



## Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota

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#### Twentieth Century Literature

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## Block Introduction

The present volume is concentrated on the study of certain representative specimens of Twentieth century British literature. There are four clocks in it corresponding to Poetry, Drama, Fiction, and Prose (Essay). The Twentieth century opened with a deep sense of scepticism and uncertainty. It set in the mood of enquiry and questioned everything. The old Victorian poets, novelists and playwrights were yawned over for various reasons. The Twentieth century, thus, began with a belligerent mood and a new creative epoch dawned in literature. It meant a contemptuous rejection of the accepted values. Men felt themselves to be living without purpose in a society without meaning. The twentieth century writers were essentially rebels and wished to consider afresh what was so far authoritative and settled in literary genre. The reversal coincided with the death of Queen Victoria and a few years later World War I precipitated a crisis that altered things irreversibly for all. Intellectuals of the century wooed the socio-political ideals of Marxism and socialism. George Bernard Shaw came out with Fabian socialism which vowed not to take resort to violent means to achieve the end. Shaw intellectualised the genre of drama.

World War I left many permanent scars on the face of modern life. It left mankind shaken and shattered. Parallel to progressive measures there were unmistakable signs of social despair, dissatisfaction and unrest. Young men serving as military officers, among whom were many writers like Isaac Rosenberg, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Caudwell, Rupert Brooke enhanced an element of anxiety and anger in public life. The social unrest was underlined in the poetry of W.H. Auden, Wilfred Owen, Sassoon and in Erich Von Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, W.H. Auden's *1 September 1939*, R.C. Sherrif's play *Journey's End*, Edmund Blunden's *-Undertones of War etc.* G. Moore and Bertrand Russell were the frontline philosophers of the period. The depth psychologists- Alfred Adler, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung revealed new ways interpreting man's psyche and behaviour. Freud dwelt on the mystique of the Unconscious mind. Freud's psycho-analysis and Jung's archetypal explanation opened up new avenues of literary creation. Marxism became a dominant ideology. H.G. Wells, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley etc interpreted life in the light of new ideas. D.H. Lawrence in his novels- *The Rainbow*, *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* examined interpersonal relationships in the light of depth-psychology and indulged in the mystique of sexuality and eroticism. James Joyce in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young man* highlighted the subtle aesthetics of the century emphasizing intuition and expression. Georgian poetry was welcomed by the intellectually gifted writers like D.H. Lawrence. G.M. Hopkins's poetic technique was appreciated. Thus period saw a number of literary and artistic movements such as Dadaism, Futurism, Surrealism, Imagism, Cubism, Symbolism to forge newer modes of literary creation. W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence Ezra Pound, Dylan Thomas, experimented with new stylistic

techniques in poetry.

Virginia Woolf in her novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* etc came out with the technique of stream-of-Consciousness. The traditional story-oriented novel was replaced by the psychological novel. The twentieth century poetry was deromanticised by T.S.Eliot. His poem *The Wasteland* shook the critics stock notions about poetry. Modern poetry, thus became more or more experiential. Edith Sitwell, W.B. Yeasts, T.S.Eliot, Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, Ford Madox Ford, Edit Sitwell, Ted Hughes, Dylan Thomas were preoccupied with innovative techniques of form to incorporate subtle experience in poetry. The word 'modern' became synonymous with complexity of a kind that repelled the reader. Poetry became more or less a cross-word puzzle in T.S.Eliot, R.S.Thomas, Dylan Thomas, etc.

The Complexity arose in their works because they made poetry a cauldron of myths, new techniques, and subtle philosophic strands unusual syntactic phrase patterns and symbolic associations syntactic techniques patterns and symbolic associations surfaced in their poems. The impact of the French writers Charles Baudelaire, Valery, Mallarme, Andre' Gide, Cannot be under estimated on the twentieth century British poets, playwrights, novelists and essayists.

T.C. Eliot created his niche in the genre of poetic drama as he wrote *murder in the Cathedral*, *The family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party* etc. His *Four Quartets* is a classic like *The Waste Land*. The poet is at his philosophic best is it. Credit goes to Robert Bridges to discover G.M.Hopkins as a craftsman of modern poetry. Hopkins, thought a Victorian created miraculous poetry with 'sprung rhythm' creating music out of stressed and unstressed syllables i.e. with iamds, dactyls, trochaics etc. The prominent Post-second world war poets and writers were W.H.Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis Mac Neice, William Empson, John Lehman, Cecil Day Lewis, Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes etc could not imitate Hopkins. A wave of feminism also swept through Europe. Women poets like Kathleen Raine, Stevie Smith, Sylvia Plath made their presence felt. There were echoes of gender divide and gynocritics. Showalter was one of the pioneers in the field.

The novelists like Joseph Canard, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson etc thrilled the readers with their works. John Galsworthy as a playwright and Somerset Maugham as a novelist became popular like the Victorian novelists Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens. George Orwell's essay *Shooting the Elephant* and Mark Twain's *Kim* highlighted the sensibility of colonialism in India.

I wind up my telescoping resume of the twentieth century British literature realising the fact that I cannot in the limited space present a very comprehensive and elaborate discourse as it would be quite unweildy and haphazard.

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## UNIT-1

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### T.S. ELIOT : *THE WASTE LAND* ( I )

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#### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 About the Author
- 1.3 About the Age
- 1.4 Eliot as a Classicist
- 1.5 Eliot's Symbols and Images
- 1.6 Eliot as a Modern Poet
- 1.7 Eliot's Poetic Technique
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Review Questions
- 1.10 Bibliography

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#### **1.0 Objectives**

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The purpose of this unit is to present an elaborate discussion on the age of T.S. Eliot, features of modern poetry, elements of classicism in Eliot's poetry so that you may equip yourself to critically appreciate Eliot's one of the major poems 'The Waste Land'.

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#### **1.1 Introduction**

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The greatest single force in Modern poetry was G.M. Hopkins, the most original and the most intense poet of his time. In the 1930s, two groups of poets became known – the school of wit and the school of Romantic politics. The first group was influenced by Donne, Eliot, Pound and others. They were enemies of romance ; intellectual self-dissectors and disturbers of convention, and introduced into poetry a cerebral abstractness and a chill, hardness both of which were new. In their best poems they illustrate the limitations of poetry composed in the wits and the extent to which scientific, anthropological and literary allusions and terms could justifiably be used in poetry. The members of the other group, chief among them being W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis and Stephen Spender, were propagandist left wingers. They turned away from the prevailing of introspection and in the interest of the isolated individual they rejected the musky polarities of Lawrence and the mystical ecclesiasticism of Eliot and sought a central apprehension of life in altruistic utopian idealism which though superficially

Marxian, owed more to Shelley and Morris. They brought a breath of fresh air into poetry after a generation of self-love and self-disgust of determinism and frustration. From Eliot's *The Waste Land* to Auden's *Spain*, the predominant trend of poetry was one of social comment. Poetry might be introvert or, extrovert in manner, but it assumed the existence of a standard of values outside the writer and the duty of art to pass moral judgments. The war of 1939-1945 simplified both life and art. It brought into poetry a concentrated and substantial experience of life and peril of death which on the whole was accompanied by self-knowledge and understanding of others. Naturally their work was preoccupied with human pain but their attitudes were on the whole less pessimistic than those of the twenties. The main tone is perhaps a quiet stoicism tempered with a resolved hope for freedom and fraternity.

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## 1.2 About the Author

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T.S. Eliot, the greatest modern English poet, was an American by birth and an Englishman by adoption. Born at St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., he became a naturalized British subject in 1927. As such he had the blending of the best of the American blood and the English intellect. He combined in himself strange and opposing characteristics. He came to possess a manysided personality. He was a classicist, an innovator, a critic, a social reformer, and a mystic all combined into one. He was a professed classicist and an uncompromising upholder of tradition, and at the same time an innovator in intellectual and aesthetic field. Though a great and acute thinker, he had a spiritual approach to life, a quality which is rare in the twentieth century dominated by science and materialism. Of all the modern English poets he had done most to make his age conscious of itself and aware of the dangers inherent in modern civilization.

T. S. Eliot's parents, were both descended from old New England families. His paternal grandfather had come to St. Louis from Harvard Divinity School to establish the city's first Unitarian church and then to found and preside over Washington University. His father Henry Ware Eliot became president of a local industry. His mother Charlotte Channcey Stearns is the author of a long poem on the life of Savonarola and a biography of her father-in-law. Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., the youngest of seven children.

Eliot had his early education in the Smith Academy in St. Louis and he completed his preparation for College at the Milton Academy in Massachusetts. He entered Harvard in the fall of 1906, where he pursued philosophy as his major field of study. As an under-graduate he edited and contributed poems to the *Harvard Advocate*. He completed his course in philosophy in three years and then continued to study philosophy in the Graduate School with an interruption for one year's study at the Sorbonne. In 1914, he returned to Europe, studying first in Germany and then, after the out-break of the war at Oxford. Although he completed a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of E. H Bradley, he never returned to Harvard for the formal acceptance of the degree.

Eliot married Vivienne Haigh Wood in 1915 and for a time was employed briefly as a

teacher of various subjects at a boys' school near London and after that at Lloyd's Bank. His physical condition prevented him from entering the U.S. Navy in 1918. From 1917-1919, he was assistant editor of the *Egoist* and for that period and the years following, besides writing poetry, he supported himself by writing for magazines and periodicals, reviews and essays, some of which have since become famous. Eliot's personal literary relations led him into the publishing business. Eventually, he became Director of Faber and Faber, a position which he held till his death. He became the editor of the *Criterion* at its beginning in 1922, a quarterly review which influenced literary developments for the period of its duration. It ceased publication at the approach of World War II. After an absence of eighteen years, he returned to the U.S.A. in order to give the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1932-1933. He made frequent visits to his native country, lecturing, and giving readings at various institutions and accepting official awards of honour. The British Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature were awarded to him in 1948. In 1947, his first wife died, after prolonged illness. In January 1957, Eliot married Miss Valerie Fletcher, who had been his private secretary. He died in London in 1965.

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### 1.3 About the Age

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T.S. Eliot was born in 1888, a year before the death of Browning. The Victorian era actually came to an end in the eighties. The last ten years of the century saw a ferment of new ideas, gave birth to a fresh set of forces in literary life, and witnessed a reaction against many of the old Victorian ideals.

All new literary movements have a similar origin and start with a similar aim—an attempt to return to the method and manner of ordinary natural speech. The new movement bears some resemblance to the Romantic Revival in that it is revolutionary in outlook, that it is democratic in its implications, that it involves a closer correspondence of Art with Nature. But if the general resemblance is remarkable, the differences that give it a distinctive characteristic, are equally remarkable.

*Breakdown of Values*—The chief characteristic of “the twentieth century literary scene is a breakdown of values. The Victorian world broke down into pieces. The outlook of the rising generation was scientific rather than emotional or romantic. The older formula emphasized the individual, it drew attention to the importance of man as man, irrespective of class distinctions. Today the formula is collectivistic, not individualistic in its emphasis: it is economical rather than moral and sentimental. The implications of the old slogan ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ held up by the Romantics like Byron and Shelley carry with them a vital significance but imperceptibly the values attached to these words altered. Craving for more power, more freedom, greater unconventionality in literature accomplished a good deal that was desirable in reinvigorating both literature and life.

The attitude of the new movement is one of challenge, challenge of the old moral and social values, challenge of earlier literary forms; it is an age of experimentalizing. Old literary

conventions had to be broken up. "Windows must be smashed when you want to let in fresh air, idols have to be overturned when you wish to revitalize reverence." (*Compton Ricketts.*)

*Loss of Belief*—From 1900 until the First World War, poetry in England wavered between two worlds not sure of its path. Much of Georgian poetry can be characterized as poetry with an immediate popular appeal, an attempt to revitalizing the failing romantic tradition without infusing into this process anything foreign to that tradition. The result was intensified enervation ; they continued to play with subjects having a preconceived and rather facile emotional appeal. "It was limited in genre, but it is a legitimate by-path of poetry." Poetry which will command only a limited audience was produced as a remedy for the prolific inbreeding of Georgian poetry which would have constituted a great danger to the future of any better species of poetry.

Imagism was another curious little movement which came as a revolt against Georgian ineffectiveness. It can be called the first step towards Modern poetry, which chose a very awkward moment to be born. Poets had lost their belief in the figures of the romantic past and sought for figures in the 20th century familiar life. But the war threw poetry at least 30 years back into the lap of her old Victorian grandmother. The new poetry with Eliot's '*Prufrock*' was trying to find a way to express the complexities of the modern world and the perplexities of modern life in language which should be at once natural and flexible. The war made it all simple by giving them no time to think. In 1914, poets were turning themselves into soldiers. In the best poetry of Brooke and Bridges we find courage, obedience, a hate of the enemy and the feeling of patriotism. The war became tardy in progress and it led poets to the humanity be-neath the heroic soldier. It turned the poets to satire, to the pity of war, the desolation and the cruelty that it caused. The best poetry of war is most fiercely anti-war.

Then followed the years of disillusion. On 11th November, 1918 came the Armistice and the war was over. Peace was what every one desired. The war to end war became a common phrase. But the optimists were wrong. The treaty produced a post-war era of gradual awakening to a disillusion, which was all but complete. The 1920's is flatly called the decade of Despair. Instead of a new world, chastened to charity by suffering, there followed a period with alarm of wars. So post-war poetry is neither cheerful nor inspiring.

No one expects it to be. Even Browning's '*Pippa*' would have found it difficult to sustain the burden of her song. Loss of belief in the values of life even in the basic humanity beneath the horrors pervaded all walks of life and this disillusion is reflected in the poetry of the time. It is not merely disillusion that we find : it is something approaching chaos. In order to get out of the scepticism of the inter-war days, the scientific test was the only test. It caused a break-away. The outside world was shocked at the peculiar turn the poetry had taken. Even the definition of 'art' underwent a change. It was held that the value of art lay in the degree of fidelity with which it presents human life and human nature to us. But now it is changed —Its value was recognized in the artist's power to make other people see the things in the way in which he sees them.



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## 1.4 Eliot as a Classicist

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As a poet Eliot is a classicist and traditionalist. Referring to the classicism of Eliot, Maxwell observes in *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*: “A characteristic of classicism is its acceptance of an already existing poetic background, whose function is to provide the poem’s incidental symbolism. *The Rape of the Lock* is conceived with the framework of the classical epic, using its accepted symbols. Pope saw no reason for the creation of symbols peculiar to himself—as Shelley did in *Prometheus Unbound*—symbols whose full meaning could be appreciated only by their creator, although their necessary vagueness could produce a pleasing suggestion of profound significance and final order. Of the same nature is Eliot’s acceptance of traditional literature as his poetic world. This can be seen most clearly in *The Waste Land*, where a blending of traditional European and Eastern thought is the necessary background to his interpretation of the contemporary problem. The basic symbolism is taken from the Grail legend, and, particularly in the last section, Eliot introduces the journey symbol, which is a well-defined feature of European legend. The significances of this journey are defined by reference to traditional literature, as Pope defined a critical concept by reference to classical mythology :

When Ajax strives some rock’s vast weight to throw  
The line too labours, and the words more slow ;  
Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain ;  
Flies o’er the unbending corn and skims along: the main.

“We may examine a passage in detail to show more explicitly that Eliot’s use of tradition is the same as Pope’s use of the world of classical mythology ; as a system providing a convenient symbolism which can be used to elucidate meaning, and to aid communication. The climax of ‘The Burial of the Dead’ is a blend of references to several traditions, the purpose of which is to reaffirm and illuminate -what has gone before by its relation of the poem’s setting to these traditions. The city of this passage is not necessarily London alone, it is the same as the city over the mountains of Section V, which is

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

And this is because it is the same as the city of Baudelaire, to which our attention is drawn.

“To appreciate fully the significance of the reference we must have at the back of our minds all that Baudelaire meant by the modern city. For him it was enveloped in an atmosphere obscure,’ as Eliot’s is seen ‘Under the brown fog of a winter dawn.’ Because of his deathlike quality the city is unreal and this prepares the way for the next allusion, to Dante’s *Inferno*, the spiritual home of the city-dwellers as it is of those,

who lived

Without praise or blame,

who while on earth, 'never lived.' Having established by reference to Baudelaire's city that the crowd flowing over London Bridge has never truly lived, Eliot now indicates the reason. Because they have avoided spiritual decision during their time on earth, the people of the crowd are the same as those of the *Inferno*, who

of death

No hope can entertain.

That is, they are in a middle state, partaking fully of neither life nor death. A contrast is implied as well, for Dante's shades, unlike the city crowd, and like the Sibyl, accept the Christian paradox that through death may come life, and 'wish to die' (Epigraph to *The Waste Land*).

"Stetson who is now hailed in Eliot's poem, fulfils the same function as the spirit singled out in the *Inferno*. This spirit,

to base fear

Abjured his high estate,

pleasing neither God nor the enemies of God, Stetson is no one person; he is a type, symbolising the crowd, universalised by his association not with a recent war, but with Mylae, a battle in the Punic war. The corpse which Stetson has buried is to be identified with Dante's 'base fear' which we may take in this context as the part played by Stetson 'in the ships at Mylae.' Stetson's failure at Mylae typifies man's eternal spiritual failure, and he has tried to destroy his consciousness of it by burial in his mind. The lines :

Oh keep the Dog far hence that's friend to men,

Or with his nails he'll dig it up again

are an adaptation of Webster's

But keep the wolf far thence that's foe to men,

For with his nails he'll dig them up again.

They have a compound function. Primarily they recall the atmosphere of Webster's Dirge, and the parallelism reinforces the impression of Eliot's death-like city. But as the lines are altered this cannot be their only purpose. The Dog may be spiritual awareness or conscience, which Stetson makes no attempt to arouse in the fear that it might force him to recognise his spiritual failings, to attempt to redeem himself—this none of the people of the waste land

wishes to do, for it requires effort and positive action. The last line of the section.

You, hypocrite lecteur ! mon semblable - mon free ;

refers the condemnation of Stetson to all humanity and recalls to the reader the initial thesis that this city is the city of Baudelaire :

Eliot's part has been the selecting and combining of various traditional symbols which depend for their understanding mainly on their being recognised. This may be contrasted with interpreting the more arbitrary creations of a private symbolism. Despite the obvious differences between this more involved and more highly organised use of an existing poetic background, and that of the Augustans, the basic similarity remains. Eliot's use of allusion is not always for emphasis by parallelism. Frequently a contrast is implied : sometimes one allusion may contain at once a parallel and a contrast. Whatever the immediate purpose, the principle remains unaltered. By his technique of allusion and quotation Eliot indicates his acceptance of an objective symbolism, as the Augustans accepted that of classical gods and goddesses, nymphs and satyrs. It may be objected that Eliot uses 'Dog' as a purely arbitrary symbol for spiritual awareness; certainly Eliot does not entirely repudiate the poet's right to create such symbols with limits. The point is that we are better able to interpret the symbolism of this arbitrarily selected figure because of what we have already learnt from the juxtapositioning of Eliot's poem and traditional literature. Once it has been shown by the relationship between the two, what the corpse which Stetson buried is, it is comparatively easy to decide what would be most likely to disturb it.

We must stress too that Eliot in going to tradition for his symbols does not disturb what he uses. By relating the past contemporary life in this way he not only charges his poetry with an added significance, but emphasises the continued virility of the past. When Shelley took Prometheus as the hero of his drama he did not mean by Prometheus, what Aeschylus meant. The significance of Prometheus, and all the other characters in the tragedy, is utterly and arbitrarily altered to suit Shelley's purpose so that reference to Aeschylus will have no relevance to an understanding of Shelley's symbolism. The issue is not whether this is a good or a bad thing but simply that Shelley's use of traditional figures is in no way similar to Eliot's. To seek symbols as Eliot does is to retain the essential suggestive quality of all symbolism, while limiting the suggestiveness to a clearly defined range. Eliot hints at precise concepts, whereas for the Romantics a symbol was a centre of unlimited expansion—something of this is said by Eliot in his essay on Swinburne (*The Sacred Wood*), *This is one advantage of Eliot's substitution of tradition for the classical mythology as the background which will provide imagery and symbolism. It can intensify the feeling, the content of the poem, retain the suggestiveness which does so much to differentiate poetry from prose, and yet assure that the suggestiveness will be confined to the demands of the poem's purpose. It attempts to eliminate excessive blurring of the object, which tended to result from Romantic usage.*

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## 1.5 Eliot's Symbols and Images

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“In his poetry Eliot, is, in his own words, “occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist.” This ‘private world,’ so intensely real to each of us individually, can hardly be communicated. So the poet resorts to symbols and images which will help to create an objective correlative’ of his own vision or experience in the mind of the reader, and rhythms which would “penetrate far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word.”

In the use of symbols, Eliot was very deeply influenced by the French symbolists like Mallarme and also the English metaphysicals. In Eliot, we find the methods of these two schools amalgamated. His images have more in common with the metaphysical conceit or they are intellectual images. Even in *Prufrock*, we have plenty of examples of this ‘wit’ image. The very first simile in the poem –

“Let us go then, you and I  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table.”

The relationship between the evening and Prufrock, who is the etherised patient is very effectively conveyed. There is a similar image in another poem

“He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.”

These images fall under Johnson’s definition of metaphysical wit-’a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike’ and also Edmund Wilson’s analysis of symbolist technique as “The medley of images : the deliberately mixed metaphors , the combination of the grand and prosaic manners ; the bold amalgamation of material with spiritual.”

Again, like the metaphysicals, Eliot tends to draw out of an image, all the suggestions possible :

“I looked for the head of Mr. Appollinax  
rolling under a chair  
Or grinning over a screen  
With sea weed in its hair.”

It is by the association of Appollinax with the ‘worned bodies of drowned men that this image is aroused. This swift elaboration of the initial idea is equally a characteristic of metaphysical poetry. In both *Prufrock* and the *Portrait of a Lady*, Eliot stresses the same weaknesses of a society concerned exclusively with trivial refinement, second-hand experience and complete spiritual inaction. And yet we have to clear him of the most serious implications

of such spiritual indifference. In the slow deliberation of the lines:

“Ah, my friend, you do not know,  
You do not know.”

What life is, you who hold it in your hands ; there is, however, the first hint of the death-in-life theme is to occupy so much of Eliot’s later poetry.

We easily recognize these people among the inhabitants of ‘The Waste Land,’ where the elaborate symbolism gives the full moral implications involved.

*The Waste Land* owes much to Baudelaire and Verlaine and the Jacobean dramatists. “A new stock of imagery of contemporary life, the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, the elevation of such imagery to the first intensity—presenting it as it is and yet making it represent much more than itself, in all these Eliot is indebted to Baudelaire.

The background of squalor in *The Waste Land* and the early poems is intimately related to the people whom it surrounds. The fog in ‘*Prufrock*,’ in ‘*Portrait of Lady*,’ ‘the brown waves of fog’ in ‘*Morning, at the Window*’—predecessor of the brown fog of a winter dawn, ‘the brown fog of a winter noon’ in *The Waste Land* is so consistent a feature that it is something more than a mere frame-work. This dusk, of dawn and of noon, of morning and afternoon, is the dusk of Dante’s limbo which equates the ‘unreal city.’

Eliot’s own impressions of industrial civilization combine with those of Baudelaire, Verlaine, La Fontaine while his background of indecision, uncertainty and violence recalls that of “the broken fragments and systems in Jacobean drama.” Symbolist technique is adapted to his purposes.

In the carefully -selected juxtapositioning which appears in various forms, the blending of vague descriptive phrases with words grammatically precise, used in a vague sense—‘restless nights in one-night cheap hotels,’ ‘the eyes assured of certain certainties,’ in all these Eliot is following the tradition of the metaphysical images.

A suggestive juxtapositioning of past and present is Eliot’s method of showing the temporary characteristics of the present time. Death, gloom, trance, a complete lack of vitality, by all these the poet conveys exactly the atmosphere of futility and indecision in *Prufrock*. Here he is adapting the symbolist practice of communicating indirectly by means of metaphor and symbol, by a suggestive association of ideas. Eliot has sustained better the correspondence between symbol and reality. His associations are with traditional literature, and past eras, with myths, and legends. In *The Waste Land*, for example, the basic symbol is from the Fertility Ritual which is suggested by the book *Ritual to Romance* but this basic symbol is reinforced by other devices, the cumulative effect of the setting and its relations to the human beings, the contrast of words and ideas, the delicately phrased indecisions, repeated in their various aspects.

*Rhapsody on a Windy Night* has a conscious attempt to do in English what the

symbolists had done in French, to mirror a mood by 'a selection of images which have a common subservience to that mood, and hence, act as symbols for it. It is by the very nature of this symbolism that communication is achieved. Here again Eliot is under the strong influence of Verlaine.

Dante's methods of resolving into sensuous imagery the impact of thought on his sensibility, impressed Eliot greatly. It is in imagery that unification of sensibility finds expression. Imagery transcribes one experience in terms of another. But in Eliot there is apparent a complex desire to express one sense-perception in terms of another, an aural experience in visual terms. It was Donne's peculiar ability to amalgamate disparate experiences, to escape the abstraction of thought from experience. This was the primary attraction of Donne for Eliot.

An examination of some of the common symbols in Eliot's poetry will help to indicate the nature and scope of his theory of the objective correlative. Consider, for example, the basic symbol of *The Waste Land*. The common source of all the myths which have inspired the major symbol of the poem lay in the fundamental rhythm of nature—that of the death and rebirth of the year and their varying symbolism was an effort to explain the origin of life. The close relation in all these symbols between the spiritual and the physical, and the fact that their symbolism was basically sexual are quite obvious. They point to the fundamental relation between sex and religion. Eliot found in this a scaffold for his poem and also a specific clue to the dramatic shaping of his material he was to work upon.

Eliot's poem is not a pale reproduction of this by linking together various myths, he portrays the equivalence of different experiences, in the legendary waste land of the myths, in the limbo of Dante, in the unreal city of London, in the waste land of post-war Europe. It is like the variation of a single melody in the hands of an expert musician. The romantic and classical symbol is of lustful passions in 'Sweeney Erect,' the childish day – dreams of dazzling success compared with the actuality of the state and unsavoury emotions present in 'A Cooking Egg,' the sick symbolic content of the sacrament of baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity in 'The Hippopotamus', all these are full of implications.

There is much packed symbolism and verbal concentration in 'Burbank', but the materials are much more lively and the versification more agile and flexible, than in *The Hippopotamus*. *Gerontion* does not deal with a man, symbolic of a civilization ministering to body, mind and spirit. He is abstract intelligence fixed to nothing stable, with no organic relationship between himself and a living culture. Blake saw the tiger as the symbol of the union of the creator and his creation : the symbol of the energy of the creator expressing itself in all forms of physical incarnation. Eliot suggests the link between the human and the natural world in associating the year, the seasonal cycle of birth and death, with juvenescence, the youthfulness of a human-being. "In the juvenescence of the year came Christ the tiger ;" *Gerontion* was intended by Eliot as a sort of prologue to *The Waste Land*. *Ash Wednesday* belongs to a widely different world and the 'Lady' inspired by Dante's Beatrice is visualized as a symbol in the process of spiritual regeneration, the symbol of hidden wisdom, the enlightener, the mediating

function between the conscious ego and the inner world of the unconscious *Four Quartets* express. Eliot's most complete expression of the experience of believing a dogma ; the theme of the continuity and co-existence of death and rebirth in the metaphor of beginning and ending is given the best illustration. The true pattern of history is not a sequence in time, but is a 'familiar compound ghost' of the spiritual values which have made a people, 'a pattern of timeless moments.' These exist apart from the cycle in which night follows day and winter summer :

“So, while the light fails

On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel

History is now and England.”

Eliot believed that natural law is meaningless unless complemented and completed by spiritual law, and these two creative spheres become united in a symbol of incarnation. It is the ultimate symbol of revelation, illumination, transfiguration. But it is also the process at work in all man's true experiences of self-fulfilment. On earth in religious experience, it has its highest reflection in the symbol of the saint, which Eliot has used in '*Murder in the Cathedral*.' In the secular world, its revelation is the presence of art, the symbol which he chose as the title of 'Four Quartets'.

When Eliot began to write, the speech of the poet's - tribe had become impoverished, atrophied, and inarticulate. Hence, it was inevitable that a poet should resort to the language of symbol, the logic of imagination, to reawaken consciousness, and to widen the area over which the music of poetry can be heard.

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## **1.6 Eliot as a Modern Poet**

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T.S. Eliot has been described by one of his admirers as one first holding the key of modern poetry in his open hand and then unlocking its door. As he flings open the door, we enter a strange world of people who have as if just escaped from the broader and vaster life outside and found a retreat into this new Inferno. It is said that human nature seldom changes and these denizens of Eliot's Inferno are basically similar to their predecessors in the realm of poetry. But in giving them vitality and individuality, Eliot has evolved a new pattern in poetic technique and achieved a remarkable position in the history of poetical innovation.

Eliot began by rejecting the romantic faith. He believed that romantic poetry was essentially escapist, and it is for those who demand of poetry a day-dream, or a metamorphosis of their own feeble desires and lusts or what they believe to be intensity of passion. He declared an allegiance to a central authority to which all men might owe allegiance, in objective standards by which men might agree to judge art, and in any inspiration other than the shiftings of personality through which adult, orderly art might be created. So in Eliot we see how Romantic egoism was to give way to the classical principle of faith in the value of tradition, precisely at the time

when such a change of heart was most needed in poetry.

While acknowledging Eliot's debt to tradition, we can judge his modernity by the extent to which he broke with tradition. Eliot was profoundly conscious of his age which was "a war-like, various and tragical" one. Life was chaotic, and in his early poetry up to '*The Waste Land*' he has given us the most convincing presentment of social aimlessness ; has made concrete for his contemporaries, the paralysis and decay of his generation. If Eliot had remained at the level of *The Waste Land*, his poetry would have suffered from the fate of too topical poetry. But Eliot emerged from that state of more loyalty to his age to evolve an independent poetic creed.

Eliot is a modern poet not merely because of the novelty of his themes and by a keen awareness of his time but chiefly because he has evolved a new method of poetic communication. He saw the deep significance of the relationship between poetry and the rhythm and idiom of ordinary speech. He also felt that to build up poetry with dead idiom is like living a life of dead habits and obsolete manners. All revolutions in poetry hold up this ideal but Eliot gave a new meaning to this principle. He felt that it was high time that poetry was restored from the excess of artificiality and musical elaboration into which it had lapsed. Eliot evolved the tripple formula of the mythical method, the auditory imagination and the objective correlative. He also brought to the use of poetry the suggestiveness of the symbolist technique. The organized labour of intellect rather than the fortuitous stimulation of emotion is the proper basis of Eliot's poetry. In his intellectual bias, in his belief in authority rather than liberty as the guide to truth and in his regard for formal details, Eliot was reviving to a certain extent the Augustan tradition. The edifice that he built on this foundation is Eliot's own and marks how his individual talent developed while acknowledging his indebtedness to tradition. In Eliot's hands poetic art has widened in sensibility, discovered for its use the subconscious and very effectively utilized the possibilities of prose rhythm.

While reviving classicism, Eliot's poetry has also made full and proper use of science and psychology, two of the modern interests of man. It is interesting to note how deeply psychoanalysis and psychotherapy has influenced Eliot's themes. The mind and its infinite powers has become a very interesting topic for study and research in the 20th century and Eliot's poetry as well as drama reflect the obsessions of an age. The more we live, huddled together, the more solitary we become and the absence of a true and sincere friend has led the individual to take refuge in clinical psychology. The wide array of characters in Eliot's early poetry suggest something grimly mysterious and abnormal about them, their names, their thoughts and talks and also about the world they live in. One may even presume that they have come to the last resort of the poet's Inferno, dejected from a psychoanalyst's clinic.

Even in his symbols and imagery, he is influenced by science and modern thinking. Consider for example images like -

"Like a patient *etherised* upon a table,"

— (*Prufrock*)



or

“It is impossible to say just what I mean !

But, as if a *magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns*

on a screen. “ — (*Prufrock*)

In his return to the consolations of religion and faith in a spiritual rebirth, Eliot is again reflecting a tendency of the age. All movements in nature conform to a cyclic process of birth, growth, degeneration or decay and rebirth. In a world preoccupied by materials and a general lowering of discipline and spiritual values of life, it is only natural that the civilised individual should pursue the consolations of spiritual awakening. ‘In the Beginning is the End’ also, Eliot’s later poetry expresses the significance of this spiritual rebirth in unequivocal terms.

“I am tired with my own life and the lives

of those after me,

I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.”

Eliot is modern not only in his imagery and method of communication, but also in his language and metrical devices. Free verse and impressionism were both movements of liberation, simultaneous reactions against romanticism and a decadent classicism. They represent the changes that have been going on in the European sensibility. With free verse, poets got a new instrument that was capable of reflecting the rapidly shifting vision of our time. Eliot’s amazing genius lies in the use of words and rhythms and his extra- ordinary fertility in styles of writing, each manner apparently perfected from the first part of his achievement was to have worked out an elaborate system of reference and association, a sort of poetic shorthand. The recurring image which has been brilliantly developed in *The Waste Land* is an important part of the system.

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## 1.7 Eliot’s Poetic Technique

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Eliot’s poetic technique emphasizes the impersonality of art, the disciplines necessary to it. Following the tradition of the Jacobean and the symbolists, Eliot too fully objectified his material. He does not attempt to reflect the personality of the poet. It is a poetry of ironic contrasts and oppositions where connectives are not ‘written out’ in the narrative method. Instead, the figures, symbols and rhythms are held together by the tension of their inter relationships which again are invisible. In the Jacobean and the symbolists, Eliot also rediscovered the use of the full resources of language itself in poetic practice, bringing back that fusion of the simple word and the speech-rhythm with all that is most rich and complex and surprising which again had been lost to poetry for so long.

One of the most familiar aspects of Eliot’s poetry is its complex echoing of multiple sources. He believed that one of the requisites of the poet, or maker is ‘Imitation, to be able to

convert the substance, or riches of another poet to his own use.” Eliot’s uses of allusion, adaptation and quotation, serve a double purpose; it is an aspect of tradition as well as that of the process of transformation.

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## **1.8 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this unit we have acquainted you with :

- (a) the life of T.S. Eliot
- (b) the age of Eliot, which saw a ferment of new ideas and witnessed a reaction against many of the old ‘victorian ideals.
- (c) Eliot’s classicism
- (d) the use of symbols and images in Eliot’s poetry.
- (e) Modernity of Eliot’s poetry.
- (f) Eliot’s poetic technique which emphasizes the impersonality of art.

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## **1.9 Review Questions**

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- 1. Discuss the elements of modernity in the poetry of T.S. Eliot.
- 2. “Eliot is a Classicist” Discuss.

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## **1.10 Bibliography**

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- 1. Pinto : Crisis in English Poetry.
- 2. Jones Dowson : A Critical Study of The Wasteland and Other Poems.

## UNIT-2

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### T.S. ELIOT : *THE WASTE LAND* (II)

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Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Genesis of The Waste Land
- 2.3 The Theme of the Poem
- 2.4 Poetic Devices Used in the Poem
- 2.5 The Use of Literary Allusions in the Poem
- 2.6 A Critical Estimate of the Poem
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Review Questions
- 2.9 Bibliography

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#### **2.0 Objectives**

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In continuation with its previous unit, this unit contains an elaborate discussion on T.S. Eliot's one of the most popular poems *The Waste Land* and throws light on its genesis, theme, poetic devices and characters.

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

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T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is by far the most representative poem of the twentieth century. It exposes the very soul of the modern generation with all its horrors-moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy, disillusionment and waste. It particularly exposes the horror of war and the waste and frigidity that accompany and follow the modern warfare. Here the 'waste land' is Europe devastated both physically and spiritually by the two world wars in a single generation.

The poem gave a rude shock to the world and forced it to look into the various maladies and channels of emotional and spiritual disintegration into which it had drifted. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot's mood is negative and analytic. He was more aware of the facts of disintegration than of the universal system of order and restoration. The hope of restoration of order and integration is indeed there, but it is a distant vision.

The students are advised to go through the poem and then read the sections that follow :

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## 2.2 The Genesis of *The Waste Land*

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*The Waste Land* gave the world a shock, a shock that had a curative effect, to a war crazy world. It was a great positive achievement in the history of English poetry. In it a mind fully alive to the impressions of the age had forced a poetic triumph out of the very difficulties that confronted a poet of that age.

War does something to heighten the sympathetic sense of each other in people who might otherwise practise a mutual disregard. Eliot was to be a Londoner in the two wars. London of the First World War and the glimpses it gave of people, suffering and courage led to a heightening of his poetic powers, awakened him to the futility, horror and boredom, beneath human existence and *The Waste Land* was the result. It used to be said that *The Waste Land* was a “dead end” to him. It would have been so, had not the Second World War shaken his sympathies and sensibilities, extended and deepened his sympathies and his reflections on history. He was able to write the last two Quartets and then proceed to the successful plays of which he had dream so long.

It is true that the immediate sense of the ugliness, the emptiness and aimlessness of man’s spiritual estate during the post-war years, was responsible for the genesis of *The Waste Land*; Eliot spoke with the voice of the lonely prophet in a corrupt city. But he was not alone in the impulse to lament the desolation or disorder around him and to cry for a reawakened sense of the old laws and values; he was different only in that he was the first to find a voice and a form for that cry. It is a poem which reflects the post-war struggle for re-orientation.

Eliot wrote the work not merely under the influence of war and London, but also under the stress of illness. Six years of strenuous work, wage earning on the one hand and intellectual conquests pursued at the same time had exhausted him. But a poet’s breakdown is often the moment of creation. It was possible for him, therefore, to gather all that he had experienced and by bold and simple strokes to metamorphose the despairing sounds, the desperate sights of his world, into something rich and strange. *The Waste Land* is a work in which the poet writes simultaneously about his own illness and the world’s illness, of which his own is a reflection. He records and condemns his own despairing state and prescribes or rather attempts to prescribe a cure for the healing of the city civilization of which he is the representative.

Along with these were the influence of writers like La Forge, Stravinsky, Pound and Miss Weston, which settled for Eliot, the method he was to adopt. It is of the essence of Eliot’s method in the poem that the experiences created and enacted in his poems are both timeless and timely. The poem also holds up Eliot’s religious position, viz., that man is in no sense perfect, but a wretched creature who can yet apprehend perfection. The poem was, in fact, a demand for such a realization.

The possibility of spiritual rebirth is a constantly recurring theme in Eliot and Jessie

Weston's book provided Eliot with the plan of his poem, with a "way of controlling and ordering and giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of fertility and anarchy which is contemporary history." The poet is agonizingly aware "in the imprisonment of his personal waste land, that the possibilities of rebirth cannot be dismissed, as an historical anachronism, that the truth of the experience is eternally present, and that the living of it plunges the whole man in to a process of disintegration and conflict." The presence of sterile degeneration and the necessity of regeneration and change is the general truth behind it and its central theme.

The technique and mode of expression in the poem, the very fragmentariness of its nature and the broken images, all these point to the poet's meaning, more significantly to another preoccupation in the poet's mind at the time of the conception of the poem. This was his utter despair of even succeeding in fully articulating his meaning. A sense; "of isolation, and alienation, and the impossibility of communication is the chief inspiration of the poem. Much of the poetry of *The Waste Land* is achieved in the effort to find speaking symbols for an experience that cannot be told. The problem of articulation, the difficulty to find a means of communication which would all express his feelings, this was what he was striving for. If he has failed, the very failure is effective in portraying his 'Waste Land' occupied by mere 'effigies' for men. As an attempt towards effective communication, *The Waste Land* helped Eliot to reorganize himself for another eight years of work, it helped younger poets to organize for another thirty, it set in motion the moralistic poetry of men like Auden.

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### 2.3 The Theme of the Poem

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*The Waste Land* like Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* offers a criticism of life in the sense of an interpretation of its problems. In both there is a painful consciousness of the sickness and the fever and the fret of contemporary civilization but *The Waste Land* goes beyond a mere diagnosis of the spiritual distempers of the age; it is a lament over man's fallen nature, a prophecy and a promise. Unlike Arnold, who suggests a cure of escape from the feverish contact of modern life Eliot vaguely hints at the possibility of 'rebirth. Obviously there is no assurance of this redemption, but there is at least the awareness that it is the only way out. The conclusion of the poems gives no assurance of any sort but the basic symbol used in the poem is one of restoration into life though after hazardous quests, The legend of the Holy Grail which originated in fertility cult tells how a questing knight saved the Waste Land from drought and barrenness, occasioned by the old age of the ruler, known as the Fisher King. The Knight must restore the latter's youth by riding to the Chapel Perilous and there questioning the Lance and the Grail, symbols of the male and female principles. Eliot's poem is an allegorical application of this story to modern society and religion. Our civilization is the Waste Land; we can obtain youth and life giving rain only by journeying far, questioning our condition and earning a hard lesson. To enforce his premise, Eliot uses symbols drawn from kindred myths and religions. In the process what ironic pictures of modern manners, what superb mingling of satiric vulgarity and sensuous delicacy, what prophetic earnestness, and what variety of imagery and rhythm are revealed.

The best way to read the poem is to regard it as a “Phantas-magoria of futility, a series of trains of thought in the mind of a social observer.” Such an observer is introduced in the person of Tiresias, the seer, who having been both man and woman, suggests the characteristics of all humanity.

Part I, entitled, ‘The Burial of the Dead,’ emphasizes the inevitable dissolution which must precede new life, and begins with a lament over the loss of fertility in what should be a spring season and illustrates this by reproducing typical chatter of cosmopolitan idlers, passing thence to symbols of our barrenness. The decay of love in the modern world is then suggested. The section ends with a vision of London as an unreal city, in a nightmare of memories. In the lines.

“That corpse you planted last year in your garden  
Has it begun to sprout ? Will it bloom this year?”

the connection with the fertility cult is established.

In Part II, ‘A Game of Chess,’ the title of which recalls the dramatic irony of Binaca and the fatal power of woman, he cleverly draws us to two types of modern women in contrasted literary styles. After picture of a luxurious boudoir which rivals Keats, he gives the petulant conversation of its occupant and her eternal question :

What shall we do tomorrow ?

What shall we ever do!

In the next quest the tone of disgust deepens. The sordidness of urban pleasure suggests the flames of lust, hatred and infatuation in which mankind is burning. Just as the poet has introduced into the boudoir, touches of Cleopatra and Dido, so now he recalls the river of Spenser’s *Prothalamion* and with equally devastating irony; goes on to parody Goldsmith’s “When lovely woman stoops to folly” in order to contrast the cynicism of the modern girl with the eighteenth century sentimental ideal. Similarly, he uses Wagner’s ‘Rhein-old’ melodies ; and a picture of Queen Elizabeth flirting, with Leicester in her barge, to emphasize the permanence of human sensuality and the degradation to which it has now fallen. With intense agony of soul, he finally alludes to the repentance of Saint Augustine and to the teaching of the Buddha.

After a short section, emphasizing the brevity of sensual life, the several themes are recapitulated in Part V and the way of escape vaguely hinted at. Our sterility is again asserted :

“Here is no water but only rock,  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water.”

In this desert, we suffer illusions; where two walk, there goes a shadowy third. There are murmurs and lamentations. When we reach the Chapel Perilous, it seems empty but as we doubt betraying Christ, and the cock crows twice, God gives a sign by thunder bringing rain.

Self-surrender, Sympathy, Self-control—these three are the ways to salvation.

The poet speaks of setting his own house in order though London Bridge is falling down. He must pass through the fire of purification. He is haunted by images of desolation and a shower of literary allusions shows him slipping into frenzy. But like a charm of healing rain, he repeats the message of the thunder and ends with the blessing ‘*Shantih, Shantih, Shantih*’.

It may be pointed out that in *The Waste Land*, Eliot’s attitude was more negative than positive, analytic rather than synthetic. He was more aware of the facts of the disintegration than of the universal cyst in which the disintegration took place. Poetically, it was cry in the dark, a longing for imaginative stability, for participation in an unknown ultimate order.

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## 2.4 Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

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*The Waste Land* can be considered as Eliot’s literary workshop where all the tools of his craft are on display. The first of these devices is the underlying *symbolism* of the poem. Abandoning La Fontaine’s adolescent nostalgia, Eliot has developed a satiric dryness of witty statement in which ‘facts’ were left to evoke emotion with a minimum of explicit correlation. Necessarily, the mood is too complex for initial statement but is the implied resultant of the whole poem and is often not formulated until the close. Hence, the final emergence of harmony out of heterogeneity is entirely dependent upon a clear concatenation of image.

Eliot’s use of imagery in ‘*The Waste Land*’ sets up obstacles. It is chiefly because he inherited from the Metaphysicals the style of involving poetry with far-fetched erudition. His love of new words, strange instances and subtle allusions find expression in most of his poems.

The success of question is contingent on two factors : the intrinsic value of the quotation in its new context quite apart from any recognition of its original source; and the density of colour resulting from the recognition of the original source and its relation to the new context. Given intrinsic value even the average reader will find an adequate significance in the most recondite allusions and many of Mr Eliot’s quotations make this possible. But the frequent use of unattributed allusions demanding a close knowledge of even the accepted classics very often strains the reader’s attention. Poetry comes to depend on scholarship. In ‘*The Waste Land*’ it presents serious difficulties to the ordinary reader. At the same time, it serves to convey to the reader an idea of a complex civilization compounded of a thousand different strands. The very chaos of allusions which recall memories from Dante, Jacobean drama, Buddhism, mythology, anthropology, ‘The Golden Bough,’ ‘From Ritual to Romance’ and the ‘Upanishads,’ very effectively convey even to the uninitiated reader, the sense of the barrenness

and decay of a chaotic civilization. One is struck by the vigour and beauty of much of the details, the ironic pictures of modern manners, the superb mingling of satiric vulgarity and sensuous delicacy, prophetic earnestness, variety of imagery and rhythm.

The poem can also be considered as an allegorical application of the Grail legend to modern society and religion. Our civilization is '*The Waste Land*'; we can obtain youth and life-giving rain only by journeying far, questioning our condition and learning a hard lesson. To enforce this, Eliot uses symbols drawn from kindred myths and religions. The difficulties of this anthropological background are increased by the methods of thought which are natural to Eliot. There are five parts in the poem each containing sections, bound variously, by superficial association of ideas, by contrast, or by no link save the underlying message.

Repetition of images is another of the devices used in the poem and is the means of carrying on the symbolism from section to section. The image of the rocky desert, of water, the crowds of people, all these recur with varying emotional tones in the different sections. The whole poem gains its unity from the interweaving of such thematic material. The music of ideas repeated according to a set of patterns, makes the poem in effect the literary counterpart of the symphony to which the symbolists aspired.

Words are but an imperfect medium to communicate the complexity of the civilization that Eliot is trying to portray. Eliot tried to create new concepts assisted by echoes of tradition, the feeling for syllable and rhythm or what he called the auditory imagination. But with all these devices, Eliot's poetry fails to convey fully his meaning. In fact, in his poetry, Eliot is like his own 'Prufrock,' making an abortive attempt at self-expression. The state of mind evoked by his poetry is the state of isolation, of the ineffable and inarticulate.

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## 2.5 The Use of Literary Allusions in the Poem

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One of the most delightful and at the same time difficult aspects of Eliot's poetry is its complex echoing of multiple sources. It has been said of some writers that they write as if no one has ever written before. Of Eliot it is the reverse which is true. He was a strong believer in tradition and he believed that the ordinary reader will be equipped with a moderate familiarity with the classics so that allusions to situations and events in them will only strengthen his power of appreciation. *The Waste Land* is full of allusions which illustrate Eliot's manipulation of "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity." This rich allusiveness is also illustrative of his conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.

The scenes of modern life are set against the memories of the myths related in "From Ritual to Romance" and "The Golden Bough". The whole experience is prefaced by an epigraph from the "Satyricon". In the words of the Cumaean Sibyl, 'I want to die.' the emotional pattern of the poem is suggested. They reflect both the scornful attitude of the contemporary world towards 'tradition' and the despairing personal death-wish which is the chief aspect of the poem's emotional pattern.



In the opening movement of the poem, the coming of death is suggested by the reference to 'Ecclesiastes'. 'When fears shall be in the way—and desire shall fail because man goeth to his long home.' Then shall the dust return to earth as it was. There is an ironic echo of Iraiah: 'And a man shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land as rivers of water in a dry place.' Or as the redness of the rock suggests it may be a reference to the Mount of Purgatory reddened by the setting sun in Canto III of the "Purgatorio." Even without the reinforcement of these literary references, these lines may be read purely in terms of emotion and sensation.

