, and opened the door for what would be known as the ‘kitchen sink’ dramatists.

### ➤ *Look Back in Anger* & the Kitchen Sink Tradition

The Kitchen is literally a part of the set in the play. The setting of *Look Back in Anger* was in direct contrast to popular classical or Victorian dramas and comedies which largely centred around the public lives of socially established characters. What the Kitchen Sink Dramas did was they moved the action and emotion of the theatre from depictions of the public space of people's lives into the most intimate of settings. Victorian dramas considered the kitchen to be the realm of the domestic, of females and servants, so excluded it. Kitchen Sink dramas, however, turned this notion around and made the kitchen the centre of familial and social life. For example, in *Look Back in Anger* Porter's attic apartment, the kitchen and living spaces were all one room on the stage. This particular play blurs the boundaries of intimate domestic life and public life and created a realism not seen before in British theatre. Whether social or domestic, the Kitchen Sink drama changed the trajectory of British theatres with many of the authors such as Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney, and John Arden adopting the style and form.

British theatre was dominated by Terence Rattigan and his followers, conservative and middle-class dramatists who created 'well-made plays' about genteel subjects. *After Look Back in Anger*, everything changed. Osborne's hero, Jimmy Porter, was considered to provoke and enrage post-war British audiences. Osborne handled the themes like social injustice as done by Ibsen and Shaw. And like Chekhov, he too talked about such themes like personal failure and national decline. However, he introduced a love of criticism, a brutal sense of humour and an honest aversion of authority that transformed drama forever and started a new age of experimental British theatre.

### ➤ Positive Criticism

Osborne influenced and inspired many writers like Alan Sillitoe a working-class prose writer who felt that *Look Back in Anger* gave them the courage and confidence to tell their own stories.

Arthur Miller spoke highly of the play.

George Devine, described the play as: '*the bomb that would blow a hole in the old theatre and leave a nice-sized gap, too big to be patched up.*'

⇒ Take account of the key terms and the difference between **well-made plays** and **kitchen sink plays**.

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## 4.2.4 Sources and Background

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The cultural background to the play is the rise and fall of the British Empire. *Look Back in Anger* appeared during Britain's transition from Victorian past into the modern twentieth century.

The play was written in seventeen days in a deck chair on Morecambe pier where Osborne was performing in a creaky rep show called *Seagulls over Sorrento*.

The play was an autobiographical piece based on Osborne's unhappy marriage to actress Pamela Lane and their life in cramped accommodation in Derby. Osborne aimed towards a career in theatre, Lane was of a more practical and materialistic persuasion, not taking Osborne's ambitions seriously while cuckolding him with a local dentist.

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## 4.2.5 Introducing the Characters

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### ➤ Jimmy Porter

Jimmy Porter belongs to working class background, one of the new generations who could attend university due to the introduction of government grants in the 1940s. Well-educated and is working on a sweet stall, Jimmy is intelligent, passionate and an idealist. But he feels disappointed by a society that he finds does not want what he has to offer and still works on a system of privilege and class. Jimmy, who lost his father at an early age, had a bitter feeling about everything around him. He aggressively attacks everything that is stagnant and unjust about society, especially the middle class establishment. He attacks his wife who belongs to middle class as he feels he has failed her in her inability to love or support him. He looks back to a time when there were 'good, brave causes' to fight for and is lost in the changing world of the 1950s. As Helena says 'There's no place for people like that anymore...'

⇒ Jimmy is the protagonist of the play, a representative of the working class man.

### ➤ Alison Porter

Alison is from an upper middle class background and has married Jimmy against the wishes of her family. She fell in love with him after meeting him at a party: '*Everything about him seemed to burn...*' By the anger, aggressive atmosphere she is exhausted, frustrated and bitter. She is not able to reach out to Jimmy, understand

him and only turns away from him when he needs her most. She leaves Jimmy because she cannot be with him, but returns because she cannot live without him – *'I knew I was taking on more than I was ever likely to be capable of bearing, but there never seemed to be any choice.'* She feels lost at the death of her baby and her complete breakdown forces Jimmy to become supportive of her.

➤ **Cliff Lewis**

Cliff lives next door to Jimmy and Alison. He is a kind Welshman who acts as a shield between the couple. He is very fond of Alison, but does not seem to be in love with her as Helena suggests. He is dependent on the couple; he feels that he cannot live alone. However, when Alison leaves, Cliff too leaves Jimmy.

⇒ He is shown as easy going, a counterbalance to Jimmy and acts as a shield in the quarrels between Jimmy and Alison.

➤ **Helena Charles**

Helena is an actress in Repertory Theatre, an old friend of Alison's. She represents Alison's old life and is shocked by Jimmy's treatment of her friend. However, like Alison, she falls in love with his passion and energy. It is possible that Helena's engineering of Alison's departure is partly or even wholly to get to Jimmy. However, she leaves quickly when Alison returns as she recognises that it is not her place.

⇒ A catalyst or perhaps driving force in ending Alison's and Jimmy's marriage

➤ **Colonel Redfern**

Colonel Redfern is Alison's father. He stands for all the old-fashioned, middle class values that Jimmy hates. However, when he enters we see he is a kind and fair man who has a kind of respect for Jimmy and is embarrassed about the way he and his wife have treated him. Jimmy feels sorry for him as being a remnant of the Empire *'that can't understand why the sun isn't shining anymore.'*

⇒ Note- Like Jimmy he is a man out of his time and place.

➤ **Hugh Tanner**

Hugh Tanner is Jimmy's friend. Alison and Jimmy lived with him after they were married. He and Alison disliked each other. Hugh and Jimmy had launched a kind of 'class war' on Alison's friends and family. Hugh immigrated to China to escape the re-elected Conservative government and fell out with Jimmy when he refused to go with him.

### ➤ **Hugh's Mother**

Mrs. Tanner becomes a surrogate mother for Jimmy; when he talks of her, he describes her as being a 'good friend' to them both, even going as far as to help set him up with employment,

'And there's Hugh's mum, of course. I'd almost forgotten her. She's been a good friend to us, if you like. She's even letting me buy the sweet-stall off her in my own time. She only bought it for us, anyway.' Jimmy, unsatisfied with his own mother, has substituted her with Mrs. Tanner and developed a fondness for her and the maternal love she provides, Jimmy is very close to her whom he sees as a victim. Alison dismisses her as 'ordinary' – 'A charwoman who married an actor'. Jimmy and she are very fond of each other. She represents Osborne's own mother, who was a barmaid. Alison's account of Jimmy and Mrs. Tanner's bond discloses another aspect, 'Jimmy seems to adore her principally because she has been poor all her life, and she's frankly ignorant'.

### ➤ **Alison's Mother – Mrs Redfern**

Alison's mother never appears in the stage, like Jimmy's mother, Mrs. Tanner she is off-stage but she is referred many a times. In Jimmy's criticism of Alison and her family, Alison's mother is referred many a times. Jimmy hates her for upper class superiority and wishes her death. Readers are shocked at Jimmy's abuses reserved for Alison's mother. "... that old bitch should be dead!"(I,i.p.53). Jimmy insults her: 'Threatened with me, a young man without money, background or even looks, she'd bellow like a rhinoceros in labour—enough to make every male rhino for miles tum white and pledge himself to celibacy' (52). He accuses Alison's mother of spying on him who hires a detective 'to watch me, to see if she can't somehow get me into the *News of the World*' (52). The act of hiring a detective to follow her future son-in-law, allows her to be constructed as appearing to be mistrusting, deceitful and willing to pursue any means in order to protect her daughter. Her resistance to her daughter's marriage to Jimmy was taken by him as an attack on him and all that he represents; a working class, uncouth, stranded young man. Jimmy calls her 'pole-axed rhino', finally defeated on the day of her daughter's wedding.

Jimmy: 'Threatened with me, a young man without money, background or even looks, she'd bellow like a rhinoceros in labour—enough to make every male rhino for miles tum white and pledge himself to celibacy' (52). Alison is constantly criticised for having being born in the upper middle class and scorned at for having

the kind of mother that she has. Jimmy: She will pass away, my friends, leaving a trail of worms gasping for laxatives behind her- from purgatives to purgatory. (11, i. P.53).

Even her husband Colonel Redfern regards her as a dominating and over reactive character.

### ➤ **Jimmy's Father**

Like many left wing British men, Jimmy's father fought in the Spanish Civil War against the Fascists as a volunteer. He died at home and Jimmy sat with him at his bedside.

### ➤ **Jimmy's Mother**

Jimmy's mother suffers the same fate that Alison's mother suffers. We get to know her from Jimmy when he describes the death of his father, he reveals about his mother,

'As for my mother, all she could think about was the fact that she had allied herself to a man who seemed to be on the wrong side of all things. My mother was all for being associated with minorities, provided they were the smart, fashionable ones'.

Jimmy's description of his mother constructs her as lacking in emotion and missing the nurturing characteristics that are often associated with the maternal female. His mother was incapable of love and could only pity the dying man, 'My mother looked after him without complaining, and that was about all. Perhaps she pitied him. I suppose she was capable of that'.

Osborne had a problematic relationship with his own mother, and like his character Jimmy, he states that he hated his mother because she was "the grabbing uncaring crone of my childhood". It also did not go down well with the young Osborne that she criticized him publicly when he was growing up, and showed no grief when his beloved father died. What irritated him was her refusal to show him the maternal love he craved for.

J.B. Priestley, Alison's friend Webster and Jimmy's former girlfriend Madeline are introduced, abandoned, and then pop up again later in the conversation of the characters only.

### Stop and Think

If you see the characters cast above and then read the play, you will see that some characters are not physically present in the text, and yet they matter to the plot. Such characters show the importance of absence/presence or past/present binaries in modern drama.

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## 4.2.6 Summary with Critical Analysis

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Setting/Stage direction

“Part of the immediate ‘shock’ of *Look Back in Anger* lay in the impact of its setting”

(Lacey 29)

If you notice the opening of the play, you will find that the setting is a one-room flat in a large Midland Town... a fairly large attic room... most of the furniture is simple, and rather old. There is a double bed, a shelf of books. Below the bed is a heavy chest of drawers, covered with books, neckties and odds and ends...a small wardrobe.... two deep shabby leather armchairs. Osborne made use of a full box-set which is a convention of naturalist fourth-wall drama.

### Note- meanings

- **Box-set** - the ‘box set’ is normally used for realistic dramas on stage, consisting of three walls and an invisible ‘fourth wall’ facing the audience.
- **The Fourth Wall** – is a theatrical term for the imaginary ‘wall’ that exists between actors on stage and the audience. Visibly, no such wall really exists; it is only to keep up the illusion of theatre. The actor only imagines that they cannot hear or see the spectators.

### Act One

#### ● Stage direction

In the previous Unit on G. B Shaw’s play, you have come across the importance of stage directions that help to script a variety of things. In this play too, you will notice that there are elaborate instructions regarding facial expression, gesture, vocal delivery, actions, costumes, space and props used. For example, the opening scene of *Look Back in Anger* gives details of the scenic arrangements like lay-out of the

stage, furnishings, props, for characters/actors specific instructions like delivery of dialogue, bodily gesture, emotions and feelings. Dialogues contain implicit stage directions. In this sense, modern drama often becomes an author-director's play.

When the curtain rises, we see Jimmy Porter and Cliff Lewis, seated on opposite sides of the stage and reading newspapers. There are other newspapers too beside them and between them, forming "a jungle of newspapers and weeklies." Jimmy is smoking a pipe. In the first stage direction, Osborne defines the nature of the characters of both Jimmy and Cliff and also Alison. He describes Jimmy as "a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice" and says, "to be as vehement as he is to be almost non-committal." He describes Cliff as much more gentle—Jimmy tends to push people away, while Cliff draws them to him. Jimmy's wife Alison Porter stands ironing clothes on the left side of the stage, near Cliff and looks elegant in this working class apartment. The stage directions say that she is ironing one of Jimmy's shirts and wearing another. She is playing a double role here - servicing the domestic scene and subtly demonstrating to the audience through the visual way that she is Jimmy's property. Jimmy repetitively tries to test the limits of Alison's endurance and patience. The stage directions shed light on his desperate attempt to displease and hurt,

"He looks up at both of them for reaction, but Cliff is reading, and Alison is intent on her ironing... He has lost them, and he knows it, but he won't leave it" (p. 14)

"The tired appeal in her voice has pulled him up suddenly. But he soon gathers himself for a new assault."(p.19)

### ● Effects and Symbols

Another important aspect is the sound effects used in the play.

Act 1 has one major offstage noise, the church bells which drive Jimmy to distraction; Act 2 begins with another that is Jimmy playing his jazz trumpet. Saxophone playing – denotes Jimmy's presence when not on stage, signifying his psychological dominance.

The selection of visual images like – men sitting reading newspapers, women ironing, the toy bear and squirrel that describing Alison and Jimmy's conjugal-emotional life, and the intelligent and less delicate similarity of later acts with former, the effect of the sound - all function in a way to create a world of familiarity.

All these are put together with a purpose - they hold significance representing the recurring nature of life and that one cannot break from past. For e.g. Helena replaces Alison at the ironing-board; Jimmy and Alison return to their world of bears and squirrels at the end.

### ● The Action

The play opens with the main protagonist Jimmy Porter and his wife Alison spending a Sunday afternoon together in their small attic flat in the Midlands with their friend Cliff. It is a small room with simple, sparse furniture. There are “*books, neckties, and odds and ends, including a large, tattered toy teddy bear and soft, woolly squirrel.*” The only light comes from a skylight, so the room is somewhat dim. Alison irons, while the men read the newspapers. In the dialogue, we learn that Jimmy has never studied at a “red-brick” university but is from a “white tile” (new) one, and now runs a sweet-stall, helped by Cliff. Jimmy, who is about 25 years old, is described as “*a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike.*” They discuss the articles in the paper by the Bishop of Bromley who urges all Christians to support the manufacture of the H-bomb and denies the existence of class distinctions. Jimmy discusses some of the other odd articles in the paper. When Alison suggests that they go to the movies, Jimmy declares that he will not have his evening ruined.

After sometime Jimmy starts assaulting Alison calling her a member of the satisfied upper class, who can't actually feel anything. He accuses her, calling her friends “militant”. This attitude shows the struggle that he realizes between the upper classes and the working classes. “They're “vague,” he says, signifying that this absence of feeling makes them senseless than Jimmy himself is. For example, Nigel is an example of the ways that upper class people get power. Nigel wants to be a politician, and Jimmy thinks he'll end up a success, though he and his political pals have been “plundering and fooling everybody for generations.” He doesn't have much matter, but he has learnt to “plunder” people through his high-class education. Jimmy continues with his insults hoping for some kind of reaction from Alison. Yet from the stage direction it is clear that she is used to Jimmy's attacks, and won't give him the reaction that he wants.

⇒ Note Jimmy is angry and bitter, yet he is also tender and intense in his zealous love. Osborne attempts to paint Jimmy as a very masculine character. Look at the

stage it has very little props and they represent the working class household. Osborne is very specific with his stage directions.

- What we get from the Opening Scene:

Jimmy and Alison's one room apartment symbolizes 1950's domesticity. The room is filled with old furniture, half-read newspapers, and old clothes. Jimmy's political and social persuasions become evident here as well when he mocks a faux column in the paper written by the "Bishop of Bromley." He is opposed to any kind of organisation whether it is related to politics or to religion. Alison is from an upper middle class family for whom Jimmy has much contempt. In this scene, Jimmy bursts at Alison, Cliff and the world in general, especially attacking Alison's family. The spirited teasing between Cliff and Jimmy contradicts the deep tension and anger beneath the surface of the relationships between the three characters. Jimmy is concerned with "enthusiasm" and "living." He portrays others as inactive and sluggish. Jimmy's anger is a result of his inability to excite similar feelings in the people around him. During a mock fight between Cliff and Jimmy, Alison's arm is burned. As Cliff helps her, she confides in him that she is pregnant.

Alison and Cliff's affectionate relationship is also revealed in this scene. It is a strange relationship because the two seem to have a close connection yet this does not seem to inspire any jealous feelings in Jimmy. This relationship between the three shows how Cliff's character is integral to Jimmy and Alison's relationship. Alison is able to get the affection that she desires from Cliff while Cliff also provides the masculine friendship and confidence that Jimmy desires. Alison gets a phone call from her friend Helena who is coming to stay with them. This provokes a violent outburst from Jimmy, who tells Alison that he wishes she might have a child that would die.

⇒ Note - make an attempt to understand the basis of the argument between the characters and their attitudes and the relationship that they share among themselves.

Notice how the opening scene uses stereotypical gender references to define the characters. For example - Jimmy is smoking a pipe and reading a paper while Alison is ironing.

### **Act Two Scene One**

The scene opens two weeks later. Helena Charles is introduced. Alison and Helena her friend who has been staying with them, are preparing to go to church.

Alison tells Helena about her relationship with Jimmy, their courtship and early days of marriage when he and his friend Hugh had gate-crashed the parties of Alison's friends and family whom they despised. Helena is described as the same age and build as Alison, but with a "sense of matriarchal authority". Helena asks Alison if she is in love with Cliff, and Alison denies it. Helena tells Alison that she must either tell Jimmy that he is going to be a father or else leave him. Alison points towards the stuffed squirrel and teddy bear in the corner of the room and tells Helena that those animals represent the two of them. She tells her about the game they play in which she pretends to be a squirrel and he pretends to be a bear. It was the one way of escaping from everything. Helena warns that she must fight Jimmy or else he will kill her.

⇒ Note - In this scene Alison explains the symbolism of the bear and squirrel. She explains that by taking on the persona of these stuffed animals they both are able to have "dumb, uncomplicated affection for each other." Their games of squirrel and bear show how the only way that both can truly love each other is by being absolutely detached from the real world. As students of drama, you need to understand how symbolism becomes important in conveying the minutiae of the crises of modern life.

Cliff and Jimmy enter for tea and when Jimmy realises that Alison is going to church he verbally attacks her. Jimmy begins to sing a song that he himself has composed. It's a song about how he is tired of women and would rather drink and be alone than have to deal with their problems. Jimmy then criticises Alison's mother. Jimmy is particularly cruel to older, upper class women. Alison's mother is the archetype of such a character. Helena asks why Jimmy is so stubborn and if he thinks that the world has really treated him badly. Alison interrupts, telling her not to take away his suffering because "*he'd be lost without it.*" Jimmy abuses Helena and calls her "*an expert in the New Economics — the Economics of the Super nature.*" His frustration is revealed when tells Helena that "*I knew more about — love...betrayal...and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life.*" Helena rises, tells Alison that it's time to go, and exits.

Jimmy is angry on Alison for not understanding his sufferings. He calls her a "Judas" and "phlegm". She tells him that all she wants is peace and goes to the bed to put on her shoes while Jimmy continues to rant. Helena enters with two prayer books and tells Jimmy that there is a phone call for him. He is interrupted by a phone call. While he is out of the room, Helena tells Alison she has sent a telegram to her father to come and get her. Jimmy informs about Hugh's mother serious health issue

and asks Alison to come with him to see the ailing old woman. Alison leaves and goes to church. Jimmy equates church going with Alison's past, a past that like a knight in shining armour, he rescued her from. Alison's going to church, Jimmy considers, is a breach of allegiance to him and this uses this as justification for his further vicious humiliation of her.

⇒ Remember Jimmy feels the church to be simply a puppet of political and social power. You could relate this with Jimmy's earlier sarcasm on the Bishop of Bromley

### **Act Two Scene Two**

Act 2 Scene 2 begins the following evening. Alison's father has arrived to pick her. In their conversation Alison reveals facets of her relationship with Jimmy. The Colonel is a handsome man in his late sixties. He is slightly withdrawn. He was a dedicated and strict soldier for forty years. He feels disturbed and bewildered by everything that is happening to his daughter. He inquires about Jimmy, to which Alison replies that he has gone to London to visit Mrs. Tanner. Alison even reports how Jimmy insults him. She tells him that Jimmy believes he is a leftover from the "Edwardian Wilderness."

⇒ **Read More-** The Edwardian period in British culture. It was a period in the early twentieth century during the reign of King Edward VII in which elite British culture was influential in both fashion and ideas throughout Continental Europe. This period represents both the high water mark of British culture but also the beginning of the end for the prominence of Great Britain.

Helena arrives and reveals she will be staying that evening. Cliff enters – he is sad to see Alison go and angry with Helena. After Alison leaves, he leaves Helena alone to tell Jimmy when he gets back. Jimmy enters, having seen Alison leaving in the car. He is angry and upset – Hugh's mother has died. He directs his anger at Helena who first slaps and then kisses him.

⇒ Note - How Osborne's argues that the past has definite consequences for the present with Jimmy being compared to Colonel. The uncertainties of both Jimmy's world and that of the Colonel

This scene is symbolic and the main purpose of the scene is only to highlight the complex understanding of Jimmy's view of the past to the audience. As Alison prepares to leave, she tells her father that, "*You're hurt because everything is*

*changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it.*” Jimmy is disappointed because he views the present-day as the same as the past and sees no future for himself or anyone else. The Colonel is upset because the present is not like the past. He sees his best days as behind him. The problem is same viewed from different angles. In the Colonel’s case, the past creates resignation and confusion in the present. For Jimmy, the past creates sluggishness and anger.

### **Act Three Scene One**

This scene echoes the play’s first scene which was a domestic scene. Jimmy and Cliff are in their same places. Helena, who is now living with Jimmy, is ironing while Cliff and Jimmy read the papers. They read the papers and Jimmy complains about the lack of imagination in what are supposed to be the “posh” papers. Helena irons in a corner just as Alison did in Act I. Things have changed only slightly in their lives. A similar dialogue takes place as in Act One, where Jimmy teases Helena. Helena only brings a kind of bitterness into their relationship. Jimmy, who is fanatically opposed to her religious tendencies, believes that traditional religion represents the past. For Jimmy, religion has no place in modern society, or if it does it must take a vastly different form, such as African American religion which relies on strong expressions of emotion and personal feeling. When Helena leaves the room, Cliff tells Jimmy he is leaving – he feels that ‘it’s not the same’. Helena and Jimmy seem happy together – till Alison returns in the life of Jimmy.

⇒ Note – Jimmy comment on Cliff being a good friend and idealizes Cliff’s friendship just as he does Hugh and Mrs. Tanner and every other relationship in his life.

This scene also contains Jimmy’s most famous speech in the play. He believes that there are no longer any worthy causes to die for. Jimmy Porter clings to the Spanish Civil War, in which his father fought:

*‘I suppose people of our generation aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids. There aren’t any good, brave causes left...No, there’s nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women.’* (Osborne, 1960: 84–5)

Previous generations, represented by Colonel Redfern, were the last to sacrifice themselves for their country and their belief in a right way to live. According to Jimmy, the world is a subjective place now. There is a poverty of ideals in the

modern world. Jimmy, thus, is a character trapped between his nostalgia for the past and his assessment of his present prospects.

⇒ Observe the disappointment expressed end of faith in grand narratives- ‘There aren’t any good, brave causes left.’

Note - the theme– Individualism versus social conformity

### **Act Three Scene Two**

In this scene Helena and Alison talk while Jimmy plays the trumpet next door. Alison has come back ‘out of morbid curiosity’. She tells Helena that she came “*to convince myself that everything I remembered about this place had really happened to me once.*” Her return and the fact that she has lost her baby makes Helena feel guilty and she feels she cannot stay. Helena says that she has discovered what is wrong with Jimmy — “*he was born out of his time.*” Alison agrees. Helena then tells her that things are over between her and Jimmy. She still believes in good and evil and she knows she cannot continue to live in this way with him. Helena’s conclusion at the end of the play establishes her as the moral compass of all the characters. Alison tells her on the one hand that she should not feel guilty for staying with Jimmy while on the other hand her questions and reassurance make Helena re-evaluate her decisions. In the end, it is her sense of wrong-doing — stealing Alison’s husband — that makes her leave. This morality is represented by the church bells that ring throughout various scenes of the play and which ring at the end. With her renewed sense of right and wrong Helena represents an alternative to the subjective meaninglessness that Jimmy projects onto the modern world.

⇒ Note- Who is the moral compass in the play?

Helena’s strong sense of right and wrong allows her to make a final judgment in the play’s last act that her relationship with Jimmy is an illusion of love.

Alison begs Helena not to leave as she is worried about Jimmy but Helena calls Jimmy in and leaves. Jimmy tells Alison how he felt abandoned by her. Jimmy tells them they are both trying to escape the pain of being alive and that one cannot fall into love “*without dirtying up your hands.*” As Helena leaves, Jimmy leans against the window and blurts out, “*Oh, those bells!*” Alison begins to leave but Jimmy stops her. He tells her she denied him something when she didn’t send any flowers to the funeral. He asks her if she remembers the night they met. He tells her he admired her relaxed spirit and that he knew she was what he wanted. Alison moves to the table and cries silently.

⇒ Observe - The problem with Jimmy is he is still so trapped with the past that his extreme emotion and turmoil seem to bring anarchy to his life and to the lives of those around him. Why do you think did Jimmy find a level of comfort with Helena that he never seems to have with Alison?

Alison cries out and wants to be “a lost cause” and “corrupt and futile.” She wished Jimmy to see her and feel her pain, “*so stupid, and ugly and ridiculous. This is what he’s been longing for me to feel...I’m in the fire and all I want is to die!*” She tells him she is “*in the mud at last!*” Realizing her pain, he stops her and kneels with her. He tries to comfort her and then, with a “mocking, tender irony” begins to tell her that they’ll be together as a bear and a squirrel. He tells her he’s “a bit of a sappy, scruffy sort of a bear” but that he’ll protect her from the cruel traps even though she’s “none too bright.” She laughs a bit and then softly adds, “Oh, poor, poor, bears!” They embrace as the curtain closes.

So can you understand the different levels at which Jimmy and Alison’s playful game of bear and squirrel operate in the play?

⇒ Note –Osborne shows how to solve the problems and cope with them - the only way for people of modernity to truly understand and cope with the world around them is to create fiction.

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## 4.2.7 Analysing the Plot / Structure

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Osborne uses this closed-cycle technique to restore actual life to the stage and to convey the tediousness and episodic nature of everyday routine life. *Look Back in Anger* has a circular structure in terms of its plot and setting at least: the three acts start and finish in the same place, Jimmy’s flat, at the same time, a Sunday morning, with the same setting with the characters doing the same actions in the third and first act: Jimmy and Cliff engaged in their everlasting discussion about Sunday’s papers and Helena and Alison engaged with the ironing-board and dressed in the same way, wearing a shirt of Jimmy’s. All events take place in one location over several months. Cyclical structure: Act III plays like a repetition of the opening scene, except that Alison has been replaced by Helena. The furniture is simple and rather old: a double bed, dressing table, book shelves, chest of drawers, dining table, and three chairs, two shabby leather arm chairs. The dull setting of the play highlights the difference between the uncompromising Jimmy and the dull reality of the world

surrounding him. The play follows the traditional pattern of the well-made play: exposition, climax or complication or denouncement, final resolution of the action.