As the water-image breaks in (lines-30-40), two quotations are given from the first and third Acts of *Tristan and Isolde*. The first is from the Sailor's song: "The wind blows fresh from the homeland, My Irish child, where are you lingering?" and the second "empty and blank the sea." Tristan is the glorification of adulterous love; The sea proves traitor, it is the arrest of consummation. Between the two quotations there is the suggestion of another frustrated love, an arrested spring, a thwarted fulfilment.

The sailor symbol in the Madame Sosostris passage is suggestive of the temptation to drown out the moral and spiritual problems of the personal life by the creative activity of art. This is borne out by the quotation from *The Tempest* which follows. The line, 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' from Ariel's song, is associated in Eliot's mind with the transmuting of life into art. It points to the change of the living symbols of the past into inanimate, inorganic matter; the vision commemorated in the whole western tradition has become opaque and lifeless as the pearl—In its creative song, Ariel's song reminds us of a supposed death by drowning which in reality led to a regeneration through 'sea change' and a metamorphosis from blindness to new vision. Thus, it stands as the central symbol in the poem for the whole process of metamorphosis in both its destructive and creative aspects.

In line 60, the reference to Baudelaire widens the limits to our vision of the unreal city. It is twentieth century London, Baudelaire's 'Paris', La Forge's 'City' and it has taken on the character of a scene in a nightmare. This is followed in line 63 by an allusion to Dante's 'Limbo' to those wretches, who were never alive, who lived without praise or blame, the neutrals, the Mrs Equitones. This reference to Book III of the *Inferno*, is closely followed by the description of one who made, through cowardice, the great refusal. The couplet,

"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men

Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!"

takes us to a dirge sung over a corpse in Webster's 'White Devil.' There the dramatist calls to

"The ant, the field-mouse and the male

To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm"

and there has already been the mention in the opening lines that Winter kept us warm and that Winter symbolizes the living death of *The Waste Land* itself. The song in Webster

continues. “But keep the wolf far thence that’s foe to men.” Eliot’s, changes in the texts, carry on the painful ambivalence of attitudes. The dog was a common symbol of aid to rebirth Or the ‘Dog’ with the capital ‘D’ might suggest the Dog Star, Sirius, who was the the herald of the rising of he Nile Waters, a true friend to man. May be there is a hint to the Hound of Heaven. The total emotional effect of the allusion is horror towards the living death of the crowd flowing under London Bridge.

The Game of Chess deals directly with the artificiality and lack of human or mythical meaning in the central ‘fertility’ situation, the marriage relation of men and women. It opens with a reminiscence of Cleopatra on the stately burnished throne of Egypt. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra lavishes all the luxury and stateliness of her infinite variety on the scene but the vitality of the contemporary woman in the dramatic glimpses that follow is futile and their games with men are nothing but an empty pastime or an open hostility ending in a stalemate. There is also the reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in the line—

“As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene.”

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Middleton’s play, *Women Beware Women* are also alluded to. The former referring to the story of Philomela recreates the world where the physical and temporal is transcended by the spiritual and eternal, her song gave meaning to her moral pain. Here lust still triumphs, her voice is vulgarized. The reference to Middleton’s play suggests the meaningless sexual intrigue where one after another people fall a victim to the manoeuvres of the opponents until finally death conquers all.

The Fire Sermon opens with memory of Spenser’s marriage song and its scenes of nymphs and lovers preparing gaily for a wedding on the river bank, haunting the picture of autumn desolation. Spenser’s river and the sea in the tempest shrink to the dull canal and its dirty water, The Grail Castle to the gashouse. The protagonist, the Fisher King and Ferdinand melt into a single figure.

The river nymphs of the opening section now change to the three Thames daughters, whom Eliot associates with the Rhine daughters of Wagner’s opera. The Thames-daughters compare the pollu-tion of the river in the present day and its sluggish movement and cluttered surface with the colour and liveliness and music and brightness of the Elizabethan scene. The river or the sea at the scene of violation have no cleansing power. It is part of the emptiness of life in general.

The reference to St. Augustine’s ‘Confession,’ “to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears,” winds up the section with a collocation of Eastern and Western asceticism.

What the Thunder Said is based on a fable of the meaning of Thunder found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. “Datta, Daya-dhvam and Damyata, Shantih, Shantih, Shantih,” these words which are in foreign tongues and not translated into his own inner experience leave the poem with no conclusive, but only a formal ending.

In line 427, there is a reference to Purgatorio; “And so I pray you, by that virtue which leads you to the topmost of the stair, be mindful in due time of my pain. Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.” There is the suggestion of purification hinted at in ‘Fire Sermon’.

“Why then I’ll fit you” is a quotation from Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and “Hieronymo is mad again” is the sub-title of that play. Hieronymo has been asked to provide a ‘show’ for the entertainment of the king. He intends to use a tragedy he has written in his youth, fitting the actors to the parts he wants them to play in real life. Another strange aspect of this play is that

“Each one of us must act his part

In unknown languages.....

In parts of the play, Hieronymo feigns madness and postpones taking action to revenge his Son’s death. He says :

“I am never better than when I am mad;

Then methinks I am a brave fellow

Then I do wonders, but reason abuseth me;

And there’s the torment, there’s the hell.”

Eliot’s mind is filled with associations of all these fragments. Like Hieronymo he is casting himself, fitting himself in the parts, in ‘sundry languages’ of those other poets who have suffered and struggled to achieve new life. It is when he is mad, that he is better, and feels able to say the concluding words of the poem : “Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.”

It cannot be denied that the continuous use of often obscure literary allusions has rendered the poem obscure and that the average reader, already puzzled by the preliminary knowledge of myths and romance, might turn away with diffidence. To those who consider it worth the trouble, the rich allusiveness of the poem will unfold fresh delights, much more rewarding than the power, general effect of which will be felt even by those who do not” bother to understand it all. “Given intrinsic value, the average reader will find an adequate significance in the most recondite allusions, and most of Eliot’s quotations make this possible.”

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## 2.6 A Critical Estimate of the Poem

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*The Waste Land* is the most important and the greatest achievement of T. S. Eliot. It symbolises the modern civilisation which is compared to a Waste Land. Referring to this poem Bullough has observed in *The Trend of Modern Poetry* : “*The Waste Land* goes beyond a mere diagnosis of the spiritual distempers of the age ; it is a lament over man’s fallen nature, a prophecy, and promise.”

Our civilization is the waste land; we can obtain youth and life-giving rain only by

journeying far, questioning our condition, and learning a hard lesson. To enforce this, Mr Eliot uses symbols drawn from kindred myths and religions. The relationship between these must be known before the poem can be understood. And the difficulties of this anthropological background are increased by the methods of thought which we have seen are natural to him. There are five parts, each containing sections bound variously by superficial association of ideas, by contrast or by no link save the underlying message. To the uninitiated reader the poem may seem chaotic. Only those with some knowledge of Dante, Jacobean drama, Buddhism, mythology and the works of Sir James Frazer, as well as of *From Ritual to Romance*, can appreciate its movement, even with help from the poet's notes. Yet no one could fail to be struck by the vigour and beauty of much of the detail. What ironic pictures of modern manners, what a superb mingling of satiric vulgarity and sensuous delicacy, what prophetic earnestness, what variety of imagery and rhythm !

“The best way to begin reading the poem is to regard it as a phantasmagoria of futility, a series of trains of thought in the mind of a social observer. Mr Eliot indeed introduces such an observer (in a not very effective attempt at suggesting comprehensiveness and impersonality) in the persons of Tiresias, the seer, who having been both man and woman, suggests the characteristics of all humanity.

“Part I, called *The Burial of the Dead*, to emphasise the inevitable dissolution which must precede new life, begins with a lament over the loss of fertility in what should be spring-season, and illustrates this by reproducing typical chatter of cosmopolitan idlers, passing thence to symbols of our barrenness :

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.....

“The decay of love in the modern world is then suggested by a quotation from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (romantic idolatry), with which is compared an instance of amorous sentimentality. That secret wisdom, too, has fallen on evil days is shown by the introduction of the Tarot pack of cards, used formerly for divination, now for fortunetelling. He ends with a vision of London as an Unreal City, in a nightmare of memories :

That corpse you planted last year in your garden  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

The connection with the fertility cult is thus emphasised.

“In Para 2, called A Game of Chess, to recall the dramatic of Middleton's Bianca and the fatal power of woman, he cleverly draws two types of modern woman in contrasted literary styles. After a picture of a luxurious boudoir which rivals Keats, he gives the petulant conversation of its tenant, and her eternal question :

What shall we do tomorrow ?

What shall we ever do ? .....

The man replies :-

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a close car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Then answering the words *knock*, the scene changes to a public house at closing time, and the garrulous mean talk of another woman.

“In part 3, the tone of disgust deepens. It is called ‘The Fire Sermon’ to suggest to the initiated the sermon of the Buddha in which he spoke of mankind as burning in the flames of lust, hatred and infatuation. Here we are shown the sordidness of urban pleasures. Just as he introduced into the boudoir touches of Cleopatra and Dido, so now he recalls the river of Spenser’s *Prothalamion*, and with equally devastating irony goes on to parody Goldsmith’s ‘When lovely Woman,’ in order to contrast the cynicism of the modern girl with the eighteenth century sentimental ideal. Similarly, he uses Wagner’s *Rheingold* melodies, and a picture of Queen Elizabeth flirting with Leicester in her barge, to emphasise the permanence of human sensuality and the degradation to which it has now fallen. With agony of soul he finally alludes to the repentance of Saint Augustine and to the teaching of the Buddha.

“After a short fourth part, translated from one of his earlier experiments in French and emphasising the brevity of sensual life, the several themes are recapitulated in part 5, and the way of escape suggested. Our sterility is again asserted :

Here is not water but only rock,

Rock and no water and the sandy road,

The road winding above among the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water...

In this desert we suffer illusions; where two walk there goes a shadowy third. There are murmurs and lamentations. When we reach the Chapel Perilous, it seems empty ; but as we doubt (betraying Christ) and the cock crows twice, God gives a sign, by thunder bringing rain. And the message of the thunder is threefold: Da, Dayadhvam, Damyata — self-surrender, sympathy, self-control These three are the ways to salvation.

“The technique of the poem is that of ‘the music of ideas’ already attempted on a small scale in *Gerontion*. Here it is organized with great skill and elaboration in five sections are movements, the first of which introduces the main themes, which are developed with variations in the second and third, while the fourth is short, grave and slow, a kind of pause before an

impressive culmination of the fifth.

The themes of this symphonic poem are a series of scenes rather like film shots fading and dissolving into each other, seen from the viewpoint of an impersonal observer, the protagonist of the poem, who is identified with the impotent Fisher King and also with Tiresias, the blind prophet of Greek legend. In one of his notes, Eliot writes that Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a character, is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest ... What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, 'is the substance of the poem.' Tiresias like the Spirit of the years in *The Dynasts*, is an embodiment of the modern mind, the keen observer who is 'Powerless to act.'

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## 2.7 Let Us Sum Up

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- (a) The Waste Land's primary theme is the spiritual barrenness of modern man.
- (b) The poem is a varied galaxy ranging from the simple and innocent hyacinths girl to the Clairvoyante, Madame Sosostris, from Ferdinand, the Prince of Naples to the one eyed merchant. All these characters are embodied in one person in the figure of Tiresias who represents the wisdom of both sexes.
- (c) The structure of the poem is built up of contrasts; the series of scenes from modern life are set against the memories of the myths.
- (d) The poem is remarkable for its underlying symbolism.

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## 2.8 Review Questions

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1. Briefly discuss the origin and growth of idea in *The Waste Land*.
2. Discuss T.S. Eliot's symbolism with special reference of *The Waste Land*.
3. Critically analyse the theme of *The Waste Land*.
4. Estimate the value of the influence of *The Waste Land* on modern poetry.
5. "*The Waste Land* is a music of ideas, the ideas like the musician's phrases are arranged not that they may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude." – I.A. Richard. Elucidate

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## 2.9 Bibliography

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1. Pinto: Crisis in English Poetry.
2. Westland: Contemporary Literature.
3. Maxwell: The Poetry of T.S. Eliot.

## UNIT-3

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### W.B. YEATS : *SAILING TO BYZANTIUM*

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#### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 About the Age
- 3.3 About the Poet
- 3.4 Reading the Poem (Text)
  - 3.4.1 Annotations
  - 3.4.2 Summary
  - 3.4.3 Symbolism
  - 3.4.4 Critical Appreciation
  - 3.4.5 Explanations of Important Passages
- 3.5 Let us Sum Up
- 3.6 Review Questions
- 3.7 Bibliography

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### 3.0 Objectives

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In this unit we intend to present a detailed critical analysis of one of the two famous Byzantium poems composed by William Butler Yeats. We shall also explain to you the philosophical symbolism employed by Yeats in the poem.

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### 3.1 Introduction

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‘Sailing to Byzantium’ is one of the most representative of W.B. Yeats’ poems. In the poem, Yeats faces old age with the wish to forget his decaying body and educate his soul for immortality. It is a little difficult poem to understand for here the poet has made use of his philosophical symbolism. For example, the word ‘Byzantium’ is the name of a city. Yet most western critics are of the view that it is a symbol for source abstraction. In spite of attempts to interpret the poem in relation to this or that philosophy, it remained obscure till 1970 when it was interpreted by Indian scholars in relation to the *Upanishads*.

A human being, according to the *Upanishads*, is made up of three things. The first

thing is his mortal body. It is born, deceys and dies. It is called “Isthool Sharira” because it consists of gross matter. The second thing is what the *Upanishads* call “Sukshma Sharira” It is of the size of a thumb and consists of the finest possible matter. It stays in the human heart. It is also the abode of the ten brain-centres called the Indriyas and of the Manas and of the Buddhi i.e. wisdom. The third thing is the Atman, also called the Self. It stays in the Buddhi as the first principle of intelligence.

Thus a live human being consists of the gross body, the subtle body, and the Atman. The subtle body stays in the heart, and the Atman dwells in the subtle body. The unity of the subtle body and the Atman is called the Jivatman. The subtle body is unageing and immortal by virtue of its nature and the presence of the Atman in it. It is this that cannot be cut up by weapons, burnt up by fire, rotted up by water, and dried up by the wind, according to the *Gita*.

There are twelve departments of the subtle body. First, there are ten brain-centres of the five bodily sense-organs and five bodily action-organs. Then there is the Manas. It is the mental screen upon which images of objects appear. Then there is the Buddhi, which is egoistic wisdom. The ruler of the gross body and the subtle body is the Atman, called the Self.

Every action or perception makes an impression on the mind-stuff. It is called a Samskara. As a speck of knowledge, it goes into the Buddhi, and stays there for infinite time. The sum total of the Samskaras of all the past lives of the Soul is called Purva-Pragya. The sum total of all the Samskaras of the present life of the Soul are called Karma. They keep the Soul in bondage all the time. So the Soul is never free from thoughts, ideas, etc. It is haunted by them even in sleep. On death, they decide the nature of Soul’s next world [i.e. body], and send it into that world, or into a series of worlds decided by them.

But the Soul can transcend the bondage of the Karma in Yogic Samadhi. There are eight steps of the Samadhi: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahama, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Yama, and Niyama are moral trainings. The Asana is the sitting posture. Pranayama is the control of the Prana. In Dharana and Dhyana, the Yogi withdraws all the powers of his Indriyas (senses) back into the mind and concentrates them on the nature of the Soul. When the concentration is long and unwavering, the Yogi is in the state of Samadhi. In it all the Samskaras lie still, and the Soul shines over them in its full effulgence. The Yogi can, if he so likes, also destroy the Samskaras one by one in a series of Samadhis. When all the Samskaras are burnt up in the fire of Yogic Samadhi, the Soul has attained Moksha. It will not be reborn any more.

W. B. Yeats has an intimate knowledge of what is called Raj-yoga. In the present poem, he tells us that, he being an old man, has given up the world. Then, seated on the Asana of the Samadhi, he prays to the powers of his Indriyas to return to his Soul, and help him attain to the Samadhi. Once his Soul has transcended his Samskaras, he shall not let it return to the



world for any kind of worldly pleasures, attractions. On the contrary, he shall scan all his Samaskaras one by one, and rule over them as the Yogi. In the Upanishads, the subtle body has been described as a golden city by virtue of the golden rays of Atman, the sun. Having taken this clue, W.B. Yeats describes the subtle body of the Soul as “Byzantium.” For Byzantium was an ancient city of golden buildings, gold ornaments, gold mosaics, etc. To give us a hint of the fact that it is the city of the Soul, he describes it as “the holy city of Byzantium.”

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### 3.2 About the Age

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It is believed by many literary critics that no great poetry was written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until T.S. Eliot came to the literary stage. In the words of A.C. Ward, “When the twentieth century opened, Tennyson had been dead nine years ago, and there was a widespread impression that English poetry had died with him.” But it could be even said that poetry today has not died. It is to take a line from T.S. Eliot’s *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: “Like a patient etherized upon a table.” The fact is that there is a lot of experimentation and innovation in modern poetry. Modern poetry has been exercising a great freedom in the choice of themes. The poet feels free to write on such diverse subjects as kings, cabbages and railways. The modern poet is down to earth and he is interested in depicting the reality of life around him.

Pastoralism, romanticism and such like tendencies were of very little interest to him. Pessimism is another trait in modern poetry. The two wars and the impending danger of a third one have cast a gloomy shadow on the poetic sensibility of the modern poet. But this pessimistic view of the sad realities of life is partly responsible for the humanitarian aspect in modern poetry.

The modern poets prefer to a simple and direct mode of expression. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats and W.H. Auden have been some of the prominent poets of the age. T.S. Eliot represents a new age of poetry, i.e. a new type of poetry which reflects the post-war phase of bitter disillusionment. Eliot, like many other poets of his time had been influenced by Ezra Pound. *The Waste Land* is perhaps Eliot’s best poetic work. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Four Quartets* also have won great fame. Ezra Pound himself produced some of the best poetry in *vers libre* and in the Imagist style. He was one of the earliest to welcome the new note in Tagore’s *Gitanjali*. Many of his early poems were translations or adaptations from the various Eastern and the Western languages. Pound’s early poetical autobiography *Hugh Selwin Mauberley* gives an account of his bitter struggle with the commercial age. While in Italy he wrote his masterpiece *The Cantos*. Ezra Pound had even influenced W.B. Yeats who was himself in certain respects an Imagist. But Yeats was also a mystic poet whose poetry was rooted in the soil of Ireland. *The Rose, The Green Helmet and Other Poems* and *The Last Poems* are some of his note-worthy poetical works.

The Irish Literary Movement was one of the most remarkable manifestations of the romantic revival of the late nineteenth century and W.B. Yeats was the bioneer of the movement and its greatest figure. The early poetry of Yeats is steeped in the spirit of the rich mystic

mythology of the Celtic race. But very soon Yeats evolved into a “modern” poet.

As a reaction to the verbal imprecision and lushness of the Romantics, emerged the imagist Movement. Their leaders were T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound. The movement was international but it proved to be short lived. Yeats was one of the several poets who were influenced by this new attitude. However, he never lost interest in or contact with the Anglo-Irish culture in which he had been brought up. He never passively reflected any new movement that arose. The change in Yeats is attributable only partly to the influence of Ezra Pound and his friends. All the same, this change was most striking. From the self-conscious romanticism of the early poems to the complex magic of Byzantium or the packed austerity of the Crazy Jane poems had been a long and tedious journey for Yeats.

Yeats worked out his poetic salvation in his own way and he never lost the compelling individuality of his accent. It was not Ezra Pound and his Imagist School but the Dublin literary circle that sent him to Standish O’Grady’s *History of Ireland, Heroic Period* where he found the great stories of the heroic age of Irish history. The Irish Revolution gave Yeats food for thought.

Even before meeting Ezra Pound in London, Yeats had come a long way, as David Daiches puts it, “In some of his early poems handling folk themes, he achieved by a careful counterpointing of contrasting pairs of images (such as human and faery, natural and artificial, domestic and wild, familiar and strange, modern and ancient, ephemeral and permanent) more suggestive patterns of meaning that might have been expected from such material. He was concerned from the beginning with opposites, with the dichotomy which he saw as central in experience : in his earlier poetry he explored the contrasts, while later he found poetic ways of resolving them or of subsuming them in a *tertium quid*”.

The fact is that Yeats’ poetic imagination was nurtured by various factors. From London Yeats got some vague pre-Raphaelite notions and some knowledge of the French Symbolists; from Silgo and Rosses he got earthiness and folk-lore and a racy dialect; from Dublin, especially in the ‘lull in politics’ that followed the death of Parnell, he got the sense of belonging to a national literary movement. Thus, we see that the social and literary milieu of the time led to the flowering of Yeats’s poetic genius.

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### **3.3 About the Poet**

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William Butler Yeats was born near Dublin in 1805 ; his childhood was spent mainly in London. His father and brothers were painters, and Yeats himself studied art for a time. He became, as a young man a member of the poetic set in London in the 1890’s; he was a keen worker in the Renaissance of the Irish theatre in the 1900’s and returned for a while to literary London before the First World War. By 1925 he was widely recognized as a major poet, and was still developing. He was also a member of the Irish Senate and a ‘public man’ (his own words) of Ireland. He died in France in 1939.

### **Three Women in Yeats' Life**

It is important to know a little about three women in Yeats's life. Maud Gonne, a beautiful but strong-minded girl with whom he fell in love and remained in love for many years (she appears often in his poetry, even in later years when he is offended by her intellectual and political arrogance, which he saw as unwomanly); Lady Gregory, an aristocratic patron of the arts, who collaborated with Yeats on the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and other projects ; and his wife, whom he married when he was fifty-two and who brought a fulfilment and stability into his work which it had previously missed.

### **PRINCIPAL WORKS OF W.B. YEATS**

#### **Poems**

*Mosada: A Dramatic Poem*, (1880)

*The Wanderings of Oisín*, (1889) *Poems*, (1895)

*The Wind Among the Reeds*, (1899)

*In the Seven Woods*, (1903)

*The Green Helmet and Other Poems*, (1910)

*Responsibilities*, (1916)

*The Wild Swans at Coole*, (1917)

*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, (1920)

*Later Poems*, (1922)

*The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems*, (1924)

*The Tower*, (1928)

*The Winding Stair*, (1933)

*Collected Poems*, (1933)

*The King of the Great Clock Tower*, (193 )

*A Full Moon in March*, (1935)

*New Poems*, (1938)

*Last Poems and Plays*, (1940)

*Collected Poems*, (1949)

#### **Plays**

*The Countess Kathleen*, (1892)

*The Land of Heart's Desire*, (1894)  
*The Shadowy Waters*, (1900)  
*Cathleen in Houlihan*, (1902)  
*Where There is Nothing*, (1902)  
*The Hour Glass*, (1903)  
*The Pot of Broth*, (1904)  
*The King's Threshold*, (1904)  
*Deirdre*, (1907)  
*The Unicorn from the Stars and Other Plays*, (1908)  
(with Lady Gregory)  
*Plays for an Irish Theatre*, (1911)  
*Four Plays for Dancers*, (1921)  
*Wheels and Butterflies*, (1934)  
*The Herne's Egg*, (1938)  
*Collected Plays*, (1952)

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### 3.4 Reading the Poem (Text)

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Now read the poem carefully

#### I

That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
—Those dying generations— at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.

#### II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

### III

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

### IV

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

#### 3.4.1 Annotations

**Line 1. That is no country for old men** — i.e. The country of sensual life is meant only for the young, not for old persons. It is because the senses and the generative organs of

the old are too weak for sensual life. Evidently “that country” refers to the period of sensual life, which is youth. The first line should be read as the last line of the first stanza.

**The young**—i.e. All young creatures.

Line 2. **In one another’s arms**—i.e. copulate; unite in sexual intercourse.

**birds in the trees**—i.e. birds also mate and unite for the purpose of sexual intercourse producing young.

Line 3. **Those dying generations**—i.e. All the mortal creatures. This line is to be read after “Fish, flesh, or fowl.”

**at their song** — at the time of their song. The poet implies that birds burst into song only in the season of mating.

Line 4. **The salmon-falls**—i.e. river estuaries full of salmon. N.B. The salmon is a large fish of pinkish-orange colour. Shoals of salmon from the sea ascend rivers to mate and spawn. But river-waters bring them back to the places where the rivers fall into the sea. And there the salmon mate.

**mackerel-crowded seas**—i.e. the sea-coasts having shoals of mating mackerel.

N.B. A mackerel is a fish of bluish and green-colour above, and of silver colour below. It is caught and eaten as food.

**seas**—i.e. coasts of seas. For mackerel fish are found only along sea coasts.

Line 5. **Fish**—i.e. Fish together with all other water creatures.

**flesh**—i.e. animals and other creatures living on land.

**fowl**—i.e. birds and other creatures that fly.

**commend**—take to heart

**all summer long whatever**—throughout their period of youth.

**whatever**—i.e. Any young one that

**is begotten**—is produced

**Fish, flesh, or fowl and dies**—i.e. Fish together with all other water creatures, all animals and other creatures living on land and all the creatures-that fly, in brief, all mortal creatures take to heart the birth of any young one [or egg] they beget or give birth to. They also take to heart the events of its death.

Line 7. **Caught in**—i.e. Being caught in; Being charmed by

**That sensual music** —i.e. charming music of the senses. NB. Here the poet indirectly represents the *Indriyas* as fairies singing charming music. The indirect representation

refers to the Sirens, mentioned in *Odyssey*, XII, who had the power of luring men to destruction by their charming song.

**all** - all the young.

**Neglect** — i.e. forget.

Line- 8 **Monuments** -great buildings [i.e. departments]; (2) records, *Samskaras* produced by activities of sensual life,

**Unageing**- evergreen, ever-young.

**Intellect** - the Soul [being the cause of intellect and life in man and other creatures with mind].

## Stanza 2

Line 1 **An aged man**—an old person.

**but** - merely.

**paltry**—i.e. useless, worthless.

**thing**—i.e. person.

Line 2. **A tattered coat upon a stick**—i.e. He is like the rag of a coat hung upon a stick; he is like a scarecrow. (mark the figure of speech in the time)

**unless**—if not.

Line 3. **soul**—His Soul, his Self.

**soul clap its hands and sing**—i.e. His Soul sings hymns to God and claps its hands in harmony with its song.

**and louder sing**—i.e. and it has to sing hymns louder .

Line 4. **For every tatter**—i.e. for every sinful act

**in**—i.e. because of.

**its mortal dress**—i.e. its sensual gross body which it wears as an outer covering. *N.B.* Here the poet has represented the gross body as a dress. The metaphor may be traced back to the *Gita*.

Line 5. **Nor is there**—i.e. There is, however, no

**singing school**—i.e. tradition that the Soul has to sing hymns.

**but studying**—except the tradition of the Soul's studying.

Line 6. **Monuments**—i.e. great qualities.

**Magnificence**—i.e. glory, grandeur, greatness.

Line 7. **sailed the seas**— i.e. crossed the mental seas of worldly attachment, desires, etc.

**and come**—and have come.

Line 8. **the holy city of Byzantium**—the holy kingdom of the Soul, which I may call Byzantium.

NB. Evidently “Byzantium” symbolizes the subtle body, in Hindi called the Sukshma sharira  
¼lw{e `kjh}½, which stays in the human heart, and which is the abode of the Soul. The  
poet implies that, being old, he has given up the world to realize the glory of his own  
Soul, through Raja-Yoga¼jkt ;kss½

### Stanza 3

Line 1. **O sages fire**—i.e. 0 divine bodily powers standing in the fire of Prana, like the sages  
standing in the fire of penance N.B. Here powers of the five sense-organs [i.e. eyes,  
ears, nose, etc.] and of the five action-organs [i.e. hands, legs, tongue, etc.] have been  
likened to sages, Rishis, standing in the fire of penance. It is an example of Vedantic  
symbolism.

**God’s holy fire**—i.e. Prana, power of life.

Line 2. **As**—i.e. Or as; Just as.

**in the gold mosaic**—i.e. in the golden pattern, called mosaic, like small pieces of coloured  
stone standing side by side. *N.B.* A mosaic is a design or pattern set in a wall. The  
design is made by fixing, side by side, small stone-pieces of different colours. Since  
the “sages” have been described as standing in the gold mosaic, we have to conceive  
them standing, side by side, like small stone-pieces of various colours.

Line 3. **Come from**—i.e. Return from, come back from

**the holy fire**—the Prana in the gross body

**Perne**—i.e. like a pern. A pern is a kind of the hawk.

**in a gyre**—in a circular movement, in a circular flight. *N.B.* When a hawk comes back to its  
master on earth, it comes back flying along a circular course.

**come from in a gyre**—i.e. Come back to Soul from your Prana-animated bodily posts, like  
a pern coming back to its master, in a circular flight.

Line- 4 **And be**—And become...

**the singing masters**—i.e. the singing guides. *N.B.* The powers are being requested to be the  
Soul’s guide during the process of attaining to the Yogic Samadhi.

Line 5 **Consume**—i.e. consume the ills of my heart. Soul. Here “heart” is a synecdochism for  
the Soul because its subtle body stays in the heart.

**consume heart away**—i.e. consume away all the worldly ills of my Soul. Since the powers



are emanations from the Prana, they are supposed to burn up all the worldly ailments covering the soul, as fog of ignorance.

**sick with desire**—the poet's Soul is still suffering from the ailment of desires.

Line 6. **fastened to** – i.e. shup up in, tied to, tethered to

**a dying animal**—a mortal animal-form, also called human form. Man is also an animal but of a higher kind.

Line 7 **it**—The poet's Soul.

**Knows not**—does not realize.

**What it is**—what a glorious thing it is.

**and gather me**—i.e. and carry me.

Line 8. **In the artifice of eternity**—into the state of *Samadhi* in which the Soul realizes that it is eternal and self-effulgent.

**artifice**—skilful method of attaining to.

**eternity**—the state and consciousness of being eternal self-effulgent.

#### **Stanza 4**

Line 1. **Once out of nature**—i.e. Once my Soul transcends the bound of nature [i.e. body and mind.] by attaining to the state of *Samadhic Nirvana*. N.B. When a yogi has attained to the Samadhi, his Soul enjoys complete freedom from the rule of body-mind combination. This state is also called the state of Samadhic Nirvana.

**I shall never take**—I shall never bring my Soul down into

Line 2. **My bodily form**—my world of the mind and the body.

**from**—i.e. for the sake of.

**any natural thing**—i.e. any charm of sensual pleasures, material possessions whatever.

Line 3. **But such a form**— i.e. But I shall maintain such a posture as if I were such a statue.

**Grecian**—of Greece; Greek.

**make hammered enamelling**—i.e. make of gold by hammering and enamelling it.

Line 5. To keep—In order to keep.

**a drowsy Emperor**—i.e. the Soul, Emperor of the physical and the mental universe still drowsy with the sleep of worldly memories,

Line 6. **Or**—i.e. Conversely; On the other hand.

set—i.e. set my Soul as if it were a bird.

**upon a golden bough**—(1) upon a bough of the gold tree of Samadhi; (2) upon the bough of the tree of Samadhi in the gold city of Byzantium.

Line 8. **what is past**—i.e. the Samskaras of all the past lives.

**or passing**—i.e. or those -of the present life which is passing.

**or to come**—i.e. or the probable fruits of all the Samaskaras, in the future. *N.B.* All the Samskaras of a perfect human life at death, gather together as Karma, and then as Karmic Vasna, to decide the nature of the Soul's future lives. This is called the doctrine of rebirth. The sum total of the Samaskaras of all past lives is called *Purva-Praya*; that of the Samskaras of the present life, *Karma*. At death these two gather together and create a special knowledge called Vasna  $\frac{1}{4}ok\downarrow uk\frac{3}{2}$ . This Vasna creates on the mind's screen images of the Soul's future worlds [i.e. bodies]. As soon as the Soul attaches itself to them, its present gross body dies, and it leaves for the embryo of its next world.

### 3.4.2 Summary

Life is a journey of the Soul through three countries— childhood, youth and old age. The poet has journeyed through the first two. Looking back, he tells himself that the country of youth is meant only for the young, not for the old. It is because youth is a period of procreative activities. Young men and women are in one another's arms. Young birds in trees burst into song and mate. Salmon fish transcend rivers to copulate and spawn. But river waters bring them back to the estuary where they fall into the sea again, and copulate there. Sea-coasts are full of mating mackerel fish. Thus fish, animals. and birds, or rather all mortal creatures, spend their youth in sensual life. Music of the senses keeps the young charmed with sensual pleasures, pains, etc. So the young do not pay any attention to the grandeur of the Soul.

An old man's life is worthless. He is like a tattered coat upon a stick, if he does not arouse his Soul from the sleep of worldly life. His Soul must expiate for every sin he has committed by means of his bodily senses. His soul can destroy its sins by realizing its own magnificent nature. So the poet has crossed the seas of worldly attachments, desires. etc. And he has now arrived at the outskirts of the holy city of the Soul, called Byzantium. [He means that he has given up the world, and is trying to become a Yogi.]

Then seated in his yogic posture, he calls upon all the powers of his senses to return to his Soul, just as a hawk comes back to its master. He also prays to them to be the guides of his Soul to self-realization. He then urges them to burn up all the worldly ills of his Soul. For it is sick with the disease of desires, and does not know its real, divine nature, being shut up in his mortal body. Finally, he prays to those powers to help his Soul attain the state and consciousness of being eternal, in the Samadhi.

Once his Soul has risen from the bondage of' body-mind Nature, in his Samadhi, he shall not bring it back to the subjection of his body and mind. On the contrary, he shall continue

sitting in his Samadhi, as if he were a gold statue made and painted by Greek goldsmiths. He shall do so to keep awake his Soul which may still be a bit drowsy with worldly sleep. Further, he shall set it on the highest bough of the golden tree of the Samadhi, to look attentively at the Samskaras of its past lives, of its present one, and also at their results in the future. Those Samskaras are to be shown by his Indriyas, the Manas, and the Buddhi, at its command.

### 3.4.3 Symbolism

For a clear understanding of the poetic idea, you have to understand the basic symbolism employed in the poem. Here *Byzantium* is the holy city of the Soul. It is holy because the Soul, also called the Self, dwells in it. Evidently, it is the subtle body, in Hindi called the *Sukshma Sharira*. The Soul is the first principle of intelligence. It being something abstract, never ages. There are twelve great departments in the subtle body. They are the departments of the ten Indriyas, the Manas, and the Buddhi. In the last line of the first stanza, they are described as “Monuments of unageing intellect.” The Soul is the ruler of its physical and mental universe. So in the fourth stanza it is described as “Emperor” of the city of Byzantium. In the Emperor’s court the Indriyas are the “ladies” and the Manas and the Buddhi, are the “lords”. The Indriyas are “ladies as that they are subordinate to the Manas and the Buddhi, their “lords.” Byzantium is a gold city in that everything here has been dyed gold by the golden rays of Soul, the sun. So here are trees made of gold, so to speak. In the last stanza, the poet therefore says that in his Samadhi, he shall set his Soul upon a bough of a golden tree. The Soul will be set as a bird freed from the cage of the body-mind combination. So it will “sing to lords and ladies of Byzantium” [i.e. to the Indriyas, the Manas, and the Buddhi] of the Samskaras as its past lives, of its present life, and also of the prospective results of all those Samakaras. The Soul has been represented as a bird; hence it will be set “upon a golden bough to sing”, that is, to chirp. When it is in the bondage of nature, the Indriyas, the Manas, and the Buddhi sing to it. Now that it has risen above their domain, it will sing to them of what is past, present, etc. The idea is that during his Samadhi, his Soul liberated from the bondage of its Karma, will scan the Samskaras of its past lives, those of its present life, and also the fruits of all those Samaskaras in the future. Such is the basic symbolism in the poem, *Sailing To Byzantium*.

### 3.4.4 Critical Appreciation

*Sailing To Byzantium* is one of the much discussed poems ever composed by W.B. Yeats. It is the first one of his poetic volume *The Tower* (1928). According to one editor, it was composed on September, 20, 1927 after the poet had suffered from great fever. At the time he was about sixty-two years old. He was detaching himself from the world, and often studied the *Upanishads* and Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*. According to the *Upanishads*, a living human being consists of three things : the gross body, the subtle body, and the Atman. The gross body consists of gross matter. It is born, ages, and dies. The subtle body consists of the subtlest matter possible. It is immortal and dissolves in the elements on the last day of the universe. It stays in the human heart and is of the size of a thumb.

The Atman dwells in the subtle body, and, as such, it is called the Jivatman, or the Self. Now the Self is glorious, and its glory has turned the subtle body “golden”. It is, of course, a figurative statement. So figuratively, it is said that the Jivatman (i.e. The Self) is “Hiranyagarbha,” that is, one who dwells in the golden womb. In other words, the subtle body in which the Soul dwells is called a golden city.

W.B. Yeats calls this golden city “Byzantium”. It is because “Byzantium” was an ancient holy city and capital of the Eastern Empire (395—1453 A.D). It was famous for its architecture, gold enamelling, gold mosaics, gold ornaments, and golden buildings. Yeats employs “Byzantium” as a symbol for the city of the Soul in his living human form. He has given his poem the title, *Sailing To Byzantium*. He implies that he has been sailing across the seas of worldly thoughts, desires, etc., with a view to arriving at the city of Byzantium. He means that he has been voyaging toward the realization of the Self. He wants to make his Soul study the glory of its own nature:

*And therefore I have sailed the seas and come*

*To the holy city of Byzantium.*

The poetic thought of the poem can be stated as follows:

Sensual life may be called a country of procreation, sensual activities, sensual desires, etc. It is not fit for old men in that sense—the organs of the old grow weak and incapable of bringing sensual pleasures. It is a life of the young only. For young men and women are in one another’s arms because of sexual urges. Young birds burst into song in sexual heat, and mate in trees. River-falls are full of copulating salmon fish and their eggs. Sea-coasts teem with young, mating, mackerel fish. In brief, fish, animal, birds, or rather all young mortal creatures are busy in procreation throughout their youth. And they take to heart and get attached to the eggs or young ones they give birth to. They are very unhappy when their young ones, children die, or their eggs are destroyed. Sensual music charms young human beings to such an extent that they do not pay any attention to the upliftment of the Soul.

But an old man is a useless thing for sensual life. He is like a scarecrow unless his Soul sings hymns in praise of God’s glory. It has to sing hymns to expiate for its sins committed by means of its gross body. The fact is that the Soul does not, and cannot, sing hymns. A sin is a *Samskara* on the mind, of a sinful act. To expiate for its sins it has to realize its own glorious nature. It has to make self-realization in yogic Samadhi. Once it has realized its own divine glory, it transcends the walls of its body mind prison and shines over it as the sun of its physical and mental universe. That is why the poet has given up the world, and has come to see “the holy city of Byzantium.” He means that he has come to the stage of attaining to yogic Samadhi.

Then seated on his yogic Samadhi, the poet prays to the powers of his bodily senses to withdraw themselves into his mind, shine upon his Soul, and burn up all the worldly ignorance enveloping it. It is sick with desire. Being shut up in the body-mind prison, it does not know its real nature. Finally, the poet prays to those powers to lead him into still Samadhi in which his

Soul, may be conscious of being eternal and self-shining. Once he is in the state of still Samadhi, he shall not come out of it for any kind of pleasure or worldly possession. On the other hand, he shall go ahead in his Samadhi, and free his Soul from the meshes of body-mind nature completely. Then his Soul shall scan the Samaskaras of his present life and also those of his past. It shall also see the prospective effects of all those Samaskaras in future.

The poem is characterized by Upanishadic symbolism. As has been said, “Byzantium” is the symbol of the city of the Soul—the subtle body. Its departments of the Indriyas, the Manas, and the Buddhi have been represented as “Monuments of unageing intellect.” The powers of bodily sense-organs have been represented as “sages standing in God’s holy fire.” “The seas” is a symbol of countless desires, hopes, etc. In the last stanza, “a drowsy Emperor” is the Soul as the Emperor of the body- mind universe. “Lords” are the Manas and the Buddhi, and the “ladies” are the Indriyas in the subtle body.

The poetic feeling is genuine and sincere. It is light at the beginning—something of a thought. But gradually it gets warmer and warmer, and rises to the height of an emotion. Its flow is like that of a stream of thoughtful ideas, which is well-controlled. The imagery of the poem is fresh and striking. In the opening stanza, we are made to perceive young men and women, fish, flesh, and fowl, all in the heat of procreation. In the second stanza, we perceive a scare-crow—’a tattered coat upon a stick.” Then we see the human body as “a mortal dress”, an image from the Gita. In the third stanza, we see “the gold mosaic of a wall”, and also a hawk [called pern] coming back to its master on the ground, flying round and round. In the last stanza, we see the Soul set upon the bough of a golden tree in the palace- court of Byzantium.

The poem is made up of 32 lines. They have been divided into four stanzas of eight lines each. The metre of the verses is iambic pentameter. Each line consists of five iambic feet, ten syllables. Some verses also have extra syllables at the end for the sake of rhyme. Each stanza has been concluded with a rhymed couplet.

The flow of verses is highly rhythmic and their spirit is lyrical to the last degree. There are alliterations, rhymes, half- rhymes, and cadences of stringing nature, as in the following.

*Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all the summer long*

*Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.*

The rhythm is iambic but characterized by a variety of falling rhythm. The diction is simple but urban and literary. Polysyllabic words are few Monosyllabic and bisyllabic ones are in the majority. The style of the poem is romantic and symbolistic. It is characterized by maturity, a symbolistic tendency, and great poetic skill.

To conclude, *Sailing To Byzantium*, is one of Yeats’ most celebrated poems. It was looked upon as difficult and obscure of its personal symbolism, in 1960’s. But Indian scholars have discovered the key to open its symbolism. The key is the Upanishadic philosophy and

Patanjali's views on yogic Samadhi. Interpreted with reference to the philosophy of *Upanishads* and *Yoga-Sutra*, it gives us clear meaning and weighty, systematic, thoughts. The poem also emerges as a poetic gem of the first water. It also contributes to Yeats' greatness as a poet of Unpanishadic philosophy and Yoga Darshan.

### **3.4.5 Explanations of Important Passages**

#### **3.4.5 (a)**

*That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
Those dying generations—at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long,  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.*

These lines have been chosen from the poem *Sailing To Byzantium* composed by W.B. Yeats. Here the poet expresses his view that youth is a period of sensual life to all young creatures. Representing his ideas through a metaphor, he gives us to understand that life may be looked upon as the Soul's journey through the countries of childhood, youth, and old age. His own Soul has already journeyed through the countries of childhood and youth. Commenting on the activities of the young during their youth, the poet here says that youth is a period of procreation and sensual life. The old are therefore unfit for the activities of that period because of their ageing body and weak bodily sense organs. Young men and women are, during their youth, in one another's sexual embrace. Under an urge to mating, young birds burst into song and mate in trees. Shoals of salmon fish, while burning with heat for mating, ascend the rivers in their estuaries, in order to copulate and spawn. But waters of the rivers dump them into the sea again, where they copulate and lay eggs. Likewise, shoals of young mackerel—fish are seen mating along sea—coasts. In brief, fish, animals, birds, or rather all young mortal creatures devote their lives to the activities of generating young ones, eggs, etc., and are slaves to their senses. Throughout their youth, they feel a profound attachment to the young ones they produce and the eggs they lay. And they are drowned in sorrow when their young ones die or eggs are destroyed. The poet implies that the period of youth is not only a period of intense sensual life but also a period of great emotional attachment to young ones, children, eggs, etc.

#### **3.4.5 (b)**

*Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lord and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come*

This extract has been taken from the poem entitled *Sailing To Byzantium* composed by W.B. Yeats. In the preceding stanza, the poet gives us to understand that he is on his seat, intending to go into yogic Samadhi. He also prays to the powers of his bodily senses to withdraw themselves into his mind, shine upon his Soul, and help him attain to yogic Samadhi. Then in the preceding lines, he tells those powers that, having attained to the state of still Samadhi, he shall continue sitting in it until his Soul is absolutely free from body-mind nature. In the present passage, he says that he shall then see his Soul transcend the dominance of his mind and body absolutely. He shall set it upon the highest bough of the highest tree in its golden city of Byzantium. He shall also enable it to rule over the Buddhi, the Manas, and the Indriyas, and to scan the Samaskaras of its present life, and those of all its past lives. He shall also enable it to see all the prospective fruits of his Samaskaras in the future. He implies that in his yogic Samadhi, his Soul shall see the nature of all the Samaskaras produced by his sensual life in the past-and the present. It shall also take into account the nature of his future worlds to be determined and destined by those Samaskaras.

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### **3.5 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this unit we have presented a detailed analysis of W.B. Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium*. Besides, we have also familiarized you with W.B. Yeats as a poet and his age.

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### **3.6 Review Questions**

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1. Critically analyse the poem 'Sailing to Byzantium'.
2. What is symbolism ? How does W.B. Yeats employ symbolic devices in 'Sailing to Byzantium'? Discuss.

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### **3.7 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-4

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### W.B. YEATS : *EASTER 1916*

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#### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Yeats as an Irish Poet
- 4.3 The Poetry of Yeats : Four Phases of Development
- 4.4 Reading the Poem (Text)
  - 4.4.1 Annotations
  - 4.4.3 Summary
  - 4.4.3 Critical Appreciation
  - 4.4.4 Model Explanations
- 4.5 Symbolism in Yeats' Poetry
- 4.6 Yeats' Doctrine of the Mask
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Review Questions
- 4.9 Bibliography

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#### 4.0 Objectives

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In this unit our objective is to discuss Yeats as an Irish poet, the four phases of the development of his poetry, symbolism of W.B. Yeats and Yeats' Doctrine of the Mask. Besides, we also intend to present a detailed discussion on W.B. Yeats' poem, *Easter 1916*.

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#### 4.1 Introduction

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*Easter 1916* is Yeats' reaction to the Easter Rebellion of Irish nationalists. It took place on Easter Day in 1916. Easter is a Christian festival. On this occasion, Christians commemorate the resurrection of Christ. The festival is held on the Sunday after Good Friday. The background of the Easter Uprising of 1916 in Dublin was something like this. The people of Ireland had been struggling for national independence from the British rule since 1870s. Gradually, the nationalists got divided into two forces. On the one hand, there were men of letters and patriotic aristocrats. They were in favour of winning Home Rule for Ireland through



peaceful and democratic means. W.B. Yeats was one of them. On the other hand, there were hot-blooded Irish revolutionaries who were in favour of violent action. Yeats' beloved Maud Gonne and her husband, John Mac Bride, were such revolutionaries.

When the first World War broke out in 1914, the British Government promised the Irish limited Home Rule after the war. They also coaxed the Irish to support Britain against the Germans in the war. Irish leaders of the peaceful nationalist movement lent the Govt. their support. But the hot-blooded revolutionaries did not cooperate with the Govt. They also waited for a suitable occasion for an armed rebellion.

Then on the Easter Day in 1916, hundreds of armed revolutionaries came out of their hideouts and attacked the key posts and important places in Dublin. By the afternoon they had captured almost the whole city of Dublin. The leaders of the revolution were Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, and Thomas Mac Donagh. The people also came out and supported the revolutionaries openly with all the means at their command.

Next day, the revolutionaries declared Ireland an Irish Republic and also set up their provisional Government at Dublin. Within three or four days the British Government took an estimate of the strength of the Irish revolutionaries. They were a few hundred in number, and had concentrated in Dublin. Some of them were the Irishmen of the British army stationed in Dublin. So within a week a division of the British army employed in Ireland captured the city of Dublin again. Many of the revolutionaries were also arrested. Then they were tried by a military court and sixteen of them, were put to death – Maud Gonne's husband was one of them.

Now the uprising was so sudden, and the revolutionaries were so heroic that even the nationalists believing in peaceful methods became their admirers. W.B. Yeats was also surprised by their bravery and patriotic fervour. The uprising also consolidated the Irish people in favour of independence. In the present poem, Yeats celebrates the Easter Uprising of 1916, he praises its organizers and fighters for their patriotism and bravery. He also criticizes himself and many other peace-loving nationalists for being inactive and complacent in the Nationalist Movement for Irish freedom. When the Uprising took place, Yeats was staying with the Rothensteins in Gloucestershire (England). He was personally acquainted with some of the leading revolutionaries. The poem was composed on September 25, 1916. For personal reasons it was not published in his poetic volume of 1919. When Ireland was granted Home Rule in 1921, the poem was published in the poetic volume entitled *Michael Robartes And The Dancer*, in 1921. Actually it was first published in an edition of twenty-five poems, by Clement Shorter. The poet had also written two other poems on the Uprising. They were *The Rose Tree* (composed on April 7, 1916) and *Sixteen Dead Men* (composed on December 17, 1916).

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## 4.2 Yeats an an Irish Poet

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Yeats was intentionally an Irish poet. As an Irishman, passionately attached to his

country by ties of ancestors and pride in his country's history and legends, he gradually became disillusioned which he felt that the violence and hatred by the Irish political leaders and journalists was the meanness of spirit, selfishness and lack of breeding which was poisoning the heroic Irish nobility.

### **The Political Concern And Return To Irish Legend**

The use of the 'inherited subject-matter' and the mythology of Ireland was not to be something educational or poetic in a simple way but something more deeply political, deepening of the political passion of the nation by strengthening its imagination, by going back to the place where it is most essential.

In his work, *Autobiographies* Yeats said: "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to the rocks and hills?" In the same work Yeats had also said: "Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new 'Brome', 'Theus Unbound', 'Patrick' or 'Columcille', 'Oisín' or 'Fianna' in Brome and Theus's stead, and instead of Caucasus, Cropatrick or Ben Bulbin?"

Yeats was keen "to show in *A Vision* something of the face of Ireland". His attempt to revive the folk art which he considered to be "the golden dream of king and peasant" and "the oldest of the aristocracies of thought" and its origin in the belief that Irish folk literature was priceless. To Yeats, Irish folk tales were one of the principal sources from which the Irish imagination might strengthen itself by drinking at the fountains of traditions kept alive amongst the people.

### **John O'Leary's Influence : Importance of Local colour**

For Yeats the most powerful influence came from John O'Leary, a great Irish patriot. Yeats himself acknowledged this debt :

It was through the old Fenian leader John O'Leary

I found my theme

As soon as the importance of local colour became clear to him, Yeats tried to seek a kind of imaginative connection with Irish places and names. In fact, *The Wanderings of Oisín* and *The Countess Cathleen* were both derived from Yeats' decision to be an Irish poet.

### **The State of Ireland**

Yeats not only lived in the troubled modern era but also lived in a country where trouble was brewing all the time. So many of his poems especially *September 1913*, *To a Friend Whose Work has come to Nothing*, *To a Shade*, *On those that Hated* (1907) are political poems. *September 1913* and *To a Friend Whose Work has come to Nothing* relate to a municipal controversy in Dublin in the year 1913, which involved for Yeats the dignity of culture in Ireland and the hope for an Irish literary and artistic revival, a revival which Yeats

feared would be destroyed by the materialism of the Irish middle class and the censorship. In this sense, *September 1913*, is a scathing attack on the whole city of Dublin, and modern Ireland itself with all its talk of Irish heroes and patriots.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Yeats' Poetry**

*To a Shade*, one of the most significant Irish poems of Yeats is addressed to Parnell, the Irish leader of the 1880's who was the hero of Yeats' youth before the reactionaries of the church and business brought him down with the despicable slanders which were the political weapons in Ireland at that time.

*On Those that Hated* (1907) is an attack on those who resented the truth of Synge whose peasants persisted in acting not like set mental figures but like human beings.

In fact, Yeats had never known a year when the political realities of a troubled time did not intrude upon his private life as a poet. Yeats always wanted to be considered a poet of the Irish cause: "True brother of a company, that sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong".

### ***Easter 1916***

Another great Irish poem is *Easter 1916*. For Yeats the Easter uprising of 1916 came to have a great significance. For Yeats, the people involved in this uprising had changed everything. The Ireland of *Easter 1916*, the Ireland of the commonplace little people, with their hands in the greasy tilts, the Ireland seen from the Dublin clubs—the Ireland of the people who existed only to provide butts for the jokes of their betters—this Ireland was transformed—changed, changed utterly. The poem an attempt to move not only into the public world but into that great flow of public world which is called history. It was an attempt to renew the Irish revolution by restoring its soul.

The poems like *The Seven Sages*. and *Blood and the Moon, An Irish Airman Foresees his Death and Meditation in Time of Civil War* also tackle Irish themes.

The poem *The Municipal Gallery Revisited* also celebrates the people Yeats admired most in Ireland.

Among the poems which lament the weaknesses of the Irish people the most notable are *At the Abbey Theatre, These are the Clouds, A House Shaken by Land Agitation, To A Wealthy Man who Promised a Second Subscription, The People and The New Faces*.

Some beautiful poems like *The Stolen Child, A Prayer for my Daughter* and most notably *The Tower*, which is one of his most powerful poems — capture the characteristic cadence of Ireland, and the Sligo country where he lived, as a child comes alive in many other poems. The two other poems which are characteristically Irish in setting are *Cools Park (1929) and Cools Park and Ballyle (1931)*.

### **His Irishness Mainly Literary and Artistic**

At the same time, we must not forget that Yeats' Irishness was always primarily literary

and artistic, much more than political. He once wrote in one of his essays :

“Alone among nations, Ireland has in her written Gaelic literature, in her old love tales, the forms in which the imagination of Europe uttered itself before Greece shaped a tumult of legend into her music of arts ; and she can discover, from the beliefs and emotions of her common people the habit of mind that created the religion of the Muses”.

Yeats’ Irishness was thus concerned more with the cultivation of the taste of the Irish people than with the oratory and struggles of the parties and groups around him. That perhaps is the reason why despite the great influence exercised on his poetry by Maud Gonne whose loss in love he always lamented, a more acceptable influence on Yeats came from Lady Augusta Gregory who was a kind of living symbol of the old Irish aristocracy. Lady Gregory’s house at Coole Park was a kind of second home for Yeats and he collaborated with her in the collection of old legends and ballads and in the founding of the Irish national stage which later was to become the Abbey Theatre.

### **A Liberal And Broadbased Nationalism**

Yeats’ nationalism at the same time was liberal and broad- based as is very clear from his repeated attacks on narrow—minded nationalists. Yeats, in fact, gradually moved away from the contemporary fanaticism of Irish politics. But as a poem like *Easter 1916* makes amply clear even in his disillusionment with Irish fanaticism, Yeats never stopped responding quickly and sincerely to the heroism of martyrs, some of whom he may not have liked personally.

### **Conclusion**

Yeats’ sense of his own identity and function as a poet began to take shape in the context of Irish nationalism and out of his deliberate and many-sided efforts to provide the Irish national movements some finer motive than mere hatred of the English. In 1909, for example, Yeats complained that “the political class in Ireland, the lower middle class from whom the patriotic associations drawn their leaders for the past ten years, have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement, a deprivation, which is the intellectual equivalent to a certain surgical operation.

The refusal of most Irish people to listen to these ideas of Yeats and the recognition of this, forced upon Yeats by the hostility shown to Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* and the Hugh Lane controversy, were among other reasons that provoked Yeats to his new powers of expression.

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## **4.3 The Poetry of Yeats : Four Phases of Development**

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There are four clearly distinct phases in Yeats’ poetic career : (i) His early poetry or poetry of the Celtic Twilight period. (ii) The transition or the realistic middle phase. (iii) The later poetry and (iv) The last phase.

Roughly, the first phase may be seen as extending from the year 1885 to the year 1902, the second phase from 1903 to 1913, the third phase from 1914 to the middle of 1928 and the fourth phase from the middle of 1928 to 1939. In the fourth phase there is a small sub-division—the last four years from 1935 to 1939 are known as the years of the *Last Poems*.

When looking at these phases in Yeats' poetic career, one factor is always to be kept in mind; throughout Yeats' poetical career, there is a close relation between the formation of his work and the formation of his self or soul. The body of his poetry can thus be seen as an expression of his poetic personality where the development of thought and style is a clear index of the movement of the poet's soul.

### **The First Phase (1885-1902)**

The poetry of the first phase is marked by colourful descriptions, elaborate portraits, romantic but vague epithets, decorative details and sleepy music. All these create a visionary atmosphere where human and superhuman figures glide like phantoms. Both the comparative immaturity of Yeats as a poet in his early career and his rich artistic potential are sufficiently in evidence in the poems of this phase.

*The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is a lyric which is the most representative of this phase in Yeats' poetry. In this lyric the studied simplicity of style and its surface refinement are remarkable. *When You Are Old* is another poem of this period which is of lasting value.

The collection, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) is considered to be the collection which brought Yeats very close to the practice of the French Symbolists.

### **The Second Phase (1903-13)**

The second phase of ten years, from 1903 to 1913 is a kind of transitional period during which Yeats tried to move towards a more realistic, condensed, flexible and 'brutal' style, characteristic of the modern poetry. The two influences are to be noted around this period. The first was that of Ezra Pound and the second that of John Donne. In Donne's poetry he found a unique example of that 'Unity of Being' which he was struggling to achieve—the blend of sensuality and the coldness of intellect. Donne's poetry provided him with an example where poetic grandeur mingled with colloquial ease, and poetic rhythm was effectively mixed with speech rhythms and lyricism, and dramatic impersonality went hand in hand.

The process of the transition during this second phase was gradual but steady and the poems of this period reflect the mixing of the old and the new style, embodying a deeper knowledge of the world around him and of his own growing stature as a major poet.

Among the better known poems of this period are:

*The Folly of Being Comforted, The Happy Townland, No Second  
Troy and Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation.*

### **The Third Phase (1914-1928)**

The third phase starting with the 1914 volume of poems called *Responsibilities* gives us some memorable poems : *September 1913, To a Shade, The Wild Swans at Coole, An Irish Airman Foresees His Death, Her Praise, Easter 1916, The Second Coming, A Prayer for My Daughter, Meditations in Time of Civil War, Sailing to Byzantium, The Tower, Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen, Leda and the Swan and Among School Children*. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that the best of Yeats' work is confined to these years. This period sees Yeats' arriving at the height of his poetic power and poetic expression. The range of the subjects also becomes remarkably vast and the poems move with a compelling vigour and concentration. *The Tower and Sailing to Byzantium* are great passionate poems of the tension between the sensual and the spiritual, their unity arising out of his own complexity. He uses symbolism which relies heavily on direct speech and on his own experiences in life. At the same time, he came to develop his idea of 'Custom', 'Ceremony' and 'Aristocracy' and he began to praise the refinement and public-spiritedness of aristocratic life.

### **The Fourth Phase (1928-1935)**

The fourth and the last phase contained poems like *A Dialogue of Self and Soul, Byzantium, The Crazy Jane Poems, An Acre of Grass, Lapis Lazuli, The Municipal Gallery Revisited, Long Legged Fly, A Bronze Head, News for the Delphic Oracle, and Under Ben Bulbin*.

The most remarkable feature of this phase is the Lear-like mask of tragic abandon which Yeats assumes in many of the key poems. The impending death of civilization is accepted as necessary for poems of a universal process, which symbolises the recurring rhythm of birth, death and rebirth. Yeats believed that we begin to live only when we see life as a tragedy and the great poems of the last period demonstrate his belief.

There is also an element of retrospection and in many of the great poems there is a visible pre-occupation with the monuments of unageing intellect which Yeats talks of in *Sailing to Byzantium*.

### **The "Last Poems" (1935-1939)**

The pattern of the *Last Poems* swings once again from chaos to order. Yeats here seems to be saying that all things may be meaningless but the man who comprehends the meaningless designs, has achieved the most that can be accomplished in life. Having lifted himself to the vantage point of age, Yeats is able to form a final attitude. A kind of special joy is now to be his. Not the lover's joy but rather the reckless joy of a 'Wild Old Wicked Man' who, looking on all things with a careless eye, is free to enjoy them for themselves. From the height of his hard-won freedom he is able to 'laugh in tragic joy'. Like the poets and tragic heroes praised in *Lapis Lazuli*, he is able to discover 'gaiety transfiguring all that dread' and at least, to look out on all the tragic scene with ancient glittering eyes, that, amid many wrinkles, are gay.

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#### 4.4 Reading the Poem (Text)

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Now read the poem

*I have met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteen-century houses.  
I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn  
All changed, changed utterly  
A terrible beauty is born.  
That woman's days were spent  
In ignorant good-will,  
Her nights in argument  
Until her voice grew shrill.  
What voice more sweet than hers  
When, young and beautiful,  
She rode to harriers  
This man had kept a school  
And rode oar winged horse  
This other his helper and friend*

*Was coming into his force  
He might have won fame in the end,  
So sensitive his nature seemed,  
So daring and sweet his thought,  
This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vainglorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy  
He, too, has been changed in his turn  
Transformed utterly  
A terrible beauty is born.  
Hearts with one purpose alone  
Through summer and winter seem  
Enchanted to a stone  
To trouble the living streams.  
The horse that comes from the road,  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute they change;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call;*



*Minute by minute they live:  
The stone's in the midst of all.  
Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a Stone of the heart.  
Or when may it suffice?  
That is Heaven's part, our part  
To murmur name upon name,  
As a mother names her child  
When sleep at last has come  
On limbs that had run wild.  
What is it but nightfall?  
No, no, not night but death;  
Was it needless death after all?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead:  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in a verse—  
Mac Donagh and Mac Bride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.*

#### **4.4.1 Annotations**

Line 1. **I have met them**—i.e. In the pre-Uprising days, I would meet them. Here the “T”

refers to W. B. Yeats himself. The present perfect tense I “have met them” is equivalent to : “I would meet them”

**at close of day**—at sunset; in the evening.

Line 2. **vivid**—bright, lively.

Line 3. **among**—in the street between the rows of.

Line 4. **Eighteenth century houses**—houses of the 18th century architecture.

Line 5. **I have passed** — i.e. I would pass by them.

Line 6. **polite meaningless words**—i.e. words of insincere, polite greeting.

Line 7. **awhile**—for a while

Line 9. **before I had done**—i.e. before I had left for home.

Line 10. **a mocking tale** — i.e. an incident in which somebody else was mocked.

Line 11. **a companion**—i.e. one of those friends who took part in the uprising.

Line 12. **around the fire**—i.e. around the central fire-place which was meant to keep the room warm in winter.

Line 14. **lived where motley is worn**—lived a life of non-serious nationalists doing only lip service to the motherland. The clause “where motley is worn” represents : (a) the mental atmosphere of laugh- jesting, bantering etc. : or (b) the mental atmosphere in which the Irish, the English, the Scottish, and the Welsh stood as friends to one another. These two meanings are based on two possible meanings of “motley” : (i) jester, and (ii) the British flag, called the “Union Jack”, of several colours. For “motley” means “a cloth of mixed colours, such as worn by jesters during the Elizabethan period.

Line 16. **A terrible beauty is born**—i.e. their revolutionary behaviour put on a form of terrible beauty.

Line 17. **That woman’s**—Constance Markiewicz’s. She was a Countess.

Line 18. **Her nights in arguments**—her evenings in arguing, in the club, in favour of Home Rule for Ireland.

Line 21. **What voice**—i.e. no voice was

Line 24. **This man**—i.e. Patrick Pearse. He was a schoolmaster and poet.

Line 25. **our winged horse**—i.e. the flying horse of poetry. So “rode our winged horse” means: wrote romantic poems.

Line 26. **This other**—i.e. Thomas Mac Donagh. He was Patrick Pearse’s friend and helper at school. He was a poet and critic of great promise. He had written a book in which

he had traced Gaelic influences on English poetry. Yeats had read that book.

Line 31. **This other man**—i.e. John Mac Bride. He was a tall, well-built, handsome man. In love for Maud Gonne, he was W. B. Yeats' rival and got success in marrying Maud Gonne in 1903. But he was imperious so that he quarreled with his wife, and left her in 1905. She remained in separation from him till he was executed in 1916.

Lines 33—34. **he had done most bitter wrong to some... my heart**— he had done great injustice to Maud Gonne and her adopted daughter, Iseult Gonne, by neglecting them altogether.

Line 37. **casual comedy**—sudden comedy of the Easter Day Uprising which was turned into a tragedy by British forces within a week. It was a comedy in that, it was a great success on the Easter Day. The revolutionaries captured all the strategic points of Dublin with little bloodshed. They celebrated their victory in the evening, and the people participated in it.

Line 43. **enchanted to a stone**—i.e. Their purpose had, as it were, changed them into a stone-wall.

Line 44. **To trouble the living stream**—i.e. to check the flow in Dublin of the living stream of the British rule.

Line 76. **Connolly**—James Connolly. He was a distinguished man of letters. Yeats worked with him for the revival of Irish literature and Irish drama.

Line 78. **green**—the green flag of Ireland as a symbol of free Irish republic.

**is worn**—is hoisted

#### 4.4.2 Summary

Some leaders of the Uprising were the poet's personal acquaintances. During the years preceding Easter 1916, he would often meet them in the streets in the evening. They would return from their shops, offices, school, etc. He would greet them, or pass by them, with a bow of his head as sign of accepting their greetings. Several of them were members of the same club he himself was a member of. And there he would often entertain them with a mocking tale or a gibe at somebody else. His life and theirs were clownish, and he and they were not serious and devoted freedom fighters for their country's political independence. But on Easter Day their behaviour put on a form of terrible beauty.

The woman who took part in the uprising boldly was Constance Markiewicz. In the pre-Uprising days she spent her day-time in simple benevolence. Her evenings were spent in arguing in favour of Irish freedom, in the Club. But in the Easter uprising she shouted patriotic slogans till her voice was hoarse. In her girlhood days she was young, beautiful, and a good rider. She used to ride after the dogs chasing hares. The other revolutionary was a schoolmaster

called Patrick Pearse. He was also a poet of good imaginative mind. The third revolutionary was Thomas Mac Donagh. He was a poet and, critic of great promise. At Pearse's school, he was helper and friend of Patrick Pearse. The fourth man known to the poet was John MacBride. The poet considered him to be a drunken, boastful, rustic. [He had married the woman, Maud Gonne, the poet had loved for a long period.] John had done injustice to Maud Gonne by quarrelling with her and letting her live in separation from him. Yet in the uprising his role was so brave that the poet considers him worthy to be described in the present poem. He resigned himself to his role of an armed rebel in the sudden comedy of the uprising, which, within a week, turned into a tragedy. His heroic behaviour put on a terrible form of beauty.

The hearts of all the revolutionaries were filled with a single aim. It was to win freedom for Ireland. Their purpose was the same all the time in all the seasons. The idea of Irish freedom seemed to have enchanted them with its charm. It had also made them stone-hearted. So on the Easter Day they rose to check the flow in Dublin of the stream of British imperialism. The things, the animals, the birds, about them were all changing with the movement of time every minute. But their minds were firm and changeless in reference to their aim and objective. When a horse's hoof slips on the brink of a little stream of a moorland, its legs splash in the stream water. The curlews sitting on the brink get terrified and jump into the water. The female ones call to their male ones. They get alive and change their behaviour every minute. But a stone lying in the water makes no change in its position. Likewise, in the midst of the busy and changing Irish life, the stone-hearted rebels did not change their purpose and course. They had been working for Irish freedom for a long period. A prolonged sacrifice makes a person's heart merciless and cruel. But in a political struggle sacrifice has to be prolonged. For we can never say that the sacrifice already made is sufficient for the cause. Only God knows whether a sacrifice for a cause is sufficient or not. As for man, he can only murmur the names of the martyrs one after another. All the revolutionaries except the woman were caught and shot dead. Are they asleep in the night? No, they are in the lap of death, never to come back again. Was their martyrdom necessary for Irish freedom? England had already promised to grant Home Rule to Ireland in 1914. If England fulfils her promise to grant Ireland her desired Home Rule, the sacrifice of the revolutionaries made during the Easter Week of 1916 will prove unnecessary. Their dream was however, noble, and they sacrificed their lives for it. So the poet celebrates their glorious deed in the present poem. Today throughout Ireland they are looked upon as great martyrs. They will also retain their glorious status in future having laid down their lives for their country.

#### **4.4.3 Critical Appreciation**

Yeats' poem entitled *Easter 1916* is one of the three well known poems which contain his reaction to the Easter Uprising in Dublin of 1916. The Irish Nationalist Movement, for Home Rule in Ireland began in 1870s, and continued till 1919. But there were two forces behind the movement. There were the pacifists who ran the movement through democratic and peaceful means. W. B. Yeats and many other men of letters were under the banner of

pacifists. At the earlier stage their leaders were Charles Stewart Parnell (1846—1891) and John O' Leary. The other force consisted of the hawks believed in the efficacy of violence and weapons. Yeats' beloved, Maud Gonne, and many of his friends and acquaintances were among the hawks. All of them were in favour of violent action. During the years between 1908 and 1914 Yeats had become disillusioned with Irish politics and politicians because of their pettiness. He had also developed a dislike for the Irish masses. But when in 1916 the Easter uprising took place in Dublin, he was amazed with wonder. He felt in his heart a storm of admiration for the revolutionaries, who were executed. So he composed the poem on 25 September 1916.

### **The Uprising of 1916**

The present poem contains the poet's tribute to their brave sacrifice. It is, however, necessary to describe here the nature of their action in order to understand the spirit of the poet's tribute to their sacrifice. In 1914 the First World War (1914—1918) broke out. In order to win the support of the Irish people against Germany, the British Govt. promised to grant Home Rule to Ireland. It was to be granted to her after the war. The peace-loving nationalists accepted the offer. But the revolutionaries did not accept it and began to wait for an opportunity to rise against the Govt. Then in the morning of Easter, 1916, a few hundreds of them captured almost the whole of the city of Dublin. By the evening they set up their own provisional government of Ireland. They also declared Ireland a democratic republic. The people also supported them. But the British armies captured the city again within the Easter week. Most of the revolutionaries were caught. Then they were tried by a military court and sixteen of them were executed.

### **The Poetic Thought**

The poet says that some of the revolutionaries were his acquaintances. In the pre-Uprising days, he would meet them in the street in the evening. They would return from their shops, offices, etc. He would pass by them and accept their polite wishing, with a nod or he would wish them with meaningless polite words. Some of them were members of the club he was member of. And in the club, he would tell them a mocking tale, or make fun of somebody else's claim, to entertain them. At the time, he and they lived a life of clownish, non-serious, nationalists. But on Easter Day of 1916 their behaviour changed entirely, and put on a form of terrible beauty. Among them, there was a woman. Her name was Constance Markiewicz. She was a plainhearted, benevolent, woman in her youth. She was a beautiful girl with sweet voice. She was a good rider and hunter. In the club, she would argue in favour of Home Rule for Ireland. When the uprising took place, she raised patriotic slogans so much that her voice went hoarse.

Another revolutionary the poet was familiar with was Patrick Pearse. He was a schoolmaster and poet. The third revolutionary known to the poet was Thomas Mac Donagh. He was a poet of great promise and also critic. The fourth man was John Mac Bride. He was

the poet's rival in love [and succeeded in marrying Maud Gonne in 1903]. The poet thought him to be a worthless boaster. He also wronged Maud Gonne by quarrelling with her and leaving her. But on Easter Day he behaved so bravely and selflessly that the poet considers him worthy to be described in the present poem.

Now, all of them, except the woman, were tried [by a military court] and were shot dead. Their hearts were filled with one purpose. It was to win freedom for Ireland. Their devotion to this cause was much too sincere. It inspired them to check the flow of the stream in Dublin of the British rule, as a stone-wall across it. Things and beings around them changed with the passing of time every minute. But their purpose was unchanged. Even when the British forces surrounded and captured Dublin in the Easter week, they did not change their resolution in fear of their life. In the midst of the British cavalry men, they were as firm as a stone.

The long period of the Nationalist Movement had made them stone-hearted. Then they were executed. Was their sacrifice unnecessary? If the British Govt. fulfils their promise and grants Home Rule to Ireland after the war their sacrifice may prove unnecessary. But their dream was noble. Their sacrifice will therefore noble in every condition whatever. So it is unnecessary to argue that their excessive patriotism destroyed their reason and led them to death. The poet celebrates their noble sacrifice in this poem. Mac Donagh, Mac Bride, Connolly and Pearse, together with their companions—all, of them have become immortal by their martyrdom. They are, and will be, honoured throughout Ireland, as great martyrs for the cause of Irish freedom. Out of their sacrifice, 'a terrible beauty is born.'

### **Metre and Rhythm**

The poem has been composed in iambic tetrameters and trimeters. The first verse is an iambic tetrameter, the second, an iambic trimeter. The third is again an iambic tetrameter and the fourth, a trimeter, and so on. There are extra syllables at the end of verses, here and there. On the whole, the metre is ballad metre of iambic features. The rhythm is ascending, having variety here and there. The sentence "A terrible beauty is born" is repeated in the poem at three places, as if it were a refrain. Here, and in a good number of other verses, the rhythm is sweet and striking.

### **Imagery**

The poetic feeling is genuine and sincere. It is invested with the intensity of an emotion. The poetic emotion is excited in the poet by the extraordinary courage and exceptional behaviour shown on Easter Day by the revolutionaries. They were only a few hundred. Yet they fell on the forces of the mightiest empire in the world. His amazement is heightened by the fact that in the pre-Uprising days "they lived where motley is' worn", that is, they behaved like ordinary people. But on Easter Day,

*All changed, changed utterly;*

*A terrible beauty is born.*

The poem has two striking images. In one, the revolutionaries are represented as a barrier of stone risen to stop up the flow of a living stream. And the stream is that of the British imperialism ruling over Dublin. The image is fresh, striking, and probably original. In the second image, Irish life has been represented as a stream and the revolutionaries as rocks, or big pieces of stone lying in the stream. If a horse's hoof slips down the brink of a moorland stream, the water birds sitting along the brink jump into the stream and dive. They also make a lot of noise. Likewise, when the cavalry men of the British brigades entered the stream of Irish life after the uprising, there was a lot of hue and cry. But the revolutionaries, being the pieces of stone in the stream, remained still and firm. Other images belong to the visual imagination. But "terrible beauty" is a symbol which represents the revolutionaries' behaviour as full of "terrible beauty."

### **Diction and Style**

The diction of the poem is simple and modern, devoid of all decorations. "The diction", writes one critic, "is almost bare and unobtrusive. The words seem to be the components of a picture or of a great building." The majority of the words is that of monosyllabic, and bisyllabic words. Polysyllabic words are few, and far between. They are also simple such as "companion", "meaningless", "sensitive", etc. They are also sweet sounding, as "casual comedy," The style of the poem is realistic and lyrical with an undercurrent of romanticism.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, *Easter 1916* is a remarkable lyric of unadorned beauty. It belongs to the period of the poet's maturity. So he does not describe the revolutionaries' behaviour plainly and in terms of action. He employs symbols and antithetical words, such as "terrible" and "beauty", "stream" and "stone", "shrill" and "sweet", etc.

### **4.4.4 Model Explanations**

*Hearts with one purpose alone*

*Through summer and winter seem*

*Enchanted to a stone*

*To trouble the living stream.*

These lines have been extracted from the poem *Easter 1916* written by W. B. Yeats. Here the poet describes the purpose of the revolutionaries who took part in the Easter Uprising of 1916. He also pays his tribute to their bold action. He says that their hearts burnt with the sole purpose of winning political freedom for Ireland. The purpose remained the same throughout the summer, the winter or any other season. On the Easter Day of 1916, it cast on them, as it were, a magic spell and turned them into a force of dauntless courage. The result was that they stood themselves as a stone-wall in the living stream of British imperialism in Dublin, and attempted to stop its flow by way of the uprising. The poet implies that they rose against the

British rule over Dublin, as if they were a stone-wall across the bed of the stream of British rule over Dublin. The stream of the British imperialism was a living one, flowing with all its force. And they made an uprising to stop up its flow, as if they were a barrier made of stone.

*A horse hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse splashes within it;  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor cocks call;  
Minute by minute they live :  
The stone's in the midst of all*

This passage has been taken from the poem entitled *Easter 1916* composed by W.B. Yeats. Here the poet pays a tribute to the dauntless courage of the revolutionaries that rose against the British rule over Ireland, on Easter Day, 1916. He represents his tribute through a comparison. He says that when a horse's hoof slips on the brink of a moorland stream, the horse's legs splash in the stream water. It terrifies the stream birds, called curlews, sitting on the stream-brink. And they jump into the stream and dive. The female ones among them call to their male ones. There is a great commotion for a while. Their behaviour changes every minute. But the stones lying in the stream are not affected by the horse's splashing at all. The same thing happened on Easter Day 1916. The horse-men of the British forces entered the Irish life in Dublin during the Easter week after the uprising of Easter 1916. The stream of Irish life was greatly disturbed by the splashing, of their horses hoofs. Many people went into hiding. There were screams of women and children. Their behaviour changed every minute, so to speak. But the revolutionaries were not disturbed at all, as if they were the stones lying in the stream of Irish life in Dublin. They fought until they were caught.

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#### **4.5 Symbolism in Yeats' Poetry**

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Yeats' poetry is replete with symbols. He has been regarded as one of the greatest symbolists in English literature. In his poetry the same symbol is often used for different purposes and in different contexts. His symbols are derived from occult studies which included a fascination for fairies, banshees, astrology, automatic writing and prophetic dreams. He had come to know from Madame Blavatsky that the great memory of Nature preserved the legends of all nations. This made him feel that he could come in contact with *Anima Mundi* through symbols drawn from Irish legends—Oisín or Aengus, the hound with one red ear or the white deer with no horns. Arbitrary occult symbols like that of the 'rose', 'cross', 'lily', 'bird', 'tree', 'moon' and the 'sun', Yeats found in the Kabalistic, theosophical and other such works.

##### **The Symbol: 'the Rose'**

The rose symbol occurs frequently in the poems of W.B. Yeats. Most of his poems,



which have the rose as the central symbol, can be found in the volume called *The Rose* which appeared in 1933. In *The Rose or Peace*, the symbol of 'the rose' means earthly love but in *The Rose of The World* this symbol means, on the one hand transient earthly love and beauty and on the other hand eternal love and beauty, thus, complicating the meaning. The shift in meaning of the same symbol in different poems of Yeats, at times baffles the readers. In *The Rose of Battle*, 'the rose' is a refuge from earthly love, symbolising God's side in the battle of spirit against matter. But this very symbol stands for the power of creative imagination and occult philosophy in the poem called *To the Rose upon the Rod of Time*.

### **The Symbol: 'Dance'**

According to Yeats the value of a symbol is in its richness or indefiniteness of reference. This, he feels, makes it much more mysterious and powerful than allegory with its single meaning. Like 'the rose', the symbol of the 'dance' is closely connected with Yeats's "system" and often appears in his poetry. It is used, at times to indicate patterned movement and at times to indicate joyous energy. *Upon a Dying Lady* is a poem in which the woman's soul "flies to the pre-destined dancing place." Of course, this pre-destined dancing place suggests all that is traditionally associated with a heavenly after life — perfect unity, peace and joy. In the closing stanza of the poem called *Among School Children* the concept of unity is invoked once again by the symbol of the 'dance'. The first four lines of the closing stanza depict a heavenly or an ideal state of balance and unity but the focus in the last four lines shifts to life itself giving the suggestion that one cannot separate the part from the whole, nor body from spirit, or being from becoming.

### **The Symbol: 'Byzantium'**

'Byzantium', too, has been used by Yeats as a symbol for unity and perfection. Yeats felt that Byzantium and its golden age is symbolical of a kind of unity and perfection such as the world had never known before or since. He believed that the religious, aesthetic and practical life were one in the early Byzantium. He saw in the Byzantine culture and unity of being, a state in which art and life interpenetrated each other. In his poem *Sailing to Byzantium* 'Byzantium' becomes the symbol of a perfect world. The poet rejects the world of birth and death and decides for Byzantium. He thinks he will be able to defeat Time by taking refuge in the world of art because art itself is timeless. He ignores the sensual music made by "that dying generation" (mortal birds) in favour of the ethereal music produced by the Byzantine birds of hammered gold and gold enamelling. 'Byzantium' suggests a far-off, unfamiliar civilization which is symbolical of the ideal, aesthetic existence he longs for.

### **Symbols in "The Second Coming"**

A study of symbolism in the poem *The Second Coming* will show us the nature of the symbols Yeats was wont to use. They are taken partly from private doctrine, partly from Yeats' direct sense of the world around him and partly from both these sources. For Yeats one of the qualities that made life valuable under the dying aristocratic social tradition was the

“ceremony of innocence” a phrase that occurs in this poem. The expression “falcon and the falconer” have both a symbolic and a doctrinal reference.

### **Opposing Symbols in “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”**

An example of two opposing symbols can be seen in *A Dialogue of Self and Soul*. On the one hand there is the symbol of Sato’s sword while on the other hand there is the winding stair that leads to darkness : an after-life from where there is no return. The ‘Soul’ is inclined to contemplate on the winding stair which symbolises the path of escape. But the ‘Self’ prefers to contemplate on Sato’s sword instead. However, in *Meditations an Time of Civil War*—Yeats used this same as a symbol of art which is imperishable and contrasted it with the artist who is perishable. But in the poem *Self and Soul* the word is used as a masculine symbol for life, war, love, and sex. The ‘Self’ in the second section of the poem reasserts its right to live life again and to suffer as man. It represents the totality of living, whereas the ‘Soul’ represents withdrawal from life. It stands for abstraction.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, winding stairs, spirals of all kinds, gyres and spinning tops are some of the symbols which are of great importance in Yeats’ later poetry. These symbols serve as a means of resolving some of the dichotomies in life that had arrested Yeats’ interest from the very beginning of his literary career.

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## **4.6 Yeats’ Doctrine of the Mask**

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Yeats’ doctrine of the Mask expounds the theory that the wearing of an ideal Mask by a poet, and his merger in the ideal self, produces in him a dramatic tension which gives rise to poetic creation, poetic power, and poetic truth. Yeats implies that art and poetry spring from the struggle in the poet’s soul between the two opposite forces of life—the real self and the ideal self. Evidently the conflict between the two is spiritual. When the two meet, there are feelings of self-exploration and self-realization. The dramatic tension results in an enlargement of the soul and a strong emotional experience, in the poet. Thence proceeds “poetry of opposites.” Explaining Yeats’ view on the doctrine of the Mask, Graham Hough remarks:

“All creative activity depends on the energy to assume a mask, to be deliberately reborn as something not oneself. Something of the theatrical element of affectation ever is necessary to all active virtue. When the artist ‘found hanging upon some oak of Dodoha an ancient mask, painted and regilt to his liking, and at last put it on, he found that another’s breath came and went within his breath upon the carven lips, and that his eyes were, on the instant, fixed upon a visionary world.”

### **Merger But No ‘Negative Capability’**

Yeats’ doctrine of the Mask implies a merger of the self in the anti-self to such an extent that there is no effacement of the self, no negative capability. The self has to put on the

mask of the anti-self, make self-exploration, and assess the degree of self-realization in the anti-self. And here the conflict between the self and the anti-self,— the struggle between the opposites,— will begin. The self has its own mind. The anti-self has no mind of its own. It has only its mask, its history, its pre-determined behaviour. So the conflict will be between the two visions of the same self. The conflict will be a struggle for power and supremacy between two opposites - the real self and the ideal self. It will cause an enlargement of the poet's soul and give rise to an intense emotional experience in the mind. It is poetry, filled with an urge for poetic creation. Yeats says the same thing indirectly as follows : *Out of the quarrel with the -self, we make poetry.*

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#### **4.7 Let Us Sum Up**

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This unit discusses

- (a) Yeats as an Irish poet
- (b) The four phases of the development of Yeats' poetry
- (c) Yeats' doctrine of the mask
- (d) Use of symbols in Yeats' poetry
- (e) Yeats' poem *Easter 1916*

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#### **4.8 Review Questions**

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- 1. Bring out the sustained and continuous growth of Yeats' poetic genius.
- 2. Why is Yeats called the poet of the Celtic Twilight ?
- 3. Discuss W.B. Yeats' symbolism in detail.
- 4. Make a critical estimate of Yeats' poem *Easter 1916*.
- 5. Write a short note on Yeats' Doctrine of The Mask.

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#### **4.9 Bibliography**

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- 2. A.S. Collins : English Literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 3. A.C. Ward : Twentieth Century English Literature.
- 4. David Diaches : The Present Age.
- 5. John Unterecker : Yeats : A Collection of Critical Essays.
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## UNIT-5

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### W.H. AUDEN : *Sept. 1, 1939* and *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*

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Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2. About the Age
- 5.3 About the Author
- 5.4 About the Poems : (a) *September 1, 1939*  
(b) *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*
- 5.5 Glossary
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Answer to Self Assessment Questions
- 5.9 Review Questions
- 5.10 Bibliography

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### 5.0 Objectives

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In this unit we aim at providing you details about W.H. Auden and his two poems. By the end of this Unit you will be able to know about :

1. Modernism
2. Biographical details about W.H. Auden
3. W.H. Auden as one of the major modern poets.
4. Two of his poems and the various themes; and
5. Various poetic devices used by the poet to convey his ideas

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### 5.1 Introduction

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In this unit you have been given a background of the poet as well as two of his important poems. You should study the works of the poet, especially these two poems with a background of modern English literature. Therefore, before studying two poems you should study the background of the modern age in literature and what makes modernism. Is it a

chronological or thematic phenomenon? The two World Wars and the imagery of destruction, horror, terror and fear; and the role of an artist, especially a poet for solutions in the era of wilderness and mind-boggling problems make the proper background to these two poems. Before studying the poem on the death of W.B. Yeats, you should know W.B. Yeats as a poet and revolutionary. Glossary will help you understand the poems in a better manner. Self Assessment Questions and their answers are meant to guide you towards the appropriate understanding of the text. Exercise has been given for you in the form of Unit End Questions. You should prepare these questions for the purpose of your examination also. As the short length of the unit does not permit full explanations of issues and background themes, you should consult the books recommended in the section for suggested reading. You have been provided material from various critical texts and internet but you should cultivate the habit of reading the text between the lines and develop the habit of going into the depth of issues concerning the poems.

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## 5.2 About the Age

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W.H. Auden belongs to the Modern Age of English Literature. Modernism in literature stands for a number of tendencies and trends which were prominent in the first half of the twentieth Century. In English Literature it is especially applied to the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, W.B. Yeats, F.M. Ford and Conrad. Broadly speaking, it reflects the impact of the psychology of Freud and the anthropology of Sir J. Frazer as expressed in the work *The Golden Bough (1890-1915)*. Much modernist writing includes a sense of cultural relativism. An awareness of the irrational and the workings of the unconscious mind make an important part of modernism. The works are full of experimentalism. Harold Rosenberg calls it the “tradition of the new”. Modernism has rejected the Victorian and Edwardian framework of narrative, description and rational exposition in poetry and prose in favour of a stream of consciousness presentation of personality, a dependence on the poetic image as the essential vehicle of aesthetic communication and upon myth as a characteristic structural principle (as can be found in *Ulysses*). Discontinuity is a marked feature of modernist literature. Historically it rejects the procedures and values of the immediate past. It adopts an opposite stance to the immediate past. Aesthetically also it is against the immediate past. Modernism is a diverse phenomenon. Herbert Read says in *Art Now (1933)* that modernism is “an abrupt break with all tradition ... The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned”. To the unfamiliar reader modernist verse as that of Eliot and Pound may seem to have a tendency of chaos of sharp atomistic impressions and some critics of modernistic tendency dislike the drift from the “human, all too human elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production” towards “dehumanization”.

W.H. Auden (1907-1973), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Robert Frost (1874-1963), James Joyce (1882-1941), Robert Lowell (1917-1977), Marianne Moore (1887-1972), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), Wallace Stevens (1879-1957), William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

are some of the important poets of this era.

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### 5.3 About the Author

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Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England, in 1907. He moved to Birmingham during childhood and was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. As a young man he was influenced by the poetry of Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost, as well as William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Old English verse. At Oxford, his fame as a poet was immediately apparent, and he formed lifelong friendships with two fellow writers, Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood. In 1928, his collection *Poems* was privately printed, but it wasn't until 1930, when another collection titled *Poems* (though its contents were different) was published, that Auden was established as the leading voice of a new generation. Ever since, he has been admired for his unsurpassed technical virtuosity and an ability to write poems in nearly every imaginable verse form; the incorporation in his work of popular culture, current events, and vernacular speech; and also for the vast range of his intellect, which drew easily from an extraordinary variety of literatures, art forms, social and political theories, and scientific and technical information. He had a remarkable wit, and often mimicked the writing styles of other poets such as Dickinson, W. B. Yeats, and Henry James. His poetry frequently recounted, literally or metaphorically, a journey or quest, and his travels provided rich material for his verse.

From his Oxford years onward, his friends uniformly described him as funny, extravagant, sympathetic, generous, and, partly by his own choice, lonely. In groups he was often dogmatic and overbearing in a comic way; in more private settings he was diffident and shy except when certain of his welcome. He was punctual in his habits, and obsessive about meeting deadlines, while choosing to live amidst physical disorder.

He visited Germany, Iceland, and China, served in the Spanish Civil War, and in 1939 moved to the United States, where he met his lover, Chester Kallman, and became an American citizen. His own beliefs changed radically between his youthful career in England, when he was an ardent advocate of socialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, and his later phase in America, when his central preoccupation became Christianity and the theology of modern Protestant theologians. A prolific writer, Auden was also a noted playwright, librettist, editor, and essayist. Generally considered to be the greatest English poet of the twentieth century, his work has exerted a major influence on succeeding generations of poets on both sides of the Atlantic.

Many of his poems during the 1930s and afterward were inspired by unconsummated love, and in the 1950s he summarized his emotional life in a famous couplet: "If equal affection cannot be / Let the more loving one be me" ("The More Loving One"). He had a gift for friendship and, starting in the late 1930s, a strong wish for the stability of marriage; in a letter to his friend James Stern he called marriage "the *only* subject". Throughout his life, he performed charitable acts, sometimes in public, as in his marriage of convenience to Erika Mann

in 1935 that gave her a British passport with which to escape the Nazis, but, especially in later years, usually in private, and he was embarrassed if they were publicly revealed.

W. H. Auden was the Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets from 1954 to 1973, and divided most of the second half of his life between residences in New York City and Austria. He died in Vienna in 1973.

Auden published about four hundred poems, including seven long poems (two of them of book-length). His poetry was encyclopedic in scope and method, ranging in style from obscure twentieth-century modernism to the lucid traditional forms such as ballads and limericks, from doggerel through haiku and villanelles to a “Christmas Oratorio” and a baroque eclogue in Anglo-Saxon meters. The tone and content of his poems ranged from pop-song clichés to complex philosophical meditations, from the corns on his toes to atoms and stars, from contemporary crises to the evolution of society.

He also wrote more than four hundred essays and reviews about literature, history, politics, music, religion, and many other subjects. He collaborated on plays with Christopher Isherwood and on opera libretti with Chester Kallman, worked with a group of artists and filmmakers on documentary films in the 1930s and with the New York Pro Musica early music group in the 1950s and 1960s. About collaboration he wrote in 1964: “Collaboration has brought me greater erotic joy . . . than any sexual relations I have had”.

Auden controversially rewrote or discarded some of his most famous poems when he prepared his later collected editions. He wrote that he rejected poems that he found “boring” or “dishonest” in the sense that they expressed views that he had never held but had used only because he felt they would be rhetorically effective. His rejected poems include “Spain” and “September 1, 1939”. His literary executor, Edward Mendelson, argues in his introduction to Auden’s *Selected Poems* that Auden’s practice reflected his sense of the persuasive power of poetry and his reluctance to misuse it..

Auden began writing poems at thirteen, mostly in the styles of 19th-century romantic poets, especially Wordsworth, and later poets with rural interests, especially Thomas Hardy. At eighteen he discovered T. S. Eliot and adopted an extreme version of Eliot’s style. He found his own voice at twenty, when he wrote the first poem later included in his collected work, “From the very first coming down”. This and other poems of the late 1920s tended to be in a clipped, elusive style that alluded to, but did not directly state, their themes of loneliness and loss. Twenty of these poems appeared in his first book *Poems* (1928), a pamphlet hand-printed by Stephen Spender.

In 1928 he wrote his first dramatic work, *Paid on Both Sides*, subtitled “A Charade,” which combined style and content from the Icelandic sagas with jokes from English school life. This mixture of tragedy and farce, with a dream play-within-the-play, introduced the mixed styles and content of much of his later work. This drama and thirty short poems

appeared in his first published book *Poems* (1930, 2nd edition with seven poems replaced, 1933); the poems in the book were mostly lyrical and gnomic meditations on hoped-for or unconsummated love and on themes of personal, social, and seasonal renewal; among these poems were “It was Easter as I Walked,” “Doom is Dark,” “Sir, No Man’s Enemy,” and “This Lunar Beauty.”

A recurrent theme in these early poems is the effect of “family ghosts”, Auden’s term for the powerful, unseen psychological effects of preceding generations on any individual life (and the title of a poem). A parallel theme, present throughout his work, is the contrast between biological evolution (unchosen and involuntary) and the psychological evolution of cultures and individuals (voluntary and deliberate even in its subconscious aspects).

Auden’s next large-scale work was *The Orators: An English Study* (1932; revised editions, 1934, 1966), in verse and prose, largely about hero-worship in personal and political life. In his shorter poems, his style became more open and accessible, and the exuberant “Six Odes” in *The Orators* reflect his new interest in Robert Burns. During the next few years, many of his poems took their form and style from traditional ballads and popular songs, and also from expansive classical forms like the Odes of Horace. Around this time his main influences were Dante, William Langland, and Alexander Pope.

During these years, much of his work expressed left-wing views, and he became widely known as a political poet, although his work was more politically ambivalent than many reviewers recognized. He generally wrote about revolutionary change in terms of a “change of heart”, a transformation of a society from a closed-off psychology of fear to an open psychology of love. His verse drama *The Dance of Death* (1933) was a political extravaganza. His next play *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), written in collaboration with Isherwood, was similarly a quasi-Marxist updating of Gilbert and Sullivan in which the general idea of social transformation was more prominent than any specific political action or structure.

These tendencies in style and content culminate in his collection *Look, Stranger!* (1936 Auden retitled the 1937 US edition *On This Island*). This book included political odes, love poems, comic songs, meditative lyrics, and a variety of intellectually intense but emotionally accessible verse. Among the poems included in the book, connected by themes of personal, social, and evolutionary change and of the possibilities and problems of personal love, were “Hearing of harvests”, “Out on the lawn I lie in bed”, “O what is that sound”, “Look, stranger, on this island now”, and “Our hunting fathers.”

Auden was now arguing that an artist should be a kind of journalist, and he put this view into practice in *Letters from Iceland* (1937) a travel book in prose and verse written with Louis MacNeice, which included his long social, literary, and autobiographical commentary “Letter to Lord Byron”. In 1937, after observing the Spanish Civil War he wrote a politically-engaged pamphlet poem *Spain* (1937); *Journey to a War* (1939) a travel book in prose and verse, was written with Isherwood after their visit to the Sino-Japanese War. Auden’s



last collaboration with Isherwood was their third play, *On the Frontier*, an anti-war satire written in Broadway and West End styles.

Auden's themes in his shorter poems now included the fragility and transience of personal love ("Danse Macabre", "The Dream", "Lay Your Sleeping Head"), a theme he treated with ironic wit in his "Four Cabaret Songs for Miss Hedli Anderson" (which included "O Tell Me the Truth About Love" and the revised version of "Funeral Blues"), and also the corrupting effect of the public and official culture on individual lives ("Casino", "School Children", "Dover"). In 1938 he wrote a series of dark, ironic ballads about individual failure ("Miss Gee", "James Honeyman", "Victor"). All these appeared in his next book of verse, *Another Time* (1940), together with other famous poems such as "Dover", "As He Is", and "Musée des Beaux Arts" (all written before he moved to America in 1939), and "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", "The Unknown Citizen", "Law Like Love", "September 1, 1939", and "In Memory of Sigmund Freud" (written in America). The elegies for Yeats and Freud are partly statements of Auden's anti-heroic theme, in which great deeds are performed, not by unique geniuses whom others cannot hope to imitate, but by otherwise ordinary individuals who were "silly like us" (Yeats) or of whom it could be said "he wasn't clever at all" (Freud), and who became teachers of others, not awe-inspiring heroes.

In 1940 Auden wrote a long philosophical poem "New Year Letter", which appeared with miscellaneous notes and other poems in *The Double Man* (1941). At the time of his return to the Anglican Communion he began writing abstract verse on theological themes, such as "Canzone" and "Kairos and Logos". Around 1942, as he became more comfortable with religious themes, his verse became more open and relaxed, and he increasingly used the syllabic verse he learned from the poetry of Marianne Moore.

His recurring themes in this period included the artist's temptation to use other persons as material for his art rather than valuing them for themselves ("Prospero to Ariel") and the corresponding moral obligation to make and keep commitments while recognizing the temptation to break them ("In Sickness and Health"). From 1942 to 1947 he worked mostly on three long poems in dramatic form, each differing from the others in form and content: "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio", "The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" (both published in *For the Time Being*, 1944), and *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (published separately in 1947). The first two, with Auden's other new poems from 1940-44, were included in his first collected edition, *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (1945), with most of his earlier poems, many in revised versions.