### **Exposition Act 1:**

All the major characters are introduced, either on stage or in the dialogue and the audience learns about their lives. Alison's pregnancy is mentioned and Helena's imminent arrival is discussed.

### **Complication Act 2:**

Alison and Jimmy's situation is complicated by: Helena's arrival, the death of Hugh's mother and the arrival of Alison's father with whom she leaves. Helena tells Jimmy about Alison's pregnancy at the end of the Act which leads in to the conclusion.

### **Denouement Act 3:**

Alison returns, having lost her baby, the situation moves to a kind of resolution, with Jimmy and Alison together again. The shift in their relationship leads to a hopeful ending. Thematically however, the element of hope in the ending is a debatable proposition, and we shall come to that later.

## **KEY ISSUES IN THE MAJOR SCENES**

### **Act One**

Provides context of the play and gives background to the action/storyline. The period – over ten years after the end of II World War, austerity, the new importance of socialism, the changing relationship between the classes.

Introduces key characters and establishes central themes and issues –

Education and class: Jimmy is fiercely proud of his working-class origins and despises all other classes. Yet we learn from Cliff that he has 'posh' relatives. He appears to be well educated and taunts Cliff for his attempts to improve his education.

The role of women: Alison is treated as a kind of household servant by both men but especially by Jimmy.

Jimmy attacks modern society. He thinks people lack enthusiasm for life and have little concern for others.

Patriotism - good or bad?

### **ACT 2 Scene 1**

This act introduces the ideas of Religion: one of Jimmy's pet hates. It is connected with his father's death - 'certain god-fearing gentlemen there had made such a mess of him he didn't have long left to live.' The church bells every Sunday are a reminder to him. Alison going to church with Helena looks to him like a terrible betrayal.

### **ACT 2 Scene 2**

This act is important because it gives an idea of Class division and British society in the 1950s. Example: The Colonel's story of leaving India is an example.

Explains the reason why Jimmy married Alison. Friendship between Cliff and Jimmy is also highlighted.

### **ACT 3 Scene 1**

Speaks of Jimmy's relationships with women- What does he want from them? He isn't sure. Jimmy's hostility towards women: '*Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death?*' All of his savagery in the play is directed against women - Alison's mother, his own mother, his various lovers, the landlady, Alison and Helena. Significant departures in this regard are Hugh's mom – Mrs Tanner, and Madeline – his adolescent love.

Why do you think do we see these differences in Jimmy's attitude to women?

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## **4.2.8 The Angry Generation in Different Genres**

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"Angry Young Men" movement Kitchen sink realism is often related to the rise of the Angry Young Men, a category applied to some British playwrights and novelists who became popular in the mid-1950s. Their political views were initially labelled as radical, sometimes even revolutionary, and they described social alienation of different kinds. Authors placed by critics in this category include. John Osborne, whose play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) led to the term "Angry theatre" (coined by critic John Russell Taylor); Arnold Wesker; Harold Pinter; John Braine; and Alan Sillitoe. Drama critic John Heilpern wrote that *Look Back in Anger* expressed such "immensity of feeling and class hatred" that it altered the course of English theatre.

### **➤ THE ANGRY YOUNG MEN**

In the 1950s a new literary movement emerged in Britain: the Angry Young

Men. The great pioneer of this new kind of literature was John Osborne. His revolutionary play *Look Back in Anger* was the beginning of the era of the Angry Young Men. The Fifties became known as “The Angry Decade” (Heilpern, 2006: 164). These young men were not a part of any organized movement but were, instead, individuals angry at a post-Victorian Britain that refused to acknowledge their social and class alienation. The play was a real innovation because the anger of its protagonist Jimmy Porter symbolized the general condition of Britain’s lower middle class in the 1950s:

*“What was new and struck the public nerve in Look Back in Anger, was the sense of naked honesty that came from the identification between author and protagonist, and the tone of self-lacerating (but generalized) anger”* (Innes, *Modern British Drama: 1890-1990* :1890-1990 103).

Jimmy Porter represents a culture that suffered longing for the past glory. Porter is often considered to be literature’s inspiring example of the angry young man. Jimmy is angry at the social and political structures that he believes has kept him from achieving his dreams and aspirations. He directs his anger towards his friends and, most notably, his wife Alison. Jimmy’s rage and anger is his expression of pent-up emotion and his need for life in a world which has become uninteresting. This anger became a symbol of the rebellion against the political and social malaise of British culture. His anger is destructive to those around him.

The works of the Angry Young Men had a rebellious character. Their heroes rejected anything that would hold back their growth as individuals: *“they will not accept anything that dulls the intensity of feeling, the proclivity to act and react to their environment. They refuse to join a society that will deny them anything because it is „out of their class”* (Kroll 557).

Some critics confused their longing for individual development with a total rejection of society. Actually, the heroes’ rebellion is rather quiet:

*“They do not reject all society; none of the heroes leave England. They dissent; they run away from what they do not like. Detach, but don’t destroy. If necessary, escape from an impossible situation and find one’s own comfortable niche.”* (Kroll 557)

● **Read:**

1. Kroll, Morton. *“The Politics of Britain’s Angry Young Men.”* The Western Political Quarterly 12.2 (1959): 555-557. JSTOR. Web. 19 May 2010.

2. Skovmand, Michael, and Steffen Skvovmand, ed. *The Angry Young Men*: Osborne, Sillitoe, Wain, Braine, Amis. Oslo: Akademisk Forlag, 1975.

The 1950s - the end of an era with social reforms and the beginning of a period with little state interference.

The age of wealth, individual moneymaking and no public commitment nor enthusiasm for political or social reasons caused anxiety and disillusionment, especially among the working classes.

The cynicism and resentment of the Angry Young Men is clear evidence of the despondency inflicted by the wretched state of Britain in the 1950s. (Skovmand, 1975: 18)

⇒ Note - The Angry Young Men were commonly associated with left-wing aspirations. In their works they accused the former political and social situation of Britain, a state being ruled by the Conservative Party.

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## 4.2.9 Themes and Critical Approaches

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The major theme of *Look Back in Anger* is social protest. Osborne probed into personal relationships and bared their social determinants. Even though Jimmy Porter was born in a working-class family; the play cannot be labelled as a working-class play. Its protagonist Jimmy Porter no longer belongs to the working classes, because he is “*first-generation, university-educated, emerging middle-class*” (Heilpern, 2006: 174). Jimmy dropped out of university since he no longer felt at ease with his emerging new social status. He did not want to lose his pure link with the working classes in which he was born, but it was already too late. He has arrived in a no-man’s land, stuck in-between “*the working class, to which he belongs emotionally, and the middle classes, to which he belongs by right of education*” (Skovmand, 1975: 86).

### **Class Conflict**

The play announced the emergence of a new class: the educated working class. Jimmy Porter hailed as the spokesman of the new younger generation (Taylor, “Ten Years of the English Stage Company” 123). Jimmy Porter is the bearer of stereotyped class images. He describes his friend Cliff as an unwitting person because he belongs to the working class: “*Well, you are ignorant. You’re just a peasant*” (Osborne, 1960: 3). He continues his conversation by pointing to the supposed literacy of his

upper-middle-class wife Alison: “(to Alison) What about you? You’re not a peasant are you?” (Osborne, 1960: 3). A few moments later, the battle *of the classes returns*:  
*Jimmy*:

Why do you bother? You can’t understand a word of it. Cliff: Uh huh. Jimmy: You’re too ignorant.

Cliff: Yes, and uneducated. Now shut up, will you?

*Jimmy*: Why don’t you get my wife to explain it to you? She’s educated. That’s right, isn’t it? (Osborne, 1960: 3)

This scene is a good example of Jimmy’s position in-between the uneducated working-class Cliff and educated upper-middle-class Alison. Of course these labels are all Jimmy’s own. Osborne depicted Cliff as the essential counterbalance to Alison in order to present Jimmy’s dilemma physically onstage: “*His attraction towards Cliff as a romanticized image of the proletariat and his ambivalent relationship with Alison – on the one hand repulsion because of the values she represents and on the other sexual and emotional attractions*” (Skovmand, 1975: 87).

The flat is the replica of the outside world where Jimmy wages the struggle of the classes. Jimmy is aware that he is a displaced person in a society in which “*the wrong people [are] going hungry, the wrong people being loved, the wrong people dying*” (Osborne, 1960: 101). His running of a sweet-stall could be an indicator of his denial to recognize his new place in society. Alison’s father, Colonel Redfern, does not understand Jimmy’s choice: “Sweet-stall. It does seem an extraordinary thing for an educated young man to be occupying himself with. Why should he want to do that, of all things” (Osborne, 1960: 66). Skovmand distinguishes two possible reasons for Jimmy’s adherence to a sweet-stall: If this is meant as more than a purely private protest, it is futile; if on the other hand it is as means of keeping his wife in social and economic circumstances which are unusual and embarrassing for her, then Jimmy is definitely successful in his line of work: “The Lady Pusillanimous [Alison] has been promised a brighter easier world than old Sextus [Jimmy] can ever offer her.” (1975: 87)

Heilpern stated reasons behind the popularity of *Look Back in Anger* are that it was thrillingly new in the 1950s: “*It was the first British play that openly dramatized bruising emotion, and it was the first to give the alienated lower classes and youth*

*of England a weapon.*” (2006: 184) Jimmy Porter spoke for a large segment of the British population in 1956 when he ranted about his alienation from a society in which he was denied any meaningful role. Osborne saw his play as a weapon with which ordinary people could break down the class barriers.

Jimmy’s alienation from Alison comes precisely because he cannot break through her “cool,” her unwillingness to feel deeply even during sexual intercourse with her husband. He criticizes her in a harsh attempt to get her to strike out at him, to stop “sitting on the fence” and make a full commitment to her real emotions; he wants to force her to feel and to have vital life. He calls her “Lady Pusillanimous” because he sees her as too cowardly to commit to anything Jimmy is anxious to give a great deal and is deeply angry because no one seems interested enough to take from him, including his wife. He says, “*My heart is so full, I feel ill—and she wants peace!*”

⇒ **Read** –

Heilpern, John. John Osborne: A Patriot for Us. London: Chatto & Windus, 2006. Print.

### **Identity Crisis**

The question of identity and the confusion over it is one of the major issues that affect all the characters of the play.

Jimmy scolds everyone around him to open up freely to honest feelings. He is trapped in his own problems of social identity. He doesn’t seem to fit in anywhere. As Colonel Redfern points out, operating a sweet-stall seems an odd occupation for an educated young man. Jimmy looks upon enduring suffering and being a participant in the pains of life as the only way to find, or “earn,” one’s true identity. As we see in the play, he can embrace Alison only after she has suffered the unspeakable pain of the loss of her unborn child and has come back to him.

Helena discovers that she can be happy only if she lives according to her perceived principles of right and wrong.

Colonel Redfern is caught out of his time. The England he left as a young army officer no longer exists. Jimmy calls him “just one of those sturdy old plants left over from the Edwardian wilderness that can’t understand why the sun isn’t shining anymore,” and the Colonel avers with this view.

Cliff does seem to have a strong sense of 'who he is', accepts that, and will move on with his life.

### **Anger and Hatred**

Jimmy Porter is full of anger. His anger is directed at those he loves because they refuse to have strong feelings, at a society that did not fulfil promises of opportunity, and at those who snugly assume their places in the social and power structure and who do not care for others. He lashes out in anger because of his deeply felt helplessness. When he was ten years old he watched his idealist father dying a painful death for over a year. He vividly remembers his father talking for hours, "pouring out all that was left of his life to one bewildered little boy." Jimmy says, "You see, I learnt at an early age what it was to be angry—angry and helpless. And I can never forget it."

### **Indifference and Passivity**

Alison is the direct target of Jimmy's attack, her indifference and passivity are merely the immediate representations of the attitudes that Jimmy sees as undermining the whole of society. It is the self-satisfied weakness of the society that infuriates Jimmy. When speaking of Alison's brother Nigel, he says, "*You've never heard so many well-bred commonplaces coming from beneath the same bowler hat.*"

The Church according to Jimmy has lost relevance to contemporary life. The Church of England was out of contact with the daily lives of most Englishmen. The Church is not simply a spiritual leader but also owner of vast properties and thus a member of the land-holding class.

Jimmy quotes the fictional Bishop of Bromley that he is upset because someone has suggested that he supports the rich against the poor. He denies class distinctions and says, "*The idea has been persistently and wickedly fostered by—the working classes!*" Jimmy sees the Church as providing an easy escape from facing the pain of living in the here and now—and thus precluding any real redemption.