After completing *The Age of Anxiety* in 1946 he focused again on shorter poems, notably "A Walk After Dark," "The Love Feast", and "The Fall of Rome.". His next book, *Nones* (1951), had a Mediterranean atmosphere new to his work. A new theme was the "sacred importance" of the human body in its ordinary aspect (breathing, sleeping, eating) and the continuity with nature that the body made possible (in contrast to the division between humanity and nature that he had emphasized in the 1930s); his poems on these themes in-

cluded “In Praise of Limestone” and “Memorial for the City”. In 1949 Auden and Kallman wrote the libretto for Igor Stravinsky’s opera *The Rake’s Progress*, and later collaborated on two libretti for operas by Hans Werner Henze.

Auden’s first separate prose book was *The Enchafèd Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (1950), based on a series of lectures on the image of the sea in romantic literature. Between 1949 and 1954 he worked on a sequence of seven Good Friday poems, “Horae Canonicae”, an encyclopedic survey of geological, biological, cultural, and personal history, focused on the irreversible act of murder; the poem was also a study in cyclical and linear ideas of time. While writing this, he also wrote a sequence of seven poems about man’s relation to nature, “Bucolics”. Both sequences appeared in his next book, *The Shield of Achilles* (1955), with other short poems, including the book’s title poem, “Fleet Visit”, and “Epitaph for the Unknown Soldier”.

Extending the themes of “Horae Canonicae”, in 1955–56 he wrote a group of poems about “history,” the term he used to mean the set of unique events made by human choices, as opposed to “nature,” the set of involuntary events created by natural processes, statistics, and anonymous forces such as crowds. These poems included, “The Maker”, and the title poem of his next collection *Homage to Clio* (1960).

In the late 1950s Auden’s style became less rhetorical while its range of styles increased. In 1958, having moved his summer home from Italy to Austria, he wrote “Good-bye to the Mezzogiorno”; other poems from this period include “Dichtung und Wahrheit: An Unwritten Poem”, a prose poem about the relation between love and personal and poetic language, and the contrasting “Dame Kind”, about the anonymous impersonal reproductive instinct. These and other poems, including his 1955-66 poems about history, appeared in *Homage to Clio* (1960).

His prose book *The Dyer’s Hand* (1962) gathered many of the lectures he gave in Oxford as Professor of Poetry in 1956-61, together with revised versions of essays and notes written since the mid-1940s.

While translating the haiku and other verse in Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*, Auden began using haiku for many of his poems. A sequence of fifteen poems about his house in Austria, “Thanksgiving for a Habitat”, appeared in *About the House* (1965), with other poems that included his reflections on his lecture tours, “On the Circuit”. In the late 1960s he wrote some of his most vigorous poems, including “River Profile” and two poems that looked back over his life, “Prologue at Sixty” and “Forty Years On”. All these appeared in *City Without Walls* (1969). His lifelong passion for Icelandic legend culminated in his verse translation of *The Elder Edda* (1969).

He was commissioned in 1963 to write lyrics for the Broadway musical *Man of La Mancha*, but the producer rejected them as insufficiently romantic. *A Certain World: A commonplace Book* (1970) was a kind of self-portrait made up of favorite quotations with com-

mentary, arranged in alphabetical order by subject. His last prose book was a selection of essays and reviews, *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973).

His last books of verse, *Epistle to a Godson* (1972) and the unfinished *Thank You, Fog* (1974) include reflective poems about language (“Natural Linguistics”) and about his own aging (“A New Year Greeting”, “Talking to Myself”, “A Lullaby” [“The din of work is subdued”]). His last completed poem, in haiku form, was “Archeology”, about ritual and timelessness, two recurring themes in his later years.

Auden’s stature in modern literature has been disputed, with opinions ranging from that of Hugh MacDiarmid, who called him “a complete wash-out”, to the obituarist in the *Times* (London), who wrote: “W. H. Auden, for long the *enfant terrible* of English poetry . . . emerges as its undisputed master”.

In his *enfant terrible* stage in the 1930s he was both praised and dismissed as a progressive and accessible voice, in contrast to the politically nostalgic and poetically obscure voice of T. S. Eliot. His departure for America in 1939 was hotly debated in Britain, with some critics treating it as a betrayal, and the role of influential young poet passed to Dylan Thomas, although defenders such as Geoffrey Grigson, wrote that Auden “arches over all”. His stature was suggested by book titles such as *Auden and After* by Francis Scarfe (1942) and *The Auden Generation* by Samuel Hynes (1972).

In the US, starting in the late 1930s, the detached, ironic tone of Auden’s regular stanzas set the style for a whole generation of poets; John Ashbery recalled that in the 1940s Auden “was *the* modern poet”. His manner was so pervasive in American poetry that the ecstatic style of the Beat Generation was partly a reaction against his influence. In the 1950s and 1960s, some writers (notably Philip Larkin and Randall Jarrell) lamented that Auden’s work had declined from its earlier promise.

By the time of Auden’s death in 1973 he had attained the status of a respected elder statesman. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that “by the time of Eliot’s death in 1965 . . . a convincing case could be made for the assertion that Auden was indeed Eliot’s successor, as Eliot had inherited sole claim to supremacy when Yeats died in 1939”. With some exceptions, British critics tended to treat his early work as his best, while American critics tended to favor his middle and later work. Unlike other modern poets, his reputation did not decline after his death, and Joseph Brodsky wrote that his was “the greatest mind of the twentieth century”.

W.H. Auden is one of the greatest English poets of the twentieth century, standing next only to T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats. His span of active poetic production extends over a period of more than thirty five years. During this period, says Barbara Everett, “he has produced a large body of profuse, brilliant, and uneven work, in a dazzling variety of styles and on a formidable range of subjects. Though he early developed and maintained a tone and manner idiosyncratic enough to make the coining of the word “Audenesque” necessary to describe it; and though he early developed and maintained a concern for one or two subjects that have

come to characterise his work – Love and Good Life and the Good Place, individual isolation and social community ; nevertheless, it is the variety and fertility of his work, rather than its unity, which first commands attention”. A single poem, as much as a whole volume of series of volumes, will leave the impression of a mind peculiarly profuse and wide ranging, and of literary talents peculiarly large and free. The variety and versatility of Auden are clearly brought out by the varied estimates of his genius given by different critics. He has been called the Picasso of verse ; a poet of general ideas ; primarily a satirist ; fundamentally a romantic ; a poet who is more successful in light verse.

Auden’s achievement is remarkable, but many have failed to appreciate his true greatness, and the result is that he has attracted a lot of hostile criticism. Davison takes note of such adverse criticism and writes, “Auden is a serious writer who has demonstrated to us that poetry can be fun. His urgent social verse, his virtuosity in the field of ballads, songs and lyrics, his introspective manifestos, and his original, ambitious long poems make him for me, despite his obscurities and failures, a poet of compelling interest, as significant for our day as Eliot and Yeats were for an earlier generation. Critics have been puzzled about Auden, and in particular the *Scrutiny* school has consistently attacked him. In the 1950 edition of *New Bearings in English Poetry*, F.R. Leavis still insisted that Auden has hardly come nearer to essential maturity since, though he made a rapid advance in sophistication.. Such hostile comments have been frequent since then. For example, D.J. Enright, in *The Apothecary’s Shop*, (1957). likened Auden’s manner to that of the *Ancient Mariner*, for ‘the reader is pinned against the wall’ by his heavy moralising. C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, in imagination needed to understand the consciousness of the workers whose cause he championed’. John Bayley, in *The Romantic Survival*. (1957), makes the adverse point that ‘though Auden never regards people wantonly or inhumanly he does depersonalise them and transform them into a bizarre extension of object or place’. R.G.Cox, in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature – Vol.7*, believes that Auden ‘has not been able to resist the irrelevant elaboration, the chasing of too many hares at once, the smart epigram, or the praises Auden in his autobiographical *The Whispering Gallery*, (1955), he does also add the ‘the transplantation to America dried up the sensuous sap and made his utterances for a time seem more like the Delphic riddling of a disembodied mind’. A most pungent critic is A.Alvarez. who, in *The Shaping Spirit*, (1961), writes damningly : ‘He has caught one tone of his period but it is a cocktail party tone as though most of his work were written off the cuff for the amusement of his friends.’

Auden’s popularity and familiarity suddenly increased after his “Funeral Blues” (“Stop all the Clocks”) was read aloud in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994); subsequently, a pamphlet edition of ten of his poems, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, sold more than 275,000 copies. After September 11, 2001, his poem “September 1, 1939” was widely circulated and frequently broadcast. Public readings and broadcast tributes in the UK and US in 2007 marked his centenary year.

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## 5.4 About the Poems

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### (a) *September 1, 1939*

*September 1, 1939* is a poem by W. H. Auden written on the occasion of the outbreak of The Second World War. It was first published in *The New Republic*, 18 October 1939, and was first published in book form in Auden's collection *Another Time* (1940).

The poet says that he is uncertain and afraid at his residence as the decade has been dishonest and his hopes have expired. The people of the world are full of fear and anger like him. The dictatorial attitude of psychopathic people has led to the unmentionable odour of death and common man's private life is obsessed with this tragic vision. Why our culture has driven mad can be shown by accurate knowledge of the events from Martin Luther to the present age. What turns huge imago into a psychopathic god can be learnt from the historical events. Evil prevails into a cyclic motion from the doer to the done and from the done to the doer. Democracy has remained in the name only. Dictators all over the world have crushed the very concepts, the very soul of democracy. History repeats itself. As in the past, the present generation has accepted mismanagement, grief and dish pair as part of their life. High rising buildings declare the strength of the collective man. Arguments can be produced in favour or against any notion. But international wrong and imperialism are never far away. We try our best to be at home in adverse circumstances and try to ignore the hard realities of imperialism but we cannot do so, this is merely a dream. Only universal love, love of the whole mankind; and not the selfish love of the individual, Eros can serve this world. We try to be ethical every morning with full determination but the conservative dark prevails upon our wishes.

The poem has been written in the style of first person narrative and thus is helpful to trace the incidents, especially a major world influencing happening i.e. the Second World War. The poet narrates his first hand experience. He does not separate himself and does not make himself aloof; rather feels the effect equally. The poet has not used Frost-like persona. The atmosphere of horror, uncertainly, dishonesty, cheating and tricks is reflected through the choice of diction, e.g. the poem contains words and phrases like 'uncertain and afraid', 'the clever hopes', 'a low dishonest decade', 'anger and fear', 'unmentionable odour of death', 'an apathetic grave', 'habit forming pain', 'mismanagement and grief', 'imperialism face', 'international wrong', 'conservative dark', 'folded lie', 'romantic lie', 'humor', 'defenseless', 'stupor', 'beleaguered', 'negation and despair'. Auden has emphasized the effect of evil forces in epigrammatic, terse and direct meaning lines.

Those to whom evil is done

Do evil in return

The following lines again hammer the same feelings of the poet;

For the error bred in the bone

Of each woman and each man

Craves what it cannot have

No universal love

But to be loved alone

The evils leading to The Second World War made the authorities deaf and dumb to the common needs of ordinary people.

Who can reach the deaf

Who can speak for dumb ?

Not to speak of an efficient international authority, even the state has lost control over the law and order situation. Anarchy has prevailed. But the poet has suggested a solution in this dismal situation also.

There is no such thing as the State

And no one exists alone;

Hunger allows no choice

To the citizen or the police;

We must love one another or die.

This leads to the poet's philosophy to differentiate between Agape and Eros. Eros, selfish love, individual love leads to differentiate, division, separation, hatred, dislike among the nations of the world; which resulted into the World War. Universal love, Agape, is the only solution of this evil.

If on one side, the poem reflects the atmosphere of tThe Second World War, a particular incident in the history of the World – Hitler attacked Poland on Sept, 1, 1939 at the beginning of The Second World War, the World War II, the poem deals with the theme of universal love without which humanity has to suffer. Use of mixed themes can be noticed in other poems of Auden e.g. the poem on the death of W.B. Yeats also deals with the themes of hatred, personal prejudice, role of a poet in adverse circumstances, the contemporary politics, role of time or elegy on Yeats.

An echo of 1 September 1939 can be seen in the poem In Memory of W.B. Yeats

In the nightmare of the dark

All the dogs of Europe bark,

And living nations wait,

Each sequestered in its hate.

The above quoted lines not only express the terror and fear prevailing in the peoples of the World but also express his theme of Eros i.e. love of individual which is an evil leading to the war. The solution is universal love as is suggested in *September 1, 1939*. The poem *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* like *September 1, 1939*, contains the diction of death, war, fear, terror of which winter is the symbol. The very first stanza emphasizes the death and destruction.

The poem deliberately echoes the stanza form of W. B. Yeats' *Easter, 1916*, another poem about an important historical event, and, like Yeats' poem, Auden's moves from a description of historical failures and frustrations to a possible transformation in the present or future.

Until the two final stanzas, the poem briefly describes the social and personal pathology that has brought about the outbreak of war: first the historical development of Germany "from Luther until now", next the internal conflicts in every individual person that correspond to the external conflicts of the war. Much of the language and content of the poem echoes that of C. G. Jung in his book *Psychology and Religion* (1938).

The final two stanzas shift radically in tone and content, turning to the truth that the poet can tell, "We must love one another or die," and to the presence in the world of "the Just" who exchange messages of hope. The poem ends with the hope that the poet, like "the Just", can "show an affirming flame" in the midst of the disaster.

Even before printing the poem for the first time, Auden deleted two stanzas from the latter section, one of them proclaiming his faith in an inevitable "education of man" away from war and division. The two stanzas are printed in Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden* (1981).

Soon after writing the poem, Auden began to turn away from it, apparently because he found it self-flattering to himself and to his readers. When he reprinted the poem in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (1945) he omitted the famous stanza that ends "We must love one another or die."

In the mid-1950s Auden began to refuse permission to editors who asked to reprint the poem in anthologies. In 1955 he allowed Oscar Williams to include it complete in *The New Pocket Anthology of American Verse* with the most famous line altered to read "We must love one another and die." Later he allowed the poem to be reprinted only once, in a Penguin Books anthology *Poetry of the Thirties* (1964), with a note saying about this and four other early poems, "Mr. W. H. Auden considers these five poems to be trash which he is ashamed to have written."

Despite Auden's disapproval, the poem became famous and widely popular. E. M. Forster wrote "Because he once wrote 'We must love one another or die' he can command me to follow him" (*Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951).

A close echo of the line "We must love one another or die", spoken by Lyndon Johnson

in a recording of one of his speeches, was used in the famous “Daisy” television campaign commercial in 1964 in which the image of a young girl picking petals from a daisy was replaced by image of a mushroom cloud.

In 2001, immediately after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the poem was read (with many lines omitted) on National Public Radio and was widely circulated and discussed for its relevance to recent events.

The invasion of Poland by the German-Nazi forces commenced on September 1, 1939 yet it was not the hallmark of W.H. Auden’s intention in his poem *September 1, 1939*. No, this work is far more than a description or criticism of the German-Nazi decision to invade an innocent country; this work, these words, this plea comes from the heart of a man who is living in a society filled with an oppressive nature towards those they deem less human or unfitting to society. Despite such risk of oppression Auden went ahead and published this gorgeous piece of poetry in 1940 with conscious thought to mask his true intentions because Wystan Hugh Auden was “homosexual”. By use of allusion, symbolism, and straight out diction Auden suggests truly mind-expanding concepts and a criticism of something rather unexpected.

*September 1, 1939* is split into nine, eleven lined, stanzas with no set rhyme scheme or exact meter. For the most part shifts occur randomly although one can group them to certain degrees though it would be best, in one’s opinion, to absorb the allusion-based meanings individually for yes they are ever-so deep. The first two stanzas seem to make reference to the German invasion of Poland; the third and fourth stanzas take a shot at democratically industrialized man; stanzas five and six touch on the concept of sin; surprisingly the seventh, eighth and ninth stanzas bring out the strongest messages which are rather hopeful if not optimistic. Occasionally one meets rhymes but they are inconsistent in one’s eyes and not truly compelling if one suggested they pushed the overall meaning of the work.

W. H. Auden’s *September 1, 1939* is an outpouring of disapproval and concern over the world’s current political state of affairs, as well as a personal manifesto of sorts. The speaker rails against all forms of authority he believes to be corrupt. The entire poem serves as a vehicle for the speaker to address the lies he perceives propagated by all types of government and law enforcement, ending with his wish to be a sign of hope and truth in the face of the despair a world with such grave failures demands. The speaker’s ideas, like those of the authority he denounces, seem at first glance noble and truthful, but upon further examination prove fraught with self-contradiction. Although he claims to be a rare bearer of bright truth in a world of dark, widespread lies, the speaker lies to himself and readers, the very public he is trying to protect. The speaker denounces the ruling elite and its power to twist the truth, but hypocritically takes on a role of corrupt poetic authority in order to do so.

Like those in power, the speaker possesses the ability to twist facts into a potentially convincing support of his case. The speaker complains that the government fools people into



believing their working lives are “the ethical life” in the seventh stanza, insinuating that it is in fact full of false promises the state makes to the people and the latter in turn make to themselves. In the fifth stanza, he claims that all of our actions and possessions are to prevent us from realizing we are “children afraid of the night / who have never been happy or good”, without providing any more evidence or explanation. Like those in power, the speaker is relating his completely subjective message, potentially damaging message to the public as a form of absolute truth.

**(b) *In Memory of W.B. Yeats***

When Auden wrote “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” in February 1939, Europe was on the verge of The Second World War did not actually break out until Germany invaded Poland in September, but the sense of impending catastrophe is present throughout the poem. The failure of Britain and France to resist Hitler’s claims on Czechoslovakia in 1938 seemed to define the mood of Europe as Auden wrote. In spite of the sense of expectant foreboding, all the nations seemed paralyzed, incapable of taking any action.

There is a long history of elegiac poetry, poems written on the occasion of someone’s death. *In Memory of W. B. Yeats* is a poem within that tradition, but it’s also a poem which extends the tradition. Poems about death tend to be concerned not just with the loss, but also with what remains after a man or a woman dies. Elizabethan sonnets, like those of Spenser or Shakespeare, often take this idea of something persisting even after death and use it in the context of an imagined dialogue between lovers, rather than in relation to an actual death: the lover promises his beloved that even though she must die, she will live on forever in his verses. In the elegy, that living-on after death may be thought of in religious terms, or perhaps in terms of cherished memory, or it may make itself felt by changing those who remain, transforming despair into the resolve to go on with life. This last possibility is what Tennyson’s poem, *Ulysses*, is all about.

Auden’s poem draws on all these traditions as it focuses just on that moment when the words of a poet must begin to live on after his death. The poem which Auden writes is the first step in preserving Yeats the poet. But most importantly, Auden understands this process of poetic after-life as taking place entirely within history. When Yeats’ words disperse themselves after his death, they are received into a very specific time and place: Europe, 1939. Those who may continue to remember the poet’s words live in a technological world of instruments, airports, cities, stock exchanges, and most importantly, they live at a moment of dark foreboding, as the world seems about to go to war again. For Auden, while memory deals with the past, it takes place in the present. And so the only way a poet can honour the dead, is to write a poem about the present. That’s just what he does in this poem.

After the lines “Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry,” three stanzas that originally followed were omitted in the 1966 edition of Auden’s *Collected Shorter Poems* and thereafter: “Time that is intolerant / Of the brave and innocent, / And indifferent in a week

/To a beautiful physique, // Worships language and forgives / Everyone by whom it lives; / Pardons cowardice, conceit, / Lays its honours at their feet. // Time that with this strange excuse / Pardoned Kipling and his views, / And will pardon Paul Claudel, / Pardons him for writing well.” Kipling’s views were imperialistic and jingoistic; Paul Claudel (1868-1955), French poet, dramatist, and diplomat, was an extreme conservative in his political ideas.

Commenting on the role of language and words; and how a poet acts as a “maker” it will be appropriate to know Auden’s views. In the earlier part of his career, Auden defended what he called “light” poetry, on sociological and even political grounds; more recently, he has spoken of poetry as a “game of knowledge” justifying his definition in philosophical and theological terms. Both of these critical approaches are allied to his concern, throughout his career, for the technical side of poetry – the side that most reflects the poet’s character as a “Maker”. The “*Maker*”, an old name for the poet, which Auden has made his own – is essentially a professional, delighting in the potentialities that the language itself offers, yet retaining always his awareness of the audience to and for whom he writes. the poet is a ‘Maker’ ; he makes language, and then makes poetry out of that language. Therefore, words for him are of the utmost importance. He plays with words with delight and uses them with extra ordinary skill. He hunts dictionaries for the most apt word, and has in this way saved many a word from oblivion. It was primarily in search of a new idiom and a new word usage that he went to America, and in this way sought to enrich the English language. This definition of the poet as highly professional “Maker” illuminates Auden’s own practice. he is “the conjuror” a verbal magician, and one devoted to the art of words. “His fertility of imagination, his sharply perceptive insight, his imitative response to the verbal rhythms and literary styles of other men, his own powerful and haunting sense or rhythm, his delight in linguistic peculiarities, technical languages, syntactical variations – all these are used, explored, and exploited for their own sake. Thus, if Auden’s poetic “voice” is one that commands attention, that is less by virtue of the things said – abundant and interesting though these had been – then by virtue of the skill and energy with which Auden has used the potentialities of the speaking voice itself.” In his verse, “Auden can argue, reflect, joke, gossip, sing, analyse , lecture, hector, and simple talk; he can sound , at will, like a psychologist, on a political platform like a theologian, at a party, or like a geologist in love ; he can give dignity and authority to nonsensical theories and make newspaper headlines sound both true and melodious.”

In the first part of the poem, Auden uses a reflective elegiac ideology to commemorate a poet that he held in high literary regard. After Auden describes the differing social perspectives of Yeats’ influence on the world, the second part of the poem brings forth an apostrophe that speaks to Yeats as a brother in poetry. Finally, the third part of the poem is written in verse style of Yeats, as Auden brings to life the actual poetic talents that his hero had emulated in his lifetime. In essence, the three parts of the elegy should be examined within the context of the style that Auden has chosen to commemorate William Butler Yeats.

The three parts of the poem reflect the elegiac, apostrophe and poetic mimicry of

Yeats' verse. While the poem immediately shows a traditional form of reflection and commemoration of Yeats' life and his death in the modern world, it is clear that Auden sought to idealize naturalism and mythical mastery that Yeats beheld in poetical history.

*In Memory of Major Robert Gregory* is William Butler Yeats' elegy on the death of Robert Gregory, an Irish airman who died in battle during the First World War. Written in the first person, it is a poem of twelve stanzas, in octets, which is primarily composed in iambic pentameter but which also includes iambic tetrameter. Gregory was the only son of Lady Augusta Gregory, Yeats' close colleague for two decades. They worked together as pivotal figures in the Irish Literary Revival and were among the founders of Dublin's Abbey Theatre.

Auden's poetry got effected under many influences. Auden was the most active of the group of young English poets who, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, saw themselves bringing new techniques and attitudes to English poetry. Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis were the most prominent members of the new school, which soon afterward broke apart. Like many of his generation, Auden learned from the poetic wit and irony of T. S. Eliot, and the metrical and verbal techniques of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wilfred Owen. His English studies at Oxford familiarized him with the rhythms and long alliterative line of Anglo-Saxon poetry as well as with the rapid and rollicking short lines (a sort of inspired doggerel) of the poet John Skelton (ca. 1460- 1529); both influenced Auden's versification. He learned, too, from the songs of the English music hall and, later, from American blues singers. The Great Depression that shook America in 1929 hit England soon afterward, and Auden and his contemporaries looked out at the England of industrial stagnation and mass unemployment, seeing not the metaphorical *Waste Land* of Eliot but a more literal waste land of poverty and "depressed areas." His early poetry is much concerned with a diagnosis of the ills of his country. This diagnosis, conducted in a verse that combined deliberate irreverence and sometimes even clowning with a cunning verbal craftsmanship, drew on Freud and Marx to show England both as a nation of neurotic invalids who must learn to "throw away their rugs" and as the victim of an antiquated economic system. The liveliness and nervous force of this early poetry of Auden's made a great impression, even though an uncertainty about his audience led him to introduce purely private symbols, intelligible only to a few friends, in some of his poems.

With the passage of time, Auden's poetry showed greater clarity of imagery and less of a desire to shock; he produced, in the years around 1940, some poems (such as "Lullaby") of finely disciplined movement, pellucid clarity, and deep yet unsentimental feeling. At the same time he was developing a more complex view of the world, moving from his earlier psychologically-based diagnosis of modern ills to a more religious view of personal responsibility and traditional value. But he never lost his ear for popular speech or his ability to combine elements from popular art with an extreme technical formality. Auden was always the experimenter, particularly in ways of bringing together high artifice and a colloquial tone.

W. H. Auden's *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, is perhaps his best-known poem, and it marks the great influence which the elder poet had on Auden's development. Edward Callan,

however, writes about Auden's attempt to distance himself from Yeats, even as he acknowledged Yeats' importance. He examines Auden's elegy, and particularly the revisions which he made in it over the years, in light of Auden's increasingly emphatic rejection of the romantic tradition which he identified with the nineteenth century, and with Yeats.

Friends often share stories or poems of loved one at their funeral. This helps then to ease their pain and can also express accomplishments of the deceased. When W.B. Yeats passed away, one of his contemporaries, W.H. Auden, wrote a poem in memory of him. Auden's poem titled, *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, presents the life of Yeats from Auden's perspective in three different sections. Using literary techniques such as diction, varied meter and rhyme, alliteration, and personification, Auden comments on poetry and its ability to outlive its author. Each of the three sections of this poem is different. The first section is composed of five stanzas each containing six lines. This mainly touches on the death of Yeats and contains neither meter nor rhyme. The second section is one stanza composed of ten lines and is a transitional section showing the human aspect of Yeats. It is written in iambic hexameter with a rhyme scheme of abbacdeed. The last section is made up of nine stanzas each only four lines long. It is written mostly in iambic meter. This section touches on the nature of poetry and its impact and its rhyme scheme is aabbcc etc. In the first stanza, Auden immediately begins throwing words at his readers which imply decay and death such as, "disappeared" and "dead of winter". The natural surroundings reflect Yeats death as the "brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,/And snow disfigured the public statues". Auden uses personification and alliteration in his description stating that "The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day". The last two lines contain alliteration and are repeated again at the end of this section: "What instruments we have agree/ The day of his death was a dark cold day". Auden again describes nature in his second stanza, except this time he is portraying how nature pays no attention to Yeats' death. "The wolves ran on..." despite his death and "The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays." Auden utilizes pathetic fallacy in that last line giving emotions to the river. The final line, "The death of the poet was kept from his poems", also illustrates how life keeps going on after Yeats dies. During the third stanza Auden focuses more on the actual passing of Yeats. Like a metaphorical poet he uses geographical diction to describe his Yeats' death: "The provinces of his body..", "The squares of his mind...", and "Silence invaded the suburbs". Auden also personified silence in that last line. Auden employs alliteration as well, "The current of his feeling failed". Yeats "became his admirers", living on in their memory. The fourth section discusses what will become of Yeats. His works are "scattered among a hundred cities". He finds "his happiness in another kind of wood", a bookcase as opposed to the forest. Yeats survives "in the guts of the living". The last stanza pays attention to the future making an allusion to the "Bourse", the French stock exchange, and juxtaposing that with "the poor". However they will all go about their daily lives "each in the cell of himself". The significance of his poetry will become mitigated because only "a few thousand will think of this day... The day of his death..." Auden repeats the last two lines from the first stanza, which alters the number of lines from six to eight. Auden's second section comments on what Yeats

had to deal with during his lifetime, and how his “gift survived it all”. Auden gives us examples of what he overcame, “The parish of rich women, physical decay,/Yourself”. Auden suggests that the conflict between Ireland and England “hurt [Yeats] into poetry”. Employing inverted syntax Auden states that “Ireland has her madness and her weather still” because Yeats’ poetry did not affect it. Poetry “survives” because it is an art form and it can stand alone with its integrity. It “flows...From ranches of isolation”, a notion that we are all isolated from each other, and from “busy griefs” which are our everyday burdens. The rhyme has shifted from nonexistent in the first section, to near rhyme in this section, and perfects itself to end rhyme in the last section. Auden’s final section comments on the nature of poetry and begins with the death of Yeats. Using personification and apostrophe Auden makes a request, “Earth, receive an honoured guest”, which refers to the physical body of Yeats. Auden also personifies time mentioning that it is “intolerant of the brave and innocent,/ And indifferent... To a beautiful physique”. This is the universal truth that the average person is forgotten in time. However on the other hand time will “worship language” because words can never die. It “forgives/Everyone by whom it lives”. Auden is stating that time will “forgive” an author if they write words that are great because they will be remembered by those words. Auden gives examples of this by making allusions to “Kipling” and “Paul Claudel”. In the fifth stanza of this section Auden shifts his focus to the present time and the events taking place around him. He is writing this poem during the dawn of World War II and illustrating how “All the dogs of Europe bark,/ And the living nations wait,/ Each sequestered in its hate”. Auden comments on the stupidity of war claiming that “Intellectual disgrace,/ Stares from every human face”. Next Auden instructs the poet in an apostrophe to “follow right” and “with your unconstraining voice,/ Still persuade us to rejoice”. Alluding to the biblical story of creation Auden entreats poets to, “Make a vineyard of the curse... let the healing fountains start”. In Auden’s last two lines he juxtaposes “prison” and “free” petitioning the poet to “Teach the free man how to praise”. That last line sums up the poem to make an excellent epitaph for William Butler Yeats. Auden breaks down his poem into three sections, each addressing different topics, but all connecting back to Yeats. These sections can also be look upon as stages in Yeats life. The first section represents his early years as a poet emphasized by the lack of meter and rhyme. Both of which also contribute to the sobering mood of Yeats’ death. The second section acts as a transition in the poem and can also stand for a transition in Yeats’ life which perhaps he accomplished by overcoming the obstacles described. The last section of Auden’s poem is written with flowing rhyme scheme and meter and suggests a time in Yeats’ life where he reached the height of his art. This is also the section where Auden described the benefit of words not only to the author, but to society as well and shows the triumphant end to Yeats’ life.

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## 5.5 Glossary

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(a) *September 1, 1939*

*Dives* – Bar ; tavern

*Uncertain and afraid* – afraid of the imminent war, and uncertain of future

*Clever hopes* – hopes that had been built up on skillfully negotiated pacts with Hitler and Mussolini.

*Low dishonest decade* – the period of ten years, from 1930-40 was dishonest because dishonest efforts were made to reach a compromise with Germany. The efforts were ‘dishonest’ because it was well known that a compromise with dictators like Hitler was meaningless. The government followed a policy of compromise, but Winston Churchill was against such a policy. This is a use of transferred epithet.

*Waves of anger and fear* – The reference is to the outbreak of The Second World War, as Hitler attacked *Unearth* – reveal. *The whole offence* – the full injury or harm.

*From Luther until now* – Luther the father of Protestantism (15 Century) started the process of the disintegration of Christendom into separate states. The process began with the separation of Germany from the Holy Roman Empire.

*That has driven a culture mad* – German nationalism which began with Luther has become a madness with Hitler.

*Linz* – Hitler’s birthplace. the reference may be to the boyhood of Hitler, and the many insults and acts of injustice he had to suffer. These early hardships were ‘psychological injuries’ which made him so aggressive in later life.

*Huge imago* – Final stage of evolution reached by an insect i.e. butterfly. Auden means that when Hitler was fully grown up and had acquired absolute power in Germany, he became a dictator and imperialist .

*Psychopathic God* – god – like in his power. Hitler was psychologically an abnormal person because of the psychological injuries he had suffered earlier. In his early experiences lies the root of his later violence and cruelty. (To whom evil... in return.).

*Thucydides* – A Greek historian (460 BC – 400 BC) who was condemned as a traitor and had to live in exile for 20 years.

*Elderly rubbish* – speak out a lot of nonsense, wisely and gravely.

*Apathetic graves* – people grown listless and insensitive like the dead.

*Enlightenment driven way* – devoid of knowledge and wisdom. People both in democracy and dictatorship are ignorant, incapable of thinking for themselves.

*The habit forming pain* – They have always suffered, and so they get used to suffering. They suffer silently. .

*Mismanagement and grief.* – They suffer because of the failure of their leaders and rulers, to manage the stage well.

*Into this neutral air* – by this time Auden was already in the U.S.A. , a country which was neutral in the early stages of the war.

*Skyscrapers* – multi-storeyed buildings rising high into the sky.

*Collective Man* – the society, the state, ‘the Establishment’

*Each language* – each country in its own language. *Competitive excuse* – countries compete with each other in justifying their own actions and giving excuses for the hardships of the common man. But all such excuses are useless.

*Euphoric dream* – false promises of a better and healthier life. Ultimately, there is disillusionment.

*The mirror* – the tall buildings, and other signs of collective power, are the mirrors in which the people see reflected the face of Imperialism, and the wrongs which have been done to the other countries of the world. Out of such wrongs and injustice are born dictators like Hitler. The lines show Auden’s Marxist leanings.

*Faces along the bar* – people sitting in the bar. *Cling to the average day* – follow their daily routine. They do not like it to be disturbed.

*Conspire- Combine. conventions* – Customs, routine activities like music, brilliant lights, etc.

*This fort* – the bar, which protects them like a form from the outside world, from its cares and worries.

*The furniture of home* – they feel comfortable and secure, as one does at home.

*Lest we should..... are* – They do not want to give up their daily routine as they are afraid of reality, and have not the courage to face it.

*Lost in a haunted wood* – the darkness and horror which surrounded them on all sides. They are like children lost in wilderness.

*The night* – the unknown future of which they are afraid as children are of the night.

*The windiest militant trash* – empty, incoherent nonsense with which politicians try to deceive the people.

*Is not so crude as our wish* – is not so ignorant as our desire to be loved alone.

*Nijinsky* – A Russian female dancer ( 1890-1950)

*Diaghilev*- A Russian organiser of dances. He took Nijinsky to Paris with his group of dancers. He was a tyrant, Nijinsky wrote of him that he wanted to be “loved alone”.

*Of the Normal heart* – of the common man.

*Error bred in... man* – A mistake, a sin, which is in the very blood of all human beings.

*Craves what it cannot have* – All desire what they can never have. This is their mistake.

Compare it with P.B.Shelley's "We look before and after; and pine for what is not" in *To Skylark*.

*Universal love* – Agape, love for all, which is the only cure for the ills of mankind. *To be loved alone* – Eros, sexual love, love which is selfish and possessive. *Eros* must be transformed into *Agape*.

*Conservative dark* – Their old routine which does not enable them to see the truth.

*Ethical life* – They think of morality as a result of the shock caused to them by the war.

*Commutes* – employees who get concessional rail tickets for their daily journey to their offices : Common people

*I will be true.... may work* – This shows their moral thinking. but they do not have a strong will power to fulfil their promise.

*Governors* – rulers, administrators, as helpless as the common man.

*Compulsory game* – the game of deceiving the people, a game which they are obliged to play everyday.

*Who can release them now* – None can help them, none can save them.

*Reach the dumb* – They are like dumb people who cannot listen to the advice of others. *Who can reach ... Dumb* – They are like deaf and dumb people, insensitive to all religious and moral values. They are spiritually dead, and no redemption is possible for them.

*All I have a voice* – The poet has only his voice, his language, to expose the hypocrisy, the hidden lies, of the modern age.

*The romantic lie* – the mistake that one can escape reality through romantic love.

*Sensual man in the street*- Common man given to the pleasures of love and sex.

*The lie of Authority* – The mistake of the rulers of the world that their might, represented by skyscrapers, can protect them.

*There is no.....state* – There is no such thing as the State or Collective Man. The view is as wrong as the view that one exists alone, and so should be loved.

*We must love one another or die* – the only solution to the human predicament is 'universal love' when *Eros* is transformed into *Agape*. Later, Auden modified the line to read, "we must love one another and die" which would mean that our case is hopeless, even universal love cannot save us. The line can be interpreted at various levels, which may profitably be 'studied' in the words of G.S. Fraser : "Let us take as an example of the clap trap Language that catches applause – the gift for sinisterly effective Kiplingesque



slogans, “*We must love one another or die*”.

*Defenceless* – helpless. *The night* – the dark shadow of the disastrous World War.

*Stupor* – dazed and senseless.

*Dotted everywhere.... their messages* – The world is enveloped in darkness, but here and there, there are points of light. These ‘Points of light’ are the few just and wise people who flash out their illuminating messages for the ignorant masses. The world can be redeemed, if their message is heeded.

*Composed like them... of dust* – the poet also is made of the same common dust as the common people, and also like them craves for Eros or ‘to be loved alone’. He is also guilty of self love.

*Show an affirming flame* – Give to the world a message of hope, that ‘Agape’ or universal love can save it from disaster. This is Auden’s affirmation of faith in the teaching of Christ.

### **(b) *In Memory of W.B. Yeats***

*Dead of winter* – when the winter cold was most severe. Yeats died on 1, January, 1939. January is certainly a cold, winter month, but whether it was really as cold as Auden imagines it to be, is not known. Winter symbolizes death.

*The airports* – being a modern poet, Auden draws his imagery from city life and brings in the facts of modern life, as ‘airports’ which are deserted because the planes are all grounded owing to bad weather.

*The mercury sank.... dying day* – in the evening, as the day ended, the mercury fell further in the barometer, thus indicating an increase in the intensity of cold.

*All the instruments* – the instruments which record weather conditions.

*The wolves ran on... forests* – nature was not at all effected by the death of the poet. Auden thus reverses, and treats ironically, the convention of pastoral elegy which shows all nature mourning the death. Here nature goes on its course indifferently, without caring for the poet who has passed away.

*The peasant river...* The river flowing through the countryside. *Untempted* – not attracted by. *Quays* – wharfs or harbours.

*Was kept from the poems* – The poet died and his death was mourned by the world. But his poems, his art, will live on. Art is not effected by the death of the artist. Auden thus stresses the permanence of art. The poet and the poems are separated.

*As himself* – as a human being, living in this world

*An afternoon.... rumours* – vivid rendering of the atmosphere on that sad day. Nurses were running this way and that, and there were all sorts of rumours. People were talking of the sick Yeats, and different news and views were being expressed.

*The provinces of his body... his feeling failed* – in this metaphysical conceit the dying W.B. Yeats is compared to an emperor. Different parts of his body are the provinces of his empire which refuse to follow his will, ‘squares’ or different parts of his mind become empty i.e. lose their power of thinking, outlying parts of the body “the suburbs”, becomes silent, insensitive, and the current of feeling, like lines of communication in a country, ceases to flow. The poet gradually dies. It is like a metaphysical conceit.

*He become his admirers* – The poet as a ‘person’, as a human being, died. His poetry will live on, but it shall be what others think of it. It shall undergo transformation through the successive interpretations and evaluations of his readers. He will be, or rather his poetry will be, what his admirers make of it.

*Now he is...hundred cities* – Just as the ashes of the dead may be scattered far and wide, so Yeats’ poems are scattered all over the world. They are read and admired far and wide.

*Wholly given... affections* – he is entirely at the mercy of people who did not know him. They were mere strangers to him, but now they will modify and transform his poetry by their own sensibility. *Affections* – sensibilities, likes and dislikes.

*Another kind of wood* – Strange, unfamiliar countries.

*Foreign code of conscience* – rules of conduct and art, quite unknown to the poet himself.

*Are modified.... living* – is changed and transformed by the interpretations which are put upon it by his readers. Thus even his poetry does not live on, as it is; even it undergoes a subtle, slow transformation. Just as his body is ‘transformed’ by the grave, so his poetry is ‘transformed’ by his readers.

*But in the ... tomorrow* – World will continue as usual, despite the death of the poet. ‘Tomorrow’ will have its own activity, noise and rustle, its own problems which are considered important. The poets’ death will not count for much. He is not eulogized.

*When the brokers...Bourse* – business will be carried out as usual in the market place. “Bourse” or the business exchange will continue to hum with activity as usual.

*And the poor... accustomed* – The poor will continue to be poor; nothing in life or nature is changed by the death of the poet.

*In the cell of himself* - a prisoner of his own selfishness and ego. *Is almost.. freedom* – man, a prisoner of his own self seeking, will continue to harbour the delusion that he is free.

*A few thousand* – i.e. the few readers and admirers of Yeats.

*O' all the... Cold day* – This elegiac refrain again stresses the fact that the passing away of individuals has little impact on the course of future events. Both nature and humanity go on as usual, unconcerned.

*You were silly like us* – The poet stresses that Yeats was a human being like us, with common follies and weaknesses. There was nothing extraordinary about him. Throughout, there are ironic contrasts with the conventional elegy. Auden does not glorify Yeats.

*Your gift.. it all* – the poet with his ‘silliness’ is dead. But his gift to the world, his poetry, lives on.

*The Parish of rich woman* – Larger number of rich women like Lady Gregory. Olivia Shakespeare, etc., who admired the poet and encouraged and inspired him.

*Physical decay* – like all human beings Yeats also underwent a process of old age, disease and death.

*Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry* – Auden suggests that Yeats became a poet because of his urge to serve his country, and bring about a revival of its art and literature. The wrongs of Ireland caused him pain, and hurt him into becoming a great poet.

*Now Ireland.. weather still* – but his poetry could bring about no improvement in the lot of the Irish people. As we are told in the next line, poetry can make nothing happen. It cannot effect the course of human history.

*If survives in the ... and die in* - poetry is here compared to a river, which can fertilise only the ‘soul’, it has no effect on the outside world.

*In the valley of its saying* – the human soul, the source of its being

*Where executives... temper* – the human soul is not subject to the action of the administrators of the world.

*Ranches of isolation* – Isolated nooks and corners in the human psyche.

*A way of happening* – simply as a record of possibilities and ideals, ways in which things can happen, though they do not actually happen in that way in the present.

*Honoured guest* – The body of Yeats.

*Irish Vessel* – Yeats who was an Irishman. Yeats is being compared to a vessel which in life was full of poetry, of which it has been emptied in death.

*Intolerant of* – does not care for

*Indifferent in a week... physique* – destroys in a week, a short period, even the most handsome body.

*Worship language* – respects only the language, i.e. the way of saying things of a poet, his art.

*pardons Cowardice... at their feet* – faults of character like cowardice, conceit, pride, vanity etc., of a great artist are forgotten, if he has command over language, and knows how to say things well.

*With this strange excuse* – because they were masters of language.

*Kipling and his views* – Kipling, the great Edwardian novelist and poet, is still remembered because of his art, even though he was an imperialist and colonialist in his views.

*Paul Claudel* – a poet who supported the Fascist cause during the Spanish Civil War.

*In the nightmare of the dark* – The reference is to the terrible years preceding the outbreak of The Second World War in 1939, the year of Yeats' death.

*The dogs of Europe Bark* – selfish, blood thirsty leaders of Europe, such as Hitler and Mussolini.

*Sequestered* = Separated and isolated from others, because of its own hatred and selfishness.

*Intellectual disgrace* - people hating each other because of ideological and political differences.

*And the seas of... each eye* – There is absolutely no pity or fellow feeling

*To the bottom of the night* – to the innermost depths, the poet should do everything possible to explore hidden truths.

*Still persuade us to rejoice* – use your poetry, your wisdom, to persuade us to rejoice, despite the horror of war looming large in the horizon. Yeats himself stressed this role of art in time of crises.

*With the farming of a verse* – with your gift of writing powerful poetry.

*Make a vineyard of the curse* – turn a curse into a blessing, make us rejoice despite the curse of war that threatens to destroy humanity.

*In a rupture of distress* – Joyfully, despite distress and failure

*Deserts of the heart* – dry hearts, hearts dry of sympathy and fellow feeling

*Let the healing ... start* - through your poetry make the fountains of sympathy start in the hearts of people so that humanity may be the curse of selfishness and lack of sympathy.

*In the prison of his days* – Man today is a prisoner of his own selfishness. It is his selfishness which isolates him from others. Eros-like emotions as explained by Auden.

*Teach the freeman how to praise* – First free men from the prison of self, and then inspire them to accept and praise their life, despite its many limitations and drawbacks.

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## 5.6 Self Assessment Questions

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(a) **September 1, 1939**

1. Why is the poet uncertain about and afraid of ?
2. Why do the waves of anger and fear spread over the lands of the earth ?
3. What does the poet and the public know ?
4. What can accurate scholarship do ?
5. Write a note on Thucydides.
6. What lesson can be learnt from Thucydides ?
7. What does the full height of the skyscrapers declare ?
8. What can be seen in the mirror ?
9. What is the meaning of :

*The lights must never go out*

*The music must always play*

10. What are the two types of love according to Auden ?
11. What is expected from the poet ?

(b) ***In Memory of W.B. Yeats***

12. Describe the day when the poet died.
13. Why does Auden call Yeats silly ?
14. What is the effect of Mad Ireland ?
15. Who is the “hounoured guest” and the “Irish vessel” ?
16. What is expected from the poet ?
17. Comment upon the role of Time ?
18. Who have been pardoned by Time ?
19. Why have they been pardoned by Time ?
20. What is the role of the poet in time of distress ?
21. Name the two poets who were in favour of imperialism.

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## 5.7 Let Us Sum Up

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You have studied what makes modernism and how W.H. Auden is a modern poet. You have studied two of his poems with the help of glossary, material provided and the biographical section. The critical views and glossary must have helped you to understand the poems in the proper context. You have seen how the poetic devices are an integral part to develop various themes in a modernist text.

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## 5.8 Answers To Self Assessment Questions

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(a) *September 1, 1939*

1. The past decade has been of low and dishonest politics and hopes have been cleverly unfulfilled.
2. As the poem has the Second World War in its background, countries of the World were frightened and angry over the rising face of imperialism and dictatorship.
3. The poet and the public know that evil is returned by those to whom evil is done.
4. It can show the evil, offence done from Luther till today. It can show why a culture goes mad or as an example of imperialism. It can show the happening taken place at Linz and the beginning of the Second World War.
5. Thucydides was a Greek historian (460 BC-400 BC) who was condemned as a traitor and had to live in exile for 20 years.
6. Thucydides has taught us that without democracy and enlightenment, there will be pain, mismanagement and grief. Wherever loss of democratic traditions takes place, imperialism will come again causing fear and suffering.
7. The height of the skyscrapers declares the strength of Collective Man.
8. Imperialism's face and the international wrong.
9. It is a kind of euphoric dream where we realise that we are much at ease and comfort in the routine of our homely life.
10. Auden is of the view that love of self or individual leads to selfishness and hatred in the society- this is Eros. But Agape means universal love which leads to peace and harmony.
11. The poet is expected to show an affirming flame of love and peace in the atmosphere of horror, terror, fear, negation and despair.

(b) *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*

12. It was a very dark cold day. Winter symbolizes death. Airports were deserted due to

extreme cold. All the brooks were frozen and snow disfigured public monuments.

13. Yeats thought that his views would change the life of the contemporary Irish people but this did not happen.
14. Mad Ireland hurt the emotions of W.B. Yeats and turned him into a poet. He expressed the bad condition of Ireland in his poetry.
15. No, this elegy is not written in an ordinary form of elegy where the deceased is eulogized and praised. Yeats is called a fool as he has not understood the Irish people appropriately.
16. W.B. Yeats.
17. Time is personified. Time has not favoured the brave, innocent and the beautiful. It has pardoned the people who were full of cowardice and conceit. This has favoured the language and not the ideas.
18. Kipling and Paul Claudel.
19. They have been pardoned by Time (Personified) because they wrote well i.e. not for their ideas which were full of imperialism but for language they used.
20. The poet is expected to grow a vineyard of curse i.e. in distress also he can give fruitful, peaceful and beneficial direction to the society or humanity at large.
21. Kipling and Paul Claudel.

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## 5.9 Review Questions

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1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem *September 1, 1939*.
2. Describe how Auden has created an atmosphere of horror, terror, fear, negation and despair to show imperialism's face.
3. What are the symbols used in *September 1, 1939* and *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*.
4. How has the poet created an atmosphere of death and destruction using these poetic devices?
5. What is an elegy? What are the different types of this genre? What type of elegy is *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*?
6. Is the poem about Yeats merely an elegy? How is it a subjective type of poetry?
7. Discuss how the two poems of Auden reflect the Second World War in the background.
8. Compare and contrast Auden's *September 1, 1939* with Yeats' *Nineteen hundred Nineteen*.

9. Discuss the use of images of death and destruction in the poems of Yeats and Auden.
10. Write a critical appreciation of the poem *In the Memory of W.B. Yeats*.
11. Discuss W.H. Auden as a Modern poet.