### **Problems of nostalgia**

Jimmy Porter's idea of the good society is drawn from the past. His spell of attack on Alison's colonial family is mitigated by jealousy: "The Edwardian brigade does make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms ... if you've no world of your own, it's rather

pleasant to regret the passing of someone else's." (Osborne, 1960) There is also the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War (in which Jimmy's father was mortally wounded), the time he harks back to when he speaks of there being 'no good, brave causes left'. And although still in his twenties, Jimmy seems to have passed his own golden age, represented by his offstage trumpet: "He had his own jazz band once" (Osborne, 1960:44) Alison says. "That was when he was still a student, before I knew him." (Osborne, 1960:44) Jimmy's search for a cause even leads him towards a contemplative nostalgia for the plea of a still taboo subject — homosexuality. He searches for a cause and his sadness that there is no more patriotism left of which he can be a part, seems to lead him to comment on homosexuality:

"Sometimes I almost envy old Gide and the Greek Chorus boys. Oh, I'm not saying it mustn't be hell for them a lot of the time. But, at least they seem to have a cause- not a particularly good one it's true. But plenty of them seem to have a revolutionary fire about them, which is more than you can say for the rest of us..." (Osborne, 1960:36)

**Note:**

Old Gide: this refers to the French novelist Andre Gide who was homosexual. André Gide was a French author and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947.

Jimmy's inability to identify a social cause for his heroic passions leads him to pull all his energy into domestic war with Alison. Later, Helena states even more specifically that Jimmy Porter's problem is that he was born not before his time but after it. "There's no place for people like that any longer – in sex, or politics, or anything. That's why he's so futile." (Osborne, 1960: 111) Many of these themes of nostalgia in the play also revolve around Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, who had served in the British army in colonial India. Jimmy says that Colonel Redfern is nostalgic for the "Edwardian" past — early 20th century England, before World War I, when things were supposedly simpler and more peaceful. Other characters also feel for the past, but for different reasons: they long for an era characterized by a leisurely life for rich Britons and greater worldwide power for the British Empire.

**Sexuality/Sexual morality**

Sexuality is one the agenda of the play both in its text and in its sub-text. In Act 1 towards the climax, Jimmy gives a speech about Alison's sexuality and reproductive

potential which is an example of brutal irony. We know that she is pregnant but Jimmy is not aware of the truth and curses her very badly in a verbal attack:

“If only something- something would happen to you to wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child and it would die.....” (Osborne, 1960: 37)

Jimmy associates sexuality and motherhood as a part of the same link – femaleness. Alison is seen not only as sexually voracious, but as a vindictive mother who is stopping Jimmy from giving birth to himself, finding his meaningful identity as a man. So he desires Alison’s ultimate humiliation and even wishes that her sexuality and capacity for motherhood be simultaneously ‘destroyed’. Therefore, when she returns at the end of the play to him, he is quiet triumphant that she is defeated, lost and suffering therefore able to be ‘tender’.

The post war social reforms were aimed to inspire the traditional model of male breadwinner and female homemaker. Family allowances—weekly cash benefits to families with children—encouraged childbearing. In the twentieth century British society there was a disturbing change taking place in the society in the attitude towards sex and sexuality. In the play Osborne has portrayed it in a striking manner in the opening of the play when Jimmy and Cliff are introduced to the audience from behind the Sunday newspaper. The contents of the paper are an object of Jimmy’s satirical bitterness– bishops, nuclear weapons, and repressive sexual morality. The play explores a particular kind of post war masculine identity. The association between class, social position and sexual anxiety are vividly shown in the play, where class resentment is inseparable from an antagonism towards, and fear of women. The best example is Jimmy’s disregard for Alison’s mother. This is the example of linking of class arrogance with sexual emasculation.

Sexual passion, which offers Jimmy an intermittent escape, however fails to solve his complications. He made sex an area of challenge and revenge in the deliberate class war between Jimmy and Alison. Jimmy tells about his wife: “she has the passion of python. She just devours me every time, as if I were some large rabbit” (Osborne, 1960: 43). ‘Python’ as a metaphor symbolises Jimmy’s fear of female sexuality and maternal power. Alison’s ability to give birth is one of Jimmy’s fears about female sexuality. For that reason, he wants Alison to get pregnant and lose the child.

Jimmy is even opposed to middle-class morality. According to Alison’s own statement to Cliff, Jimmy was quite angry with her virginity, as if she had deceived

him in some strange way. Jimmy seemed to think that an untouched woman would defile him. Alison's virginity belongs to her middle class values. In the post-war era, premarital sexuality was not approved by the society. However, Alison's virginity disturbs Jimmy not physically but socially. This virginity reminds Jimmy of middle class morals about female sexuality.

Alison's friend Helena is also targeted by Jimmy; he teases her virginity or the trademark of her dress, which marks her middle class values throughout Act II. Helena's clothes are another indication for Jimmy to tease. She wears fashionable, expensive clothes which signify her financial situation. She belongs to a rich middle class family and is used to such expensive habits. He calls her "evil-minded little virgin" (Osborne, 1960: 73).

Education continued to segregate students by gender: an official 1959 report by the Central Advisory Council on Education advised that girls be taught differently during their last two years in secondary school, with an emphasis on her direct interest in dress, personal appearance and in problems of human relations. Popular magazines such as *Girl* and *Woman's Own* reinforced the image of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, surrounded by domestic comforts.

In the play the role of women is basically restricted to the conventionally feminine, to a secondary role, to dependence on men, and this is echoed both in the structure and in the content of the play. Alison in the play is defined only in relation to men. She is even seen as a threat when there is any suggestion of the female (i.e., the sexual) which is likely to threaten the Jimmy's concept of identity.

### **Social change**

During the World War II, England was caught between two cultures: the old order and a vision of what was in store for the future of British society. Class distinctions remained, but government reforms began to slowly blur the lines between the upper and middle classes. Jimmy Porter wishes for an active and lively world around him. He hates the idleness of the world around him, he feels that that the world is sleeping and fears the changes that will change their life. Jimmy often criticises the nihilistic attitude of British Empire and expresses his anger as an attempt to awaken those around him from this cultural sleep. Britain had lost her earlier position of reputation. The social structure had been totally transformed in order to preserve the relative equality experienced by the population during wartime. As a result the young generation that came of age in post-war England hardly felt any

positive change, problems continued to remain the same as the attitude of the old Establishment remained intact. The political and social climate in the post war England was turbulent and alien to its people. Actually Second World War exhausted Britain and the nation lost its strength and its power dissolved. The war imposed heavy economic burden, destruction of industry and commercial property. Britain also lost her colonial power and now completely at the mercy of mighty nation like United Nation. The welfare- state had displaced the wealthy and privileged classes but failed in changing the attitudes and prejudices. Class difference was challenged.

With the Conservative Party coming into power in the 1951 election, their slogan “Set the People Free” indicated a change from state control to individual freedom and encouraged radical changes in culture. So the old-style entertainment became enjoyable, affordable, and accessible to a new audience through radio, movies, and television. Jazz music became popular in music halls, which were turned into dance halls or torn down entirely. This new music pushed out the older audiences and made way for a new, younger audience.

### **Unemployment**

The play highlights the post war young people’s frustration and impotency experienced by the middle-class. In the 1951 elections, the Labour Government was beaten by the Conservatives, but there was hardly any difference between the two political parties in Britain. The demand for social reform had put the Labour Party into power, and its leaders enacted social programs that would establish a new “Welfare State” in Britain. The Education Act of 1944 guaranteed free secondary schooling for all citizens. Several new universities were created for working-class students—a radical difference from the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge that were accessible only to the upper class. Jimmy Porter is a product of one such ‘white tile’ institution as opposed to the classy red-brick ones. For Britain’s working classes all of these changes promised more equality, opportunity and visibility. Yet within a few years, however, enthusiasm over the new Welfare State faded. Different proposals were made for full time employment of young people to protect people against large scale unemployment. Though the new government tried to eliminate the unfair advantage enjoyed by the upper class people in Britain and bring uniformity among all classes but still hardly there was any social change. The different social programs initiated proved costly, and the benefits most people received were disappointing. Britain’s economy struggled after the war; the promise of prosperity and comfort was

deferred. Rationing of food supplies, enacted during the war, remained in force until 1954, due to a shortage—in some cases, post war rations were more severe than during the war. The people now found themselves in the situation where as Jimmy comments that the people of his generation were not able to die for good causes any longer. “There are no good, brave causes left in the world,” (Osborne, 1960: 84) says Jimmy Porter.

### **The absence of social revolution**

Another very potent psychological problem which touched the post-war British society was the disastrous consequence of nuclear bomb. The scientific destruction brought about an end to men’s sense of personal heroism and bravery. British society during the post war period faced a lack of responsibility and social commitment. There was a marked decline from a work-oriented, duty-bound life to leisure oriented, fun-loving life.

“Jimmy, ‘risen’ from the working class, is now provided with an intellect which only shows him that everything that might have justified pride in the old England - its opportunity, adventure, material well-being - has disappeared without being replaced by anything but a lacklustre security. He has been promoted into a moral and social vacuum. He fumes, rages, nags at a world which promised much but which has led to a dreary plain where there is no fiber or substance - only fear of scientific destruction and the minor comforts of American mechanics.” (Taylor, 1964: 170).

Read: Taylor, Russell John. *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger: A Case Book*. London: Macmillan, 1964.

### **Gender conflict**

Throughout the play we can see gender conflict. Jimmy is constantly shown to have problems with upper class and with women in general. He attacks the old class system and their lifestyle. His easy target is Alison’s family and she being part of that family and class is always at the receiving end. In the play gender conflict functions on two levels: first of all, it becomes the site for a banished class conflict, sublimated into sexual hatred and venomous attacks on women in general and his wife Alison in particular. Secondly the battle also signifies his manhood; it’s a fight for sexual identity for him. He has to attack women and Alison is the easy target in front of him.

Though Jimmy rejects women he is not homosexual, but he is pointing to the second issue, that is, of women and domesticity, children and social responsibilities – all of which he believes often stifle creativity. In order to rediscover his own power, he has to destroy whatever remnants of independence Alison has left. The destruction is intimate, sexual and verbally violent:

“Do you know, I have never known the great pleasure of love-making when I didn’t desire it myself. Oh, it’s not that she hasn’t her own kind of passion. She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time as if I were some over-large rabbit.... That bulge around her navel—if you’re wondering what it is—it’s me. Me, buried alive down there and going mad.” (Osborne, 1960: 37-38)

Gender conflict is a battleground in the play. Jimmy comments: “Have you ever noticed how noisy women are...” (Osborne, 1960: 9) Other examples of humiliation of women in general are female surgeons and also on Feminist Movement of the era. The example of female surgeons shows the changes that is taking place in the society and in women’s life during the post-war era. Women leaving their territory; the kitchen and getting into men’s territory is significant as far as the changing roles of sexes concerned. Society during 1950s and 60s extended some sort of sexual freedom of men and women have been enlarged. Legal restrictions on the freedom of married people have been relaxed.

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#### **4.2.10 Title of the Play**

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The title of *Look Back in Anger* hints at the primary theme: the play is “*motivated by outrage at the discovery that the idealized Britain, for which so many had sacrificed themselves during the war years, was inauthentic.*” (Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, 91). Heilpern states that Osborne had considered six other titles for the play: *Farewell to Anger*, *Angry Man*, *Man in a Rage*, *Bargain from Strength*, *Close the Cage behind You* and *My Blood is a Mile High* (2006: 163). Finally, Osborne chose the title *Look Back in Anger*, inspired by the Leslie Paul’s autobiography about “*a disillusioned social philosopher [...] who lost faith in Soviet Russia during the 1930s.*” (Heilpern, 2006: 163-164) His choice made perfectly sense because disappointment in society is a major characteristic of both plays.

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### 4.2.11 Symbols and Images in *Look Back in Anger*

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**The bear and squirrel toys** - The bear and squirrel toys play an important role in the lives of Jimmy and Alison who mimic them. They have kept upon a chest of drawers the toy bear and squirrel in their one room attic flat. Alison points them out to Helena who thinks this is proof of Jimmy's being or of the madness that characterises their conjugality. This animal symbol works in two ways — first, it offers a refuge from the misery of the couple's daily married life, and provides the only way for them to communicate with each other.

Second, it implies that the only way for them to satisfy marital love in their case, seems to be based on not much more than the physical attraction between the sexes, which functions at a level below the rational. The game that they play is a way of forgetting the actual reality. Jimmy and Alison might consequently realise, in order to forget their respective social positions, and the intellectual gulf between them was to imagine themselves as animals, the bear representing masculine strength and the squirrel representing feminine softness and gentleness. Yet it is also a fact that 'bear and squirrel game' is more complex a pattern to highlight the various relationships and solitude. We would better quote where the play unnaturally closes with a repetition of the game:

Jimmy: There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere, just waiting for  
rather mad  
slightly satanic, and  
very timid little animals. Right? (Allison nods)

(Pathetically) poor squirrels! (Osborne, 1960: 119)

**The church bells** - The sound/noise of church bells entering the small living space serve as a reminder of the power of the established church, and also that it doesn't care at all for their domestic peace. Jimmy feels irritated when he hears this sound. He is opposed to church-going; he is opposed to religious practices and rituals; and the church-bells, being symbolic of the church, bother him. For example in Act I, he declares about the noise that women make, he hears the ringing of the church-bells and says: "Oh, hell! Now the bloody bells have started". The sound of the church-bells is a nuisance to him, and he feels that this sound will drive him wild. The church-bells remind him of the existence of the spiritual world.

**The jazz trumpet** - allows Jimmy's presence to dominate the stage even when he is not there, and it also serves as his anti-Establishment "raspberry." It offers

Jimmy an escape from the irksome world of the mundane, and is relaxation to him; so he hardly bothers if it is the discomfiture of others. He feels that those who cannot appreciate jazz can have no feeling either for music or for human beings. But the sound of the trumpet also suggests an atmosphere of breaking nerves. While Jimmy may resort to his trumpet as an escape, the sound of the trumpet annoys others. Other characters in the play like Alison, Helena and Cliff hate the noise made by Jimmy. The sound of the trumpet reinforces the tension of the play by drawing attention to differences between Jimmy and the other inmates of the house.

**The ironing-board** - and the very act of ironing of Alison (and later Helena too) represent the kind of routine life with which Jimmy is fed up of. The ironing serves to add to Jimmy's boredom and it therefore becomes also a symbol of his boredom. In one of his early speeches in the play Jimmy complains: "Always the same ritual. Reading the papers, drinking tea, and ironing." Afterwards also he shows his annoyance with the ironing. It is ironical that, after Alison has gone away and has been replaced by Helena, we find Helena also ironing the clothes like Alison, so that from one point of view at least there is no change in Jimmy's life. As a counterpoint to this, you must also wonder why Jimmy himself does just nothing to ease out the boredom of the characters in the play.

**Claustrophobic confinement in the Porters' attic** - The play is set in Jimmy Porter's one-room flat in a large Midland town. The bed-sitting-room setting is important both realistically and symbolically. All domestic functions exist within one space: eating, entertaining, and sleeping. The non-appearance of compartmentalised living spaces shows Jimmy being poor and their house lacks comfort. A strange sense of claustrophobia operates in the play. The characters are trapped they cannot escape, hence they are caught in a small room which they cannot leave. Whatever they do is easily seen as an effort at spending the time so as to feel in their inner emptiness.

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## 4.2.12 Summing Up

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You should by now have made an idea of the play, its main characters, Osborne's literary style and note the relevance of the 'Kitchen sink' play in its own time and our own. Your close reading of the text will gradually help understanding all these issues more intricately.

Jimmy as you see is disillusioned with social injustice, but he does not actually

fight for his beliefs. *Look Back in Anger* did not aim at purging the minds of their audience. Osborne wanted to shake Britain awake by teaching his audience how to feel. We can conclude with the words of J.R. Taylor:

Look Back in Anger seems to me not a crudely protagonist play (...) but a valid study of a highly complex personality at odds with his world. Certain enigmas pertaining to both the hero himself and the validity of his anger are central to the effect. Jimmy Porter is not only a warm-hearted idealist raging against the evils of man and the universe; he is also a cruel and even morbid misfit in a group of reasonably normal and well-disposed people (Taylor, 1968: 23).

**Some important aspects to sum up with:**

- The play represents the continuing sense of class division in British society during 1950s despite the post-war changes;
- The play also presents – the issue of clash of generations: that of Osborne, Jimmy and Alison versus the older generation represented by Colonel Redfern and the people quoted in the newspapers;
- The play highlights a sense of disappointment with political developments; the expression of a desire for emotional contact and intensity; and the supposedly sado-masochistic relationship between Jimmy and Alison

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## 4.2.13 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How does *Look Back in Anger* show John Osborne's success as a dramatist?
2. Discuss *Look Back in Anger* as a kitchen sink drama.
3. What do Jimmy and Alison's playful game of bear and squirrel represent at different stages of the play?
4. Describe the character of Jimmy Porter.
5. How did the decline of the British Empire touch England and its people as different as Jimmy Porter and Colonel Redfern?
6. What elements of British society does Jimmy find so objectionable and why?
7. What are the major themes in *Look Back in Anger*?
8. Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* points to the social anxieties of the post-war period. Explain.

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Sketch the character of Alison.
2. What are the images used by Osborne in the play *Look Back in Anger*?
3. What is the importance of the character of Cliff in the play?
4. What does Colonel Redfern represent in the play?
5. Consider the title “*Look Back in Anger*”. What does it mean?
6. Helena Charles is regarded as the moral compass of the play. Why?
7. What lies at the heart of the conflict between Jimmy and Alison?
8. How is the idea of loss of childhood treated in the play *Look Back in Anger*?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Describe two features of a typical Osborne hero.
2. Name any three works of Osborne.
3. What do the protagonists in the play *Look Back in Anger* “look back” at?
5. What is the significance of Jimmy’s trumpet playing in the play?
6. Why do you think Alison is different from the rest of her own family?
7. Do you consider Jimmy as an angry young man?
8. “A rebel without a cause?” How true is this of Jimmy?
9. Name the symbols used in the play *Look Back in Anger*.

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## **4.2.14 Suggested Reading**

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## **Unit-3 □ Harold Pinter: *The Birthday Party***

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**Structure:**

- 4.3.0 Introduction**
- 4.3.1 The Theatrical Context: Absurd Drama and Comedy of Menace**
- 4.3.2 Harold Pinter – A Literary Bio-brief**
- 4.3.3 *The Birthday Party* - Plot and Critical Summary**
- 4.3.4 Analysing Characters in *The Birthday Party***
- 4.3.5 Form and Content**
- 4.3.6 Significance of the Title**
- 4.3.7 Themes and Issues**
- 4.3.8 Summing Up**
- 4.3.9 Comprehension Exercises**
- 4.3.10 Suggested Reading**

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### **4.3.0 Introduction**

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- This unit introduces you to the life and creative output of Harold Pinter, one of the most prominent British playwrights of the second half of the twentieth century and in some detail to his second play, *The Birthday Party*
- It gives you a brief idea of the background in which Absurd drama emerged
- Issues related to plot, characters and themes are discussed for greater clarity of understanding; non-verbal elements, so crucial for any performance-text are also scrutinised
- Elements in the play that make the title significant are looked at; thus aspects that enable you to embark upon a meaningful study of the play are covered in moderate detail

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### **4.3.1 The Theatrical Context: Absurd Drama and Comedy of Menace**

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Drama as a genre had gone through phases of substantial experimentation in the

twentieth century itself with radically altered world-views stemming particularly from the World Wars and demanding an altogether different response through the arts and literature. The theatre adapted to this changed world which was fragmented and whose shared values and ideals were disintegrating. It sought to restructure both form and content such that they would reciprocate each other in conveying to the audience the all-pervasive meaninglessness that engulfs the existence of man in the contemporary world. The immediate precursors to such an approach to literature and theatre were the Existential philosophers, who felt that existing categories of understanding and defining man were not sufficient in the present times. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were two of the most influential thinkers of this school.

The kind of drama that reflected this mood best was the **Theatre of the Absurd**. The term was popularized by Martin Esslin through the identical title of his book (1961). It was taken from Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Man was shown as leading a life completely devoid of purpose and meaning; he would struggle to communicate only to be trapped in an endlessly repetitive cycle of actions and gestures which would lead him nowhere as the old certainties that man had held onto for so long had ceased to make sense as nothing was real and nothing mattered. Absurd Theatre would capture this 'nowhere' (no fixed perspective of place) and 'nowhen' (no fixed perspective of time) through the form itself. The form has to stand in for content as there are no perspectives of time and space and hence telling a story in the conventional way becomes quite impossible. Divorced from any logical development of plot, character and even theme, *Waiting for Godot* in French and English both by Samuel Beckett is one of its best examples. The other exponents of absurd drama were Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet.

Pinter acknowledged the influence of Beckett and the two corresponded substantially over their writings in course of time. In *The Birthday Party* actions like Meg bringing breakfast, having to call Stanley as the latter might have been sleeping for too long, asking whether the cornflakes were "nice" to which her husband Petey would predictably reply "Very nice", Petey sitting in the morning reading a newspaper, Meg asking whether there is anything good in it and her assertion "This house is on the list" happen to be repeated meaninglessly as dialogues interspersed to intervene in the silences and overall lack of communication. Although the play has more characters, all with their ages specified unlike *Waiting for Godot*, much of the conversation happens to be merely put on, communicating next to nothing and leading nowhere. The solipsism of some of the characters knows no bounds with Goldberg's

inflated glorification of past warmth and its present version through Meg, using Lulu as a plaything, his pride in holding a position and his intimidation of Stanley aided by McCann. Stanley himself is not far behind beating his drum “savagely possessed”, trying to strangle Meg in the game “blind man’s buff” and assault Lulu with the lights gone out. Meg, at the end, savours being “the belle of the ball” innocently ignorant of all that was potentially sinister the night before.

Influenced by Beckett, Pinter put together his own design of what would often be referred to as the “comedy of menace”. The term was used for the first time in 1958 by the drama critic Irving Wardle, who borrowed it from the subtitle of David Campton’s play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*, which in turn owed its origin to a nuanced pronunciation of the Restoration “Comedy of Manners”. Although the critic happened to withdraw that label from Pinter’s works before long and Pinter himself was not inclined to have such categories, subsequent studies of his early plays in particular found the term quite useful.

While the meaningless acts, movements and some of the dialogues generate fun and laughter coated with ridicule to bring out the comedy in *The Birthday Party*, there is some unknown threat lurking in the background that disturbs some of the characters so persistently, that they are unable to hold back their annoyance. Stanley expresses displeasure at the news that two people had opted for that boarding house “on the list”; he makes it clear in no uncertain terms that he did not want it. What might possibly have been the reason for such a repulsive stance? Was he apprehensive that people may be following him and now that they opt for this house, they have successfully traced his whereabouts? Had he then perpetrated some crime before coming to this seaside location? We are not given a clear answer but he finds himself terrorized by a barrage of intimidating questions like “Why did you leave the organization?”, “Why did you kill your wife?” etc. What perhaps aptly captures the sense of menace is the one that Goldberg puts thrice - “**Do you recognize an external force?**” (emphasis added) It prompts us to conclude that Stanley considered the arrival of Goldberg and McCann an intrusion because, as his ordeal at the party would suggest, they knew not only him but at least some, if not many of his misdeeds as well. Lulu is always vulnerable, whether in lights with Goldberg, who treats him as a mere sexual plaything, or in darkness with Stanley all over her. Petey can sense some potential harm being caused to Stanley when the two visitors force him away; yet he is able to articulate nothing about his fear either to his wife or to the audience. Apart from imagined threat, there is actual violence too with Stanley being the main

offender, trying either to strangle Meg, kick Goldberg or rape Lulu. Prolonged verbal violence, however, is inflicted on Stanley by Goldberg and McCann together. The very fact that Meg asserts that their “house is on the list” begs questions of sinister nature - was the house earlier, a place for some illegal activities presently under investigation which Meg herself was completely unaware of? Thus, what could spell doom for these characters happen to be obliquely hinted at quite frequently, whereby the tragic potential of menace can coexist with laughter and the comic. While you will read the text at length, the following excerpt will give you an idea of how the element of the Absurd works in Pinter’s play. Notice how dexterously language is used to create what apparently appears to be a comic situation but one that ultimately takes menacing proportions:

**STANLEY’S TURN-OFF AT THE VISITORS: (sensing menace)**

McCann. .... Many happy returns of the day. [Stanley withdraws his hand. They face each other.] Were you going out?

Stanley. Yes.

McCann. On your birthday?

Stanley. Yes. Why not?

McCann. But they are holding a party for you here tonight.

Stanley. Oh really? That’s unfortunate.

McCann. Ah no. It’s very nice.

.....

Stanley. I’m sorry. I’m not in the mood for a party tonight.

McCann. Oh, is that so? I’m sorry.

. Yes, I’m going out to celebrate quietly, on my own.

McCann. That’s a shame.

[They stand.]

Stanley. Well, if you’d move out of my way -

McCann. But everything’s laid on. The guests are expected.

Stanley. Guests? What guests?

McCann. Myself for one. I had the honour of an invitation.

.....

Stanley [moving away] I wouldn't call it an honour. It'll just be another booze-up.

.....

McCann. But it is an honour.

Stanley. I'd say you were exaggerating.

McCann. Oh no. I'd say it was an honour.

Stanley. I'd say that was plain stupid.

McCann. Ah no.

[They stare at each other.]

.....

[Stanley walks round the table towards the door. McCann meets him.]

Stanley. Excuse me.

McCann. Where are you going?

Stanley. I want to go out.

McCann. Why don't you stay here?

..... Goldberg. A warm night.

Stanley [turning] Don't mess me about!

Goldberg. I beg your pardon?

Stanley [moving downstage] I'm afraid there's been a mistake. We're booked out. Your room is taken. Mrs. Boles forgot to tell you. You'll have to find somewhere else.

Goldberg. Are you the manager here?

Stanley. That's right.

Goldberg. Is it a good game?

Stanley? I run the house. I'm afraid you and your friend will have to find other accommodation.

Goldberg. [rising] Oh, I forgot, I must congratulate you on your birthday. [Offering his hand] Congratulations.

Stanley [ignoring hand] Perhaps you're deaf.

.....

Get out.

Goldberg. You are in a terrible humour today, Mr Webber. And on your birthday too, with the good lady getting her strength up to give you a party.

Stanley. I told you to get those bottles out.

Goldberg. Mr Webber, sit down a minute.

Stanley. Let me- just make this clear. You don't bother me. To me you're nothing but a dirty joke. But I have a responsibility towards the people in this house. They've been down here too long. They've lost their sense of smell. I haven't. And nobody is going to get advantage of them while I'm here. [A little less forceful] Anyway, this house isn't your cup of tea. There's nothing here for you, from any angle, any angle. So why don't you just go, without any more fuss?

Goldberg. Mr Webber, sit down.

Stanley. It's no good starting any kind of trouble.