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## UNIT-6

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### DYLAN THOMAS: *FERN HILL* AND *THIS BREAD I BREAK*

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#### Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 About the Poet: His life and Work
- 6.3 About the Age
- 6.4 Introduction of the Poem: *Fern Hill*
  - 6.4.1 The Text
  - 6.4.2 Word Meanings
  - 6.4.3 Introduction
  - 6.4.4 Development of Thought
  - 6.4.5 Theme
  - 6.4.6 The Schizoid Explanation
  - 6.4.7 Language of the Poem
- 6.5 Introduction of the Poem: *This Bread I Break*
  - 6.5.1 The Text
  - 6.5.2 Word Meanings
  - 6.5.3 Analysis
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Review Questions
- 6.8 Bibliography

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### **6.0 Objectives**

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The main objective of this unit is to make you familiar with and understand:  
the introduction to the poet;  
about the life and work of the author;

about the age;  
introduction of the text;  
detailed explanation  
critical analysis of the texts;  
word-meanings;

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## 6.1 Introduction

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A great Welsh genius, Dylan Thomas was endowed with a matchless poetic personality. He was heralded as the greatest lyric poet of the twentieth century England. But soon after his death in 1953, a more critical and balanced appraisal of his poetry was made. His real worth and work, greatness and popularity have been interestingly and increasingly felt and realised, so much so that it has now become a common place of literary criticism that no study of twentieth century England poetry can be considered complete without a study of Dylan Thomas. This will be justified when you study his two popular poems, *Fern Hill* and *This Bread I Break*. However, he is an extremely difficult poet and needs persistent and painstaking efforts on your part to understand and appreciate the poet and his poetry.

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## 6.2 About the Poet: His Life and Work

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Dylan Marlais Thomas (1914-53) was a poet, born in Swansea. He was the son of the English teacher at Swansea Grammar school, where he himself was educated. He knew no Welsh. He began to write poetry while he was still at school. He worked in Swansea as a journalist before moving to London in 1934. His first volume of poems, *18 poems*, appeared in the same year. He then chose the career of journalism, broadcasting and film-making, spending much of his time in the beautiful afternoon drinking clubs of the time, and soon acquiring a reputation as both poet and popular personality. In 1937 he married Caitlin Macnamara; then settled for some time at Laugharne in Wales, returning there permanently after many wanderings in 1949. In spite of some charges of deliberate obscurity Thomas' romantic, affirmative, rhetorical style gradually won a large following. It was both new and influential (much imitated by his contemporaries of the New Apocalypse Movement). His publication of *Death and Entrances* (1946) which contains some of his best known poems including *Fern Hill* and *A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of a Child in London* established him as a poet of prominence. His *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (1952) sold extremely well.

Dylan Thomas also wrote a considerable amount of prose. *The Map of Love* (1939) is a collection of prose and verse. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) is a collection of autobiographical short stories. *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (1955) is a collection of stories. *A Prospect of the Sea* (1955) is a collection of stories and essays. He was also a popular entertainer on radio and with students. In 1950 he undertook the first of his lectures

tours to the United States and he died there on his fourth visit in 1953, as the story grew about his wild living and heavy and hard drinking. Shortly before his death, he took part in a reading in New York of what was to be his most famous single work, *Under Miek Wood*. His *Notebooks* (ed. R.N.Maud) was published in 1968. A new edition of *The Poems of Dylan Thomas* (1971) is enriched by authoritative critical comments and personal notes by his friend, Daniel Jones.

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### 6.3 About the Age

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Dylan Thomas belonged to the twentieth century. He was the poet of the forties which showed the reaction against the 'New Country Movement'. Day Lewis noted 'the appearance of a new generation of poets not so much influenced by the 'New Country School' as reacting away from it.' It is, perhaps, measure of the partial failure or limited success of that school that the most prominent and promising poets belonging to the younger contemporaries were not impelled to continue that Voyage without which W.H.Auden and his friends had initiated with great success, but rather felt the need of a fresh explanation of the inner life, or in the words of Day Lewis, 'a return to the ideals of poetic integrity and artistic individualism: a setting-out-again in the direction of 'pure' poetry.' The chief poets associated with New Romanticism are those of George Barker, David Gascoyne and Dylan Thomas. All these poets probably owe a considerable debt to Edith Sitwell and they were also influenced by the 'Surrealist Movement, which had begun in France in the nineteen-twenties and which revived a good deal of publicity in England when the first International Surrealist Exhibition was held in London in June 1936. Surrealism, like its predecessor Dada (the invention of the Rumanian Tristan Tzara), with which it had close connections, was a theory of 'pure' art, 'a re-affirmation', as Herbert Read, one of its chief English exponent, wrote 'of the romantic principle'. Dylan Thomas followed this 'romantic principle' in his poetry.

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### 6.4 Introduction of the Poem: *Fern Hill*

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#### 6.4.1 The Text

*Now As I was young and easy under the apple bough*  
*About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,*  
*The night above the dingle starry,*  
*Time let me hail and climb*  
*Golden in the heydays of his eyes,*  
*And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns*  
*And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves*

*Frail with daisies and barley  
Down the rivers of the windfall light.  
And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
About the happy yard and ringing as the farm was home,  
In the sun that is yound once only,  
Time let me play and be  
Golden in the mercy of his means,  
And green and golden I was huntrman and herdman, the calves  
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
And the sabbath rang slowly,  
In the pebbles of the holy streams,  
All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air  
And playing, lovely and watery  
And fire green as grass,  
And nightly under the simple stars  
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,  
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night jars  
Flying with the ricks, and the horses  
Flashing into the dark.  
And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white  
With the dew, comeback, it cock on his shoulder: It was all  
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,  
The sky gathered again  
And the sun grew round that veryday,  
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light  
It the first, spining place, the spellbound horses walking warm  
Out of the whinnying green stable*

*On to the fields of praise.  
 And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house  
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,  
 In the sun born over and over,  
 I ran my headless ways,  
 My wishes raced through the house high hay  
 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows  
 It all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs  
 Before the children green and golden  
 Follow him out of grace.  
 Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
 Up to the swallow throged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
 In the moon that is always rising,  
 Nor that riding to sleep  
 I should hear him fly with the high fields  
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the children land.  
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
 Time held me green and dying  
 Though I rang in my chains like the sea.*

## 6.4.2 Word Meanings

### Stanza 1

- Fern Hill:** name of the farm of Dylan’s aunt Ann Jones. As a boy, Dylan passed his holidays with his loving aunt.
- Easy:** care-free; perfectly at his ease.
- Was:** there was a time when the poet was young and eary.
- Lilting house:** Dylan uses it as an epithet for an ugly farm-house.
- Happy as the grass is green:** ‘Green’ is a symbol of youth, the innocence and the joys of youth. The use of this imagery relates the human to the non human.

**Dingle:** a small wooded valley.

**Starry:** at night the star twinkled in the sky adding to the beauty of the small wooded valley.

**Time let me be:** time, and not the boy is the protagonist of the lyric.

**Hail and climb:** He hailed the wagons as they moved by. They stopped at his call, and he climbed them.

**Golden:** all nature seemed to be green and golden to the boy. 'Golden' brings, ripe fruit to mind. 'Gold' is a symbol of 'purity' and 'green' of 'creativity'.

**Heydays of his eyes:** in the golden or happiest period of his life.

**Trail with:** Follow; run along with.

**Rivers of windfall light:** It is a metaphorical expression. The river is not a river of water but of light, which flows continuously like a river.

**Windfall:** not only does it mean 'prematurely fallen' but also carries the suggestion of some good luck, the sudden and unexpected.

### Stanza-2

**Famous:** glorified and lionised

**As:** as if

**The farm was home:** as if the Fern Hill farm was his home.

**The sun that is young once only:** the felling of the boy would be a permanent holiday is here qualified by nature man's happiness and awareness that happiness and youth are short-lived.

**Time let me play:** it was time which was the lord and master in reality and not Dylan.

**In the memory of his means:** Time was merciful, to intend happiness in an absolutely care-free manner.

**Huntman and herdman:** the 'huntman', is related to horns and foxes, and 'herdman' also both to horns and calves.

**Sabbath:** Sunday, a holy day devoted to the worship of god, the maker, and his son, the saviour.

**Holy streama:** The streama were holy, because the farm was holy and because the period of the vocations was a long Sabbath for the boy.

### Stanza-3

**All the run long:** i.e. all the day long. As long as the sun shone, the poet kept running from

place to place.

**Tunes from the chimneys:** The sight of the curls of smoke coming out of the chimneys was as pleasant and sweet to the boy.

**Fire green as grass:** Fire as intense as the grass is green. 'Green' refers to intensity, life and vitality.

**The tunes from.....grass:** all the four elements- air, water, fire and earth.

**Lovely and water:** beautiful as well as moist.

**The owls were nearing the farm away:** the fantasy of the child that the owls are carrying away the farm, as he goes to sleep.

**All the moon long:** i.e. throughout the night.

**Nightjars:** a kind of bird

**Blarred:** the epithet applies both to the dreamers and the birds.

**Flashing away:** running away, flashing in the light of the moon.

#### Stanza-4

**The cock on his shoulder:** another fantasy that the farm became a wanderer returning after its walks, wet with dew, looking white in the early morning light.

**It was all shining:** it was all bright and beautiful in the bright daydawn reminding the boy of Eden, with Adam and fire.

**Maiden:** It is all a paradisaal world reminding the boy of the Biblical Eden and the christian myth of creation.

**The sky gathered again:** The sky was bright and beautiful, as if it was suffused with the first light which later gathered to form the sun.

**Spinning place:** in chaos which was full of spinning or whirling matter.

**The spell-bound-horns:** The horses are also under the magic spell of that lovely morning.

**Warm:** they are warm in the light of the rising sun.

**Walking:** they merely 'walk' as if with a leisurely look at the beauties which the light of the morning reveals.

**Whinnying green stable:** Horses which 'whine' or 'neigh' and not the stable, again it is the horses which are 'green' full of zest for life and not the stables. An instance of double transfer of epithets.

**The fields of praire:** the meadows, the grassy fields of Fern Hill.



### Stanza-5

**And:** the opening word, also opens the second and fourth stanzas and the nocturnal half of the third.

**Honoured:** it brings the first stanza back, and foxes the second.

**gay house:** The liling house. The cluds of his Eden are 'new made' everyday, like bread from aunt Annie's oven, and everyday the first, his sun is 'born over and over.'

**In the sun born pver and over:**to the boy Dylan, it seened as if everyday was the first day of creation, and everyday the sun and the clouds were formed a new.

**I ran my headless ways:**carefree and full of the zest for life.

**At my sky-blue trades:**activity carried on under the blue sky.

**Trodes:** The boyish activity of 'headless' Dylan.

**Blue:** symbol of innocence.

**That time allows:** time which is the lord and master and not the boy Dylan. Time has allowed him to run about in such a carefree manner.

**Tuneful turning:**It brings in such mornings, so full of such sweet songs and such beauty.

**Turning:** results in the loss of paradise, and the green and gold of youth.

**Such morning songs:**the boy's songs and the present poem.

**Grace:** the blessing of God.

### Stanza-6

**It the lamb white days:**boyhood which was pure, innocent like a lamb. 'Lamb' is a symbol of purity and innocence.

**Upto the swallow thronged loft:**the loft or garret full of swallows where he used to sleep as a boy during his visits to the farm.

**By the shadow of his hand:**Time leads him once to the loft. But now it leads him by the shadow of his hand. Shadow means a ghost of his former self.

**The farm forever fled:** When the grown-up Dylan wakes from his sleep he finds that the farm does not return, that it has gone away forever. His child fantasies are no longer possible for him.

**Childless land:** The farm is childless because it is now without the child. Dylan who has grown into a man.

**Mercy of his means:** Time was merciful and used all his means to make him 'young and easy'

**Time held him:**the poet now realises that he was always held in chains by time. He was always Time's slave, although he didn't realise this truth in happy boyhood days.

**Green and dying:**He was once 'green' but now he was dying like all 'green' things.

**Though I sang in my chains like the sea:**The sea is moon- chained. As the sea sings in the chains of the moon and the sun, so the chained boy-boy who was a captive of time-also sang then.

### 6.4.3 Introduction

*Fern Hill* was published in 1946 in the volumes of poems entitled *Death and Entrances*. In this poem, there are 200 drafts of this lyric. It was given its final and present shape in 1945. It ranks very high among the lyrics of Dylan. It is remarkable for its clarity and direct statements.

*Fern Hill* was the name of the farm of Dylan's aunt Arm Jones, and as a boy, he passed the happier moments on this farm in the summer season with his aunt. The lyric is a celebration of these farm holidays. When he grew-up and visited this farm he found that 'the glory and the dream' had gone out of the farm. His youthful fantasies were no longer possible for him. This poem reminds us the 17<sup>th</sup> century poets as Vaughan, Marvell and Victorian poet Hopkins etc. It is called the best poem. 'Thomas himself is in certain respects a throwback.'

### 6.4.4 Development of Thought

The poem begins with a subtle, unemphasized opposition between Time and the boy-hero. He plays about the house and under the apple trees as "happy as the grass was green"- that is, as happy the day was long. And the rest of the stanza describes a daytime scene. But the line immediately succeeding "happy as the grass was green" skips ahead to the time of night which puts an end to playing- "The night above the dingle starry."

Time allows the young Dylan to have and go his ways. But only within limits. Thomas employs equal skill and with the same result in the last line: "Down the rivers of the windfall light." The basic metaphor, rivers of light, is strong in its suggestion of an unceasing flow. The contradictory significance of the odd epithet 'windfall' almost escapes attention. Light thus is that which comes easily, naturally, and as a kind of gift. The concept of a decay and end of light has little or no initial impact.

In the second stanza, Thomas is onerous enough in the phrase, "the sun that is young once only." But in "And the sabbath rang slowly," he is at his tricks again, on the one hand there is the idea that everybody is a holiday and a holy day, as long as one of those Victorian Sunday afternoons, which never seemed to end.

The idea is explicit in the third stanza in "All the sun long it was running....." And the

next contradiction between long and running. It is not only Thomas who is running but also the horses of the day. Thomas sees high hayfields and smoke from the chimneys. And there is a oneness, an assimilation of himself into the four elements:

*It was air*

*And playing, lovely and watery*

*And fire green as grass.*

In the second half of the stanza, the child is usually lying down and looking up. His movement does not cease- he rides to sleep. But it is a less dramatic movement than that of the farm about him, which flies into space, and of the horse, which transform into horses of night.

“For the child, the farm so fabulously wafted away, fabulously returns like the Prodigal, or Adam restored to the Garden or Peter waking to find himself unforsworn. But merely to name the Prodigal, and Adam, and Peter is to speak the inevitable loss of simplicity of innocence, of faith. Even this fourth stanza “White with the dew,” has its hints of mortality.

Wordsworth and Traherne speak from a distance, as adults, the sense of less strong upon them, there is a re-creation, not a creation; they are not in the child’s world but looking back and expounding upon it.

#### **6.4.5 Theme**

Time, which has an art to throw dust on all things, broods over the poem. Time is our enemy. Eliot says, it is only in time and through it that we escape from it. Youth is an ignorant escape that time allows, and wiser memory another. *Fern Hill* is Thomas victory over what he laments. The green and golden joy of childhood and the shadowy sorrow of maturity become the joy of art.

#### **6.4.6 The Schizoid Explanation**

David Holbrook’s interpretation of the poem in his book *Dylan Thomas : The Code of Night* is also illuminating and interesting. In his view David was a schizoid, an individual who can relate himself to a world of his own imagination, but withdraws in fear from the external world. Here Dylan withdraws into the world of his early boyhood. “He creates the world of childhood, in which the child makes his world and endows it with significance:”

*The sky gathered again,*

*And the sun grew round that very day.*

The state of childhood in which one may believe in one’s omnipotence, and cosmic importance is distanced. As he creates the child’s vision, he enters the phantasy life of infancy- so that to him everyday is the first day:

*So it must have been after the birth of the simple light  
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm  
Out of the whinnying green stable  
On to the fields of praise.*

The 'sky blue trades' of phantasy belong to a time when nature allows one to have an 'irresponsible' dream, which takes no account of world and time. The poem brings it home to us that our sense of our own validity and our sense of the world's meaning emerge from this first irresponsible vision. To be honoured, lordly, carefree, famous has a 'golden' and 'green' value which underlies our capacity to feel alive in a world colored with significance. It is the child who can hear the tunes in the chimneys, and who knows a sun that is 'young once only.'

Of course, the poem is intensely nostalgic. Adult consciousness brings a less of phantasy freedom. The child is self-enclosed in his Eden, and the poem encounters the paradoxes of omnipotence and impotence, freedom and slavery. The swallows are a symbol of life-gathering, and also of movement about the world. 'The ridding and flying' express as a desire to grow up and the singing expresses a defiant joyfulness, even inspite of the passing of time. Time holds him, like a benign mather, and spares the child the recognition of the cruelty of the passing of time, that is all. But the poem is written from a perspective which sees how, after childhood, one has passed out of grass.

The effect of the poem on us is to recapture for us the energy and vision of childhood, and to help us infuse our own adult stitutes with something of the visinary power of the child, indeed to see that we only see a meaningful world because of that first irresponsible vision.

#### **6.4.7 Language of the Poem**

Language is used in a very original and eloquent way. There is repetition, "green" is repeated in each stanza. Starting similes like "fire green as grass"; transferred epithets such as

Spellbound horses walking warm

Out of the whinnying green stable;

Arresting metaphors such as "rode to sleep". "It was Adam maiden" gain its effect by compression; exaggeration as when the hay fields were "high as the house", are all meant to suggest the child's imagination. The poet is adopting the child's view of the world and life. Phrases like "all the sun long", "all the moon long" show how a child measures time.

Striking phrases much as "once below a time", the rivers of the windfall light" in the first stanza should be noticed "once upon a time" is adapted or modified. This is not merely unconventional. It emphasizes that man is subject to time, "river of light" is metaphorical: light flowing as in a river, "windfall" suggests that the splendour of these rivers of light is a windfall, an unexpected prize.

Words like green, golden are repeated. “Time let me hail and climb” is echoed in “Time let me play and be”.

The second stanza uses words, like Sabbath and holy to give a religious dimension to boyhood experience of vacation on the farm. It reflects the adult nostalgia for and idealisation of childhood.

In the third stanza uses words, “fire green as grass” is queer expression”, “green suggesting intensity and vitality. The boy imagined or fantasized that while he was sleeping at night, the farm was carried away by the owls, and when he woke up, the farm, “like a wanderer white with the dew”, came back with “the cock on his shoulder” “Adam and maiden” suggests that the boy thinks of eve as a maiden. His world was like the garden of Eden before the original sin was committed, or the forbidden fruit (“apple”) tasted notice the light abounding and the constant presence of the sun.

“The whinnying green stable” is an example of transferred epithet. Horses, not stables, whinny or neigh and are green or youthful. “The fields of praise” means the fields of Fern Hill for which the boy was all praise connect “the sun grew round that very day ‘and’ the sun born over and over.”

“Lamb white days” suggests bright, pure, and innocent days or time. It is not the colour of the lamb but its virtue that is meant in this curious phrasing, “riding to sleep” is boyish imagination for falling asleep or going to sleep.

“I sang in my chains like the sea” in at once the boy and the poet singing. The simile of the sea is high imaginative. The sea is chained to the moon and the sun, and sings in its waves and tides. The poet is like the sea, the image is glorifying. The sea is eternal, and so, the poet seems to suggest, is the art of poetry. Time’s slave transcends time in this way.

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## **6.5 Introduction of the Poem: *This Bread I Break***

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### **6.5.1 The Text**

*This bread I break was once the oat,*

*This wine upon a foreign tree*

*Plunged in its fruit;*

*Man in the day or wind at night*

*Laid the crops low, broke the grape's joy.  
Once in this wine the summer blood  
Knocked in the flesh that decked the vine,  
Once in this bread  
The oat was merry in the wind;  
Man broke the sun, pulled the wind down.  
This flesh you break, this blood you let  
Make desolation in the vein,  
Were oat and grape  
Born of the sensual root and sap;  
My wine you drink, my bread you snap.*

### 6.5.2 Word Meanings

- Oat:** grain from a cereal plant used as food.  
**a foreign tree:** Jerusalem.  
**Plunged:** put or go suddenly and with force (into)  
**decked:** decorated  
**Merry:** happy, gay  
**Desolation:** destruction, ruin, unfit to live in.

### 6.5.3 Analysis

Dylan Thomas is a great modern poet. His poems are imbued in moral and religious ideals. They, like the sonnets of Shakespeare, remain timeless. Living from in the early twentieth century, he has cultivated more freedom in his views. The present poem in your syllabus, *The Bread I Break* illustrates all these qualities very well.

The poem *The Bread I Break* is clearly and certainly related to the sacrament used in many Christian based religions. It speaks to the 'bread' that represents Christ's flesh and it speaks to the wine that represents Christ's blood.

The bread is referred to as being, 'once an oat', the oat growing free and full in the fields only to be cut down, harvested and as processed into flour in order to make the bread. The poem opens with a viewpoint against the church. In a way, we can say that Christ's life was pure, innocent and noble hearted, but through religion it has become 'processed'.

Making a reference to the wine it is “upon a foreign tree”. This has an allusion to Christ’s birth in Jerusalem. It clearly indicates that Christ was a Jew, Yet Christian churches spread anti-semitism. Still the feeling of the poem is set:

*“Man in the day or wind at night  
Laid the crops low, broke the grape’s joy.”*

The poet has used aggressive language throughout the poem. The words like “plunged, broke, knocked, decked, pulled, break, desolation and snap” used in the poem denote the aggressive tone of the poem. These words are joined with combined sentiment of liking something fragile so only to destroy them.

In the second stanza, the poet refers to, “summer blood.” Alone, this may bring several images summer warmth, life and other images; however, in our view, this line is clarified when the poet says:

*“Man broke the sun, pulled the wind down.”*

It is Christ’s blood, but more importantly holy and divine. The divinity was brought down by mankind. The oats that were wild are cut down and fly through the wind. By pulling the wind down, man rejoices in the Savior’s death.

In the last stanza, the poet condemns and criticizes those who abuse the Savior’s (Christ’s) sacrifice of showing the right path to Heaven. Perhaps to say that by letting people believe they will only be forgiven for their sins, they only sin more.

*“I his flesh you break, this blood you let  
Make desolation in the vein,  
Were oak and grape  
Born of the sensual root and sap;  
My wine you drink, my bread you snap.”*

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## **6.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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Thus we see that Dylan Thomas poems illustrate 20<sup>th</sup> century English poetry at its best. His love for words and language was exceptional. Some of his lines and phrases are memorable and form a part of current English. “I advance for as long as forever is”, “I snag in my chains like the sea”, “a grief ago” “all the sun long”, “once below a time”, “the lamb white days”, etc. Show his originality. He realised his ambition of making his poems “a watertight section” of the stream of life and consciousness. His symbolism has three aspects: natural, conventional and private. He was a poet for whom meaning was bound up with pattern and order. He makes his language a part of the stream of consciousness.

From the poems we have studied show that the poet was preoccupied with the interinvolvement of creation and destruction. But his love for childhood or boyhood and his sacramental feeling for the unity of man and nature are no less important.

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## 6.7 Review Questions

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1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem *Fern Hill*.
2. Give a critical summary of *The Bread I Break*.
3. Write short notes on:
  - (a) The portrayal of childhood in *Fern Hill*.
  - (b) The imagery in the poem *Fern Hill*.
4. “*Fern Hill* celebrates the joy of life”. Illustrate with examples from the poem.
5. Discuss the symbolism of Dylan Thomas: natural, conventional and private. Give examples.
6. Discuss Dylan Thomas as a poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His themes are limited, but primary, elemental human experience. If you were to select ten British poets of the century, will you include Thomas among them?
7. Would you accept that he wrote “for the love of man in praise of God”?

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## 6.8 Bibliography

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## UNIT-7

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### BERNARD SHAW : SAINT JOAN ( I )

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#### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 About the Age
- 7.3 About the Author
- 7.4 About the Play : *Saint Joan*
  - 7.4.1 Introduction
  - 7.4.2 Detailed Summary
  - 7.4.3 Critical Analysis
  - 7.4.4. Plot Construction
  - 7.4.5 Theme
  - 7.4.6 Allegory
- 7.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 7.8 Review Questions
- 7.9 Bibliography

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#### 7.0 Objectives

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In this unit I propose to familiarise you with the modern drama and initiate you to read and understand Bernard Shaw as a dramatist. Shaw's drama *Saint Joan* is prescribed for your study. No account of modern drama can be complete without considering the contribution of Bernard Shaw. Shaw is a peculiar mixture of Ibsen and Wycherley. You are advised to go through in details to understand literary scenario of later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and evaluate Shaw as a dramatist. You must read about contemporary English drama, its merits and demerits, ideas, philosophy, theories and other qualities of Shaw and analyse *Saint Joan* to develop capability to :

- (i) read and analyse the features of modern drama,

- (ii) evaluate the drama in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries,
- (iii) understand and evaluate Bernard Shaw's contribution as a dramatist,
- (iv) read and understand *Saint Joan*,
- (v) critically analyse the concepts and qualities of *Saint Joan*, and
- (vi) evaluate the drama and answer questions in your own words.

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## 7.1 Introduction

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From the dramatic point of view, the first half of the nineteenth century was almost completely barren. Many of the major poets had tried their hand at drama, but none of them had achieved any success. The greater part of their work never saw the stage. The professional theatre of the period was in a low state. Among the respectable middle classes it was despised as a place of vice. Audiences did nothing to raise the standard, which remained deplorably low. The popular pieces of the day were melodramas, farces, and sentimental comedies, which had no literary qualities whatever, they were poor in dialogue and negligible in characterization and relied for their success upon sensation, rapid action, and spectacle. Prominent among the writers of melodrama in the period was Dion Boucicault (1822-90).

Not unnaturally it was a period of Shakespearian revivals, staged on a lavish scale, and it was in 1879 that the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was built at Stratford on-Avon. Within the melodrama itself there can be traced a significant development from romantic and historical themes to more domestic themes and this movement towards realism received considerable impetus from the work of T.W. Robertson (1829-71), a writer of comedies, who introduced the idea of a serious theme underlying the humour, and characters and dialogue of a more natural kind.

The arduous struggle to create an audience for the new drama led its champions to seek additional support in the provinces, and thus came into being the repertory movement. A season of Shaw repertory was given in 1904 at the Court Theatre under the Vedrenne-Barker management.

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## 7.2 About The Age

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This period of the beginning of modern literature sees the end of the long reign of Queen Victoria (1901) and of the stability which the country had so long enjoyed. The shock administered by the Boer War (1899-1902) to the violent imperialism of the later years of the reign helped to divert attention from the cruder conceptions of imperial expansion to social problems at home. There ensued a period of sweeping social reform and unprecedented progress. The reawakening of a social conscience found its expression in the development of local government and the rapid extension of its influence upon the health, education, and happiness of the citizen. More than ever before political issues were fought on the basis of

class loyalties, and this period sees the emergence and rapid growth of the Labour Party. Political passions ran high, and the years before the War saw serious labour troubles, many of them connected with the growth of Trades Unionism. Home Rule for Ireland, Free Trade or Protection, Votes for Women, the decline of agriculture and the growing urbanization of the country were major problems of the day. After the Boer War the aloofness which Britain had so long and prosperously maintained from European conflicts was abandoned in face of growing German strength.

On literature the effect of the spread of education after the Education Act of 1870 and 1902 was profound. Not only was there a larger market than ever before for the 'classics' and for all types of fiction, but there arose an entirely new demand for works in 'educational' fields – science, history and travel. As a profession and as a business, literature offered better financial prospects.

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### 7.3 About The Author

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George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin of Irish Protestant stock, and there received a somewhat scanty education at a number of local schools, including the Wesleyan Connexional School. Most of his cultural background he owed to his mother, a talented woman with whom, in 1876, he came to London. Here he became an active member of the Fabian Society soon after it was founded in 1884, and he not only wrote pamphlets on politics and economics but did much platform speaking as was the part in the campaign to disseminate the ideals of Fabian socialism. From 1885 to 1908 he won fame as a journalist – with the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1885) ; *The World*, as an art critic ; *The Star* (1888), as a music critic; *The World* again (1890-94), this time as a music critic ; and, most important of all, as a critic of drama for the *Saturday Review* (1895-98). It was for this paper that he wrote the well-known articles attacking the sentimentality and insincerity of the theatre of the nineties. In the meantime, after an abortive attempt to become a novelist (he wrote four unsuccessful novels : *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love among the Artists*, and *Cashel Byron's Profession*), Shaw commenced as a dramatist with *Widowers' Houses* (1892). But none of his ten plays of the nineties met with success on the stage. Indeed, recognition was delayed for over ten years, and then it came first from abroad – on the Continent and in America.

With the publication of *Man and Superman* in 1903, Shaw attained his full stature as a dramatist. It showed that he had found his feet in the world of drama. The play proved a tremendous success especially in New York and later in England. In 1904 came another of his well-known plays. *John Bull's Other Island*, which shows how an Irishman looks at England.

This great dramatic and literary giant who dominated the English scene for over half a century and who had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925 breathed his last at St. Lawrence. Herts on 2, November, 1950 leaving a vacuum in the literary world which may not be filled for several decades to come.

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## 7.4 About the Play : *Saint Joan*

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### 7.4.1 Introduction

*Saint Joan* is basically a romantic play. It deals with the life of a young girl who has a lowly origin but is able to inspire her countrymen, many of whom are not only older but also socially better than her. She leads them and triumphs over the enemy. In the process she falls into the enemy's hands. While she is being tried she faces her judges and her antagonists very bravely but ultimately dies as a martyr.

The play presents the conflict between the individual judgement and the established authority. Religious authorities feel that they are being ignored by Joan. She writes letters to the king in the name of God. She not only crowns the Dauphin as the king but advises him to rule the land as God's Bailiff. The Catholic Church which was a powerful organisation was accepted by the people of those times as a divine institution and as a natural fact like the sun moving round the Earth. Any disbelief in the open facts of nature was considered a heresy, and personal emotions of an individual were ignored in preference to the public attitude to the mighty natural phenomena.

### 7.4.2 Detailed Summary

#### Scene : I

In the year 1429 on a spring morning in the castle of Vaucouleurs which is situated on the river Meuse, between Lorraine and Champagne, Captain Robert de Baudricourt, a military Squire, is chiding his steward for the lack of eggs and milk. He suspects that the steward steals them but the steward states that the hens and every one else there, are bewitched.

Robert had ordered his men two days ago to send Joan back to her father with the instructions to keep her under control. On knowing about the non-compliance of his orders he wants to know the reason. He even manhandles the steward. He is told that the girl, though a tender one, is very "positive" and all, including the armed soldiers with whom she is always talking, have failed before her but he might be able to frighten her.

Robert says that the will of God is that he should send her back to her father with orders to lock her up in order to thrash the madness out of her. With a strange self-confidence Joan replies that things would be different from what he thinks he would do.

Robert calls Joan again and asks what her name is and other questions. She replies she is Joan de Arc, aged seventeen to nineteen years and she hears voices of St. Catherine and St. Margaret giving her messages of God, of course, through imagination. Her aim in the war is to raise the siege of Orleans, to crown the Dauphin in Rheims Cathedral and to make the English leave France.

## **Scene : II**

As the curtain rises on the second scene, we see the Archbishop of Rheims, aged about 50, and Monseigneur de La Tremouille, the Lord Chamberlain, waiting for the Dauphin to arrive. It is late in the afternoon of the 8, March, 1429.

The Dauphin is announced by the page. The Dauphin, aged 26, is the uncrowned king Charles VII. He has a paper in his hands. He is described as a poor creature, physically, with narrow eyes, a long pendulous nose, and the expression of a young dog. He is very cheeky. Just at present he is excited because the paper in his hands is the letter written by Robert de Baudricourt.

La Tremouille gives the letter to the Archbishop for reading because he himself has not been able to distinguish the letters. After reading a part of the letter the Archbishop says that De Baudricourt is a fool because he is sending a cracked country lass. Charles interrupts by saying that it is a saint, an angel, he is sending and not a country lass. She is coming to see him, the Dauphin.

The court is assembled. Bluebeard, standing on the dais, is acting as a king whereas Charles himself is standing somewhere in the middle of the room. The Duchess de La Tremouille is pretending to be the queen. When Joan comes in all the ladies assembled in the court start laughing at her dress but she does not care for it. She asks where the Daulphin is. Bluebeard says that he himself is. Joan thinks for a moment and then tells Bluebeard that he cannot befool her. She looks all round the court and picks out Charles. She tells him that she will drive the English and will crown him the king. On seeing the Archbishop, she falls on her knees before him and seeks his blessings. He blesses her and says that she is in love with religion.

Joan tells Charles that in the battle if the English win, the French will not be able to sign an honourable treaty. She advises him to have courage in both hands and pray with both hands too. Charles does not like praying and forbids her to ask him again for it. She calls him a poor child and urges him to fight for the sake of his son who will be Louis XI after his death.

At last Charles is tempted and exclaims if he could dare. He agrees to take the risk. In his excitement he calls the whole court back and requests Joan to stand by him if others bully him. He announces in the court that he has given the command of the army to Joan.

## **Scene : III**

As soon as Joan rushes in, with splendid armour, the wind drops and the pennon flaps idly down the lance. Since she has come alone, Dunois asks about her troops. She says they are miles behind and have brought her to wrong side. Dunois tells her that it has been done deliberately under his orders. He tells her where the English are positioned and that they are not to be attacked from across the bridge but from the rear by crossing the river. She asks him to attack soon because she has come with the help of God.

Joan tells him that she is a servant of God and her sword, got from behind the altar in

St. Catherine's church, is sacred. Her heart is full of courage and not of anger. Dunois immediately kneels before Joan and hands over his baton to her and requests her to lead the army. Joan is overwhelmed. She weeps in tears of joy, flings her arms round him and kisses him on both cheeks. The rafts start sailing upstream to attack the English besiegers. Dunois drags Joan along and they rush to attack the enemy.

#### **Scene : IV**

Earl of Warwick says that he will be able to catch Joan by paying a high ransom keeping in view the margin of commission of Charles's men who will sell her to the Burgundians who in turn will then sell Joan to him. These middlemen are no doubt like the greedy Jews but they are better than the Christians who want something for nothing whereas the Jews do deliver the goods.

Cauchon considers the crowning of Charles as an act of Joan's cleverness and wisdom. Pointing to John de Stogumber Warwick says that this gentleman wants this girl to be tried and burnt for sorcery. For that matter, Cauchon says that they will have to consult the French court. In that court the Frenchmen will definitely support Joan because she has defeated their enemies, the Englishmen.

Sir John Talbot is a sufficient proof that Joan is a witch. Cauchon does not consider Talbot as an able general and then, for his defeat, credit must also go to Dunois the Bastard of Orleans who defeated even the Earl of Warwick himself. The Chaplain calls Joan a rebel against Nature because she wears man's clothes ; a rebel against the Church because she is the authority of Pope ; a rebel against God because she is in league with Satan and above all she is rebellious against England. So, she must perish. Closing the conversation, Warwick rises saying that they seem to have agreed. Cauchon, too, rises but says that he will try to save her soul by all means. Warwick feels sorry for her and the Chaplain says that he will burn her with his own hands.

#### **Scene : V**

Beautifully dressed in male attire, Joan is praying in the ambulatory of Rheims Cathedral after the coronation of the Dauphin. Dunois comes in and asks her to come out to meet the people who are anxious to see her again. She refuses to go out and wants the king to have all the glory. Dunois observes that the present occasion is better than taking the bridge at Orleans. Joan wishes that it were the bridge again.

Dunois, according to Joan, is the best man and her only friend among all the nobles. She expresses her desire to go back to the farm after taking Paris. Dunois warns her not to think of taking Paris because her enemies desire her end. Joan apprehends danger from even the French ; leave aside the English and the Burgundians. That is why she had come to this place to pray in seclusion.

She prophesies again that she will not be able to fight along with La Hire any longer

because she will last only a year. It surprises every one and Dunois calls it nonsense. She asks Dunois if he would be able to drive the English out of France. He very confidently replies that he would. Joan suddenly suggests to Dunois – “before I go home, let us take Paris.” Charles is terrified on hearing it. He does not want any more fighting but wants to sign a treaty with the Duke of Burgundy.

Joan is disowned by the army, the king and also the Church. She stands alone, absolutely alone. It is pointed out by the Archbishop that when she goes out, the crowds of people will only hail her but they will not be able to protect her. As she goes out, Bluebeard remarks that she is “impossible”. Dunois declares he will fish her out of a river if she falls into it but would not do anything if she blundered at Compiègne. La Hire would follow her even to the hell. The archbishop also finds his judgement clouded by the dangerous power of her outbursts but he proclaims : “The pit is open at her feet.” Charles would like her to keep quiet.

### **Scene : VI**

In the present case Joan is a pious, chaste, religious and charitable young girl. She is far from worldliness and wantonness. She is quite innocent to look at but is devilish in pride. In her, are found side by side a diabolical pride and a natural humility. Joan complains about the ill-treatment meted out to her by the English and desires that she should remain in the hands of the Church and not with the English. She does not want to be chained. Although previously she tried to run away, yet now she will be unable to attempt it because the prison wall has been raised higher after her first unsuccessful attempt to escape.

When the Court fail to defeat her in arguments, Ladvenu shows her the Executioner who tells that he is ready to burn the heretic at the stake in market place today. Joan is horrified. Suddenly she says her voices have deceived her otherwise fire would not have been ready to burn her. So, she agrees to sign the recantation.

She delivers a very hard hitting speech. She declares that she could live under the poorest circumstances but would not endure to live but shut out from the objects of nature. So a girl who could think of another’s danger in such a moment, could not have been inspired by the devil, he opines. When he took the cross away from her she looked up towards heaven. She must have seen her Saviour in “His tenderest glory” for the sky was not empty at that time. She called to Him and died. The Executioner comes in and tells Warwick that Joan is completely burnt. Her heart would not burn but whatever was left of her, has been thrown into the river. Warwick does not feel that he had heard the last of her.

### **The Epilogue**

On the stormy night of June, 1456, 25 years after the burning of Joan. King Charles the Seventh of France, now aged 51, is lying in his bed leafing through a book. A distant clock strikes half hour. He shuts the book and whirls his rattle (a call bell) to call a servant. Instead of the servant, Ladvenu, who is 25 year old enters. He is carrying the cross which he had held

before Joan while she burnt. Charles is startled by his appearance and fails to recognise him. Ladvenu conveys him the good news about the rehabilitation of Joan and that the taint that he was crowned by a witch has been removed. Justice long delayed is at last triumphant.

The Executioner, while entering, says that he could not burn Joan completely. Her heart would not burn. She lives on beyond her body. "She is up and alive everywhere." Suddenly Warwick comes in and congratulates Joan on her rehabilitation. He owes her an apology and tells her that her burning was a political necessity.

Joan has been canonised and will henceforth be called Venerable and Blessed Saint Joan. On 30 May, her death anniversary, every year special service will be held in all the Roman Catholic churches of the world. Joan is elated to hear about her horse. She enquires about her sword too. "My sword shall conquer, yet the sword that never struck blow." Cauchon kneels before her first and thereafter, Dunois, the Archbishop, Warwick, the Inquisitor, the Soldier, and Charles all kneel before her turn by turn. She tells them that Saints can work miracles. "Shall I rise from the dead, and come back to you as living woman?" Charles then says that all have left her except the soldier from the hell. He too will go back to hell at twelve O' clock. And he goes to bed. Joan asks the soldier what he has to say. Just then the clock strikes the midnight hour and he excuses himself out. She is left alone to say : "O God that madest this beautiful earth when will it be ready to receive thy saints? How long, "O Lord, how long?"

### **7.4.3 Critical Analysis**

Bernard Shaw's first scenes are very important. In the first scene of *St. Joan* we are told about the type of character, what the heroine Joan is. She is not only a visionary but can also give a shape of reality to her visions. She has full faith in God but does not have any in the prevailing feudal system at the political level. She also hears voices.

The state of political affairs in France is well described in this scene. Dauphin, the heir apparent to the French throne, is a weakling. He is no better than a rat. His mother has disowned him as her legitimate son. The setting of the scene is pastoral and the entire action is replete with Shaw's typical wit. In the beginning the scene also seems to be farcical.

The second scene opens with the Lord Chamberlain, La Tremouille, and the Archbishop of Rheims discussing the loans they have advanced to the Dauphin, the would be king of France. Such an opening is purposeful. At this critical moment in the country's history when half of France is under the English, the Lord Chamberlain, being the commander of the army, ought to be worried about the problems of defence but he is worried about the repayment of the money given as debt to the Dauphin. Shaw, the master craftsman, very cleverly exposes the tricks of religion by making the Archbishop explain the nature of miracles and how they are performed by the persons of profession. They exploit the innocent people by telling them imaginary tables.



The character of Charles is the creation of the author in the play. Although Shaw has remained nearer to the historical figure of King Charles of France, yet his own creative faculties have made this character a masterpiece. The end of the scene is sensational but then it suits the situation in a befitting manner.

The third scene is short but significant as it brings together two important characters viz. Joan and Dunois. Dunois has been shown by many other authors as the lover of Joan but here Shaw has depicted him as her comrade. He considers her as the Maid who can perform miracles. His experience and wisdom as an able commander, have failed. So, he has been waiting for Joan to come and perform the miracle of changing the wind. Joan is always talking about her undaunted courage and that she brings the help and blessings of God. She is overconfident of her abilities but she never says that she can do anything that can be called miraculous. Shaw has shown Joan as very enthusiastic and impatient but not impractical.

From the point of view of dramaturgy, the fourth scene of Saint Joan is superb. It is full of thrill though not of action. The scene is full of movement without activity in the sense that it takes the plot closer to the anti-climax of the heroine's career. It shows a hectic preparation for the inevitable destiny of Joan. But her enemies both in the religious and secular arms of the society interpret her crimes as Protestantism and Nationalism by preaching which she has been ignoring the Church, the spiritual ruler of the Christendom and the feudal lords, the political bosses of the Christian society. Since she is harming their vested interests, she must be burnt to death.

The fifth scene shows that Joan is too simple and immature for the type of diplomacy required to be played at such a moment. In the history of a nation whose cowardly and beggarly crown prince has been crowned a king after great bloodshed in several battles. She is undiplomatic and blunt. But then there is a reason for her bluntness. In addition to the tenderness of her age, it must be said that she is selfless. She has no axe to grind. She does not find any of her interests being hurt by calling a spade a spade.

But she knows that she will last only a year after the coronation of Charles. The role assigned to her by God, is almost over. She has confirmed from Dunois if he would be able to drive the English out. She has prepared him to complete the task which she had undertaken.

The sixth action-packed scene is the longest and most thrilling. It has interspersed in it varied strata of dramatic interest. This Scene is a specimen of Shaw's mastery as a playwright. In view of the unity of time he has squeezed the time actually spent by the ecclesiasts on the trial of Joan to the bare minimum required under dramatic necessity. The scene is very tragic and the tragedy is deepened with the piteous ravings of John Stogumber after the burning of Joan. But even at this serious moment. The longest speech of the scene is delivered by the Inquisitor who is very cool headed in comparison with Cauchon who loses his balance quickly. In this speech he prepares the people to be ready to see cruelty inflicted on Joan. Of all the ecclesiasts concerned with the trial of Joan, Ladvenu is relatively more humane and gentle.

The Epilogue entertains the audience, it serves Shaw's purpose what though it is called tragic-comic by the finicky critic, and anticlimactic by the dramaturgic technocrat. The allegation that the Epilogue is a mistake because the dead and living are made to meet in it, does not carry weight. It is only a dream that Shaw is presenting and everything is possible in a dream-world. It is an illustration of his rich imagination and fertile brain.

#### **7.4.4 Plot Construction**

But since Joan d' Arc was a historical figure, history came to Shaw's rescue to provide a plot for *Saint Joan*. The plot or subject of Saint Joan was laid down before he began writing the play. Therefore he was not left with any option. It happens that *Saint Joan* does have form and shape and balance. Right from the very first scene the reader's attention is caught as soon as Robert speaks the opening words ; the interest rises gradually until the climax in scene VI ; and up to the end of the play.

#### **7.4.5 Theme**

The play *Saint Joan* deals with the rise and fall and rise again of Joan. Joan is not just an ordinary girl or a village maiden. She stands for something greater than herself. She is not only the voice of conscience of an individual but is much more, and the play is pregnant with the ideology of an age. It is a play of many and splendid merits. It is immensely serious and extremely entertaining ; it is magnificent effort of intellectual energy.

#### **7.4.6 Allegory**

Shaw's *Saint Joan* can be interpreted as an allegory. The author has invested the story of the Maid with symbolical meanings too. Joan's tragedy was that she represented something more terrible than she could possibly know ; a force so terrible that – as then feared and as the world now knows – it could be used for the devil's ends as well as for God's.

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### **7.5 Self Assessment Questions**

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1. Why did Shaw call *Saint Joan* a high tragedy?
2. Comment on the dramatic imagination in *Saint Joan*.
3. How does Shaw justify the epilogue?
4. Comment on the theme of *Saint Joan*.
5. Discuss the allegorical element in *Saint Joan*.

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### **7.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this unit you have read about the literary trends and concepts of Modern Age and have gone through the development of modern drama in the late nineteenth and the early

twentieth centuries. You have also read and understood Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. You have developed an insight to analyse and evaluate modern drama and would be able to :

- (a) understand the modern literary scenario;
- (b) analyse and evaluate modern drama; and
- (c) evaluate Shaw as an Dramatist and analyse *Saint Joan*.

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## 7.7 Answers To Self Assessment Questions

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1. The author wishes to call his drama a High Tragedy because there is no villain in it. The Bishop and the Inquisitor have not been represented as villains because Shaw feels justifiably that crime, like a disease, is not something that interests people of normal tastes. They are concerned more with what men do at their best with good intentions.
2. The dramatic imagination of Shaw was very powerful despite the fact that the historic aspect of it was not the strongest. The most turbulent and eventful period in the Medieval French environment has been concisely and artistically presented before us by the author.
3. The dramatist himself justifies the necessity of the Epilogue on a couple of grounds. Joan's history in the world actually begins there instead of ending with her being burnt. It was also necessary for the author to indicate to the spectators that she had been canonized.
4. Religion may be the predominant theme, but the secular idea of nationalism with the linguistic bias and geographical regionalism is also dealt with in the play. Joan did emerge as a nationalist coming into direct conflict with international feudalism.
5. The thrilling story of the life of Joan attracts the theatre goer as well as the scholar in the library who reads it. But the author has invested this simple story with a great deal of allegorical significance and symbolic meaning. Her conflict with the Churchmen represents an eternal conflict that continues forever.

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## 7.8 Review Questions

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1. Discuss *Saint Joan* as a chronical play.
2. Comment on Bernard Shaw's dramatic craftmanship.
3. Write a note on modern drama.
4. Bring out the merits and demerits of the plot in *Saint Joan*.
5. Give an estimate of *Saint Joan* as a new kind of drama.
6. Bring out wit and humour in the play *Saint Joan*.

7. Do you think that the Epilogue is superfluous?
8. Bring out the beauty and fairness of Joan's trial.
9. Bring out the symbolism in *Saint Joan*.
10. Discuss element of romance in Shaw's *Saint Joan*.

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## **7.9 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-8

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### BERNARD SHAW : *SAINT JOAN* (II)

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#### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 About the Age
- 8.3 About the Author
- 8.4 About the Play : *Saint Joan*
  - 8.4.1 Introduction
  - 8.4.2 Characters
  - 8.4.3 Characterisation
  - 8.4.4. Wit and Humour
  - 8.4.5 Satire
  - 8.4.6 Theory of Life Force
  - 8.4.7 Dramatic Technique
  - 8.4.8 Show an Iconoclast
  - 8.4.9 Shaw's Optimism
- 8.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 8.8 Review Questions
- 8.9 Bibliography

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#### **8.0 Objectives**

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In this unit I propose to let you have some more insight into the study of modern literary scenario and modern drama in particular. In the previous unit you have read, understood and critically analysed Bernard Shaw's masterpiece *Saint Joan*. In this unit we will discuss the characters of this drama and analyse some of the other major characteristics of *Saint Joan* which have not been analysed in the previous unit. After studying the material of the unit and going through reference material, you will acquire the capability to :

- (i) understand and analyse various socio-literary and politico-economic concepts and trends of Modern Age;
- (ii) evaluate the scenario of modern drama;
- (iii) evaluate Bernard Shaw as a dramatist,
- (iv) understand Shaw's art of characterisation;
- (v) have a general estimate of Bernard Shaw's views; and
- (vi) evaluate Shaw's contribution and answer the questions in your own words.

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## **8.1 Introduction**

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Despite the efforts of the major Romantic and Victorian poets, there was no significant poetic drama at the beginning of the 20 century. By 1920, there were signs of a rebirth, but the atmosphere in which realistic naturalistic drama thrived was uncongenial to poetic drama. At the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Yeats attempted to revive poetry on the stage but he lacked the essential qualities of the dramatist.