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## 4.3.2 Harold Pinter – A Literary Bio-brief

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### ➤ Early life, education and exposure to the Theatre

Pinter was born on October 10, 1930, in Hackney, east London, the only child of English parents of Jewish East European ancestry: his father, Hyman “Jack” Pinter (1902-1997) was a ladies' tailor; his mother, Frances (née Moskowitz; 1904-1992), a housewife. He studied at Hackney Downs School, a London grammar school from 1944 to 1948. A major influence on Pinter was his English teacher Joseph Brearley, who directed him in school plays and under whose instruction, “Pinter shone at English, wrote for the school magazine and discovered a gift for acting” according to his biographer Michael Billington. At the age of twelve, he began writing poetry and by twenty had published some of his poetical works as well.

### ➤ Career

Apart from being a playwright, Pinter was an actor, director, and a screenwriter. His acting career spanned over 50 years. In the early 1950s he toured Ireland with the Anew McMaster repertory company and worked for the Donald Wolfitt Company, at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith. He worked under the stage name David Baron

from 1954 to 1959. During this period, he also performed occasional roles in his own and others' works for radio, TV, and film, as he continued to do throughout his career. Pinter began to direct more frequently during the 1970s, becoming an associate director of the National Theatre (NT) in 1973. He directed almost 50 productions of his own and others' plays for stage, film, and television. Pinter composed 27 screenplays and film scripts for cinema and television, many of which were filmed, or adapted as stage plays.

Pinter was the author of 29 plays and 15 dramatic sketches and the co-author of two works for stage and radio. He was considered to have been one of the most influential modern British dramatists. His style has entered the English language as an adjective "Pinteresque", which, however, Pinter himself did not approve of. His works could broadly be grouped into three categories:

**a) "Comedies of Menace" (1957-1968)**

Pinter's first play, *The Room*, written and first performed in 1957, was a student production written in three days. Written in 1957 and produced in 1958. Pinter's second play, *The Birthday Party*, one of his best-known works, was initially both a commercial and critical disaster despite an enthusiastic review in *The Sunday Times* by its influential drama critic Harold Hobson, which ironically appeared only after the production had closed. Pinter himself and later critics generally credited Hobson as bolstering him and perhaps even rescuing his career. In 1964, the play would be revived both on television (with Pinter himself in the role of Goldberg) and on stage (directed by Pinter at the Aldwych Theatre) and would be well received.

In a review published in 1958, borrowing from the subtitle of *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*, a play by David Campton, critic Irving Wardle called Pinter's early plays "comedy of menace"- a label applied repeatedly since to his work. Such plays begin with an apparently innocent situation that becomes both threatening and "absurd" as Pinter's characters behave in ways often perceived as inexplicable by his audiences and one another. Pinter acknowledges the influence of Samuel Beckett, particularly on his early work; they became friends, sending each other drafts of their works in progress for comments.

Pinter wrote *The Hothouse* in 1958, which he shelved for over 20 years. Next he wrote *The Dumb Waiter* (1959), and *The Room* (1960). The first production of *The Caretaker*, at the Arts Theatre Club, in London, in 1960, established Pinter's theatrical reputation receiving an Evening Standard Award for best play of 1960.

By the time Peter Hall's London production of *The Homecoming* (1964) reached Broadway in 1967, Pinter had become a celebrity playwright. During this period, Pinter also wrote the radio play *A Slight Ache* in 1959. *A Night Out* (1960) was broadcast to a large audience. His play *Night School* was first televised in 1960. *The Collection* premiered in 1962, and *The Dwarfs*, adapted from Pinter's then unpublished novel of the same title, was first broadcast on radio in 1960, then adapted for the stage in a double bill with *The Lover*, which was then televised in 1963; and *Tea Party*, a play that Pinter developed from his 1963 short story, was first broadcast in 1965.

#### **b) "Memory Plays" (1968-1982)**

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, Pinter wrote a series of plays and sketches that explore complex ambiguities, elegiac mysteries, comic vagaries, and other "quicksand-like" characteristics of memory and which critics sometimes classify as Pinter's "memory plays". These include *Landscape* (1968), *Silence* (1969), *Night* (1969), *Old Times* (1971), *No Man's Land* (1975), *The Proust Screenplay* (1977), *Betrayal* (1978), *Family Voices* (1981), *Victoria Station* (1982), and *A Kind of Alaska* (1982). Some of Pinter's later plays, including *Party Time* (1991), *Moonlight* (1993), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996), and *Celebration* (2000) draw upon some features of his "memory" dramaturgy in their focus on the past in the present, but they have personal and political resonances and other tonal differences from these earlier memory plays.

#### **c) Explicitly Political Plays and Sketches (1980-2000)**

Following a three-year period of creative drought in the early 1980s Pinter's plays tended to become shorter and more overtly political, serving as critiques of oppression, torture, and other abuses of human rights, linked by the apparent "invulnerability of power." *The Hothouse* (1980) concerns authoritarianism and the abuses of power politics, but it is also a comedy, like his earlier "comedies of menace".

Pinter's brief dramatic sketch *Precisely* (1983) is a duologue between two bureaucrats exploring the absurd power politics of mutual nuclear annihilation and deterrence. His first political one-act play is *One for the Road* (1984). *Mountain Language* (1988) is about the Turkish suppression of the Kurdish language. The dramatic sketch *The New World Order* (1991) was followed by Pinter's longer political satire *Party Time* (1991). Intertwining political and personal concerns, his

next full-length plays, *Moonlight* (1993) and *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) are set in domestic households and focus on dying and death. After experiencing the deaths of his mother (1992) and father (1997), again merging the personal and the political, Pinter wrote the poems “Death” (1997) and “The Disappeared” (1998).

Pinter’s last stage play, *Celebration* (2000), is a social satire set in an opulent restaurant, which lampoons The Ivy, a fashionable venue in London’s West End theatre district, and its patrons. These characters’ deceptively smooth exteriors mask their extreme viciousness. Pinter’s final stage plays also extend some expressionistic aspects of his earlier “memory plays”, while harking back to his “comedies of menace”.

### **The Last Phase**

In December 2001, Pinter was diagnosed with esophageal cancer; from 2002 onwards he was increasingly active in political causes, writing and presenting politically charged poetry, essays, speeches, as well as developing his two final screenplay adaptations, *The Tragedy of King Lear* and *Sleuth*. In 2005 he stated that he would be devoting his efforts more to his political activism and writing poetry. Some of this later poetry included “The ‘Special Relationship’”, “Laughter”, and “The Watcher”. He also completed his screenplay for the film of *Sleuth* in 2005. His last dramatic work for radio, *Voices* (2005), collaboration with composer James Clarke, adapting his selected works to music, premièred on his 75th birthday on October 10, 2005.

From May 8-24, 2008, the Lyric Hammersmith celebrated the 50th anniversary of *The Birthday Party* with a revival and related events, including a gala performance and reception hosted by Harold Pinter on May 19, 2008, exactly 50 years after its London première there.

On the Monday before Christmas 2008, Pinter was admitted to Hammersmith Hospital, where he died on Christmas Eve from liver cancer.

### **Awards, Honours and Positions held**

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 UK and elsewhere. An Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and an Honorary Fellow of the Modern Language Association of America (1970), Pinter became a Companion of

Honour in 2002, having declined a knighthood in 1996. In 1995, he accepted the David Cohen Prize, in recognition of a lifetime of literary achievement. In 1996, he received a Laurence Olivier Special Award for lifetime achievement in the theatre. He received the World Leaders Award for “Creative Genius” as the subject of a week-long “Homage” in Toronto, in October 2001. In 2004, he received the Wilfred Owen Award for Poetry for his “lifelong contribution to literature, ‘and specifically for his collection of poetry entitled *War*, published in 2003’”. On October 13, 2005, the Swedish Academy announced that it had decided to award the Nobel Prize in Literature for that year to Pinter, who “in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression’s closed rooms”. Although still being treated in hospital, Pinter videotaped his Nobel Lecture, “Art, Truth and Politics”, which was later released as a DVD. In March 2006, he was awarded the Europe Theatre Prize in recognition of lifetime achievements pertaining to drama and theatre. On January 18, 2007, French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin presented Pinter with France’s highest civil honour, the Légion d’ honor, at a ceremony at the French Embassy in London. In October 2008, the Central School of Speech and Drama announced that Pinter had agreed to become its president and awarded him an honorary fellowship. His presidency of the school was brief; he died just two weeks after the graduation ceremony, on December 24, 2008.

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### **4.3.3 *The Birthday Party*: Plot and Critical Summary**

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*The Birthday Party* is a Three-Act play. It opens with Meg, the caretaker of the seaside guest house appearing with breakfast in the living room before her husband Petey. We come to know that two guests are scheduled to arrive, a piece of news which, later, incurs the wrath of Stanley, the only boarder there for one year. Meg treats Stanley as a child, possessively as she listens to his make-believe version of a world-tour as a pianist with credulous naïveté. Lulu, a young woman appears and Stanley contemplates going away with her but has nowhere to go. She alleges that Stanley troubles Meg all day long and is “a bit of a washout”. Goldberg and McCann, the visitors enter; the latter seems to be nervous about the job to be done, whereas the former appears relaxed. When they meet Meg, they come to know that it is Stanley’s birthday and Goldberg proposes giving him a grand party that night. Stanley is silent when he hears Goldberg’s name from Meg who presents him with a drum on his birthday as he does not have a piano there; the Act ends with Stanley beating the drum “savagely possessed”.

In Act 2, McCann denies that he knows Stanley although the latter claims familiarity and tries to convince McCann of the same. Stanley refuses to accept that it was his birthday and that he caused any trouble. McCann savagely hits him. When Goldberg arrives, Stanley claims that their room had already been booked and therefore McCann and Goldberg were supposed to leave without further ado. Both visitors respond with a flurry of intimidating (many of them meaningless) questions to put Stanley out of guard; the latter kicks Goldberg in the stomach and both are ready to fight. Meg arrives in party dress and urged by Goldberg gives a toast to Stanley on the occasion of his birthday with the lights put out and torch light on Stanley. Lulu arrives and is physically close to Goldberg most of the time while Meg is nostalgic in her conversation with McCann. They play blind man's buff and when Stanley is blindfolded, he catches Meg and tries to strangle her when he's thrown off by the visitors. When the torch was missing and all the lights out, Stanley takes advantage of the darkness to be physically all over Lulu. With the lights on once again, Stanley giggles and retreats as he senses danger once more from the two visitors.

In the final Act, as Meg serves Petey breakfast, they discuss about a car parked outside which happened to be Goldberg's. Petey insists that Stanley be allowed to sleep; when Goldberg arrives, Petey expresses concern about Stanley's condition and what transpired at the party; Goldberg assures him that they would take care of what is required as Petey prefers to have Stanley see a doctor. McCann enters with two suitcases evidently wanting to leave. Goldberg feels "knocked out" and lost as Petey waits for Stanley to come down. Lulu feels used by Goldberg and is furious that he is leaving; she leaves herself on being insulted by McCann. When Stanley enters, Goldberg and McCann are ready to take him away ignoring the entreaties of Petey who prefers that his traumatized boarder be left alone. After the three leave, Meg enters and is told by Petey that Stanley is still in bed. She loses herself in pleasant memories from the previous night's party where she was "the belle of the ball".

### ➤ Critical Summary

A review in *The Sunday Times* by its influential drama critic Harold Hobson mentioned earlier reads like this:

I am well aware that Mr Pinter['s] play received extremely bad notices last Tuesday morning. At the moment I write these [words] it is uncertain even whether the play will still be in the bill by the time they appear, though it

is probable it will soon be seen elsewhere. Deliberately, I am willing to risk whatever reputation I have as a judge of plays by saying that *The Birthday Party* is not a Fourth, not even a Second, but a First [as in Class Honours]; and that Pinter, on the evidence of his work, possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London ... Mr Pinter and *The Birthday Party*, despite their experiences last week, will be heard of again. Make a note of their names.

Now let's look at the text. Meg's initial dialogues seem to be no more than time-fillers accompanying a predictable routine; the tendency of pampering Stanley is accompanied by traces of self-indulgence to boost her otherwise dull and eventless life. From Stanley's side it happens to be more irritation and disgust, only intermittently accompanied by the odd flirtatious verbal like "succulent". We do not know how far this peevish exterior could be attributed to Meg's nagging approach; they could well be an expression of his already disturbed state of mind for which he could not sleep the previous night and would soon raise objection to the two visitors coming. He even threatens Meg posing her superior only to drift into a hyperbolic vision of a world tour as a pianist even as Meg entreats him to stay back. The prolonged magnification of the self suggests some inner crisis, a veiled externalization of talent possibly gone astray or not given due opportunity or recognition. Stanley's purposeless existence becomes more apparent with Lulu sparing no opportunity to point at his negatives - "You could do with a shave... Don't you ever go out?" "You depress me, looking like that" "Hasn't Mrs. Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?" "You're a bit of a washout, aren't you?" Stanley's offer to Lulu of going away together, yet without any idea as to where even when asked thrice, in its emptiness reminds us distinctly of the stasis in *Waiting for Godot* where Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in the repetitive pattern of "Let's go" "We can't" "Why not?" "We're waiting for Godot". His act of slipping away at the sight of Goldberg and McCann arouses suspicion that he is trying to escape being caught, being found out for some possible transgression; it goes without saying that fear of facing the consequences looms large and is reflected in his conduct throughout the play. The initial exchange between Goldberg and McCann suggests that Goldberg is in a very cheerful mood with complete knowledge of what he is up to and McCann nervous about the job at hand. But the superficial eloquence of Goldberg might well be a strategy of a seasoned professional to camouflage corruption and other subtle means of exploiting subordinates and those in a vulnerable position. The act of proposing a birthday party for Stanley, a co-boarder in the guest house, begs the obvious

question as to what can Goldberg's interest in it possibly be, what end does he want to achieve through it and more pertinently, whether it is not too far-fetched to suppose that it is merely an act of fellow-feeling of one boarder for another without any ulterior motive. Stanley's silence at hearing the name of Goldberg as a visitor suggests that there was, in all likelihood, some hostile association between the two. It is also evident that he still has fears, and this may be attributed to the fact that he apprehends persecution from Goldberg. We are at a loss as to whether it was indeed Stanley's birthday; does his irritable mood deny even though it is, or does Meg take the day of his arrival there a year ago, as his birthday? The "savagely possessed" beating of the drum, his birthday gift from Meg, scarcely answers this.