A number of foreign influences did much to bring about a revival of drama in the 20 century. Most important of these influences was that of the Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen, whose work gave an enormous impetus to the realist movement, to the deeper study of character and to a subtler conception of plot and character presentation. Ibsen's influence was rather late in coming to England, but with the passing of time his treatment of themes and his technical methods came to be fully accepted and a new spirit and a new enthusiasm overtook the English drama in the early years of the present century.

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## **8.2 About The Age**

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From the dramatic point of view, the first half of the nineteenth century was almost completely barren. Many of the major poets had tried drama, but none of them had achieved any success. The greater part of their work never saw the stage. The professional theatre of the period was in a low state. Toward the middle of the century, there can be traced a significant development from romantic and historical themes to more realistic themes, and this movement toward realism received considerable impetus from the work of T.W. Robertson (1829-71)

It was not until the last decades of the 19 century, when the influence of Ibsen was making itself strongly felt, and Shaw produced his first plays, that the necessary impetus was there to use the serious drama for a consideration of social, domestic or personal problems. A period so keenly aware of social problems was an admirable time for the rise of the drama of ideas, and the themes of drama became the problems of religion, of youth and age of labour and capital and above all, now that Ibsen had torn down the veil which had kept the subject in safe obscurity of sex. In the history of the realistic prose-drama, Ibsen and then Shaw,

Galsworthy and Granville-Barker were of paramount importance and they did much to create a tradition of natural dialogue. New psychological investigations increased the interest in character as distinct from plot and the realistic drama aimed more and more at the impartial presentation of real life.

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### **8.3 About The Author**

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Shaw's personality was a unique combination of the gay and the serious, so much so that the people could not make up their minds whether to take him as a clown or as a philosopher. He was a comedian with a serious purpose, a humorist with a tragic cry at his heart. In his personal life, Shaw was a man of simple habits, who shunned luxury of every kind, and for whom the best recreation was work. His tastes were simple. He did not require the stimulants which other men take in order to endure life or to forget their worries ; he was a vegetarian, a total abstainer and non-smoker. He never played games, and his exercises were limited to walking and swimming. Not sharing the tastes, habits, and opinions of the vast majority of his fellow-beings, he felt himself cut off from his kind, an alien on earth.

By nature Shaw was a tireless crusader for social justice and righteousness ; he was a propagandist for the intellectual enlightenment of the people. He was a zealous missionary and social reform was his mission. Shaw was careful in thought, though he was reckless in expression. For example, he attacked institutions, which are not sensitive, in preference to people who are; and when he did criticise individuals he added sugar to the pill, so that they could swallow it without making a wry face." Whenever he found it necessary to call someone a fool or a mad man or both, he did it so charmingly that the victim could not take offence. He went even so far as to suggest that he himself was more to be pitied than the person in question. Shaw possessed a dominating personality which would be remembered even after his plays had been forgotten, and he would always be known as the most outstanding figure of his times.

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### **8.4 About the Play : *Saint Joan***

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#### **8.4.1 Introduction**

*Saint Joan* is a great historical play. Shaw went for his material to the surprisingly accurate and full records of Joan's trial. The central characters and the chief events are all transcripts from history. In his Preface to the play, Bernard Shaw points out that, "there is not a breath of medieval atmosphere in Shakespeare's histories". He himself has taken care to, "let the medieval atmosphere blow through my play freely". This medieval atmosphere has been created by introducing the miracles performed by Joan and by showing the people as credulous and superstitious. The Church , the Inquisition, the Feudal system, the instruments of torture, the executions, the burning at the stake, all help to create the medieval atmosphere.

*Saint Joan* is a play of many and splendid merits. It is immensely serious and extremely entertaining ; it is a magnificent effort of intellectual energy, and full of pathos and sympathy ; it

is long but it never flags we are filled with the waves of emotion to be dashed on thought.

## **8.4.2 Characters**

### **(a) Joan, the Maid**

Joan of Arc is the central figure in the play. The entire action centres round her life and career. The first five scenes deal with her romantic rise, scene VI deals with her trial and burning at the stake, and the Epilogue tells of the rehabilitation of her reputation twenty-five years after her martyrdom. Shaw notes two peculiarities or abnormalities about her. First, she was a visualiser, one who saw saints and heard voices just as many persons see imaginary diagrams and landscapes. She was not a liar nor a mad person but only one of those people who have such a vivid imagination that a new idea comes to them as a 'vision' or as an audible voice. She had full faith in her own visions and voices, thought that it was God speaking to her—that he had entrusted her with an important mission—that of freeing her country – that she was the chosen instrument of divine purpose.

Joan is a highly complex character, and in her personality the dramatist has achieved a synthesis of a number of opposite qualities. She is young, immature, and ignorant of academic matters but also has great natural capacity, penetration, perception and sound commonsense. She combines down to earth practicality with vitality and spirituality. She is in love with religion, but she has a craze for war too. She loves masculine dress and ways, but is essentially feminine. In war she could outdo the most gifted professional soldiers, and yet after the war she could be outdone by the same professional soldiers. She may be called successful, because she won lasting victories.

Joan as presented in the play is not only one of the first Protestant martyrs, but also a pioneer of nationalism, and realistic warfare. Joan was the first Protestant because she answered the right of the individual to live and act according to his or her own conscience and judgment, as against the authority of the established church. Not that she was not devout or that she did not honour and respect the church. She kneels before the Archbishop and feels strengthened by his blessings, she prays regularly, and fervently. But she is not ready to yield to the church where her 'voice' and 'vision' are concerned. She must obey her 'voice' as against the church, for it is in this way that God speaks to her. She thus comes in conflict with the church, and she is regarded as a dangerous heretic, a Satan's messenger, not God's, and is put out of harm's way.

Just as she is the first Protestant, she is also the pioneer of nationalism in the field of politics. Her slogan "England for the English, France for the French", frightens feudal lords, like the Earl of Warwick who sees in Joan an enemy to their own power and authority. If the people begin to think of serving their country and their King, the lords like him will lose all their power and authority. Thus both her religious and political enemies combine to send her to the stake. But her spirit lived on, and her ideas, Protestantism and Nationalism, have spread



throughout the world.

Joan is a most remarkable character. She embodies her conception of a saint. She is a genius because she has subordinated the facts of her person in order to become an uncomplicated instrument of the Life Force, or Creative Evolution.

**(b) The Dauphin (King Charles VII)**

The Dauphin later King Charles VII of France is the most effective piece of character-creation in “Saint Joan”. He may as much no more, no less – be a transcript from history as any other character in the play but in terms of drama he is more of an original character than the others. At the time when the play opens he is aged twenty-six, and is weak and unattractive both in dress and personal appearance. He is a poor creature physically, and his appearance is made worse by his close-shaven features.

The Dauphin is very ungrateful. After the coronation, he does not even express thankfulness to Joan, instead he complains about the heavy weight of the robes. It makes the reader think that if a man cannot bear the weight of the robes how would he be able to bear the burden of kingship with all its responsibilities. When Joan tells him that she wants to go back to her village, she expects him to say some pleasing words to cajole her and to ask her to stay on. On the contrary, he heaves a sigh of relief. Joan wants him not to take away his hand from the plough and not to abandon his duties half done but he refuses to follow her advice and proposes to sign a treaty with the English. She insists on taking Paris because the king without his Capital, cannot hold his head high.

Even in the Epilogue when Ladvenu tells him that Joan has been rehabilitated and that the stigma that he was crowned by a witch, has been washed away, he immediately thinks about the difference that it would make to his own reputation and not about what it would mean for Joan’s prestige. Earlier in scene V when Joan says that in the event of her being taken prisoner, she might be ransomed by the king, the clamours about his poverty. When she is actually taken a prisoner, he does not care to stand by her but left her to be burnt without even lifting his finger.

The Dauphin is not only mean looking and cowardly, he is also selfish. He always thinks of himself and not of others. Joan has won victories for him and has crowned him as King Charles the Seventh of France, but he makes no efforts at all to save her from the stake. The burning of the Maid would not have been such an easy task, had he intervened and tried to rescue her. However, even this weak, cowardly, and spiritless King has some good in him. First of all we should note his ‘cheeky humour’ which enables him to hold his own in conversation.

**(c) The Earl of Warwick**

Richard De Beau Champ, the Earl of Warwick is a nobleman of imposing appearance, aged forty-six. He is in command of the English forces in France. He is a seasoned politician

and an experienced man of the world. The most remarkable trait in his character is that not even once does he lose self-control or become emotional. In this respect, he stands in sharp contrast with his own Chaplain John De Stogumber. The English armies have suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Maid, but the Earl does not fret or fume at his reverses. The Earl of Warwick is the true representative of the Feudal system. An intelligent man, he is able to understand the danger which he nobly stands from the ideas of Joan, the Maid. He regards her as a great enemy of the Feudal system and the Feudal lords, for she stands for the spirit of nationalism.

He is an admirable piece of character creation. This easy-mannered, sophisticated, and crafty feudal Baron stands in vivid contrast to the naive, frank, humanitarian and patriotic Joan. She represents the rising spirit of nationalism, ; he that of Feudalism already on its last legs. Warwick is a very unscrupulous politician but acts very calculatingly. Since he has travelled widely, he can understand human nature well. He has very rightly deduced that even some of the Frenchmen must be willing to capture Joan in order to earn ransom and buy her from the Burgundians for sixteen thousand pounds. He does not consider this amount very exorbitant because of the number of people involved in capturing her.

Since he has bought the Maid, he can very easily throw her into the jaws of death but he does not, because he knows the risk involved. The Frenchmen would have gone berserk with anger against the English if he had killed Joan himself. So, he involves the church for achieving his objective.

The Earl of Warwick is not merely a soldier, a diplomat, a great feudal lord, but he is also a lover of art and literature. His attention is not limited to soldiering and Feudal statecraft and the burning of subversive talkers; he is also interested in works of art and has a connoisseur's appreciation of an illuminated manuscript." This fact, that he has interests beyond those with which the play is immediately concerned, gives his character, in an uncommon degree that sense of belonging to a larger than stage life which is essential to verisimilitude.

#### **(d) Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais**

In history, Cauchon is a hypocrite, a black-hearted villain, corrupt, greedy and malicious, who sent Joan to the stake out of personal spite. Soon after the fall of Orleans, he was turned out of his diocese by Joan's soldiers, and hence he nursed a personal grievance against her. Thus in history Cauchon is a very monster of cruelty and injustice, greedy, hypocritical and abominable. But in the hands of Shaw he undergoes a transformation, and is represented as a true and sincere representative of the Church, who sends the Maid to the stake with sorrow at his heart, merely because it is his painful duty to do so, to safeguard the authority and prestige of the Church. He is represented as a sincere and just man who does his duty, however, painful it may be to him. Just as Warwick symbolises the Feudal aristocracy, Cauchon is typical of the upper clergy of his day.

During those days people believed in witchcraft, sorcery and things like that ; but he

had a maturer outlook. He does not say that such things don't exist but he does not find them harmful to the cause of Christianity. It is Protestantism which is dangerous to Catholicism, he feels and wants Joan to be tried only for that. He does not agree with the Chaplain that she is "an arrant witch". The English may consider so because they have been defeated by her but he says: "I am afraid the bare fact that an English army has been defeated by a French one will not convince them that there is any sorcery in the matter."

Cauchon conducts the trial with scrupulous fairness and even those who are sympathetic to Joan, like Ladvenu, are given a chance to speak. But where principles are concerned, he is firm and unyielding like steel. Cauchon, in Shaw's hands, is transformed into a generous and humane person, from the wicked, monster of inequity of the historical records.

**(e) Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans**

Dunois is good-natured and pleasant, and no stickler for artificial social barriers. He is democratic in his approach. He treats his page not as a servant, but as a youthful companion. In addition, he is a lover of natural beauty, and is delighted at the flight of the kingfisher. Dunois admires the Maid sincerely and truly. Still he does not come to her help when she is tried as a witch. He could have done much to help her, but he did nothing. Perhaps because she was being tried by the Church as a heretic, and it was not easy in that age to intervene in the affairs of the Church. Dunois is a man without affectations or foolish illusions. Although an able and brilliant commander, he has no personal ambitions. He serves his King and country loyally, effectively, and without show. His ability as a general is recognised by everyone. He is handsome in appearance and is introduced into the drama at the age of twenty-six : he is sturdily built and carries his armour with dignity and ease.

**(f) John De Stogumber**

It is often said that the Chaplain, John De Stogumber, is irrelevant and superfluous, as a mere piece of impertinence. It is, no doubt, true that he does nothing to further the action of the play, nor will the plot suffer, if he is taken out. But it must also be acknowledged that he provides dramatic relief in the play. De Stogumber is very anxious to see Joan being burnt at the stake as a witch, for it was only under that the French forces were winning against the English. He does not hesitate to call Bishop Cauchon a traitor when he expresses his wish to save Joan, if she gives up heretical ideas. But a change comes over him when he actually sees Joan being burnt at the stake. He is thoroughly unnerved and gasps and sobs and howls like a mad man. And when it is announced that Joan has been made a saint by the Catholic Church, he kneels down before her spirit and humbly says, "The foolish old men on their beds praise thee, because their sins against thee are turned into blessings."

**(g) Martin Ladvenu**

Ladvenu is very daring. When everyone else in the court calls Joan a witch, a sorceress or a heretic he boldly declares : "But is there any great harm in the girl's heresy? Is it not her

simplicity? Many saints have said as much as Joan. Neither King Charles the greatest beneficiary from Joan's sacrifice nor even Dunois who was always her friend, cares to plead for her. In the Epilogue Dunois excuses himself by saying that there was no use in both of them being a prey to the wrath of all-powerful Church. But Ladvenu stands by her without any selfish motive. He stands out as very courageous and very just.

He more than Cauchon or the Inquisitor, is genuinely concerned with Joan's welfare, but even Ladvenu is mildly shocked when Joan demands her freedom after recanting. In strong contrast to John de Stogumber, he hides his face in his hands while Joan is dragged away, and risks his own life to hand her a cross on the stake. When Ladvenu reappears twenty five years later, his features are strange and stark and he still bears the cross from Rouen.

At the end of the sixth scene, he describes the burning of Joan to Warwick. He recounts how he held the cross before her and how she advised him to save himself: "My lord : a girl who could think of another's danger in such a moment was not inspired by devil." He predicts that her burning to death "is not the end for her, but the beginning." How true he is.

### **8.4.3 Characterisation**

After Shakespeare, no English dramatist equals Shaw in the variety and vividness of his characters, though he lacks almost entirely that interest in the individual which is one of Shakespeare's qualities. The characters of Shaw are largely seen as the products, good or bad, of social forces, or as the representatives of ideas. Some are mere mouthpieces for his theories, while others are really projections of his own personality. Nonetheless he has contributed many memorable characters to the national heritage. Many of his characters are built with Dickensian skill around one idiosyncrasy, and Shaw is an apt caricaturist. He is particularly successful in the creation of women characters, and it is interesting to note that he has no real heroes and no villains.

### **8.4.4 Wit and Humour**

Wit is the very essence of Shavian comedy, in which the dramatist, standing outside the world he creates, sees it with an impish detachment. His sense of fun is undying, and there is in his drama an endless stream of exuberant vitality and gaiety of spirit. Sometimes his sense of humour is uncontrolled and the result is disturbing, but generally it can be said that there is a serious purpose underlying his fun. In a dramatist so intellectual, so persistently witty, so detached from his subjects, it is not surprising to find that there is relatively little emotion. Shaw rarely touches the depths of true tragedy, even in *St. Joan*, and in his work as a whole the emotional passages are brief.

### **8.4.5 Satire**

There is, no doubt, that there is a vein of satire running through the dramatic works of Shaw. In one play after another, he analyses facts regarding social institutions, codes and

conventions, and exposes their weaknesses, short-comings etc. Throughout his long dramatic career, he waged war against sham, hypocrisy, cant and affectation. He wanted to pull down the undesirable structure of obsolescent social institutions, and so often exaggerated their hollowness. We often find him indulging in exaggeration. In this respect, he is at one with satirists in general. Shaw's plays are full of satire. he asserts that Shaw was an idealist, who wanted that all individuals ; institutions ; and codes of conduct, should conform to his idea of what is right and proper, and since they did not so conform, he lashes at them to his heart's content with the lash of laughter. In his opinion, Shaw was not an artist seeking to represent reality, for his plays are full of exaggerations and distortions of reality. He was not a great dramatic artist, for the form of his plays is often defective. It is only when we consider him as a dramatic satirist that, his work at once becomes intelligible.

#### **8.4.6 The Theory of Life Force**

Shaw is a philosopher in the sense that he has tried to present a coherent and comprehensive view of human nature and of human life, and also to show the way in which human life should best be lived. He has come to the conclusion that the Life Force is the essence, the ultimate reality behind the world of the senses. He has found that the other things might be fictitious ; but there can be no scepticism about life (the Life Force) which does exist and cannot be dismissed as a *Maya*." It is this theory which makes Shaw a "Creative Evolutionist". Shaw's theory of Life Force was considerably influenced by the scientific theories of the nineteenth century. The scientists including Biologists, believed that in the beginning there was all matter and no life or spirit. Then under the influence of certain specific, but rare physical conditions this matter became conscious of itself.

#### **8.4.7 Dramatic Technique**

In spite of the emphasis which he placed on his ideas, Shaw rarely neglected the art of the theatre and his best plays are excellent on the boards. His sense of the stage was clearly illustrated in the skill with which he supervised rehearsals of his own plays. He made full use of the tricks of the trade and was a master of the art of surprise. His plays often contain an almost bewildering variety of mood, which demands great flexibility of response from his audience. To begin with he followed the conventional dramatic patterns of his age, and it was only when his reputation was established that he began such experiments as the epilogue to *Man and Superman* and the gigantic cycle of *Back to Methuselah*. One of his most interesting innovations is the use of the long stage direction, written with all the care and artistry of his dialogues and prefaces.

#### **8.4.8 Shaw As an Iconoclast**

Shaw has rightly been called the iconoclast of drama. Even as a thinker he was an image breaker. He thought for himself and could not digest ready cooked ideas. So most of

the conventions were taboos to him. He shattered all age old misconceptions and preferred not to tread the beaten track. He wrote to debunk the prevalent self-complacency, the social, economic and political evils. He dispensed with conventional stage devices like the aside and the soliloquy. He showed that a good play need not have much of a story or even striking characters. ideas are enough to make a play successful. He made drama real literature and not merely a means of entertainment.

#### **8.4.9 Shaw's Optimism**

From his criticism of the society it must be construed that Shaw is an optimist. He believes in the goodness of man. He imagines that the future man will not be degenerated into an inhuman being but will rise to be a superman in the due course of evolution. Shaw was born in one era – the era of faith, while he was brought up or rather attained his maturity in another era-the era of social optimism

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#### **8.5 Self Assessment Questions**

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1. Bring out the element of romance in *Saint Joan*.
2. Comment on the use of symbols in *Saint Joan*.
3. What type of Epilogue do you find in the drama?
4. Against whom does Joan protest?
5. What sort of drama is *Saint Joan*?

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#### **8.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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You have been given to understand the modern period of literature and the early twentieth century drama. Your reading of the previous Unit must have helped you understand the things in a better way. By the end of this Unit you must have developed a capability to :

- (a) understand modern trends and concepts in prose writings,
- (b) analyse modern drama; and
- (c) have an indepth study of dramatic characters.

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#### **8.7 Answers Self Assessment Questions**

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1. *Saint Joan* is in germ, a Romantic drama about a young girl of lowly origin. Conventionally the Maid is visualized as a romantic heroic soldier, saint killed by cruel and unjust religious bigots.
2. Joan and her voices are like symbols in a poem and its six scenes are six different moods which move, from farce to high comedy, to a romantic glimpse of warrior Joan in shining armour, and from here into an area of deepening sombreness, until by the fifth

scene the world of Shaw's play, too, has been transformed from the foolish to the tragic.

3. So, the Epilogue is a great artistic piece. The play, bereft of it, would be like a body without a brain. It is essential for the framework and also the purpose of the play and it must stand as Shaw would like it too.
4. Joan opposes authority of religion. She refuses to conform to the established religious code. She rates her personal judgement higher than that of the Church. She protests against the authority that wants to curb her individual liberty.
5. *Saint Joan* is a romance in the first three scenes, a tragedy in the IV to VI scenes and a comedy in the Epilogue which is considered as a burlesque on the action of the play. Its subject is the comedy of making amends to the excommunicated Joan who fell a victim to the mighty forces of feudalism and the Church.

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## 8.8 Review Questions

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1. Draw a character sketch of Joan.
2. There is a fusion of romance and realism in *Saint Joan*. Elucidate.
3. Comment on the character of King Charles VII.
4. *Saint Joan* is a thrilling and sensational story. Do you agree?
5. *Saint Joan* is one of the first protestants. Give reasons.
6. Write a note the role of Chaplain John De Stugumber.
7. Discuss Shaw's concept of God and religion.
8. Discuss Shaw's treatment of history in *Saint Joan*.
9. Examine the claim of Shaw as the father of the theatre of ideas in England.
10. Illustrate Bernard Shaw's form of art.

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## UNIT-9

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### **J.M. SYNGE : *THE PLAY BOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* (I)**

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Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Discussion
  - 9.2.1 J.M. Synge : His Life and Works.
  - 9.2.2 A Background to the Play
  - 9.2.3 A Critical Summary of the play.
- 9.3 Key Words
- 9.4 Let us sum up
- 9.5 Review Questions
- 9.6 Bibliography

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#### **9.0 Objectives**

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In this unit, you are going to study about the play. *The play Boy of the Western World* by J.M. Synge. After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- \* Understand the characters of the play.
- \* Understand about the structure and plot of the play.
- \* Understand the various critical aspects

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#### **9.1 Introduction**

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In this unit, you will study about the playwright, the play, the background and context of the play. Through key words and excerses given, you will reingorce your understanding of the unit. You are encouraged to use the dictionary a lot, as it will prove helpful.

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#### **9.2 Discussion**

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##### **9.2.1 J.M. Synge : His Life and Works.**

##### **Education; and Taste for Music**

J.M. Synge was educated privately and he spent much of his boyhood wandering the countryside. He had a passion for natural history. Later he went to Trinity College where he

studied languages and history. He also developed a passion for music, and he studied at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, playing the piano, flute, and violin. Later he had thoughts of becoming a professional musician, and he went to Germany for study. But he found in that country, a way of life very different from the narrow home circle. Besides, he got the feeling that the Germans were very advanced in their proficiency in music, and that he could not keep pace with them. He, therefore, gave up music and turned to literature, though he continued to play the fiddle.

### **Loss of Religions Faith**

At the age of eighteen Synge became an agnostic and ceased to attend the family church. This naturally isolated him from the group he belonged to, and his mother never stopped grieving over his loss of religious faith. When, some years later, he proposed to a girl, Cherry Matheson, the daughter of a leading personality in a religious organisation, she refused him largely on religious grounds.

### **A Meeting with Yeats in Paris**

For a time Synge lived in Paris. It was there that he met W.B. Yeats who said to him: "Give up Paris. You will never create anything by reading Racine; and Arthur Symons will always be a better critic of French literature, Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression." Synge had already visited the Aran Islands, and he had wandered in many remote parts of rural Ireland. His interest in folk-lore, in the Irish language and Celtic culture had been stimulated by lectures which he had attended in Paris. So he was mentally prepared to accept Yeats's advice.

### **Writing Plays; and Premature Death**

As a consequence, he made several visits to the Aran Islands and stayed there for a certain period of time on each visit. Subsequently, in 1907, he published a journal under the title of *The Aran Islands*. Meantime he was writing plays for the Irish National Theatre, and he later became involved in its management. He fell in love with one of the actresses, Molly Allgood, but he was already a sick man and the relationship was a troubled one. He died on 24th March, 1909, at the age of thirty-eight and was buried in the family tomb at Mount Jerome, Dublin.

### **The Secret of the Attraction of the Aran Islands**

What attracted Synge to the Aran Islands was partly an urge away from the intellectual and the sophisticated towards the simple and primitive, where traditional folk ways and folk arts still gave a style and dignity to men's lives that was absent in Paris or Dublin or London. A part of his journal shows that he considered Inishmaan, his favourite island.

### **His Journal, the Best Introduction to His Plays**

Although Synge's journal, *The Aran Islands*, is coloured by his own emotions, he

shows himself to be a keen observer, and is by no means simply a romantic literary man feeling enthusiastic about the strange and simple peasants of these islands (which lie to the west of Ireland). He may have neglected the religious and spiritual aspects of the people he wrote about, as some specialists have complained; but in most other respects he gives us a true and vivid picture of life on these islands. His journal is probably the best introduction to his dramas. He took some of his plots from stories he heard in the Aran Islands; and the people there gave him impressions for the kind of world he wanted to create in his plays. But the plays he wrote are not simply sketches of peasant life; they are works of imagination, close to myth and fairy-tale. He uses a peasant background and a peasant idiom to create something new in drama.

### **Protests and Demonstrations against His Plays**

When his plays were first performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin they met with much hostile criticism because they offended Irish national sentiment. Such well-known political personalities as Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith walked out of the first performance of *The Shadow of the Glen* in resentful protest. The first performance of *The Playboy of the Western World* caused riots in the theatre. Lady Gregory sent a famous telegram to Yeats who was in Scotland at that time: "Audience broke up in disorder." Arthur Griffith described this play "a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform." The play was criticized chiefly on the ground that Synge had misrepresented the character of the Irish people by showing them as approving the action of a young man who had murdered his father.

### **A Nature-lover**

Synge was a Nature-lover. He has been described as "a silent, an aloof, a listening man." He would stand on a headland that jutted steeply on the sea, and would look and look and look at the sparkling waters below. He had, too, a taste for a wandering, irregular life. Nature has a significant role in his plays as a background, as a setting, and occasionally as an actor.

## **9.2.2 A Background to the Play**

### **An Actual Incident, The Basis for the Story of This Play**

The story of *The Playboy* is based upon an incident which an old man in one of the Aran Islands had told Synge when the latter was staying there. Once it so happened that a man, who had killed his father with the blow of a spade in a fit of rage, fled to that island and begged for help from the natives. The natives of that island hid the murderer and kept him safe for weeks, even though the police came and searched for him. In spite of a reward which was offered, nobody betrayed the murderer and, after much trouble, he was safely shipped to America. Commenting on this incident, Synge wrote in his journal that this impulse to protect a criminal was universal in the west. This impulse was due mainly to the primitive feeling of the natives of the Aran Islands that a man would not do wrong, unless he was under the influence

of a passion which was as irresistible as a storm on the sea. If a man has killed his father, and is already sick and broken with remorse, these people can see no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law. Something in Synge attracted him to this incident, and he made it the basis for his play.

### **The Angry Reactions of the Irish Audiences to the Play**

When *The Playboy* was first produced in Dublin in January 1907, it evoked many angry protests, and caused riots at the theatre. Subsequently, when the play was produced in a couple of American cities, the Irish audiences there also strongly opposed the play and would not allow the actors to complete the performances. The hostility of the Irish people to this play was due to moral, religious, and political reasons. It was thought that the play depicted the Irish people and their country in very dark colours, and was, therefore an insult to them. The Irish people had always thought of themselves as pious people and had thought their women-folk to be especially virtuous. But this play depicted the Irish people in general to be immoral and their women-folk to be lacking in virtue. Christy, the main character in the play, is regarded by the people of County Mayo as a hero for having killed his father. The Irish audiences treated this glorification of the murderer of his father as something disgraceful and shocking. Furthermore, the satirical treatment of the character of Shawn Keogh, who is too reverential towards Father Reilly, a representative of the Roman Catholic Church of Ireland, was also regarded as something outrageous because it showed that the author was making fun of a deeply religious man. Apart from that, certain lines in the play were thought by those audiences to be obscene. They were particularly offended by that speech of Christy's in which he declares that he would not care even if a multitude of women are brought to him and are made to stand half-naked before him. A couple of characters in the play have been represented as drunkards, and this too hurt the nationalistic sentiment. In short, there was hardly any feature of this play which the Irish audiences of the time could tolerate, much less relish. The play was, therefore, regarded as a slanderous attack on the Irish people and a libel on their character.

**Note :** Ireland is divided into four provinces. Their names are Leinster, Munster, Connaught, and Ulster. The first three provinces constitute Eire or the Republic of Ireland, while the fourth (Ulster) is still under English rule and is struggling to be free. The action of the play takes place near a village on a wild coast of Mayo (in the province of Connaught), while Christy comes from the Country of Kerry (in the province of Munster). While departing at the end, Old Mahon carries a grudge against the people of Mayo and says that he and his son will find great pleasure in telling their own people "stories of the villainy of Mayo," and the fools who live there.

### **9.2.3 Critical Summary of the play**

#### **Summary Of Act I**

#### **A Country Shebeen on the Sea-coast of Mayo**

The action of this play takes place near a village, on a wild sea-coast of Mayo. It is the name of an Irish county in the province of Connacht. The scene is a country shebeen or public-house where liquor is served, sometimes outside the licensed hours and, therefore, illegally, and where certain articles of daily use are also on sale. The public-house belongs to a man called Michael James, who is a widower and who is assisted in running it by his grown-up daughter, Pegeen Mike, who is about twenty years old.

### **A Conversation between Pegeen and Her Fiance, Shawn Keogh**

When the play opens, Pegeen is busy writing a letter to a business house, ordering certain articles of dress and a few barrels of porter (which is a kind of beer). Shawn Keogh, a man to whom she is engaged to marry, comes in and asks where her father has gone. She informs him that he has gone to the cross-roads above on the hill in order to meet a few men including Philly Cullen, and that he proposes to accompany them to Kate Cassidy's wake (wake is a gathering of people, who remain awake throughout the night by the side of a dead body). Pegeen complains that, if her father goes to the wake, she will be left alone in the house and will have to spend the night in a state of fear. Shawn assures her that, after she is married to him, she will have no reason to complain because he is not interested in going 'to wakes or weddings in the darkness of the night. Pegeen scornfully tells him not to feel too sure that she will marry him. It becomes clear to us from the way she talks to him that she is by no means in love with him. But Shawn has no doubts about her willingness to marry him and tells her that they are only waiting for the permission of the church for their marriage. The permission is to come from the bishops at Rome, and the local priest, Father Reilly, has already recommended their case. (Their permission to the marriage is needed because, as a rule, no marriages are allowed during the period of Lent which is a time of fasting and prayer).

### **Pegeen's Low Opinion about the Men-folk of This Place**

Pegeen makes no secret of her dislike for Shawn whom she addresses as "Shaneen". She expresses her surprise that Father Reilly should take any notice of a man like Shaneen. In fact, she wonders how Father Reilly can take any notice whatsoever of the people of this place. After all, in this place one meets only fellows like Linahan who has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen who is lame, or one meets the Mulrannies who were driven away from California (in the U.S.A.) and who have lost their wits: She says that the really brave people who once lived here are no longer to be found in this place. There was a daring fellow by the name of Daneen Sullivan who had attacked a police constable; and then there was Marcus Quin who had been imprisoned for six months for crippling other people's ewes and who had a rare gift for telling stories which could draw tears from the eyes of the old women who listened to him.

### **A Strange Fellow Seen by Shawn**

When Shawn makes another reference to Father Reilly, Pegeen feels annoyed and tells him not to torment her by constantly talking about the priest. She is at the moment more

concerned about her being left alone in the house for the whole night. Shawn asks if he should bring Widow Quin here to spend the night with her. Pegeen says that she does not wish to have anything to do with that woman who had murdered her own husband. Shawn thereupon expresses the hope that Pegeen's father will change his mind and will not go to the wake, especially because Shawn had seen from a distance a fellow hiding in a ditch above on the hill, a fellow who had appeared to be in great distress. Shawn says that, as it was a lonely place and as it was quite dark at the time, he had not thought it proper to approach that fellow. Pegeen thereupon makes fun of Shawn for his cowardly behaviour.

### **Pegeen Afraid of Being Left Alone during the Night**

Pegeen's father now enters, accompanied by two other men, Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrell. Pegeen scolds her father for getting ready to go to Kate Cassidy's wake, and for not realising that she will be left alone in the house. Pegeen says that it is not safe for a young girl to stay all alone in the house when everybody knows that the harvest-boys, tinkers, and soldiers, keep going about in this region and that such fellows can make a nuisance of themselves to a young girl who is alone in the house.

### **Shawn Unwilling to Stay with Pegeen for the Night**

As Michael James is determined to go to the wake (where there will be plenty of free liquor to drink), he suggests that Shawn should stay in the house for the give Pegeen company. But Shawn refuses to stay because he thinks that Father Reilly would object to Shawn's staying alone with a young girl for the night, even though Shawn would soon be marrying Pegeen. Michael James says that there is no harm in Shawn's staying there and that Shawn can spend the night in the shop while Pegeen can sleep in the inner room. But Shawn is terribly afraid of what Father Reilly might think about such an arrangement. Michael thereupon catches hold of Shawn in order to force him to stay, but Shawn runs out of the shop, leaving his coat in Michael's hands.

### **The Arrival of the Strange Fellow at the Shebeen**

Pegeen scolds her father for making fun of Shawn who feels uneasy because of the priest's possible objections; and she scolds him also for not keeping a servant in the house to help her in doing the work and for protecting her whenever she is alone in the house. But Michael James says that a servant is simply not available and that he is helpless in the matter. Just at this moment Shawn comes back running to the house and tells Michael James that there is a fellow whom he had seen earlier in the evening in a ditch on the hill and who is now following him. Perhaps, says Shawn, that fellow would steal Michael's hens. Everybody looks at the door with some curiosity and, a moment later, Christy Mahon, a young man of a slight build, comes in, looking very tired and frightened and dirty. Pegeen asks him if he is one of the tinkers who have camped in the valley. Christy replies that he is not one of them but that he has been walking so much that he is now feeling dead tired. He then asks Michael James if there is any danger of the police raiding this place. Michael asks him if he is wanted by the police.

Christy replies that there are many people, besides himself, who are wanted by the police.

### **Christy, Guilty of a Mysterious Crime**

Everybody now wants to know why Christy is wanted by the police and what crime he has committed. He is asked if he is guilty of having committed a theft or a robbery. But his reply is that he has committed a much bigger crime. He is then asked if he is guilty of a sex-crime. But he replies that he has always been a decent lad. Then he is asked if he happened to attack bailiffs or agents or landlords. But Christy replies that his crime is of such a serious nature that he cannot remember if anybody else has committed a similar deed. Christy is then asked if he has minted false coins or if he has not married more than one woman. But Christy replies that he has not minted any false coins and that he has not married even one wife, let alone two or three. Nor has he fought on behalf of the Boers, says Christy.

### **Christy's Murder of His Father**

As Christy has said "no" to each of these questions in the course of his interrogation, Pegeen now says that this fellow has done nothing at all, and that he is merely talking rubbish. But Christy now describes the crime of which he is guilty. He says that he had killed his father and that for the last eleven days he had been walking along the road in order to escape from arrest. He says that his father was a dirty, ill-tempered man whom he could not tolerate. In reply to questions from Michael and others, Christy says that he had hit his father on the head with a spade and that his father had then fallen down dead. Christy also says that he had buried his father in the potato-field where the incident had taken place.

### **Christy Employed as a Pot-boy at the Shebeen**

Everybody, present in the public-house, with the sole exception of Shawn, is greatly impressed by Christy's mention of his crime. Everybody thinks that Christy had done a very brave deed. Pegeen suggests that Christy should be employed in the public-house as a servant (or a pot-boy). Philly and Jimmy too admire Christy for his bravery and fearlessness. Pegeen says that, with such a fellow working in the house, she would not feel afraid of the soldiers and others. Michael now offers to employ Christy in his public-house, even though Shawn objects to a criminal like Christy being employed in a decent, quiet household with Pegeen Mike living there. But Pegeen, having become very interested in Christy, tells Shawn to keep his mouth shut. Christy asks if he will be safe here from the police, and Michael assures him that the policemen of this place are fellows who would not touch even a cur. Christy thereupon accepts the offer, and Michael and his companions leave the public-house in order to attend Kate Cassidy's wake, feeling quite confident that Pegeen will now be perfectly safe with Christy to look after her.

### **Shawn No Longer Wanted**

Now Shawn also offers to stay at the public-house for the duration of the night be-

cause there is another man in the house and because Father Reilly will now have no reason to object to Shawn's spending the night under the same roof with Pegeen. But Pegeen no longer wants Shawn in the house and so she sends him away.

### **Pegeen's Admiration for Christy**

Pegeen is full of admiration for Christy because of the bravery which he displayed in killing his father. When she looks at his feet, which are small, she says that he must have descended from aristocratic ancestors. Referring to his name, "Mahon", she says that it is "a quality name" and that this name belongs to the exalted families of France and Spain. She says that he is a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble forehead. Christy is delighted as well as surprised to hear such words in praise of himself. Pegeen asks him if the girls in his own native place had never told him what kind of a handsome young man he was, but Christy replies that the girls in his native village were bloody liars. Pegeen then asks him if he has been telling his story to every girl and woman whom he met in the course of his prolonged walking. But Christy says that he never told his story to anybody till tonight and that, in fact, he had not met any decent woman like herself during the eleven long days that he had been walking. Pegeen expresses the view that he is capable of talking fine language like the poets of Dingle Bay. She says that poets were men just like him—fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper was roused.

### **Christy's Past Joyless Life**

Christy now asks Pegeen if she is single or married. Pegeen replies that, being so young, she has never thought of marriage. Christy says that he too is not married. He then informs her that his father had been instigated against him by a hard-hearted woman and that he had not been able to put up with his father's bad temper. He also says that nobody in the whole of Ireland had previously paid any attention to him and that he had been leading a quiet simple, routine life. Pegeen asks if he had been flirting with the girls, but Christy says that even the girls had never paid any attention to him. Pegeen says that she was under the impression that he had been living like a king of Norway or a king of some eastern country having many mistresses and wives, but Christy explains that he had been leading a life of toil and drudgery, without any joy or any fun. His only diversion in his native village had been stealing rabbits and fish from other people's territory.

### **Christy's Hatred for His Father**

Christy then again talks about his father and tells Pegeen that he was a man raging at all times and perpetually swearing oaths and cursing others like a military officer. His father was a great drunkard also, and he sometimes got up early in the morning and, going out into the yard "as naked as an ash-tree in the moon of May" began throwing lumps of earth towards the stars in the sky, thus frightening the pigs and the sows. Christy also tells her that his brothers and sisters all used to curse their father even when they woke up at night to cough or to sneeze. His father was fiercely hated by all his children.



### **A Visit by Widow Quin**

Pegeen now assures Christy that he will be able to live a peaceful life in this place and that nobody would trouble him here. Just at this moment there is a knock on the door and Widow Quin enters.

### **Widow Quin's Futile Effort to Take Christy Away from Pegeen**

Widow Quin tells Pegeen that, under the instructions of Father Reilly and Shawn Keogh, she has come to take away Christy to her own house so that he may not get drunk and misbehave with Pegeen if he stays for the night at the public-house. Widow Quin then takes a good look at Christy and feels attracted towards him. Pegeen, who has herself fallen in love with Christy, would not like to lose him, and, therefore, tells Widow Quin to go away because Christy is dead tired on account of his having walked over long distances during the last eleven days and because he should not, for that reason, be disturbed. Widow Quin, however, insists that Christy should go with her to her house. Pegeen tells Christy that this woman had hit her husband with a rusty pick-axe and that he had died of blood-poisoning as a result of that blow. It was a sneaky kind of murder and had brought her no credit, says Pegeen. Pegeen also tells Christy that Widow Quin's house is a mere thatched, leaking cottage where he cannot feel comfortable. Widow Quin, in retaliation, says that if Christy stays on at the public-house, Pegeen would very soon start scolding and snubbing him. However, Christy makes it clear that, having been hired in the public-house as a servant, he would prefer to stay on here. Widow Quin then says that, as it is not safe for her to go back to her house all alone, she would also like to spend the night here in the public-house. But Pegeen is not willing to allow her to stay here. Widow Quin then gets up to leave, but she warns Christy not to develop an intimacy with Pegeen because Pegeen would soon be marrying Shawn Keogh and because Pegeen is only waiting for the Pope's permission to the marriage (which normally cannot be held without special permission of the Church authorities during the period of Lent which is a time of fasting and prayer). Christy feels quite perturbed by this information, but Pegeen tells him that Widow Quin has told him a lie and that there is no question of her marrying Shawn Keogh. Christy thanks heaven for Pegeen's clearing his doubt in this matter, and Widow Quin has to go back disappointed to her own house.

### **Christy's New-found Happiness**

Pegeen now goes to the inner room in order to sleep for the night, while Christy offers a prayer to God and Virgin Mary on behalf of Pegeen. When Christy is absolutely alone, he thanks Fate for having blessed him with so much good luck. Two fine women have fought over him, each wanting him for herself. This is the good luck that has come to him as a result of his having murdered his father. He thinks that it was foolish on his part not to have killed his father much earlier.

## **Summary of Act II**

### **Christy in a Jubilant Mood**

The Scene is the same as in the preceding Act, namely the country public-house owned by Michael James. Christy has spent the night in the public-house while Michael James had gone with his friends to the wake and has not yet returned, though it is late in the morning. Christy is feeling very happy with his new environment and the position in which he finds himself as a servant in the public-house, with very little work to do. He even feels that the mirror in this public-house shows him to be much more handsome than the mirror in his own house in his native village used to show. Just then he finds a few girls coming towards the public-house, and he, from a feeling of shyness, hides himself in the inner room in order to get properly dressed so as to be able to face them if necessary.

### **Presents for Christy from the Village Girls**

A few girls from the village—Sara, Susan, Honor and Nelly—now enter the tavern. They have heard the story about the young man who had killed his father with the blow he had given to him with a spade, and they have all come to see what this young fellow looks like. They too have felt greatly impressed by the story of Christy's bravery and courage in having killed his father. Feeling thrilled by the heroic deed of this young man, they have brought presents for him. It so happens that Pegeen is not at this time present, having gone to the hill-top in order to milk the goats and get some milk for Christy's tea. Thus the visiting girls get an opportunity to talk to Christy in Pegeen's absence.

### **Christy, a Hero in the Eyes of the Village Girls**

Christy comes out of the inner room, feeling timid like a mouse. Sara asks him if he is the man who had killed his father, and Christy replies in the affirmative. Sara then welcomes him and says that she has brought him a couple of duck's eggs for his food, adding that the ducks owned by Pegeen are absolutely worthless while the eggs which she has brought are very nutritious. Susan then speaks and says that she has brought some butter for Christy so that he should not eat dry potatoes, especially after having walked such a long distance away from the place where he had killed his father. The girl, Honor, says that she has brought a piece of cake for him. Another girl by the name of Nelly says that she has brought a boiled hen for him. The girls are happy to be in the company of a young man who had killed his father. They look upon him as a hero.

### **The Circumstances in Which Christy Had Killed His Father**

Just then Widow Quin arrives at the public-house and asks the girls what they are doing there. The girls reply that they have come to see the man, who had killed his father. Widow Quin says that she has decided to include Christy's name in the list of those who are going to participate in the sports competition, which is to be held in the course of the day. Sara says that young man will surely defeat every other participant. Widow Quin now asks the

circumstances in which Christy killed his father. In reply Christy gives an account of the circumstances in which he had committed the murder. According to Christy, his father wanted him to marry a fifty-five year old widow, weighing two hundred weights and five pounds, besides being lame and blind in eye, and notorious for her loose morals. Apart from everything else, Christy had been suckled at that woman's breast for six weeks from the time of his birth onwards, and therefore it had been simply impossible for him to agree to his father's suggestion that he should marry that woman. The disagreement had led to his father threatening to kill him and his lifting a spade to attack him, whereupon, Christy had lifted his spade and given such blow to his father that his body had been split into two from the head to the waist.

### **The Village Girls' Admiration for Christy**

This account by Christy of how he had killed his father simply thrills the girls. Susan says that it is a grand story which Christy has told, and Honor says that he has told the story in a lovely manner. All the girls now say that he is a marvellous fellow. Susan says that God has sent him here to provide a second husband to Widow Quin. Sara thereupon joins the hands of Christy and Widow Quin, and proposes a toast to all the wonders of the western world. Just then Pegeen returns to the house and is simply shocked to see Christy making merry with Widow Quin and the young girls.

### **Pegeen's Rebuke to Widow Quin and the Other Girls**

Pegeen angrily asks the girls and Widow Quin why they have come here. Sara says that she came to buy some tobacco, while Widow Quin says that she came to buy some starch for her garments. Pegeen makes an insulting comment on both these excuses, and Widow Quin then leaves with the girls, asking Christy not to forget to come to the sports in order to compete in them.

### **Pegeen's Rebuke to Christy**

Pegeen now takes Christy to task for having tried to become intimate with the girls and for having talked freely to them. Christy tells her that he had killed his father with a spade similar to the one which is lying there. Pegeen stops him from talking about that incident because, she says, he has already told her the story six times since the morning. Christy feels hurt and says that it is strange that she should not want to hear his story when the other girls had come walking four miles to listen to it. Pegeen tells him that the girls had come by a short cut and did not have to walk a long distance.

### **Pegeen's Threat to Christy**

Pegeen then tells Christy that she had gone down to the village and had found a story of father-murder in the newspaper. She tells him that the fellow who had murdered his father would be sentenced to death by torture and that the culprit would receive no mercy from anyone. Christy asks if he too is now in danger of arrest for his crime of murdering his father. Pegeen replies that, if he keeps talking freely about the murder to a pack of wild girls, the news

of his murder would certainly spread and that he would also then face death by hanging and would die in great anguish. Christy feels quite scared by Pegeen's threat and says that, if it is not safe for him to stay here, he would leave and take to a wandering life like Esau or Cain over the mountains and over the plains. Pegeen says that he had better do that because the judges in this place are merciless and would show him no leniency.

### **Christy's Distress and His Decision to Quit**

Christy is now feeling quite bitter about the possible fate that awaits him. He says that he will again become a lonely wanderer depending upon the charity of women and girls whom he might meet on the way. Pegeen taunts him by saying that, with so many girls available in Mayo, there is no need for him to feel lonely. But Christy says that, in the course of his wanderings, he will certainly feel lonely while people will be spending their nights comfortably in their homes, and lovers will be making love in the darkness of ditches. Pegeen then says that he is the oddest kind of fellow she has ever met and that she herself is neither odd nor lonely even though she has to live with only her father and has no other company. Christy says that she has no reason to feel lonely because all kinds of men would gladly come and crowd round her to hear her sweet voice. Pegeen says that he is a very persuasive talker and that a man like him can never feel lonely because the girls would feel much interested in his talk. She says that he is a fine lad with "sufficient savagery" in him to have killed his father. But Christy says that he is feeling heart-broken now because he will soon find himself far away from her. He then picks up his rod and gets ready to leave.

### **Christy Prevailed upon by Pegeen to Stay on**

Pegeen now orders him to put down his rod because, having been employed in this place as a pot-boy (or waiter), he cannot run away from his duties. Christy replies that he should go if there is a danger of his being arrested and hanged. Pegeen then admits that she was just trying to scare him and that the news-papers of the previous two weeks did not contain any news of the murder that he had committed. She assures him that he is quite safe here. However, she warns him against becoming intimate with the local girls. Christy feels delighted to be asked to stay on here. He says that it will be a great comfort to him to hear her voice, to look into her two eyes, to watch her moving around in the warm sunlight, and to wash her ankles at night when she is too tired.

### **Shawn's Offer to Christy**

Shawn Keogh now comes to the public-house in the company of Widow Quin. He sends Pegeen away on the pretext that her sheep have entered Jimmy's field and are eating the cabbages there. He then turns to Christy and makes an offer to him. If Christy departs from this place, thus leaving Pegeen free to marry Shawn, he would give to Christy his new hat, his breeches with the double seat, and his blessings and Father Reilly's blessings in addition. Christy feels quite annoyed by Shawn's trying to bribe him in order to make him quit this place. Widow Quin also supports Shawn, and tells Christy that the best course for him would be to

go away because, in Shawn's opinion, Pegeen would not suit Christy as a wife. Shawn says that Pegeen has a devilish temper and that, within a short time of getting married, Christy and Pegeen would be leading a cat-and-dog life because of her quarrelsome nature. Before Christy can give any reply, Widow Quin asks him to go into the inner room and try on his body the clothes which Shawn has brought for him. Christy goes inside and shuts the door in order to try the coat and the breeches on his person.