The rising action is accompanied by increasing discord in the uneasy conversation between Stanley and McCann, where both try to gain control and ascendancy culminating in violence with Stanley at the receiving end. They never arrive at an agreeable footing; McCann expresses disappointment at Stanley's fastidious behavior on his birthday and his intention of celebrating "quietly on [his] own", ignoring the arrangements for the party, Stanley denies as before, that it was his birthday, claims to have known McCann before throwing a wide range of associations none of which McCann could relate to, and dismisses their choice of that boarding house and speaks derisively about Meg, both of which are objectionable to McCann. As one who could have understood and clarified Stanley's conduct better (as the final Act would suggest), the departure of Petey for a game of chess; and the arrival of Goldberg, become complicit in turning things from sour to bitter in no time. Once Stanley says point blank that Goldberg and McCann should leave and stays obstinate in his stance, there is a flurry of invectives more from Goldberg than Stanley followed by relentless interrogation of Stanley by both visitors leading to a preparation to fight, after Stanley kicks Goldberg on the stomach. It is here that menace rises to a higher pitch with the atmosphere of hostility and aggression all-pervasive. There is no trace of acceptance of one for the other, let alone the expected harmony of a pleasant occasion like a birthday. The battle lines are clearly drawn and there is only a brief respite with Meg's entry and toast to Stanley greatly appreciated by the ever-voluble Goldberg, who, as is clear by now, feigns warm participation with sinister motives temporarily shelved. He shifts to entertaining himself with Lulu, a girl young enough to be his daughter; he readily seduces her, reducing her to a sexual toy, while Meg, blissfully unaware of any trace of vice around carries on a rather reflective conversation with McCann about her father and early life. Over drinks, there is hardly anything

meaningful that is said or done; in the process, Lulu gives in to Goldberg's advances with her characteristic liking, as she declares, for older men. The blind man's buff is not only the climax of the play's action, but is very symbolic; with all the frenetic activity in the dark, aggression, violence, counter-attack, a possible attempt at rape ending in giggles, no end is reached. It not only becomes a mockery of a party, but lets us know significantly, that, barring Petey, all the characters, embroiled in meaningless acts of persecution and vengeance are in a continuum of playing exactly such a game as this.

Meg remains completely oblivious to the previous night's disaster; she can do no more than spot the drum broken before her without realizing the greater damages caused elsewhere to the people around. She even supposes McCann to be an old friend of Stanley, both gossiping late into the night before. It would be a gross exaggeration to remark that she has entered second childhood but to say the least, she dwells in a pleasant make-believe world to keep herself happy. Lulu having seen the real face of Goldberg, who used her for one night just to satisfy his perverse appetite, expresses resentment but meets with only insult from McCann in return. Whether from Stanley or these visitors, it is only suffering that is inflicted upon Lulu. Meanwhile, Goldberg astutely handles Petey's genuine concern for Stanley; quite diplomatic, he never says a word against Stanley, mentions that Dermot was looking after him, and that they would take him to Monty. In his answer to Petey's enquiry about what might have caused Stanley's nervous breakdown at the party, Goldberg manufactures a confidently circumlocutory reply bringing in a plethora of possibilities, vague but deftly covered up through rhetoric. Petey remains helpless before the proactive visitors, and can only put in a word of caution to Stanley not to be dictated by them, which, the latter (having lost all strength, physical and mental), is in no condition to abide by. Even as Goldberg and McCann take away the hapless Stanley with them, Meg, ignorant of any untoward development as ever, reminisces with pride, having been "the belle of the ball" in the party.

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#### **4.3.4 Analysing Characters in *The Birthday Party***

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**Petey:** Introduced as a man in his sixties in the dramatist personae, Petey Boles is easily the most laconic and reasonable character in the play. He is perceptive about the insidious motives of the two visitors and more realistic in his concern for Stanley's well being towards the end compared to Meg's melodramatic affection and

self-admiration. He is a deck-chair attendant in a seaside resort and according to his wife, “is out in all weathers”. However, he is too passive to implement what he feels and remains a helpless spectator as Goldberg and McCann carry Stanley away forcefully. He humours his wife’s idiosyncratic behaviour occasionally even as his eyes are glued more often to the newspaper.

**Meg:** A distinctly prominent presence through most of the play, Meg, also in her sixties, manages the boarding house, keeping everything in order. Unlike her self-effacing husband Petey, Meg is very expressive about whatever she speaks and has a complex relationship with Stanley, the only boarder for the last one year. She treats him as a child and we are given to think that she pampers him too much for his liking; sometimes it verges on flirtatious affection and Stanley is repelled by its excesses. When Goldberg later asks about her husband, Meg says that “he sleeps with me”; is she, through this statement trying to conceal something she is guilty of, easy before a stranger? She is very positive about their house being “on the list”, not suspecting ever, the intrusion of troublesome elements; her understanding of reality is woefully poor as she retains her festive mood throughout at the prospect of, with respect to, in and the day after the party. Although Stanley had frowned on her and tried to dominate and even strangle her playing blind man’s buff, there is no aggrieved reaction on Meg’s part at all. She is taken in by Goldberg’s hyperbolic eulogies and becomes increasingly self-absorbed as the play draws to a close. Even Petey prefers shutting her out from reality seeing her euphoric; he deliberately lies to her that Stanley might have been sleeping even though he knew very well that he was taken away in a wretched state. She is given to nostalgia too, as her dialogue with McCann in the party over drinks brings to the fore, even though, in the context of the play it might have been no more than an intermediate diversion with something intense about to erupt.

**Goldberg:** A man in his fifties Goldberg seems to wield more power in words and actions than any other character in the play. He is/was called by various names such as Nat, Simey, etc. by various people which casts some doubt on his actual identity; however, through persistent verbal fluency he puts up a substantially sociable exterior given to appreciate older values, warmth and auspicious occasions like birthdays. While he wins over the gullible women Meg and Lulu (not in the same manner though) who fall for his cheerful mien and advances respectively, his real self appears wickedly through the encounters with Stanley who is dented and crushed, physically and psychologically at the end. He finds a way to dodge past

Petey's concerns about Stanley, is successful in using Lulu for one night only to leave and dismiss her with humiliation and has the loyalty of McCann whose personality is shadowed by him at least at the beginning. He reads the pulse of the house readily - once Meg is appeased beyond doubt, the rest shall fall in place perfectly according to his design and command. The workings of menace are shown through him to a large extent though not exclusively.

The following textual excerpt will give you an idea of this:

**GOLDBERG'S RHETORIC ON BIRTHDAY AND CELEBRATING MEG'S COMPLIANCE:**

(Build-up to the climax)

Goldberg: But a birthday, I always feel, is a great occasion taken too much for granted these days. What a thing to celebrate - birth! Like getting up in the morning. I've heard them. getting up in the morning, they say, what is it? ..... Whenever I hear that point of view I feel cheerful. Because I know what it is to wake up with the sun rising, to the sound of the lawnmower, all the little birds, the smell of the grass, church-bells, tomato juice -

.....

Goldberg. Say what you feel. What you honestly feel. [Meg looks uncertain.] It's Stanley's birthday. Your Stanley. Look at him. Look at him and it'll come. Wait a minute, the light's too strong. Let's have proper lighting...

.....

Meg. Well- it's very, very nice to be here tonight, in my house, and I want to propose a toast to Stanley, because it's his birthday, and he's been here for a long while now, and he's my Stanley now. And I think he's a good boy, although sometimes he's bad. [An appreciative laugh from Goldberg.] And he's the only Stanley I know, and I know him better than all the world, although he doesn't think so. ["Hear-hear" from Goldberg] Well, I could cry because I'm so happy, having him here and not gone away, on his birthday, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him, and all you good people here tonight ...[She sobs.]

Goldberg. Beautiful! A beautiful speech ... That was a lovely toast....Well, I want to say first that I've never been so touched to the heart as by the toast you've just heard. How often, in this day and age, do you come across real, true warmth? Once in a lifetime. Until a few minutes ago, ladies and

gentlemen, I, like all of you, was asking the same question. What's happened to the love, the bonhomie, the unashamed expression of affection of the day before yesterday, that our mums taught us in the nursery?... the lady of the house said her piece and I for one am knocked over by the sentiments she expressed. Lucky is the man who's at the receiving end, that's what I say....we've known a great fortune. We've heard a lady extend the sum total of her devotion, in all its pride, plume and peacock, to a member of her own living race.

**McCann:** A thirty-year old man accompanying the seasoned Goldberg on duty, McCann is given to anxiety and nervousness before getting into the job assigned which he performs "as cool as a whistle" according to his superior. He is unable to relax and is a bit restless, something that gives Goldberg enough cause to lecture at some length. In his bilateral interaction with Stanley, there is no common ground created, opinions and claims of one are at loggerheads with those of the other and bitterness knocks at the door. With Goldberg joining hands, their hostility towards Stanley assume alarming proportions culminating in violence and mental derangement of the latter. He, by and large, follows Goldberg's instructions to manipulate the party scene with the torch, although he could be aggressive on his own too, as could be seen in an earlier blow to Stanley who gripped his arm. He treats Lulu derisively for Goldberg's convenience. He appears to be a good listener though, whether to Goldberg's self-glorification or to Meg's reminiscences.

**Stanley:** Perhaps the most complex portrayal of the play, Stanley, in his late thirties and the only boarder in the seaside guest house for the last one year, remains an enigma throwing up a lot of questions for the audience. Is he lazy and laid-back by nature, or has he lost his will to work because of some transgression on his part or an unfortunate incident? Why does he vent his fury and displeasure at Meg? Is it merely her motherly affection that grew out of familiarity or is the relation more intimate - "I don't know what I'd do without you" - with Stanley's such professed dependence? Why does he make no attempt to seek Petey's guidance regarding his well-being and future when there was no better and sensible well-wisher? Given to sexual perversion, as was clear in his attempt to rape Lulu, how was it possible for him to accommodate himself in the guest house for as long as one year with a woman in charge of it? Before the effort to strangle Meg in the party, did it never surface before the old lady, and if so, what was her response? Why is Stanley so bereft of defensive strategies when he already apprehends some wrongdoing before the

intruders actually arrive? Why does he claim familiarity with McCann? Why does he pretend to be such a renowned pianist embarking on a world tour? Does the expression of a troubled mind before the wrong and entirely unsympathetic people spell his doom, or is it retributive justice for some crime of his? Why could he not prevent the fiasco as to whether it was his birthday or not by making an assertive and conclusive statement instead of merely denying it? Does his inability to mention any place (given three attempts) where he could take Lulu suggest that he had no shelter elsewhere, that the boarding house was his only hiding place?

Once again, the following excerpt from the text will give you an idea:

**LULU TO STANLEY (Puts Stanley's condition in perspective)**

....Do you want to have a look at your face? (Stanley withdraws from the table.) You could do with a shave, do you know that? (Stanley sits, right at the table.) Do you never go out? (He does not answer.) I mean, what do you do, just sit around the house like this all day long? (Pause) Hasn't Mrs. Boles got enough to do without having you under her feet all day long?

Stanley. I always stand on the table when she sweeps the floor.

Lulu. Why don't you have a wash? you look terrible.

Stanley. A wash wouldn't make any difference.

Lulu (rising) Come out and get a bit of air. You depress me, looking like that.

Stanley. Air? Oh, I don't know about that.

.....

Stanley (abruptly) Would you like to go away with me?

Lulu. Where?

Stanley. Nowhere. Still, we could go.

Lulu. But where could we go?

Stanley. Nowhere. There's nowhere to go. So we could just go. It wouldn't matter.

Lulu. We might as well stay here.

Stanley. No. It's no good here.

Lulu. Well, where else is there?

Stanley. Nowhere.

.....

Lulu. You're a bit of a washout, aren't you?

**Lulu:** The youngest character in the play, having just entered adulthood, Lulu falls an easy prey to Goldberg's perverse sexual appetite and although she expresses resentment having seen the ugly side of his, it gets too late and she is only despised by McCann. Her own preference for "old men" to satisfy her carnal needs without exercising discretion in terms of taste and compatibility becomes her undoing. She does not appear so thoughtless though, when she first appears and makes certain very clear observations about Stanley without being inclined to flirt or be intimate.

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### 4.3.5 Form and Content

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In the earlier Unit on Postmodernity, you have read much about the dissolution of the conventional parameters of form and content in literature. Pinter's play actually gives you a fair idea of how this happens and the effects that it leads to. Notice for instance, the opening of the play, where you find unnecessary repetitions of dialogues and Meg's desperate attempts at seeking attention:

Meg. Is that you Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

Petey. What?

Meg. Is that you?

Petey. Yes, it's me.

Meg. What? (Her face appears at the hatch) Are you back?

Petey. Yes.

Meg. I've got your cornflakes ready. (She disappears and reappears.) Here's your cornflakes.