### **Widow Quin's Offer of Help to Shawn**

Shawn now expresses to Widow Quin his apprehension that Christy will not leave this place but will stay on to marry Pegeen. Widow Quin says that girls always admire a man of courage and hate cowards like Shawn. Shawn replies that, if he had not been a religious kind of man, he would show enough courage by approaching Christy from behind and stabbing him with a pike. It is easy to become a hero by killing one's father as Christy has done, says Shawn. But Shawn's father being already dead, Shawn is in no position to become a hero by that method. He then appeals to Widow Quin to find some way out of the difficulty and to send away Christy from this place. Widow Quin says that she can save him by herself marrying Christy and thus depriving Pegeen of the opportunity to marry that young fellow. Widow Quin, however, demands a price from Shawn for doing so. She says that Shawn will have to give her his red cow and his mountainy ram, besides the right of way across his rye path, and a load of dung at Michaelmas. Shawn agrees to give her these things and many other things too.

### **Christy's Rejection of Widow Quin's Offer to Marry Him**

Christy now comes into the shop from the inner room, looking very smart and elegant in the clothes which Shawn had given him. Widow Quin admires him for his changed appearance and improved looks. She then makes a sign to Shawn to leave them alone. When Shawn has left, Widow Quin tells Christy that he is looking very trim and attractive and that she would like to have a serious talk with him. Christy says that he would like to go towards the hill-side in order to look for Pegeen. Widow Quin says that he should forget Pegeen and that he should accept her (Widow Quin) as his companion. She says that he and she will make excellent companions for each other. Christy says that he does not need her as a companion because he will never be in want of companions when all kinds of girls want to meet him and offer presents to him. He says that all the girls have greatly been impressed by his bravery in having given such a powerful blow to his father as to have split his body into two from the head to the waist.

### **The Unexpected Arrival of Christy's Father**

As Christy opens the door in order to step out, he sees a sight which has a stunning effect on him. He immediately retreats, feeling almost dizzy. On being asked by Widow Quin what has disturbed him so much, Christy says that he has just seen the walking spirit of his murdered father and that he does not know how to hide himself from that ghost of hell. The door is now pushed open from outside, and Old Mahon (Christy's father) appears on the threshold. Christy at once hides himself behind the door. Old Mahon's appearance here means

that he had not died of the blow which Christy had given him. Old Mahon now asks Widow Quin if she had seen a young lad early in the morning or on the previous night. He describes the young lad as an ugly fellow with a murderous look on his face and a little rod in his hand.

### **Old Mahon's Account of Christy's Murderous Attack**

Widow Quin asks the old man why he is searching for that young fellow. Old Mahon replies that he wants to kill the young fellow because the latter had given him a heavy blow with a spade and had broken his head. Old Mahon takes off his hat and shows his head in a mass of bandages and plaster. Widow Quin looks at his head and asks whether it was a robber who had hit him. Old Mahon replies that his own son, a dirty stuttering idler, had hit him. Widow Quin says that it was a very hard blow which his son had given him. She then says that he must have provoked his son to an extreme degree to make him inflict such a serious injury on his head. Widow Quin adds that it is a shameful matter that an old man like him should have tormented his young son. Old Mahon feels enraged by Widow Quin's accusation and says that he had been showing the patience of a saint and that it was only when his patience had utterly been exhausted that he had quarrelled with his son who was a fool and an idler.

### **Old Mahon's Poor Opinion of His Son**

Widow Quin asks if his son never did any work and Old Mahon replies that, if at all he did anything, he spoiled it and that, when he was not doing anything, he was merely making faces at himself in the mirror. Widow Quin asks if his son was in the habit of running after the girls. Old Mahon mockingly says that his son used to hide himself behind the bushes, whenever any girl appeared upon the hill. Widow Quin then asks if the young fellow was fond of drinking. Old Man replies, again in a mocking tone, that his son had a very delicate stomach and that he had neither the capacity to drink nor the strength to smoke. Old Mahon also says that his son was the butt of ridicule among the women-folk of his native village and that they used to laugh at him and call him the mad son of Mahon. Old Mahon goes on to describe his son as dark and dirty, and as an ugly young blackguard.

### **Old Mahon Sent Away**

Widow Quin now tells Old Mahon that she had seen a fellow of that kind closely resembling Old Mahon and that he had gone over the hills to catch a boat in order to sail away from this place. On hearing this, Old Mahon abruptly leaves in order to try to overtake his son for whom he has been searching for the last ten days or so, in order to punish him for the blow which the young fellow had given him. As Old Mahon is going, Widow Quin urges him to punish the young fellow severely but not so severely as to put himself in the power of the law.

### **Christy's Deep Regret Over His Father Being Still Alive**

When Old Mahon is gone, Widow Quin turns to Christy and says that he is "the walking Playboy of the Western World." She mocks at his claim to have "divided his father to his breeches belt." (In other words she mocks Christy for having claimed that he had, with one

blow, split the old man's body into two from the head to the waist). Christy is now feeling much distressed by the sudden appearance of his father and by the realization that the story he has been telling everybody here about the murder he had committed has proved to be false and that he would now be exposed to ridicule. He does not know how he will face Pegeen when she comes to know the facts. Widow Quin tells him that Pegeen would drive him away from her door because, having regarded him as a kind of wonderful hero, Pegeen would now find that he is only a petty schemer who had invented the story about the murder of his father. Christy laments the fact that his father should merely have pretended to be dead and that he should have now come here to put an end to all his new-found happiness. He curses his father for having disrupted his life at this place just when he was on the verge of winning Pegeen as his wife. Widow Quin tells him that Pegeen would have been no good as a wife for him because she is an ill-tempered girl smelling badly of liquor which she has to serve to the customers in her father's shop. But Christy says that Pegeen is fit even to handle merchandise in the heavens above; and he expresses his grief over the fact that fate has let him down at the last moment.

### **Widow Quin's Futile Bid to Win Christy**

Widow Quin now tries to get Christy as a husband, for herself. She tries to win him by telling him that he will be very happy with her at her cottage. She says that she has taken a fancy to him and that she will herself look after him and serve him at her house when he begins to live with her. She also assures him that he will be perfectly safe from arrest at her house and that he will have interesting jobs to do in the company of the wisest old men. But Christy cannot drive out the image of Pegeen from his mind. He tells Widow Quin that he is interested only in Pegeen and nobody else. He then appeals to Widow Quin to help him in winning Pegeen. He says that, if Widow Quin helps him, he will pray to God to show His mercy to her (Widow Quin) and send her to heaven when she dies.

### **An Understanding between Christy and Widow Quin**

Finding that she herself has no chance, Widow Quin says that she will help him on condition that, when he is married to Pegeen and has become the master of this place, he would give her a right of way which she wants, besides a mountainy ram, and a load of dung at Michaelmas. Christy swears by the elements and by the stars of night that he will do so. Widow Quin then tells him not to disclose to anyone that his father has come to this place. She says that, if his father reappears here, she will say that the old man is a maniac and not Christy's father. Just then the girls from the Village arrive at the public-house and ask Christy to go with them to the sports so that he can participate in the various contests. Christy gets ready to go with them, especially because Pegeen is also waiting for him there.

### **Summary Of Act Iii**

#### **Old Mahon Back at the Public-house**

The scene is the same as before while the time is a little later on the same day. Jimmy

and Philly come back in a semi-drunken condition to the public-house (while Michael James was too drunk at the wake to have been able to return with these fellows). From their talk we learn that Christy has distinguished himself in the sports and won a lot of money in the games of chance which were held at the fair. Philly also refers to the fact that Christy has no other subject to talk about except his having killed his father with the great blow which he had given to the old man with a spade. As they are talking, Old Mahon again comes to the public-house from where he had previously been tricked and sent away by Widow Quin. Old Mahon demands some liquor from Jimmy and Philly who, themselves have been searching for liquor in the cupboards. Widow Quin now also arrives at the public-house and feels completely surprised to see Old Mahon back at this place. As Widow Quin happens to be carrying some liquor on her person, she gives a drink to Old Mahon but privately tells Jimmy and Philly that this old man is a mad fellow who is falsely claiming that Christy is his son who had broken his head. She then encourages Old Mahon to talk so that Jimmy and Philly should become convinced that she has told them nothing but the truth. Old Mahon says that it is very unfortunate that he should have been attacked by his own son whom he had tended from the hour of his birth. Widow Quin asks him if his son was a lad of about twenty and a great hand at racing and leaping. But Old Mahon replies that his son was nothing but a fool of whom the old as well as the young used to make fun of and whom everybody treated as if he were a “mangy cur.”

### **Christy Taking Part in the Village Sports**

At this point a great burst of cheering is heard from a distance. Old Mahon asks what this roaring is about. Widow Quin informs him that it is the crowd of villagers witnessing the sports and cheering a young lad who is the champion Playboy of the Western World. Widow Quin does not, however, tell Old Mahon the name of this young lad because she had promised Christy that she would see to it that people do not come to know that his father is still alive or that the old man is actually present at this place.

### **Old Mahon’s Near-recognition of His Son**

Jimmy, who is looking out from the door to see what is going on at the site of the sports, informs Old Mahon that the young lad is now about to take part in the mule race. Old Mahon now also looks out from the door and finds that the young lad riding a mule closely resembles his own son. He then says that he would like to go and have a close look at the games and the competitors. Widow Quin, however, urges Old Mahon not to go to the games but to take the road to some other town because he would not find any lodging in this place and would not even know where to sleep. But Philly encourages the old man to witness the games and suggests that the old man should stand upon the bench nearby so as to have a good view. Old Mahon then mounts on the bench and Widow Quin stands by his side. He sees Christy leading in the mule-race and asks who that young fellow is. Widow Quin replies that he is the champion of the world. Jimmy and Philly also express the view that this young fellow would defeat everybody in the mule-race. At this point Old Mahon almost recognizes the champion as his own son Christy, and says: “It’s Christy, by the stars of God.”



### **Old Mahon Once Again Sent Away by Widow Quin**

Old Mahon now jumps down from the bench and tries to run out of the door in order to catch hold of Christy whom he has recognized. But Widow Quin stops him saying that the young champion is not his son. She informs him that the young fellow whom he thinks to be his son is quite a different man who is going to marry the daughter of the owner of this public-house. Old Mahon cannot believe that any decent and rich girl would marry his son. But Widow Quin says that he is mad if he thinks that the young fellow is his son. Old Mahon is at last convinced that the young fellow is not his son because his son could never have won in the games and could never have been cheered by a crowd. Old Mahon accepts Widow Quin's opinion that he himself has gone mad and has therefore made the mistake of thinking the young champion to be his son. Widow Quin now tells him that the boys in this place treat a madman in a very cruel and brutal manner, hitting him with stones, and that for this reason it would not be safe for him to stay on here. At Widow Quin's suggestion, Old Mahon decides to run away from here for his own protection.

### **Widow Quin Alone in the Public-house**

When Old Mahon is gone, Philly, who has understood Widow Quin's tactics, says that to him the old man did not appear to be mad. Philly says that he would follow the old man and would find out if he was really mad or if Widow Quin was just fooling him. As Philly goes out, Jimmy says that he agrees with Widow Quin in her view that the old man is mad and says that he would now follow both the old man and Philly in order to see what happens. So he too goes away, and Widow Quin is left alone in the public-house.

### **Christy's Triumph at the Games**

The next moment the crowd comes carrying Christy on their shoulders and shouting slogans in praise of his achievements in the sports competition. The girls in the crowd are particularly enthusiastic about Christy's victory and Pegeen is treating him as a real hero. Pegeen now tells the crowd that Christy is very tired and is drenched with perspiration and that he cannot therefore attend to them any longer. She tells the crowd to go and witness the tug-of-war which is still to take place on the village green. The crowd thereupon agrees to leave Christy alone but, before going away, they hand over to Christy the prizes which he has won. The prizes are a bagpipe, a fiddle, and a walking-stick. Christy tells the crowd that his display of his prowess at the games was nothing as compared to the single mighty blow which he had given a few days ago (to his father). The crowd then leaves, and so does Widow Quin.

### **A Romantic Scene between Pegeen and Christy**

When the crowd has gone, Pegeen congratulates Christy on his triumph in the games. But Christy says that he has yet to win his crowning prize which is a promise from her that she would marry him in a fortnight's time. Pegeen, who feels inwardly delighted by this demand from Christy, does not immediately give an affirmative reply but says that everybody thinks

that very soon he would go away to his own native place and would offer his love to some other girl. Christy strongly refutes this suggestion and goes on to paint a very bright and romantic picture of how he and she will make love to each other on the slopes of the mountains. Christy says that, when Pegeen will be lying in his arms and he will be showering kisses on her, he would feel a kind of pity for the Lord God who is always sitting lonesome on His golden throne. Pegeen now begins to respond to Christy's words of love. She admires him for his eloquence and his persuasive manner of talking. She then asks him what special quality he has found in her to attract him when he is himself a superior kind of man with a poet's gift of talking and with an exceptionally brave heart. Christy says that in her heart there is the light of seven heavens and that, when he goes out of doors in the darkness of night to catch fish from the river, the light from her heart will serve as a lamp to light his path. Pegeen says that, if she becomes his wife, he will find her to be an expert in dealing with bailiffs and also in coining funny nicknames for the stars of the night. But she again expresses her apprehension that he will soon go away from this place and that his love-talk is therefore meaningless. Christy replies that he loves her so much that he wants to worship every straw in her thatched cottage and every pebble lying on the path to her door. Pegeen says that, if he has spoken the truth, she will light candles to celebrate the divine miracle which has brought him all the way from his home in the south to this place. She also says that she has already bought new gowns and that she is in a position to marry him without any delay. Christy agrees that a divine miracle has brought about the meeting between him and her. Pegeen says that she often used to imagine that she would marry some rich Jew with barrels of gold, and that she had never thought that a wonderful man like him would come and win her heart. Christy replies that he had always heard women talking in a loving manner to all kinds of fools and that he had never imagined that the day would come when a girl like her would be talking sweetly to him also. Pegeen says that she herself does not understand how she is talking sweetly to him when she is known in seven neighbouring towns for her biting tongue.

### **Pegeen's Decision to Marry Christy**

At this point Pegeen's father, Michael James, comes back home from the wake in a drunken condition. He is singing a song in a tipsy manner but, on seeing Christy, stops singing and begins to praise him for having distinguished himself at the sports competition. Michael James then refers to the forthcoming marriage of his daughter to Shawn Keogh, saying that the permission from the Pope at Rome has already been received by the local priest, Father Reilly. Michael James also says that Father Reilly is anxious to perform the marriage ceremony without any further delay because he is afraid lest Christy, a fellow "who'd capsize the stars," should prevent the marriage in an effort to win Pegeen as his own wife. Pegeen thereupon angrily tells her father that she has already changed her mind and that she has decided to marry Christy Mahon 'instead of Shawn Keogh who is "a middling kind of a scare-crow with no savagery or fine words in him at all."

### **Shawn's Angry Reaction to Pegeen's Decision**

Michael James strongly objects to Pegeen's decision, but Pegeen tells her father that it would be a poor thing for her to marry a fellow like Shawn. Shawn, who is also present, scolds Pegeen for having made up her mind to marry a dirty tramp whom she has picked up from the highways of the world. Shawn tells her to think of his weight of passion, of the holy dispensation which has come from the Pope, and of the herd of cattle which he is giving to her as a present in addition to a gold ring. Pegeen gives an insulting reply to Shawn and tells him to go away and find some rich heiress as a wife for himself. When Shawn still repeats his claim to marry Pegeen, Christy threatens to murder him whereupon Michael James raises an outcry saying that, if there is to be fight between the two suitors, the fight should take place not in his public-house but on the sea-shore. Shawn, however, is not ready to fight, being a thorough coward. He says that he would rather spend his whole life as bachelor than fight a savage like Christy. As Christy picks up a spade, apparently to attack Shawn, Shawn flees in terror.

### **The Approval by Pegeen's Father**

Michael James has now no objection to Pegeen's marrying Christy. He says that, even though Christy is a dangerous kind of man, he would like to become the grandfather of boys who have been begotten by a brave man like Christy than to become the grandfather of children begotten by a coward like Shawn Keogh. (Like Pegeen, now Michael James also refers to Shawn not as Shawn but as 'Shaneen' which is a contemptuous form of Shawn). A daring fellow, says Michael James, is the jewel of the world, and a man like Christy who had split his father's body with a single blow has the bravery of ten men.

### **The Reappearance of Old Mahon, and Pegeen's Reaction**

An unexpected development now takes place. A noise is heard from outside. Old Mahon (Christy's father) is seen rushing towards the public-house, followed by a large crowd and Widow Quin. Old Mahon makes a rush at Christy, knocks him down, and begins to beat him. When Pegeen asks the old man who he is, Old Mahon replies that he is Christy's father. Pegeen asks if, after having been killed by Christy, he has now come back to life. Old Mahon replies that a man like him could not have been killed by a mere blow given to him with a spade. Saying this, he begins to beat Christy again. Pegeen now indignantly turns towards Christy and asks him if he had told them all a lie that he had killed his father. Christy at first denies that the old man is his father, and then defends himself against Pegeen's accusation by saying that it was his father who should be called a liar for having pretended to be dead after receiving the blow when actually he had not died. Pegeen is now furious with Christy for having won her heart by deceitful means. The crowd is also in a state of fury because Christy had befooled all of them by claiming to have killed his father and having thus created the impression on them all that he was a hero. Pegeen tells him to quit this place for good because he is a treacherous man. The crowd roars mockingly, saying: "There's the playboy! There's the lad thought he'd rule the roost in Mayo!" The crowd calls upon Old Mahon to punish this

liar in a suitable manner.

### **Another Attack by Christy upon, His Father**

Christy now appeals to Widow Quin to save him somehow. Widow Quin says that she had already done her best and that she can do no more. Christy is feeling too ashamed of himself to seek any help from Pegeen who, in any case, is in no mood to show any kindness to him. Far from helping Christy, she tells Old Mahon to take away his son from this place failing which she will ask the local young lads to destroy him here. Old Mahon now approaches Christy in a threatening manner, and tells him to go back with him to their native place. Christy wants to be left to his own fate. The crowd now calls upon both father and son to settle the matter by means of a fight. Christy tells the crowd to stop yelling and says that they had themselves made a hero of him "by the power of the lie" which he had unknowingly told them. He says that he would rather lead a lonely life now than live in the midst of such fools as they are. At this point, Old Mahon makes a movement towards Christy whereupon Christy tells him to keep away from him lest he should become wild and attack him. Christy then suddenly picks up a spade, whereupon the crowd shouts that Christy is going mad. Christy reminds them that he has won all the games in their village. But Old Mahon tells Christy to stop talking and to go with him. Christy, now feeling desperate, rushes at his father with the spade, and chases him out of the door, followed by the crowd and Widow Quin. There is a great noise outside, then a loud cry of pain, and dead silence. It seems to everybody inside the public-house that this time Christy has definitely killed his father with a blow from the spade.

Christy re-enters the public-house, and is followed by Widow Quin. She tells him that now the people have turned against him because he has killed his father almost in their presence and because they cannot endure this brutal action to which they have almost been witnesses. She also warns him that he will be hanged for murder if he does not make good his escape when there is still time. She offers to lead him by the backdoor in order to help him out of the present difficulty. But Christy says that, if he leaves Pegeen, his life will have no meaning. Widow Quin says that he can get a girl like Pegeen in every village of Ireland. She promises to find him a more beautiful sweetheart than Pegeen every month. Christy, however, replies that he is not interested in any other girl and that he would be indifferent even if Widow Quin brings a large number of selected women and makes them stand half-naked before him.

### **Christy's Refusal to Accept Widow Quin's Suggestion to Escape**

Now the girl called Sara comes running and tells Widow Quin that the crowd have themselves decided to hang Christy for having murdered his father. Widow Quin repeats her offer to help Christy to safety, and Sara too promises all help. But Christy says that Pegeen will now definitely marry him, because he has truly proved himself to be a hero by having actually killed his father. Widow Quin and Sara try to drag him away to a safe place but Christy threatens to use violence against them whereupon Widow Quin decides to send for a doctor in order to take Christy to a madhouse.

### **The Decision to Hand over Christy to the Police**

Widow Quin and Sara then go out in order to bring a doctor who can declare Christy to be mad and therefore a fit case to be removed to the, madhouse. Their purpose in doing so is to save him from the crowd which is enraged because Christy has now actually killed his father almost in their presence. Michael James asks Philly if the old man is really dead, and Philly replies that he is on the verge of death but not yet actually dead. Michael says that Christy, deserves to be punished for his crime and that they should all combine to bind him hand and foot so that he may not escape. Michael James does not want that the police should come to harass him and the others in view of the murder that has taken place. He would therefore like Christy to be handed over to the police; and this can be done only if he is tied with a rope. Pegeen too has now turned against Christy because, in the first place, he had told everybody the lie that he had killed his father, and secondly because now he has actually killed his father. She says that there is a big difference between a heroic action and a dirty deed, meaning that Christy's account of his having killed his father in the potato- field showed him to be a hero but that the manner in which he has now killed his father shows him to be guilty of a dirty deed. Christy is horrified at Pegeen's changed attitude towards him, but she does not soften. She tells the men that Christy should be taken away from here in order to be handed over to the police. Shawn is now very active in supporting Michael James and Pegeen in their decision that Christy should be handed over to the police.

### **Old Mahon Still Alive**

Michael James (assisted by Pegeen) and some other men now deftly throw a rope around Christy and tie him up. However, Christy manages to bite Shawn on the leg, and Shawn shrieks with pain. Pegeen picks up a piece of burning turf and scorches Christy's leg. Just then there is another surprise for everybody because Old Mahon comes crawling on his hands and feet (because he had not been killed this time also but had survived the blow). Christy is now struggling to free himself from the knots of the rope. Nor is there any need for Michael James and the other men to try to hold Christy as a prisoner any longer because Old Mahon's arrival on the scene shows that no murder has taken place.

### **Christy's Decision to Go Back with His Father**

Christy now asks his father what has brought him here once more and whether he wants to be killed for the third time. Old Mahon asks why Christy has been tied, and Christy replies that he was to be taken to the police to be hanged for having murdered his father. Michael James who was largely responsible for Christy's being tied up defends his action, saying that, if Christy had not been held, others including Michael James himself would have been prosecuted for the murder of Old Mahon. Old Mahon then unties the knots so that Christy becomes completely free. Old Mahon suggests to Christy that they should now go back to their own village to tell the people there about the villainy of the inhabitants of Mayo. Christy agrees to go provided his father accepts a subordinate role and provided Christy

himself takes all decisions in future. Old Mahon is very happy that his son will go back with him. Christy then thanks the people of this place for having turned him into a real hero at the end. He says that he is now a different man from what he was when he had arrived here on the previous day and that now he will go “romancing” through the remaining years of his life and will enjoy himself to the utmost in a boisterous manner.

### **A Happy Ending for All Except Pegeen**

Michael James is happy that the intruders have left. He says that there will now be peace in his tavern. Shawn, going towards Pegeen, says that a miracle has taken place because now Father Reilly will be in a position to perform the marriage ceremony and unite Shawn and Pegeen in wedlock as soon as the wound caused by Christy’s bite on his leg has healed. But Pegeen gives him a box on his ear and asks him to leave her alone. She then bursts into a lamentation over her loss of Christy, “the only Playboy of the Western World.” Thus, though the play ends happily for everybody else, it ends sadly for Pegeen who feels very distressed to have lost the man with whom she had really fallen in love. Of course, the play ends sadly for Shawn also, but Shawn’s distress is entirely of a comic kind and amuses us rather than arousing any sympathy in our hearts.

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### **9.3 Key Words**

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Brigid	:	Goddess of fertility of the heathen Irish
Cnuceen	:	a little hill
Cockles	:	molusc (the coldest, wettest, ill-paid work)
drouthy	:	thirsty
gallous	:	spirited
gamey	:	amorous
gob	:	mouth
loy	:	a long narrow spade
pot-boy	:	menial in a public house
riz	:	rise
spit	:	perfect likeness
streleen	:	stroller
supeen	:	a mouthful
whisht	:	silence
zola	:	french novelist

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## 9.4 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you have studied

- about the playwright
- about the background of the play
- the summary of the play

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## 9.5 Review Questions

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1. Give a brief description of the playwright, Synge.
2. Give a brief background of the play
3. Give a brief summary of the play

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## 9.6 Bibliography

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## UNIT-10

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### J.M.SYNGE : *THE PLAY BOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* (II)

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Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Discussion
  - 10.2.1 Is the play a Comedy or tragedy ?
  - 10.2.2 Development of Christy's Character
  - 10.2.3 The Language of the Play
  - 10.2.4 The Title of the Play
  - 10.2.5 Christy as the Mock-hero or Christ-Like figure
- 10.3 Let us sum up
- 10.4 Review Quations
- 10.5 Bibliography

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#### 10.0 Objectives

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In continuity with the previous unit, here we shall have a greater in depth study of the play *The Play Boy of the Western World*. We shall critically examine Christy's character and talk about the language and title of the play.

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#### 10.1 Introduction

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In this unit, you will study about the characters, structure and critical aspects of the play. Through the excerses given, you will reinforce your understanding of the unit. You may use the dictionary a lot, as it will prove helpful.

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#### 10.2 Discussion

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##### 10.2.1 Is The Play A Comedy Or A Tragedy ?

##### Satirical Comedy

The Play does not lend itself readily to classification. As we examine this play, we find that it has several sides to it. In one mood we may suggest that it is sheer extravagant comedy, with elements of strong farce in the resurrection of Christy's father, and in the deflation of a



boastful man. As such, it embodies the classic elements of reversal and recognition. And yet it is a comedy which ends unhappily for ““ Pegeen who is unable to marry Christy, the Playboy. It is also possible to call this play a Dionysiac comedy in which the instincts are given uninhibited play; this in keeping with Synge’s demand for what is “superb and wild in reality.” So the Playboy himself becomes a country Don Juan, rejoicing in his new-found power to excite the admiration of women. Another way of looking at this play is to regard it as a satirical comedy. It is a satire on the proverbial willingness of the West to give shelter to the criminal and murderer. In that case Christy, the Playboy, becomes a comic Oedipus, the man who killed his father. There is also satire in the pursuit of man by woman, the comic reversal of the conventional view. Indeed, we may carry the idea of the mock-heroic still further, and see in Christy an Odysseus, the wanderer cast up and seeking refuge: his triumph in the sports on the sea-shore being a parody of the Greek games.

### **A Tragedy**

But again we may see the play, if we so wish, as a tragedy, with Pegeen as the heroine-victim. Pegeen found her man, made him, won him in the face of opposition from her own sex, and then lost him. Pegeen’s loss is absolute and beyond comfort, because she has lost her illusion of greatness in her lover, and she has lost him physically too; while the complacent Shawn sees the obstacle to his marriage with her removed.

### **A Distorted Tragedy**

Some feel that, the play has a very special place in the history of tragedy. This critic regards it as a deliberately distorted tragedy, all the joints wrenched out of place by a comic vision that Synge imposed upon it. This play contains in itself a number of the formal qualities of traditional tragedy. The hero possesses, or acquires through the story of his murder of his father, a Promethean virtue in his destruction of the “jealous old tyrant” who was about to force him into a hateful marriage. The murder seems, to the listeners of the story, to have been accomplished with a heroic strength and precision, and so a legend of Herculean strength is born. Christy’s story is received and approved by an audience of men and women, like a Chorus. The women offer him gifts and Christy confirms the probability of his story by his achievements in the village sports which come conveniently to convince everyone of his strength as the slayer of a tyrant, the supplanter of his father, the inaugurator of a new and heroic race to be produced through his union with Pegeen. It is, however, a distorted tragedy because at the end we find ourselves face to face with the comic resurrection of the slain father, and the dissolution of the heroism which had been built up by Christy’s imagination and the imagination of his listeners. The hero vanishes; the son is reconciled to his father, our interest, in so far as it is tragic, is transferred to Pegeen whose final speech is a lament reminding us of the lament of Dido, the Queen of Carthage, over the departure from her kingdom of her lover, Aeneas.

### **Serious Elements in the Play: The Two “Murders”**

Now, if we were to choose a label for this play, we would unhesitatingly describe it as

a comedy, though we would at the same time admit that there are some tragic elements in it. There are tragic elements even in the greatest comedies of Shakespeare, but they are still comedies because of the prevailing atmosphere of fun and gaiety. The play contains an abundance of fun, and at places makes us laugh heartily. The tragic elements in this play do not produce any lasting impression on our minds, and though Pegeen's lament at the end at having lost her lover is quite moving, it does not alter the character of the play as a comedy. Before analysing the comic character of the play, it would be worth-while to take a look at what may be regarded as the serious issues which tend to generate a feeling of melancholy and gloom in our minds. The main such issue, of course, is patricide, or the murder of a father. When Christy tells his audience in the shebeen that he has committed a very grave crime, and then reveals the nature of that crime, his listeners heartily approve of what he has done and begin to pay him compliments on his bravery in having killed his father. This reaction of the listeners comes as a shock to us. It was natural for the Irish public of the time to have protested against this play because of what they regarded as the glorification of a man who had killed his father. Our reaction to this glorification is somewhat similar. It is only retrospectively, when Old Mahon is found to be alive, that we see the comic aspect of the episode of the murder. Up to the end of Act I, we feel somewhat depressed by the admiration with which Pegeen and others regard Christy's action in having murdered his father. In his soliloquy at the end of Act I, we find, to our dismay, Christy feeling sorry that he had not killed his father sooner. But Christy's regret here has its comic side also. When, Christy seems to have killed his father on the second occasion, we are again shocked, but this time our feeling is shared by all the others (with the possible exception of Widow Quin). The first murder was an accident, but the second murder is deliberate and therefore an unpardonable crime which "Christy commits in order to preserve his heroic image in the minds of the people of Mayo. In this case, again, the murder is found to have a comic side to it because the old man has not actually died of the blow which Christy had given him. However, the fact remains that Christy had dealt a death-blow to his father and had experienced no pang of regret for having murdered the old man.

### **Christy's Grievances against His Father**

Christy's complaints against his father in the course of his conversation with Pegeen in Act I have also a certain degree of seriousness about them. Christy describes his life in his native village as having been one of drudgery with few recreations. He tells Pegeen that his father was drinking and cursing all the time, and ill-treating him under the influence of a hard-hearted woman. Christy's account of his past life and of his father's callous treatment of him certainly gives rise to the kind of pity which we associated with a tragedy.

### **Old Mahon's Grievances against His Son**

Subsequently it is the father's turn to complain against his son's misbehaviour. Talking to Widow Quin (in Act II), Old Mahon says that his son had driven him out in his old age when he had nobody to aid him. He tells Widow Quin that his son was an ugly young "streeler" with

a murderous mouth, “a liar on walls”, a “talker of folly”, an idler who did not do any useful work at all, an ugly young blackguard. Even if half of what Old Mahon alleges against his son be true, we have every reason to sympathise with him. We are inclined to sympathise with the old man even more towards the end when he has to accept defeat at the hands of his son and When Christy tells him that he will be the leader from now on, the master of all fights, and that the old man will have to cook his oatmeals and wash his potatoes. Old Mahon seems perfectly contented with the subordinate role which Christy assigns to him from now onwards, because he feels that his son has finally achieved heroism and manhood.

### **Widow Quin’s Futile Efforts to Save Christy from the Crowd**

Then there is something pathetic about Widow Quin’s efforts to save Christy. The whole crowd has turned hostile to Christy, and he finds himself helpless. Widow Quin alone stands by his side, and tries to take him away beyond the reach of the crowd, but Christy refuses to go away because he does not want to leave Pegeen. Widow Quin even tires to disguise him as a woman in order to make it easy for him to slip away, but he is determined to stay on in the hope that Pegeen will marry him. This attempted disguise also has its comic side.

### **The Persecution of Christy**

The persecution of Christy by the crowd is also a melancholy episode in the play. Without going into the merits of what Christy has done or not done, the manner in which the crowd, and especially Pegeen, treats him does arouse a feeling of sympathy in us. Pegeen declares that the world will see this man beaten like a schoolboy, and she refers to him as an ugly liar who was trying to play off as the hero. She goes to the extent of scorching his leg. Michael and others have bound Christy with a rope, and he lies struggling vainly on the floor. All this has a touch of tragedy. But even this situation has been enlivened by various comic touches.

### **Pegeen’s Lament at the End**

But it is the final speech of Pegeen which lends to this play a certain distinctly tragic quality. After Christy has left, all Pegeen’s dreams vanish. She had told him earlier in this Act that she and he would make an excellent pair of “gallant lovers,” and she had said that she would be burning candles to celebrate the divine miracle which had brought him to her. She has also told her father that she was now determined to marry Christy, and she had obtained his consent. But all Pegeen’s hopes have come to nothing, and she finds herself deserted by her lover, though the fault is entirely her own. After having finished reading the play, our thoughts do remain with Pegeen for some time, and we share the grief to which she gives expression in her final speech.

### **A Boisterous, Rollicking Comedy on the Whole**

In spite of all this, *The Playboy* is a comedy, and a boisterous, rollicking comedy at that. A play which amuses us at every step and makes us laugh again and again cannot be called a tragedy just because it ends in the frustration of the hopes of the heroine. The heroine's frustration at the end is almost neutralized by Christy's departing speech in which he thanks the people of Mayo for having transformed him into a hero. For him life will now be a series of delightful adventures. The play depicts the metamorphosis which Christy undergoes from a shy, timid, clumsy lad into a self-confident, daring, and self-assertive man who is capable now of even dictating his terms to his father. This transformation is certainly a happy one, and it gladdens our hearts. Apart from this welcome development in the character of the central figure, this play is a comedy because of an abundance of humour in it. And the humour here is of several kinds—the humour of situation, the humour of character, and the humour of dialogue.

### **Funny Situations**

Some of the situations in the play are uproariously funny. For instance, Shawn slipping away from Michael's hold and leaving his coat in Michael's hands cannot fail to make the audience in a theatre roar with laughter. Other funny situations are Pegeen and Widow Quin each pulling Christy in her direction towards the end of Act II; Susan putting on Christy's boots; Christy's holding a mirror behind his back; Christy hiding himself behind the door when he sees his father alive and coming towards the shebeen; Philly searching for some more liquor when he is already semi-drunk; and, above all, Christy's biting Shawn on the leg and Shawn's screaming with pain.

### **Humour of Character**

Most of the characters in the play make us laugh because of their absurdities or weaknesses. Drunkenness is most often amusing and we here have four heavy drunkards—Michael James, Philly, Jimmy, and Old Mahon. Michael and his friends make it a point to go to a wake in order to drink the free liquor that is served there, Old Mahon once drank himself almost to a state of paralysis when he was in the company of Limerick girls. Cowardice is another comic trait. Shawn Keogh of Killakeen amuses us not only by his refusal to fight Christy but by refusing even to feel jealous of "a man did slay his da". Widow Quin amuses us by her search for a second husband after having murdered her first several years before. We cannot help laughing when she tells Pegeen that she is better suited as a companion for Christy because she is woman who has "destroyed" her husband and buried her children. We laugh at Old Mahon when he falls into Widow Quin's trap not once but twice. On the second occasion he even agrees with Widow Quin that he has gone mad and goes on to give her an account of an earlier fit of madness during which seven doctors had gathered round him to take down his ravings. Indeed, all these characters treat us to what is literally a riot of laughter.

### **Humour of Dialogue**

The dialogue in the play too is a source of rich comedy. Leaving aside a few speeches which may momentarily depress us or put us in a serious mood, the rest of the dialogue amuses

us greatly. The verbal duel between Pegeen and Widow Quin is one of the comic highlights of the play. Widow Quin slanders Pegeen by saying that the latter goes “helter-skeltering” after any man who winks at her on a road, and Pegeen accuses the widow of having reared a ram at her own breast. Then there are the satirical remarks Pegeen makes to Shawn. Widow Quin, speaking to Christy, says that Pegeen is a girl “itching and scratching” and one who stinks of stale whisky. These are examples of conscious wit and humour, but we are also greatly amused by the unconscious humour of many of the speeches of Michael, Old Mahon, Philly, and Jimmy. Michael’s way of describing the wretched life of a man who has never married is very funny. Old Mahon’s use of words and phrases to describe Christy’s shyness and his incapacity to drink or to smoke is highly entertaining, while Philly and Jimmy amuse us by their talk about the exhibition of skulls in the museum in Dublin.

### **Conclusion**

It would be most inappropriate to call this play a tragedy when it has such a rich comic fare to offer to the reader. A tragedy depicts suffering, pain, anguish of an exceptional kind; and a play does not become a tragedy because of a few serious moments or because of one single speech by the heroine lamenting her fate. If we want to form an idea of what a tragedy is, we should read *Riders to the Sea*; and if we want to enjoy a comedy, we should turn to *The Playboy*.

### **10.2.2 Development Christy’s Character**

Christy is the central character in the play, and the theme of this play is the development that takes place in his character. There is a vast difference between the Christy whom we meet at the beginning and the Christy as we find him at the end of the play. There is, indeed, a transformation in his character during the brief period of about twenty-four hours that he spends in a shebeen near the sea-coast of Mayo. The Christy who leaves this shebeen at the end of his brief stay is an altogether different Christy from the one who had arrived there. Whether this rapid but sure change is psychologically convincing or not is a matter of opinion.

#### **A Poor Image of Christy at the Beginning**

When Christy first enters the shebeen he is “very tired, frightened, and dirty”; and he speaks in “a small voice.” When Michael asks him to come and sit near the fire because he is looking “famished with the cold,” he walks to the fire-place sighing and moaning, Then he sits down and begins gnawing a turnip, and is too miserable to feel the others staring at him with curiosity. Even before that, he had been heard by Shawn “groaning wicked like a maddening dog” in the ditch up on the hill. Thus we get a very poor image of Christy in the beginning of the play.

#### **A Very Favourable Reaction to Christy’s Confession of a Murder**

Then, as a result of the interrogation to which he is subjected by Michael and his friends, Christy reveals that he had killed his father. The reaction of Michael and the others,

including Pegeen, to this confession surprises us greatly as it must have surprised Christy also. 'Philly's comment is that Christy is a daring fellow. Jimmy's reaction is expressed in the following words: "Oh, glory be to God!" Philly then says that Christy is not a common week-day kind of murderer and that even the police must be afraid of a man like him. Pegeen remarks that Christy is "a lad with the sense of Solomon". Jimmy says that the lad who has killed his father must be so brave as to face even a foxy devil from hell. Pegeen says that if she had this lad by her side in the house she would no longer feel afraid of cut-throats like the tinkers and the soldiers who sometimes visit this region. The result of all this praise which is bestowed upon Christy is that Michael, accepting the suggestion made by Pegeen and Jimmy, hires Christy as a pot-boy in the shebeen, assuring him that in this place he would be perfectly safe from arrest by the police. Jimmy is quite happy that Christy has been employed as a pot-boy and says that with Christy staying in the shebeen during the night, Pegeen would be perfectly safe against all danger because she will be looked after by a man who had killed his father. The manner in which all those present in the shebeen (with the only exception of Shawn Keogh) have received Christy's confession of his crime must have given to Christy a lot of encouragement and must have completely driven out of his mind any sense of guilt that he might have been experiencing during the eleven days that he has been walking the roads. This encouragement greatly influences his mind and generates much self-confidence in him.

### **The Effect on Christy of the Praise Bestowed on Him**

Alone with Pegeen, Christy makes no secret of the kind of life he was living back in his native village and the kind of fellow he was thought to be there. The account which he gives, of himself to Pegeen confirms the poor image that we had formed of him at the beginning. As yet we do not see any perceptible change in him. He tells Pegeen that he had been "toiling, moiling, digging, dodging from the dawn till dusk," with no recreation or joy or sport except, getting an occasional opportunity to poach rabbits or fish. He also tells her that he used to be very badly treated by his tyrannical father and that he had no peace of mind in his house. Pegeen assures him that he will have peace in this place, that nobody will trouble him here, and that a fine lad like him should have his good share of the earth. The praise which he had received previously and Pegeen's words now produce their effect on him, as is clear from the reply which he makes to Pegeen's assurance of a good life for him. His reply is that it is surely time that he too had his share of the joys of this world because he is "a seemly fellow with great strength in him and great bravery too." This is the first sign that Christy gives of having been influenced by whatever has been said in praise of him and especially by a recognition of his murder of his father as a heroic action.

### **The Effect on Him of the Rivalry between Pegeen and Widow Quin**

The quarrel between Pegeen and Widow Quin over Christy immediately afterwards deepens the effect that has already been produced on Christy's mind by the flattering words he has heard from everybody and especially from Pegeen who had gone so far as to say that he seemed to have descended from aristocratic ancestors, that he had a quality name, that he

had a poetic temperament, that the girls in his village must have been paying considerable attentions to him, and that he must have been living like a king of Norway or some eastern king. Finding that he is the coveted object of desire of two women; Christy at the end of Act I congratulates himself and thanks God and the saints for the good luck that has befallen him, and he even feels that, if he had killed his father sooner, good fortune would have smiled on him long before: "Two fine women fighting for the likes of me—till I'm thinking this night wasn't I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by." By the end of Act I, then, a change has already come over Christy, and he has acquired a high degree of self-esteem and self-confidence. This is the first important step in Christy's development.

### **The Effect of the Attentions Paid to Him by the Village Girls**

Next morning Christy is in a jubilant mood because of the good luck that has befallen him. He feels that he has got an excellent job in the shebeen, with very little work to do. He now even begins to think that he is handsome. He feels that the mirror in his own home in his native village was "the devil's own mirror" because it did not show him to be as handsome as he really is and as he finds himself in the mirror hanging upon the wall of this shebeen. This new feeling of self-importance is strengthened by the village girls who have come in a group to see the man "who did destroy his da." These girls have brought presents for him—duck's eggs, butter, cake, and a boiled hen. Widow Quin also arrives at this moment and announces that she has put down Christy's name in the list of those who will compete in the village games which are to be held on this very day. Sara receives this information with great enthusiasm and says that she is absolutely certain that Christy "will lick the world" (that is, will defeat every other competitor). Widow Quin then asks the girls to give Christy a good, nourishing breakfast, and invites Christy to tell her and the girls the story of how he had killed his father. Christy feels elated by the attentions that he is receiving and begins his account of the quarrel with his father. Now we find another change in Christy. He becomes quite eloquent as he gives his account of the incident, and he goes into details. He tells his listeners why he had quarrelled with his father, what his father had said to him, and what he had said to his father in reply. He tells them that his father had raised his scythe to attack him but that he had saved himself with a leap to the east. He had then turned around with his back to the north and hit a blow on the ridge of his father's skull, and in this way "split his father to the knob of his gullet." The girls are much impressed by the story and together they say "Well, you are a marvel ! Oh, God bless you I You're the lad surely!" Thus Christy becomes the object of high praise by the girls, one of whom now proposes a toast to the health of Widow Quin and Christy who, she says, would be a suitable second husband for the widow. The merry party at this point is interrupted by the arrival of Pegeen who drives away the girls. But another step forward in the evolution of Christy's mind and personality has already been taken. He has become a hero not only in the eyes of others in this village but in his own eyes also.

### **Christy's Newly-developed Ego, and a Brief Set-back to It**

When the girls have gone, Christy starts telling his story to Pegeen but she stops him saying that he has already told her the story six times since the dawn of this day. To this remark Christy says that it is a queer thing that she does not want to hear his story once again when those girls had come walking four miles in order to listen to it. Now we find Christy feeling very self-important indeed. He was a nobody when he first came, but already his ego has come to the surface. However, Pegeen quickly pricks the bubble of his vanity, and deflates his ego by telling him (falsely, of course) that she has read a news-item in a local news paper which shows that there is every possibility of Christy's being arrested by the police for the murder of his father. Feeling scared, because his original timidity has not yet completely left him, Christy begins to speak in a sentimental and pathetic manner. He says that he must leave this place in order to save himself from the police and that he must prepare himself to face the hardships of a wandering and lonely life. His new-found command of the language enables him to compare his future wandering life to that of Esau and Cain. However, he heaves a sigh of relief when Pegeen tells him that there is no need for him to leave because there is no danger of his being arrested. He then quickly returns to the mood of self-confidence and self-esteem with which he had been talking before Pegeen had entered and interrupted the fun he was having with the village girls and with Widow Quin.

### **Another Step Forward in Christy's Development**

Now Shawn comes to see Christy. Widow Quin too comes with Shawn. Christy is at this time feeling more self-confident than ever before, and this self-confidence enables him to reject Shawn's proposal in a scornful manner and without the least hesitation. Christy asks him aggressively whether Shawn wants to bribe him in order to drive him away from this place. When, at a sign from Widow Quin, Shawn has left, Widow Quin tries to engage Christy in an intimate conversation with herself but Christy says in a boastful manner that he wants to go out of doors in order to look for Pegeen. Widow Quin tells him that he should not bother about Pegeen at this time and that she herself would be a very good companion for him. Christy, however, replies that he is not short of company any more because the village girls had come to him with food, while Shawn had come to him with clothing. And now, tightening his belt in a proud manner, he says that he is "a gallant orphan who had cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt." This time Christy has further magnified his heroic action by claiming that he had split his father's body with one blow from the head to the waist. This is yet another step forward in the development of Christy's character and personality.

### **His Father's Arrival and Another Blow to Christy's Ego**

This mood of exhilaration, however, lasts only a moment because just then he catches sight of his father coming towards the shebeen. Christy's ego is once again deflated on seeing his father very much alive. He now seeks Widow Quin's help. Widow Quin, however, tries to win him as a lover and husband for herself and, failing in this object, agrees to help him on certain terms.

### **Christy at the Peak or His Career**



At the beginning of Act III we find that Christy has emerged as the best sportsman at the village games. Evidently, his latent faculties have come to the surface as a result of the heroic image which has been built up in the minds of the local people. He even goes on to win the mule race and in this way becomes “the champion of the world,” in Widow Quin’s words. As Old Mahon is being kept away from Christy by Widow Quin’s tricks, Christy’s spirits at this time are high. He receives high praise from the crowd of spectators who offer him the prizes he has won. Alone with Pegeen, Christy tells her that he will win the crowning prize only if she promises to marry him within a fortnight. Pegeen was already full of great admiration for him, and his victory at the games has further enhanced his image in her eyes. Christy now speaks in a language which is charged with intense emotion. He becomes a real poet when he speaks to Pegeen in this love-scene. His manner of talking is ardent and passionate, and he compares her to Lady Helen of Troy. He speaks of “squeezing kisses on her puckered lips.” He speaks of their wandering together, drinking water from a well, and “making mighty kisses with their wetted mouths”. He tells her that he would like to worship even the straws of her cottage and every stone that lies on the path to her door. At this moment Christy is at the peak of his career. Pegeen promises to marry him without any delay because her wedding gowns have already been bought. Christy has given evidence of the great qualities which lay dormant and hidden in him and which have come to the surface as a result of a favourable and fostering environment. His potentialities have taken full shape, and he has achieved the full maturity and ripeness of his latent powers and faculties.

### **The Shattering of Christy’s Image As a Hero**

Then comes another set-back to Christy’s sense of his own importance. His father, who had twice been sent away by Widow Quin, comes back once more to the shebeen, and seeing Christy, rushes at the young fellow and begins to beat him. At first Christy receives the beating passively. But, when Pegeen, finding his father to be alive, becomes furious with Christy; calling him a liar and asking him to quit this place, and when Christy is much harassed by the taunts and mocking remarks of the crowd, Christy feels enraged with his father and, picking up a spade, gives him another blow which seems to kill the old man. The reaction of the crowd, and of Pegeen too, to this second murder is bitterly hostile. Everybody now treats him as a dangerous criminal. Christy finds that, instead of admiring him for his having chased his father out of the shebeen and having killed him, the crowd (including Pegeen and her father) have turned antagonistic to him. Pegeen, Michael, and some others then manage to bind Christy with a rope in order to hand him over to the police for the murder of his father. Christy finds himself in a strange predicament, especially when Pegeen goes so far as to scorch his leg.

### **Christy Triumphant at the End**

But Christy’s degradation and humiliation come to an end when his father re-appears yet again. Christy’s second blow to his father had also failed to kill him; it had only stunned him. The old man unties the knots of the rope and releases his son. Michael and others have

now no right to hold Christy as a prisoner because no murder has taken place, and Christy once again dominates the scene. Christy agrees to go back with his father to his native village but on condition that his father will now be content with a subordinate position and that he himself will rule at home. Christy's self-confidence at this time is at its height and he truly regards himself as a hero. In his final speech Christy declares that he has become a hero ("a likely gaffer") because the people of Mayo had glorified him, and that his life, henceforth, would now be a series of glorious adventures: "I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime." Christy has now no need even for Pegeen who had proved faithless to him and, when he has gone, Pegeen bursts into a lament at having lost "the only Playboy of the Western World." Christy had come to this place as a weakling but has left as a hero with his latent powers fully revealed and developed.