He rises, takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. Meg enters by the kitchen door.

Are they nice?

Petey. Very nice.

Meg. I thought they'd be nice. (She sits at the table.) You got your paper?

Petey. Yes.

Meg. Is it good?

Petey. Not bad.

Meg. What does it say?

Petey. Nothing much.

Meg. You read me out some nice bits yesterday.

Petey. Yes, well, I haven't finished this one yet.

Meg. Will you tell me when you come to something good?

Petey. Yes.

Pause.

Meg. Have you been working hard this morning?

Petey. No. Just stacked a few of the old chairs. Cleaned up a bit.

Meg. Is it nice out there?

Petey. Very nice.

Pause.

Meg. Is Stanley up yet?

Petey. I don't know. Is he?

Meg. I don't know. I haven't seen him down yet.

Petey. Well then, he can't be up.

Meg. Haven't you seen him down?

Petey. I've only just come in.

Meg. He must be still asleep.

.....

What time did you go out this morning, Petey?

Petey. Same time as usual.

Meg. Was it dark?

Petey. No, it was light.

Meg. (beginning to darn) But sometimes you go out in the morning and it's dark.

Petey. That's in the winter.

Meg. Oh, in winter.

Petey. Yes, it gets light later in winter.

Meg. Oh.

Pause.

What are you reading?

Now see if you make the same observations about this section, as we make below:

The play gets off to a sedate start as Petey is quiet and laconic at the breakfast table with his newspaper; the speaker is mostly his talkative wife whose household chores make up the early action described through precise stage directions. Her off-stage chores give way to silence while her innocent quarrels over the food served to the fastidious Stanley result in pauses in conversation. As the dialogues proceed, Stanley becomes more irritable pushing away Meg's arm as she ruffles his hair; disagreement over the tea served heats up somewhat with Stanley taking verbal liberties - "succulent" - and disapproving of Meg entering a man's bedroom, all leading to another phase of silence. Even though Meg strokes his arm sensually or tickles him, Stanley recoils in disgust and leaves or pushes her away. It goes to show along with some of Meg's dialogues like "Am I really succulent?" that there was a peculiar love-hate, affection-dependence relationship in which, in all likelihood, liberties that crossed the line, were taken. The next silence allows Meg to change topic and divert the anguished Stanley (on hearing that two visitors were to arrive shortly) to something pleasant as the piano. Lulu's critical comments on Stanley's appearance make him wash his face and slip away as soon as he could see the visitors entering. The next pause after quite some time enables Meg to bring up the topic of Stanley's birthday for the first time after she had been describing how he came to their boarding house. Without the speaker's least anticipation and awareness, it becomes the turning point in the drama, a moment of grim foreboding. Stanley becomes still at the mention of Goldberg's name, too confounded to say anything and although he kisses Meg on getting his birthday gift from her, it is only after she wants

it and far from spontaneous. The “uncontrolled” and “savagely possessed” beating of the drum becomes a loud and obtrusively announced disapproval of Meg accommodating the aforementioned guest.

In the second Act, McCann, tearing newspaper into strips, even with just an elementary introduction, succeeds in preventing Stanley from going out on his birthday and stretching a conversation that generated increasing disharmony and a bit of physical combat too. Goldberg’s presence shortly after raises Stanley’s temper even more and he is unable to sit despite being told to do so umpteen times. When he finally does, preceded by silence, it becomes the last time before he loses all physical and mental strength as he is hounded by scores of questions and his glasses snatched away. Although he recovers to land a kick on Goldberg’s stomach and prepare for a fight with McCann holding up a chair, it is a lone battle after which he can do no more than sweat profusely and utter incoherent sounds. Once Meg enters the scene, Goldberg switches to a warm exterior with a slightly indulgent gesture of slapping her bottom. Lulu sitting on Goldberg’s lap promptly makes her his ideal lecherous pastime for the party. Meg, in true party spirit wants Stanley to dance and does so herself; all the action around notwithstanding, there is immovable stillness inside Stanley. The fact that Meg and Lulu in unison welcome Goldberg’s proposal of playing blind man’s buff - this time an irrecoverable blow for Stanley, again without their anticipation, though - is meaningful in that both are absolutely blind to the astute Goldberg’s schemes. In the next major piece of action Stanley - we may speculate, in revengeful anguish - becomes violent on Meg and is thrown off by his two adversaries. Silence accompanies darkness on the stage and the search for the missing torch. There are grunts, stumbling and groping of Lulu in the dark; she is made the next target by Stanley whom his enemies do not spare; just as Lulu whimpers, Stanley can put up no better resistance than to giggle and retreat once the torchlight reveals his deed. Compared to the first Act, the thrust of the actions here, punctuated by silences both verbal and physical, is markedly negative; it is aimed more often at causing harm and injury.

The final Act begins much the same way as the first; it surprises us as to how Meg could have slept “like a log” the previous night and still reflect pleasantly upon Stanley being able to use the drum (which she finds lying broken before her) on his birthday. The pauses are Meg’s conjecture about Stanley and McCann possibly knowing each other for long and what and how long they talked that night. When McCann arrives with two suitcases ready to leave, from what he reports refusing to

go back to the room upstairs, we sense that Stanley's speech has been paralyzed. Goldberg, in perfect command of the situation for much of the play, feels "knocked out", fatigued and gravely ponders over what they ought to do with Stanley. When Stanley is brought on to the stage for the final time, in spite of the wooing and marathon bullying by Goldberg and McCann, he is unable to utter anything beyond a few agonizingly broken syllables; the pauses and silences are centred chiefly around him. No physical or verbal defiance was possible any more. The playwright, like many of his predecessors from Shaw to Beckett through varying degrees, usurps the role of the director by specifying not only the movements, gestures and expressions that accompany many of the dialogues but also the action as well as the inertia of non-action substantially.

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#### **4.3.6. Significance of the Title**

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It seems inappropriate by all counts to throw a party for someone who, on that day, plainly denies it being his birthday more than once. Besides, the more the arrangements proceed, the more self-occupied Stanley becomes and is completely out of tune with the spirit of a party. There is no turning towards or greeting anybody as the party approaches but adamant turning away from and having a go at everybody verbally/physically except Petey. He is not in the least in harmony with himself to celebrate an occasion and be sociable.

The title is ironical in every respect. Meant to be a community gathering, the characters not only lack bonding (Petey going out and Lulu coming late) and fellow-feeling, there is consummate hostility and ill-feeling culminating in violence and sexual assault. They are fragmented within themselves, and the inner discord does not wait long to manifest itself externally. Stanley makes obtrusive noise instead of properly playing his birthday gift, asks Goldberg to leave straight on his face even as the latter wishes him on his birthday, is hit by McCann, kicks Goldberg and attacks both Meg and Lulu. The mean and insensitive Goldberg makes Lulu a sexual toy, combines with McCann to launch a nightmarish interrogation of Stanley and tortures him mercilessly after the game blind man's buff gets over. Meg and Lulu, over drinks drift away from collective enjoyment. Given the battle lines drawn in the scene, the night clearly becomes a mockery of a party.

After Stanley's ordeal at the party is over, we find the emergence of a living corpse; the day observed in supposition of it being his birthday, puts an end to his

speech and renders him virtually invalid and incapable of resistance. It turns out to be a party of violence giving birth to physical paralysis and spiritual death. There could not have been any greater irony than witnessing the absolute termination of joy on such a day.

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### 4.3.7 Themes and Issues

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- **Confusion and Disorder:** Unsure communication accompanied by misunderstanding and displeasure abound in the play. Fluctuation in mood, particularly in Stanley's case, makes a mess of things, whether with the innocuous Meg serving breakfast, or with McCann as most of his assumptions go negated and opinions mismatch, or with Goldberg with loss of temper. His proposal of taking Lulu away with him, yet not knowing where, naturally puts her off; it is an obvious marker of absurdity and a confused state of mind. Lulu, discarding Stanley and falling for Goldberg, invites further disorder; not only is she assaulted in the dark by the disbalanced Stanley, she is used for one night and dismissed by the crafty Goldberg and insulted by McCann. Petey is unable to resolve his confusion and come to a concrete decision to facilitate the well-being of Stanley. With insightful perception of what might have transpired at the party, a man of purpose could have done better but he does not take a step forward to restore order. The height of fragmentation is reached as the characters play blind man's buff - in the dark, blindness, obstinacy, mutual intolerance, violence, aggression and sexual perversion commingle and coalesce.
- **Sex and Violence:** These are present either separately or together; Meg and Stanley appear to share a sexual relationship on top of the pampered mothering on display. Although the moody Stanley seems too easily repelled and reacts with anger, irritation and frowns to stamp his domination, there is, notwithstanding these repulsive responses, some endearing affinity. His attempt to rape Lulu, however, combines sex with violence, even revenge. Goldberg cleverly avoids violence and resorts to persuasion in his sexual exploitation of Lulu. Violence is seen when McCann hits Stanley, when Stanley kicks Goldberg, tries to strangle Meg (another possible act of revenge) and is thrown off by his enemies, who, on discovering his attempted rape of Lulu, inflict further physical damage and cruelty that is not described but is to be inferred from his loss of speech.
- **Atonement and Retribution:** The characters, Stanley, in particular, are

haunted by guilt from an unrevealed past, which they are unwilling to confess or lay bare. Stanley atones through torture, Goldberg through fatigue and discomfiture in the final Act and Lulu by fleeing. McCann also tries to run away from his sins by packing up and leaving Stanley's room hastily. Meg is also at the receiving end of physical aggression from Stanley, perhaps a roundabout punishment for misdirected sexual overtures. Even Petey, at the end has reason to feel guilty as he does nothing to save Stanley from possibly being treated more brutally in future.

- **Recollections:** Goldberg is the most elaborately nostalgic, building up a pure, clean, value-based image of the past; however, in the merciless treatment of Stanley that he masterminds, and the dismissive attitude to the young lady Lulu used insensitively for mere sexual entertainment, he makes a mockery of such reflected glory. There is self-aggrandizement of Stanley as a world famous pianist which Meg supplements through nostalgia. The two women also recollect their past with mixed memories. There is disparity in claims between Stanley and McCann as the former recalls incidents and associations not recognized by the latter.
- **Complacency:** Petey, Meg and Stanley are confined to the comfort of a seaside boarding house with exchanging routine pleasantries or giving prolonged indulgence to lethargy. The spell of such inaction is broken by the arrival of Goldberg and McCann but the former is no less complacent regarding his past, values, warmth and position held. Petey, at the end, despite full knowledge of Stanley's predicament, chooses to retreat into the complacency of the boarding house without taking any trouble to intervene actively and rescue their one-year long boarder. Meg is complacent with their house being "on the list", while Lulu is complacent with her choice of old men, in this case Goldberg, for which she has to suffer.
- **Language:** Language in *The Birthday Party* hides more than it reveals. Meg's meaningless repetitions point at her attention-seeking tendency betraying inner insecurity thereby. Stanley's displeasure at Meg is directed more towards himself, something which he could not extricate himself from. Goldberg manipulates language at every turn to his advantage, masking his true self and projecting a genial nature with appreciation and praise generously showered, particularly on Meg, whose confidence he wins easily. Lulu, the least given to concealment, is trapped easily through Goldberg's adept use of persuasive language; Petey also is likewise kept at arm's length through promises and assurances from Goldberg profusely expressed though scarcely meant.

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### 4.3.8 Summing Up

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Having a fair idea of the relevant issues that are treated in the play, we are now in a position to make the following observations:

- The play combines tragic and comic elements through uncanny candour
- There is pretentious, false and at times vain exhibition of power
- The actions, attitudes and tendencies of the central character are potentially the most futile
- Women are treated slightly and with scorn; the appreciation that comes from Goldberg is loaded with ulterior motives
- The only character with clarity of thought and feeling for the endangered is the most passive

When asked why *The Birthday Party* has endured, Pinter observed: “It’s possible to say that two people knocking at the door of someone’s residence and terrorizing them and taking them away has become more and more actual in our lives. It happens all the time. It’s happening more today than it did yesterday and that may be a reason for the play’s long life. It’s not fantasy. It just becomes more and more real.” To this we may well join in chorus and add that it’s no less real with us in India.

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### 4.3.9 Comprehension Exercises

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● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How does Pinter use language in *The Birthday Party* to expose the hypocrisy of the powerful over the weak?
2. How do violence, aggression, displeasure and irritability become self-defeating in Pinter’s play?
3. How do silence, pause and stillness contribute to the atmosphere of menace in *The Birthday Party*?
4. Give a sketch of the meaningless, repetitive and inconsequential speeches and actions and show how they build up the pervasive mood of *The Birthday Party*.

● **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. How do Pinter’s characters brag, glorify oneself falsely and pretentiously to immerse themselves in incorrigible complacency?

2. How does sexual perversion manifest itself and to what effect in *The Birthday Party*?
3. Does the play offer retributive justice to its characters?
4. How do undisclosed facts about characters contribute to the interest of the play?

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What is the setting for the entire play?
2. What was Stanley's nightlong daydream?
3. What do Meg and Stanley find objectionable in each other?
4. What is Goldberg's view of an occasion like birthday?
5. What is Goldberg's opinion on the toast that Meg gives to Stanley on his birthday?
6. What is Meg absorbed in as the play ends?

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### **4.3.10 Suggested Reading**

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Pinter, Harold. *The Birthday Party*. 15-102 in *The Essential Pinter*. New York: Grove P, 2006.

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Raby, Peter. Ed. *Cambridge Companion to Pinter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

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