### **10.2.3 The Language Of The Play**

#### **Synge's View about the Language of Drama**

In the Preface Synge tells us that in writing the play he has used only one or two words which he had not actually heard among the country people of Ireland or spoken in his own nursery when he was a child. A certain number or phrases employed by him had been heard also from herdsmen and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo or from beggar-women and ballad-singers near Dublin. Synge in the Preface acknowledges his debt to the folk-imagination of these people from whom he had heard much fanciful kind of talk. In Synge's opinion, the imagination of these people, and the language used by them in their day-to-day conversations, are rich and 'living, and it is therefore possible for a writer like him to be "rich and copious in his words," and at the same time "to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a varied and natural form". Synge goes on to say that writers like Ibsen and Zola have dealt with the reality of life "in joyless and pallid words". But, according to Synge, a dramatist must have reality and he must have joy. In a good play, says Synge, every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry.

#### **Synge's Use of the Actual Speech of the People**

Now any reader of the play would be greatly struck by the kind of language that Synge has employed. This language is obviously characterized by the qualities which Synge has mentioned in his Preface. The two most outstanding qualities of this language are (i) its realism and (ii) its poetic richness. As to realism, Synge himself says that he has not used any word or phrase which he had not actually heard from the people themselves. Indeed, some of the most memorable passages in this play were transferred without alteration from the notebooks of local idioms which he had compiled during his travels. For instance, Christy's picturesque description of his father in Act I as "naked as an ash-tree in the moon of May" contains a simile which Synge had heard in Kerry. In the writing of this play, Synge has given evidence of great skill in blending the dialects of different regions, and he has shown fine discrimination in selecting

idioms from his notebooks, using them with unfailing dramatic propriety and making them an organic part of an exquisitely sustained rhythm.

### **The Poetic Quality of Many Speeches**

As to the poetic richness of the dialogue in this play, we find an abundance of speeches which are highly imaginative, or which are charged with intense emotion, or which employ bold and original metaphors, or which show a skilful use of alliteration or onomatopoeia, or which employ the kind of rhythm which we expect in verse only, or which combine several of these qualities. The poetic quality of some of the speeches lends to them an irresistible appeal.

### **The Wide Range of the Speeches**

Thus the language employed by Synge in this play shows a wide range. We have prosaic but highly realistic and vivid speeches which merely supply information or advance the action; and we have highly poetic speeches which express the speakers' intense emotion and which arouse a corresponding emotion in us as well. Between these two extremes we have several variations. However, it must be pointed out that even the poetic speeches are not divorced from reality; these poetic speeches are not merely fanciful or fantastic; even they are rooted in reality.

### **The Colloquial Quality of Shawn's Speeches**

The spoken language of the region where the action of the play takes place is well exemplified by almost all the characters, but only a few illustrations will serve our purpose. When Shawn is trying to break away from Michael's hold because he wants to get away from the shebeen, he says: "Don't stop me, Michael James. Let me out of the door, I'm saying, for the love of the Almighty God. Let me out. Let me out of it, and may God grant you His indulgence in the hour of need." Later, when it seems to Shawn that Christy will not leave the village but stay on to marry Pegeen, he says to Widow Quin: "He'll not leave us Widow Quin. He's a score of devils in him the way it's well-nigh certain he will wed Pegeen." Still later, when Pegeen has bluntly refused to marry Shawn, he says to her: "And have you no mind of my weight of passion, and the holy dispensation, and the drift of heifers I'm giving, and the golden ring?" Now, all these three and several other speeches by Shawn possess a colloquial ring and represent the ordinary, everyday language of the people of Mayo.

### **The Colloquial Speeches of Michael and His Friends**

Michael James and his companions, Philly and Jimmy, mostly speak in the same colloquial and realistic manner. This is clear first from the way in which the three men interrogate Christy when Christy has just arrived at the shebeen. Each of the three questioners speaks in the ordinary, everyday manner of people holding a conversation. Later, Philly and Jimmy on returning from the wake to the shebeen (at the beginning of Act III) again speak to each other in the same ordinary and realistic manner. Philly, for instance, complains that Pegeen is the devil's own daughter for having locked all the cupboards, "and she so fussy after that young

gaffer.” And Jimmy replies that it is “little wonder she’d be fussy, and he after bringing bankrupt ruin on the roulette man,” etc., etc. When afterwards Michael returns from the wake, he shakes Christy by the hand and says to him: “The blessing of God and the holy angels on your head, young fellow. I hear tell you’re after winning all in the sports below,” etc.

### **Old Mahon’s Realistic and Vivid Speeches**

Old Mahon also provides many examples of the colloquial manner of speaking. He uses many vivid phrases in order to express himself, but we never have the feeling that he is going out of his way in using them. These phrases come to him naturally, because that is the kind of language he has always used. For instance, he says to Widow Quin about Christy: “I want to destroy him for breaking the head on me with the clout of a loy.” He describes Christy to her in the following manner: “And he a liar on walls, a talker of folly, a man you’d see stretched the half of the day in the brown ferns with his belly to the sun.” Old Mahon then goes on in the same realistic but vivid manner to describe his son’s clumsiness at work, his tendency to hide himself from girls because of his shyness and timidity, his incapacity to drink or to smoke a pipe, and his having been “the laughing joke of every female woman, the way the girls would stop their weeding if they seen him coming the road to let a roar at him, and called him the looney of Mahon’s.”

### **Widow Quin’s Natural, Spontaneous Manner of Speaking**

Likewise, Widow Quin speaks most vividly and effectively, but without in any way departing from the ordinary, everyday use of the spoken language. Her soliloquy at the end of Act II would serve as a convincing example: “Well, if the worst comes in the end of all, it’d be great game to see there’s none to pity him (Christy) but a widow woman, the like of me, has buried her children and destroyed her man.” This speech produces a comic effect, but she has made no effort to produce that effect. She has spoken in her natural, spontaneous manner. The conversation of the village girls among themselves and with Widow Quin is yet another example of the same kind of thing.

### **Realistic Speeches by Christy and Pegeen**

In the beginning even the two central characters, Pegeen and Christy, speak in the ordinary, matter-of-fact, colloquial manner. They too employ vivid and striking phraseology, but the realistic quality of the language remains paramount. Christy’s monologue at the beginning of Act II is a very good example of this. As for Pegeen, her conversation with Shawn at the very outset of the play is a striking example, especially the two speeches in which she first mentions the kind of wretched fellows who live in this village and then goes on to describe the wonderful fellows, who had lived here previously.

### **Poetic Speeches by Pegeen and Christy**

Then we turn to speeches which are highly poetic. Both Pegeen and Christy give evidence of their imaginative natures early in the play. Pegeen, soon after she has met Christy,

allows her imagination to weave visions of Christy's aristocratic descent. He has a "quality name," she says, "the like of what you'd find on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain." She then tells him that he has the temperament of a poet: "And I've heard all times it's the poets are your like—fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused." Her imagination really takes wing when she tells him that he must have lived like a king of Norway or an eastern monarch. But it is in the famous love-scene in Act III that we find both Christy and Pegeen talking in a highly poetic manner. Christy speaks of his two hands stretched around her, and he "squeezing kisses on her puckered lips," till he'd "feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden chair." Pegeen tells him that any girl "would walk her heart out" before she'd meet a young man of his eloquence. He then speaks of roaming about on the plains of Erris in her company, their drinking a little water from a well and "making mighty kisses with their wetted mouths", or their "gaming in a gap of sunshine". He goes on to compare her with Helen of Troy holding a bunch of flowers in her golden shawl. Pegeen is so carried away by her emotion that she tells him that she would be burning candles to celebrate the divine miracle which has brought him to her, and she goes on to say: "There won't be our like in Mayo, for gallant lovers, from this hour today."

### **Christy's Other Speeches with a Poetic Quality**

It is not only in the love-scene that Christy speaks in a poetic manner. Once he has been recognized as a hero, all his speeches are found to be eloquent and grandiloquent. The manner in which he describes to the village girls his quarrel with his father and the murder that he had committed is a big improvement upon the account of the quarrel he had given to Pegeen in Act I. His description to the village girls has become more elaborate, and he has added certain details which his imagination seems to have invented. In fact, every speech by Christy in Acts II and III shows an imaginative quality which his speeches in Act I did not have to the same extent.

## **10.2.4 The Title Of The Play**

### **Two Parts of the Title**

There are two parts of the title, *The Playboy of the Western World*. The first part is The Playboy, and the second part is the Western World. Both these phrases need an explanation, because they do not mean what we would normally expect them to convey. Both phrases have been used in a peculiar sense.

### **The Meaning of "the Western World"**

We may first consider the phrase "the Western World." Normally we understand this phrase to mean the countries of the west as distinguished from the countries of the east. The countries of the west include Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, the U.S.A. (and several other countries). The countries of the east include Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, India, Burma, Japan, etc. In the title of this play, however, the phrase "the Western World" has been

used to mean Western Ireland only. In the course of the play, of course, at one point “the Western World” refers also to the United States of America, but otherwise the phrase has been used in a narrow sense to distinguish it from the Eastern regions of Ireland.

### **The Geographical Location and Extent of “the Western World”**

As a critic informs us, the scene of the play has been placed in north-west Mayo, within sight of the sea-shore, and of the dominant mountain, Nephin. This place is not situated far from the towns of Belmullet and Castlebar. “The Western World” is the land lying westward of the river Shannon. This land is proverbial for its wildness and poverty. It is isolated from the civilized East and South, and also isolated from the stern virtues of “the black North”. Perhaps there are connotations of the Holy Islands, the Country of the Sunset, St. Brandon. Yet it may be regarded as a “world”. It is a world representing a mixture of the fantastic, romantic, brutal and sentimental. In the play Synge’s own dual attitude is fully apparent. Synge was once asked whether he wrote his plays out of love or hatred for Ireland, and his reply was that he had often asked himself that question, meaning thereby that he had not been able to decide whether he loved or hated Ireland. The fact is that Synge’s satiric view is constantly directed towards certain aspects of the peculiar blend of paganism and Roman Catholicism that he saw in the Western World. The local priest of the village where the scene of the play is set does not actually appear before us. The priest, father Reilly, hovers in the background as the guardian of peasant morality and as the supporter of the cowardly and feeble Shawn; his comments on each situation are yet those of the ordinary moral man. Against settled and dull convention and a religion which can be made to appear superficial, there are set Synge’s tinkers, tramps, and publicans, in their actual or potential vitality.

### **An Ironic Use of the Word “Playboy” by Widow Quin: Actor or Impostor**

We then come to the phrase “The Playboy” which has been used in the course of the play in various ways. The word “Playboy” is first used by Widow Quin in Act II when Christy, who is about to leave the shebeen to look for Pegeen, suddenly sees his father coming towards the shebeen and staggers back, exclaiming: “Saints of glory ! Holy angels from the throne of light !” Widow Quin thereupon asks him what ails him. Now Christy has all along been under the impression that his blow had killed his father; and that was the reason why he had fled from the potato-field (in order to escape arrest by the police). Now he finds that his father is still alive, and so, in reply to Widow Quin’s question, he says: “It’s the walking spirit of my murdered da !” As Christy would by no means like to meet his father, he quickly hides himself behind the door, leaving Widow Quin to deal with his father. Widow Quin then enters into a conversation with Old Mahon who informs her that he is looking for a young lad who had broken his head “with the clout of a loy” and whom therefore he would like to “destroy.” Old Mahon explains that it was his own son who had hit him, and he describes his son as “a dirty, stuttering lout.” Old Mahon, promptly rejects Widow Quin’s conjecture that he must have been “tormenting” his son and must have provoked him by his ill-treatment to attack him. Old Mahon then describes his son as “a liar on walls,” a “talker of folly,” an idler who could never do any farm-

work properly, and who was so shy that whenever he saw a girl coming towards him over the hill he ran away and hid himself behind the shrubs, a poor fellow who did not have any capacity either to drink or to smoke, the laughing-stock of the women who used to call him “the looney of Mahon’s” and used to roar with laughter on seeing him. That is not all. Old Mahon also refers to his son as an “ugly young blackguard”. Now this description of Christy by Old Mahon is totally at variance with the impression that he has created about himself on Michael, Pegeen, Philly and Jimmy, Widow Quin, and the village girls. All these people have been thinking him to be a brave and courageous fellow who had the strength and the guts to have killed his father with a single blow of the spade. This was the impression that he had created on Pegeen and others in the evening when he had first arrived at the shebeen. The reaction of those present to his confession of his crime had been also immediate and most favourable. Pegeen had especially felt drawn towards this fellow and, a little later, Widow Quin had come to the shebeen in order to take him away to her own house, though Pegeen had successfully resisted the widow’s effort. Next morning, Christy is lionized by the village girls who have brought presents for him and who, on listening to the story of how he had killed his father, say to him: “Well, you’re a marvel! Oh, God bless you! You’re the lad surely!” A little later Old Mahon arrives on the scene and, as we have noted above, speaks most contemptuously about his son to Widow Quin. Widow Quin is considerably amused by the old man’s description of Christy and, when she has sent away the old man, she turns to Christy, and says: “Well, you’re the walking Playboy of the Western World, and that’s the poor man you had divided to his breeches belt.” This remark by Widow Quin is sarcastic. The poor man who had been “divided to his breeches belt” is still alive, and very much so because he is searching for Christy in order to punish him. And Christy has turned out to be a “walking Playboy.” The word “Playboy” is used here in the sense of one who plays a role or acts a part. Widow Quin means that Christy had committed no murder at all and was not therefore entitled to any praise for his supposed bravery. Christy has only been pretending to be a murderer, and he has been putting up this pretence just to win tributes from people and also to win the hearts of women. Thus Widow Quin uses the word “Playboy” here in an ironical and mocking tone to emphasize the disparity between Christy’s pose as a murderer and the actuality (the actuality being that he has committed no murder).

### **The Playboy in the Sense of a Champion at Games**

Then the word “Playboy” is used in Act III, this time again by Widow Quin, but with a different connotation. This time the word is used in the context of Christy’s triumph in the village games. Christy has won ‘a lot of money at the chance-games at the village fair, and he has also won the top position in all the sports such as racing, leaping, and jumping. The crowd is heard cheering the winner and Old Mahon, on hearing the crowd roaring, asks Widow Quin what this noise is about. Widow Quin replies (“with the shade of a smile”) that the crowd is cheering a young lad, “the champion Playboy of the Western World.” This time the word “Playboy” has been used in the sense of one who can play games and win in the context of

athletic contests. In a literal sense, therefore, the use of the word *Playboy* here to mean a sportsman is perfectly appropriate, but *Widow Quin* is somewhat ironical this time also, because she is aware of the reality of *Christy*. *Old Mahon* has just told her that his son was a dunce who never reached his second book at school. He has also told her that back in his native village both the old and the young used to make fun of *Christy*, and used to swear, rage, and kick at him as if he were “a mangy cur”. Therefore, when *Widow Quin* uses the word “*Playboy*” for *Christy* now, she really means that *Christy* is a sportsman but at the same time she smiles to think of the true background of *Christy* and the opinion which *Christy’s* father has expressed about the young fellow.

### **The Dramatic Purpose Served by the Use of the Word “Playboy”**

The use of the word “*Playboy*” by *Widow Quin* on this second occasion serves a certain dramatic purpose also. *Widow Quin* wants to keep *Old Mahon* away from *Christy* because she has promised to help *Christy* against his father. When *Widow Quin* refers to *Christy* as a “champion *Playboy* of the Western World,” she uses a very big and impressive epithet for *Christy* so that *Old Mahon* should not think *Christy* to be his son. *Widow Quin* uses this epithet to put *Old Mahon* off the track and, when a moment later *Christy* wins the mule race also and *Old Mahon* has recognized his son, *Widow Quin* insists that the champion in the games is not his son. She is able to convince the old man by saying that his son, whom he has himself described as a dunce, could not have emerged as a winner in the games. In this way she is once again able to send *Old Mahon* away from the shebeen.

### **A Sarcastic Use of the Word “Playboy” by the Crowd**

On the third occasion, the word “*Playboy*” is used for *Christy* by the crowd of people towards the close of Act III when *Old Mahon* comes back once again and, having recognized *Christy* beyond any doubt, rushes at him and begins to beat him. The fact of *Christy’s* father being still alive now becomes known to *Pegeen* and to everybody else, with the result that *Pegeen* turns hostile to him for having told the lie that he had killed his father; and the crowd begins to mock and jeer at *Christy* because *Christy’s* father is beating *Christy* as if *Christy* were a schoolboy. The crowd says in a mocking tone:

“There’s the *Playboy*! here’s the lad thought he’d rule the roost in Mayo! Slate him now, Mister.” Here the word “*Playboy*” is used in a double sense: it means one who proved a champion in the games; and it also means one who has been acting a part by having pretended that he had killed his father. The crowd makes fun of *Christy* for having dreamed of becoming the leading personality in Mayo. And the crowd calls upon *Old Mahon* to punish the young fellow for the deception he has practised upon them and upon *Pegeen*. The crowd had already said to *Christy* only a moment before: “You’re fooling *Pegeen* !You’re a liar !”

### **Christy Truly a Playboy at the End**

Finally, the word “*Playboy*” is used by *Pegeen* in her last speech at the end of the play



when she bursts into a lament at Christy's departure and says: "Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World." Now, at last, the word "Playboy" has been used without any irony and without any mockery. Now this word has been 'used in a laudatory sense. Now the use of the word "Playboy" is a tribute to Christy, both because he proved to be a champion at the games and because he showed himself to be a great lover (to Pegeen). The word "Play" also means "to flirt with a girl" or "to court a girl", or "to make love to a girl." Christy has shown his aptitude for this kind of play also. Earlier in the same Act, after he had been declared the champion winner at the games, he told Pegeen that he needed his crowning prize which was a promise from her that she would marry him within a fortnight. He then painted a glorious picture of their future together as lovers. He spoke to her of his "squeezing kisses on her puckered lips." He told her that they would roam about on the plains, drinking water from a well, and "making mighty kisses with their wetted mouths." He compared her to Lady Helen of Troy. He told her that he loved her so ardently that he wanted to worship the very straws of her cottage and the very stones lying on the path to her door. Pegeen had greatly been moved by this kind of poetic and passionate love-making, and had responded fully to him by saying that from that moment onwards there would be no such "gallant lovers" in Mayo as he and she. Pegeen has all that in mind when now at the end she says that she has lost "the only Playboy" in most senses of the word—a man who could emerge as a champion at the games, a man who could play successfully with language, a man who could excel in the play of love-making, (apart from being a man who had been regarded as one who could play a role or act the part of a murderer). At the end, then, the man and the pose have become identical. Now at last the word is spoken without irony. Christy has won the right to the use of this word for him.

### **The Appropriateness of the Title**

Apart from the fact that the phrase "the Western World" is somewhat misleading, the title is quite appropriate. Christy is the central character in the play around whom the whole action of the drama revolves; he is the focus of all eyes in the story and the focus of our eyes too. And he has shown himself to be a "Playboy" in all senses of the word. Synge thus chose a title which is justified.

## **10.2.5 Christy As The Mock-hero Or Christ-like Figure**

### **Two Different Interpretations of Christy's Character Possible**

In the opinion of some critics, Christy begins as a weakling but develops into a hero during his brief stay in Mayo. If we accept this view, we can affirm, that the play offers to us essentially the vision of a man constructing himself before our eyes. According to this approach, Christy develops not merely into a likely man but into a poet-hero, "the only Playboy of the Western World." In other words, we can see Christy as the undeveloped poet coming to consciousness of himself as man and as artist. But there is another way of looking at Christy also. According to this other approach, Christy is depicted as a mock-hero when he arrives at

the shebeen in Mayo, where he is received in a friendly and admiring manner, and that he continues to be a mock-hero till the very end. There is much in the play to support each of these two view-points. But it seems that there is much greater weight in the first view than in the second.

### **Christy, a Ridiculous Person at the Beginning**

In the beginning, Christy appears to us as a very poor creature indeed. When he first enters the shebeen he is “very tired, frightened, and dirty”; and he speaks in a “small voice.” To Michael he looks “famished with the cold.” We then find him walking to the fire-place, sighing and moaning. Then he sits down and begins gnawing a turnip in a miserable manner. Thus Christy is made to look ridiculous.

### **An Unexpected Reaction to Christy’s Crime**

When Christy has revealed to Michael and the others present in the shebeen the nature of his crime, the reaction of his listeners is unexpectedly favourable. All of them, with the sole exception of Shawn, look upon him as a very brave man for having murdered his father with a single blow of the spade. Jimmy, for instance, says that the lad who has killed his father must be so brave as to face even a foxy devil from hell. Pegeen says that if she had this lad by her side in the house she would no longer feel afraid of cut-throats like the tinkers and the khaki-clad soldiers. But as we read these comments by Pegeen and the others, we feel greatly amused to think that a fellow who has killed his father (and that too by a mere accident) is being regarded as a brave man.

### **The Praise Showered upon Christy, Very Amusing to Us**

We then feel even more amused when we find Pegeen admiring Christy for his small feet, his quality name, his poetic temperament, and his having lived like a king of Norway or like some eastern king. The account which Christy himself gives to Pegeen of his past life in his native village confirms the poor impression of him which we form at the beginning. He tells her that he was very badly treated by his, tyrannical father and that he never had any peace of mind in his house. Thus the praise which he has received from Jimmy, Philly, and especially from Pegeen seems to us to be absolutely misplaced, and we wonder at the fantastic manner in which Pegeen, more than anybody else, has talked to him and about him. When Widow Quin comes, there is a regular verbal duel between the two women over Christy, and Christy begins to think himself truly lucky because each of the two women wants him for herself. But we merely smile with amusement.

### **Christy’s Ego, Pricked by His Father’s Arrival**

Then the village girls come and lionize him because he had murdered his father and has narrated the story of the murder in a “lovely” manner. Soon afterwards, however, the bubble of Christy’s newly-acquired ego is pricked when he finds his father coming towards the shebeen. The father had not died of the blow, after all. Christy feels dismayed at the sight of his

father and hides himself at once behind the door.

### **Christy, an Absurd Fellow According to His Father**

It is really funny to see Christy hiding fearfully behind the door, while Widow Quin has to deal with Old Mahon. The description which Old Mahon now gives to Widow Quin of his son confirms the poor image that we had originally formed about him and also confirms us in the view that everybody in the shebeen has been completely deceived about Christy. When, at Widow Quin's suggestion, Old Mahon goes away, she turns to Christy and mockingly says that he is "the walking Playboy of the Western World." He is an impostor because he never murdered his father, and we too look upon him in that light.

### **A Braggart, Humiliated and Degraded**

However, Christy goes on to win the games and be received by the Mayoites as a great champion. Alone with Pegeen, he speaks to her in highly poetic language and obtains a promise from her that she would marry him within a fortnight. But now his father comes back and, seeing Christy, rushes at the young fellow and begins to beat him. Pegeen, discovering Christy's lie, turns hostile to him and so does the crowd of people. In his desperation, Christy "kills" his father a second time, thinking that he can, by this deed, regain the admiration of Pegeen and the people in general. But now he is treated by everybody as a dangerous criminal; he is tied up with a rope by Pegeen and others in order to be handed over to the police. It is funny, indeed, that the so-called hero now finds himself humiliated and degraded by everybody. At last he is rescued by his father who had not died of Christy's blow this time also and who appears on the scene once again. Christy's final speech is an example of a braggart making an empty claim that he has become a "likely gaffer" in the end. Thus Christy continues till the very time of his departure to be a preposterous fellow who had been irrationally regarded by Pegeen and others as a hero but who has finally been exposed as a kind of clown who is capable of becoming dangerous if he lays his hands upon a spade. But even the two blows which he had given to his father have proved totally ineffective.

### **The Other Approach: the Development of Christy into a Real Hero**

This, as we have already said, is one way of looking at Christy. But in regarding Christy as a mock-hero till the very end we would be making a mistake. In the beginning he is certainly timid, cowardly, and almost insignificant. Of this there is no doubt at all because such is the impression we get about him both from his own account and afterwards from his father's account. But once he hears words of encouragement and praise from Michael, Jimmy, Philly and, above all, Pegeen, he begins to gain self-confidence and acquire courage. The change which begins to take place in him is real. At the end of Act I, he discovers that he is the object of desire of two fine women, and he begins to feel proud of himself. At the beginning of Act II, we find him in a mood of exhilaration, especially because the mirror here shows him to be more handsome than the mirror back at home which presented a squint-eyed image of him. Christy is now a man with an ego, and this ego receives a big boost when the village girls come

to him with presents and when they admire him for his courage and strength in having killed his father. His newly-acquired self-confidence then enables him to emerge as a champion at the games even though he felt somewhat demoralized on finding his father to be still alive. In the memorable love-scene, he speaks to Pegeen in glowing words worthy of a true poet. Thus Christy has not only become a champion at the games and an object of admiration for the people of Mayo but also an ardent lover capable of expressing himself in highly imaginative language charged with intense emotion. There is no question of any mock—heroism here. He is a true hero—a winner in athletic contests, and a successful wooer. Moved by his eloquence and his obvious sincerity, Pegeen promises to marry him and soon afterwards rejects Shawn and firmly tells her father of her decision to marry Christy. The fact that Christy soon afterwards murders his father again is rather unfortunate and detracts from his heroic image. But he does so in a state of desperation and partly for the sake of self-preservation and partly in order to regain Pegeen's love. He thinks that no price is too high to pay for Pegeen. He is then shabbily treated by Pegeen and the crowd, but the fault is not so much of Christy himself as that of the people who have now turned against him precisely for the same reason for which they had originally admired and glorified him (that reason being his murder or his supposed murder of his father) At the end, after he has been released from the knots of the rope by his father, he speaks once again in a triumphant manner and there is no boast in his words. He tells his father that he will be the captain and the leader now, and the master of all fights. And he tells the crowd that he is thankful to them for having made him a "likely gaffer," and that he will now go "romancing through a romping lifetime." What he means is that his life will now be a series of delightful adventures. These are not empty words. The illusion has become a reality; the dream has become an actuality; the weakling has become a hero. He is now in a position even to ignore Pegeen who had proved faithless to him and whom now he regards as beneath his notice. The dormant qualities of Christy have come to the surface, and he will now dominate wherever he finds himself and in whatever situation he is placed.

### **By No Means a Christ-like Figure**

We must, however, guard against the mistake of going too far in our estimate of Christy as a hero. We must not glorify or deify him. He has become a hero no doubt, but he remains human with all the limitations of a human being. He is not to be regarded as a Christ-like figure because there is really nothing of Christ in him. One of the critics has expressed the view that Christy has been depicted by Synge as a Christ-like character. In the first place, the name "Christy" is almost identical with the name "Christ". Then Christy gains followers and admirers as Christ did. The village girls come with presents to Christy and in this way remind us of the three wise men of the east (known as "the Magi") who had gone with gifts to see Christ when he was born. A girl called Sara even suggests that there is something divine about Christy because he is not using his right hand to touch the gifts they have brought. She asks Christy: "Is your right hand too sacred for to use at all?" Then comes the betrayal. Christ was betrayed by one of his disciples, and he was crucified by the mob. Christy is betrayed by Pegeen and is persecuted by her and by all the others. He is tied up with a rope, and Pegeen goes so far as

to scorch his leg with a burning piece of turf. It is on account of such similarities that Christy has been imagined to be a Christ-like figure. But we cannot attach any importance to these seeming similarities. The story of Christy is narrated in a light-hearted manner, with a lot of humour, wit, and irony. The story of Christ, on the other hand, is sombre, sacred, tragic, and also uplifting and ennobling. The story of Christy provides sheer fun and entertainment. Besides, it is also possible for us to treat the above-mentioned similarities as ironical. The gifts brought by the village girls, for instance, are ducks-eggs, butter, a slice of cake, and a hen. These presents are a parody of the gifts brought to Christ by the Magi. Sara is merely teasing Christy when she says that perhaps his right hand is too sacred for him to touch the gifts. In the same way, the persecution of Christy is a parody of the Crucifixion.

### **Christy, No Anti-Christ**

If Christy is no Christ and no Christ-like figure, nor is he an anti-Christ. The view that he is an anti-Christ has also received some support on the basis of some of the speeches in the play—Christy’s coming strikes fear into the hearts of the folk in the shebeen, especially Shawn, who had heard him “groaning wicked like a maddening dog”. Yet when they have learnt that he is a murderer, Pegeen is ready to take him as her defender for the night, and Philly and Jimmy support her argument. In this way they create of him a champion of discord and conflict. Killing his father is admired as an act of courage which qualifies him as a defender against the law. When Widow Quin first proposes him for the village games, Sara says that he will surely “lick the world”—not that he will save it, but “lick” it. Old Mahon particularly regards Christy as an anti-Christ and therefore says to him: “And isn’t it by the like of you the sins of the whole world are committed? Christy himself, in Act III, says to Shawn when the latter thinks that he will die of Christy’s bite: “You will then, the way you can shake out hell’s flags of welcome for my coming in two weeks or three, for I’m thinking Satan hasn’t many have killed their da in Kerry, and in Mayo too”. Christy’s using the word “devil” many times in the course of the play also supports this view of him as an anti-Christ. But it will be a distortion of the play to look at Christy as an anti-Christ. A man does not become an anti-Christ merely because in his angry moods he freely used such words as “devil” and hell. An anti-Christ shows his devilish character by his evil deeds, and Christy’s only evil deeds are the two “murders” of his father, the first of which was unintentional and the second an act of desperation when Christy found himself cornered by the mob and alienated from Pegeen. Besides, neither of the two “murders” actually takes place. We may therefore repeat at the end that the most appropriate approach to Christy’s character is to look at the play as depicting the evolution of Christy from a weakling to a hero.

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## **10.3 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this unit you have studied

- about the main characters in the play
- about the theme and title of the play

– about the various critical aspects of the play

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#### **10.4 Review Questions**

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1. Is the play a comedy or tragedy ?
2. Trace the development of the character of Christy
3. Comment on the language used in the play
4. Give your views on the title of the play.

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#### **10.5 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-11

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### JOHN OSBORNE : *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*

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#### Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 About the Author
- 11.3 About the Age
- 11.4 Introduction to the Play
  - 11.4.1 Detailed Explanation
  - 11.4.2 Critical Analysis
  - 11.4.3 Style and Setting
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Review Questions
- 11.7 Bibliography

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#### 11.0 Objectives

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After going through this Unit you will be able to understand-

- the structure and rhetoric; symbols and archetypes; tone, genre, texture and language of the play;
- the mood and temper of the youth of post-war England;
- the sociological and psychological significance of the play;
- the relevance of the play in the present-day world.

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#### 11.1 Introduction

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On 8 May 1956, at the Royal Court Theatre in London, an audience watched history being made. A play that introduced a brand new playwright, John Osborne, accomplished nothing short of miracle that transformed the English stage- drama found a new idiom, the theatre a new audience, and Osborne won a decisive battle for theatre over the new threat, the television, and established the social relevance and the artistic merit of English theatre at least for the next few decades. It opened the doors for the next few generations or two of playwrights, and began a new wave in theatre, a Second Renaissance of English drama. The

play had been quite simply sent by him through the post to the newly established English Stage Company, a group idealistically devoted to new theatrical writing, and was their first new British play to be produced. It received mixed reviews, but on the whole critical opinion was favourable. The reviewers were agreed on one point: that Osborne's was a distinctive new voice. Soon the hero of *Look Back in Anger* became a kind of folk-hero for a young generation puzzled by the Hungarian revolution, unhappy about Britain's last imperialist fling at Suez, and determined to protest against the hydrogen bomb and about all sorts of political and social questions. The play became the centre of a lot of solemn theorizing about "the angry young man" and his place in society. More important the success of the play ensured the survival of the enterprising company which had staged it (the English Stage Company), and kept the Royal Court Theatre (where it was staged) open as a platform for young writers with something new to say. Because of *Look Back in Anger* and some other plays, Osborne became widely known as an "angry young man." In fact the first night of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre on the 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1956 was regarded by many as a turning-point in the English theatre. And it is recognized by most that Osborne made profound impact on his own generation and that his own success made possible the production of work by other young dramatists. *Look Back in Anger* came into the hands of the English Stage Company through the post in response to an advertisement calling for new plays. Its author was a twenty six years old actor of no particular distinction. No play by him had previously been produced in London, and he had no literary reputation at all. The English Stage Company liked the play and decided to offer it to audience as their first by a new author. Work on *Look Back in Anger* began on 4 May 1955 and was finished within a month on 3 June. For about a decade after the acceptance of *Look Back in Anger* by George Devine of English Stage Company and its triumphant production, the story of Osborne was as much the story of his dramatic achievement and the development of English Drama, as of John Osborne, the private man and actor. *Look Back in Anger* shocked the audience by the novelty of its content, though its form did not break out of the confines of the conventional realistic well-made play.

Although the play received quite encouraging reviews on its opening, it did not immediately prove to be a hit. However, the play caused a sensation when one act of it was shown on television. The sample of the play seen by people on television aroused their interest, with the result that audiences at the theatre swelled in numbers. Thus television, which is generally feared as the rival of the theatre, in this case actually proved helpful to make the play popular. The reviewers too were by no means hostile. One of them, Kenneth Tynan, was actually enthusiastic. He wrote, on May 8, 1956, *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theatre as the third production of the newly formed English Stage Company.

Although the first production of the play was not initially financially successful, after an excerpt was shown on BBC the box office was overwhelmed. Osborne was publicized as the "Angry Young Man" and the success of *Look Back in Anger* opened the doors to other young writers who dealt with contemporary problems. When it first appeared on the London state in 1956, the play completely revolutionized British theatre. For the first time, a harsh,



brutal realism came to the fore. The characters felt and spoke like “real” people. A revival in English Drama was seen by some critics as beginning with *Look Back in Anger*.

The pre-war period had been dominated by upper class comedies and farces. *Look Back in Anger* featured a working class man as the protagonist, and it discussed working-class issues. The play examines the social distinctions at play at the time of its genesis, and spawned a number of playwrights all of whom became known as “angry young men,” a phrase that was first applied to Osborne. The title of this play has two parts, one emphasizes looking back and the other introduces the anger. The phrase ‘in anger’ establishes that the anger is an emotion felt in the present times and is reason for ‘looking back’. It is a play about an angry young man. Three of the other titles that Osborne considered for the play underscore this point—he debated between “*Farewell to Anger*”, “*Angry Man*”, and “*Man in a Rage*”. Most other reviewers saw the play as attempting to express the disillusionment and anger of a generation. The hero, or non-hero, of *Look Back in Anger* is a man called Jimmy Porter who is a product of that world.

Even though many critics saw a new genre, the kitchen-sink drama, developing in the English theatre with *Look Back in Anger* as the first. The angry young men were voicing the resentment of the youth of the post-atom-bomb world. The New Wave consisted of playwrights like Arnold Wesker, John Arden, Peter Shaffer, Shelagh Delaney, and Edward Bond, to name a few. Many of the New Wave playwrights had avowed political positions and intentions. The ‘Angry Young Men’ was the name given to writers like Osborne, Colin Wilson, John Wain, John Braine, Stan Barstow, Alan Sillitoe, Keith Waterhouse, and Kingsley Amis, all of whom were aged under thirty and were critical of convention, tradition, and the class system and expressed intense dissatisfaction with modern life and England. The same appellation of ‘Angry Young Man’ was also given to their male characters. They wrote, usually, about lower middle class or working class people. Incidentally, it was their part time press officer for the English Stage Company, George Fearon who invented the term ‘angry young man’ to publicize the play. The works of these writers represented a literature of protest, often articulated through provincial characters with a working class background. These characters were generally disturbed, anguished, angry, desperate and at times funny, pouring out invectives against the society, its codes and institutions in seething and vitriolic rhetoric. Jimmy Porter, to an extent, emerged out of this intellectual climate. John Osborne has responded more sensitively to his period. The invectives and tirades of Jimmy Porter embrace all the major contemporary issues. Thus Jimmy assails the ruling conservative party through his criticism of his brother-in-law, Nigel Redfern, the budding Tory politician. He condemns the Bomb repeatedly and he denounces the Bishops for supporting it. His attack on the Church extends further to one on Christianity, to Faith in general and to all kinds of superstitions that Mrs Redfern believes in. He fervidly strikes at the upper class and condemns the ethos of their hostage, Alison, particularly the smugness and the ideal of the stiff upper lip. On the other hand, the Imperial theme is embodied in the figure of Colonel Redfern and India is projected as an exotic land where he could forget about the changing British reality and continue clinging to Edwardian values.

Osborne subverts middle class values when he presents Miss Drury as a nosy parker and shows Jimmy and his friends as leading rather permissive lives. Jimmy's defiance of the conventional sexual code heralds the death of middle class morality. However, Osborne's play is not a social tract or political treatise. Jimmy simply responds to what is happening around him without working towards a practical solution. Carter said that it is not a play about anger, it is about feelings, about despair. Indeed it is not a play about any of these themes but essentially a dramatisation of the way in which the characters feel about these concerns. Osborne said, "I want to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards."

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## 11.2 About the Author

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The son of Thomas Godfrey Osborne, a commercial artist, and Nellie Beatrice, a barmaid, John James Osborne was born in December 12, 1929. in Fulham South West, London. Much of Osborne's childhood was spent in near poverty, and he suffered from frequent extended illnesses. He was deeply affected by his father's death from tuberculosis in 1941 and also remembered vividly the air-raids and general excitement of war. Osborne attended state schools until the age of twelve when he was awarded a scholarship to attend a minor private school, St. Michael's College, in Barnstaple, Devon. He was expelled at the age of sixteen after the headmaster slapped Osborne's face and Osborne hit him back. He left school in 1949, and that was the end of his education. Having got interested in the theatre, John Osborne tried his talent for acting, making his debut at the Empire Theatre in Sheffield in a play called *No Room at the Inn*. Soon he became an actor-cum-manager-cum-playwright. He first wrote two plays in collaboration with others-*The Devil Inside Him* in collaboration with Stella Linden, and *Personal Enemy* in collaboration with Anthony Creighton. It was with the play *Look Back in Anger* that Osborne made his reputation as a dramatist. He was twenty six when he wrote this play and submitted it to the English Stage Company which had newly been set up at the Royal Court Theatre and which decided to stage the play as its first by a new author. Osborne continued his career as an actor-cum-dramatist. The play he wrote during the ten years following the first production of *Look Back in Anger* included *The Entertainer*, *The World of Paul Slickey*, *Luther* and *Inadmissible Evidence*. Osborne has been the recipient of a number of awards and distinctions. He has also made his mark as a writer of film scripts, some of his own plays having been made into films too. With the publication of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, John Osborne came to be known as angry young man. This label was both his good fortune and misfortune. The play marked the beginning of the new drama and it became a talking point in a way that had no precedent. But the author's misfortune consisted in the fact that he could not afterwards grow out of the label or could not at least convince the public that he had done so. Osborne was just twenty six when *Look Back in Anger* was produced, and he was considered something of a juvenile prodigy. *Look Back in Anger* was a strongly autobiographical piece based on Osborne's unhappy marriage to Pamela Lane and their life in cramped accommodation in Derby. While Osborne aspired towards a career in theatre, Lane was of a more practical and materialistic persuasion. It also contains much of Osborne's

earlier life, the wrenching speech of seeing a loved one die is a replay of the death of Thomas, Osborne's father. What it is best remembered for though, is Jimmy's tirades against the mediocrity of middle-class English life, personified by his hated mother Nellie Beatrice. Madeline, the lost love Jimmy pines for, is based on Stella Linden, an older rep-company actress who first encouraged Osborne to write.

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### 11.3 About the Age

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With the Second World War ended an era in the history of Great Britain. The Labour Government that was voted to power in 1945 slowly but steadily dismantled the British Empire, and the Conservative Government that succeeded in 1951 could not discontinue, let alone reverse the process. The energy of the nation turned inwards as the Attlee cabinet began building up a welfare society which guaranteed health care, subsidized housing, social insurance, old age pensions and so on. The process was however difficult, and the continued shortages and rationing in the late 1940s disenchanted many and the euphoria generated by the new society started waning at the turn of the decade, culminating in a change of government and the setting in of apathy and cynicism. Other casualties of the new era were the Church of England, class distinctions and middle class morality. There was also some social leveling under the Labour dispensation and the disparity between the classes marginally diminished. Finally, as happened after the First World War, there was a liberalization of sexual mores, prudery decreased and sexuality became less of a taboo. In literature, the new generation produced the 'Angry Young Man'.

The play reflects the contemporary times in England and attempts to determine as to what led to this anger. It is a play about the state of England in the mid-nineteen fifties- a play that became emblematic of the angry generation. A play that articulated the angst of lower middle class youth, the play is revolutionary. This is a play about the emotional state of the youth and is unabashed in its representation of feelings, even if it also claims the status of an intellectual play, saying important things about the politics of England and the world. This enables it to show the play as standing at a crossroads both of the British stage and also of political and historical epochs.

*Look Back in Anger* has several distinguished predecessors. Ibsen, the father of Realism in drama dealt with a number of social problems-as did Osborne-especially in his problem plays. Chekhov modified Ibsen's realism by introducing characters who often simply eat, drink, talk and do nothing, like Jimmy; they are drifters, who, to an extent like him, have lost their sense of mooring. The early Strindberg who was a Naturalist portrayed brutal pictures of the man-woman conflict in plays like Jimmy and Alison or Helena. Among the early Modern Anglo-Irish and British playwrights, George Bernard Shaw, an acknowledged master of rhetoric, used the stage to condemn the establishment in many of his seminal plays. Earlier still, in Oscar Wilde, whose novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he dramatized, Osborne found a playwright who, in his well-made plays, looked at man-woman relationships, erotic attachments and

social conventions from a satiric perspective, standing them on their heads and probing them afresh by suggesting as the norm the diametric opposites of existing values. Osborne himself admitted the influence of D.H. Lawrence. His plays, often based on his early memories, frequently dramatize marital conflicts, especially marital tensions, resulting from differences in class backgrounds—a tough, coarse but vigorous working class man matched with a sensitive, delicate, snobbish upper class lady—almost as in *Look Back in Anger*. Tennessee Williams, the other playwright whose influence Osborne was willing to acknowledge, repeatedly presents social outcasts, sensitive individuals who refuse to conform to the values of the crass society around them. They also, like Jimmy and company, play roles and identify with names in literature in order to escape from or cope with the problems that confront them. However, they lack the strength of Jimmy's defiance.

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## 11.4 Introduction to the Play

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The three-act play takes place in a one-bedroom flat in the Midlands. Jimmy Porter, lower middle-class, university-educated, lives with his wife Alison, the daughter of a retired Colonel in the British Army in India. His friend Cliff Lewis, who helps Jimmy run a sweet stall, lives with them. Jimmy, intellectually restless and thwarted, reads the papers, argues and taunts his friends over their acceptance of the world around them. He rages to the point of violence, reserving much of his bile for Alison's friends and family. The situation is exacerbated by the arrival of Helena, an actress friend of Alison's from school. Appalled at what she finds, Helena calls Alison's father to take her away from the flat. He arrives while Jimmy is visiting the mother of a friend and takes Alison away. As soon as she has gone, Helena moves in with Jimmy. Alison returns to visit, having lost Jimmy's baby. Helena can no longer stand living with Jimmy and leaves. Finally Alison returns to Jimmy and his angry life.

*Look Back in Anger* is the story of Jimmy Porter, his wife Alison, his friend Cliff, and Alison's friend Helena. Although the story concerns all these four persons, the most dominant character in the play is Jimmy Porter. The action of the play takes place in a flat in a town in the English Midlands. The occupants of this flat are Jimmy Porter, his wife Alison, and Jimmy's friend Cliff who is a Welshman. Both Jimmy and his friend are men of a working-class origin while Alison comes from an upper-middle class family. The social disparity between the husband and the wife is one reason why Jimmy is always in a state of dissatisfaction. The plot of *Look back in Anger* is driven almost entirely by the tirades of Jimmy Porter rather than outside forces.

All the three persons are nearly of the same age, being about twenty five. Jimmy is well-educated, having graduated from a University. Although, he is a university graduate, he is earning his livelihood by running a sweet-stall where he is assisted by Cliff. He has previously tried his hand at many other occupations, but he could not stick to any one of them.

The fact that society has not treated him well is perhaps another reason why he is dissatisfied with life. In other words, not having been able to find a suitable career, he feels that

he is unwanted by society. Jimmy may therefore be regarded as a maladjusted person both at home and outside. It is he who makes all the most important speeches with an intellectual content. He is also the most important person from the psychological point of view, as he is from the intellectual angle. He is a complex personality, while the others are comparatively simple persons. Jimmy is the angry young man who is keenly dissatisfied with life in general and who is unable to reconcile himself to his environment and to the people around him. Throughout the play we find him raging against things, denouncing people, and giving expression to his disgruntlement and bitterness in endless rhetoric.

Alison Porter is important too from the psychological point of view as representing a woman who suffers passively, and who after a brief period of self-assertion, ultimately adopts an attitude of submission to her domineering husband.

Cliff and Helena stand only on the fringes of the action of the play.

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## 11.5 Detailed Explanation

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**The play opens** on a chilly Sunday evening in the month of April in a one-room flat in a large Midland town. The audience is introduced to the scene of the Porters' one-room apartment in the Midlands on an early April evening. The curtain rises on a large Victorian attic room, furnished simply with a dressing table, a double bed, a bookshelf, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, a gas stove and a cupboard. Downstage center is a dining table with three chairs, as well as two worn leather armchairs. Jimmy Porter and Cliff Lewis are seated in the armchairs, surrounded by newspapers. They are both about twenty-five, although Cliff has an easy air about him while Jimmy seems more tightly wound. Alison Porter, Jimmy's wife, a tall, dark girl with a striking beauty, is ironing off to the left whilst wearing one of Jimmy's shirts. When the curtain rises, Jimmy and Cliff are seated in chairs and are busy reading newspapers. Besides the papers which they are actually reading, there are a large number of other newspapers and magazines lying around them. Alison is busy ironing clothes on an ironing board. Alison is attempting to do the week's ironing and is only half listening as Jimmy and Cliff engage in the expository dialogue. Jimmy's dissatisfaction with things and with persons becomes evident as soon as he starts talking. Jimmy and Cliff are attempting to read the Sunday papers, plus the radical weekly, "price ninepence, obtainable at any bookstall" as Jimmy snaps, claiming it from Cliff. This is a reference to the *New Statesman*, and in the context of the period would have instantly signalled the pair's political preference to the audience. Jimmy is making a lot of fuss about what he finds in the papers. Jimmy complains that half the book review he is reading in his "posh" paper is in French. He asks Alison if that makes her feel ignorant and she replies that she wasn't listening to the question. Immediately one of the main themes is introduced, Jimmy's railing the inertia of Alison. He is dissatisfied with the routine kind of life which he has to lead, and with the behaviour of both of his wife and his friend, referring to both of them as devoid of any enthusiasm for anything. Alison, doing the ironing, it emerges that Alison and Jimmy come from two sides of the class divide—Alison is the daughter of a colonel in the

British army and upper middle class, Jimmy is the first generation of his family to be educated and still feels strongly tied to his working class roots. Jimmy is angry not just because of Alison's family background, but because of her personally. In a strong verbal attack, he demeans her in front of Cliff.

He hates Sundays especially because it is always so depressing on Sundays. Most of the comments which Jimmy makes on persons and things are witty, though his wit is sarcastic and bitter. When Cliff says that Jimmy's talk makes it difficult for Alison to think, Jimmy says that Alison had not had a thought in her head for years.

Jimmy begins his usual tirade against the quality of the papers he and Cliff are reading, and the audience gets the sense that Cliff usually plays the straight man to Jimmy's passionate outbursts. Jimmy begins to turn his tirade against Alison while snatching away Cliff's paper, and Cliff defends her while trying to get back his reading material. Alison answers tersely to whatever Jimmy is flinging at her, deadpanning an agreement even when Jimmy blatantly derides her intelligence. The argument turns to who drank all of the tea, and who should make more, with comments on the quality of the paper interspersed. Cliff flirts, not covertly, with Jimmy's wife. Cliff asks, "How are you, dullin'?" Alison responds, "All right thank you, dear." Cliff kisses her hand and puts her fingers in his mouth, saying to Jimmy, "She's a beautiful girl, isn't she?" "That's what they all tell me," is all that Jimmy can say. Jimmy seems not to notice, or at least not to acknowledge, their flirtation. Jimmy's next comment on an article in the newspaper reveals his contempt for Alison's father. Cliff suggests that a movie might cheer them all up, and Alison declines, while Jimmy rants about how terrible movie theaters are. Jimmy and Alison notice that Cliff's new trousers are wrinkled, and Alison offers to press them, leaving Cliff without pants. After Alison and Cliff both light up cigarettes, much to Jimmy's consternation, Jimmy begins a tirade against the state of the culture of the world, and kicks Cliff after he realizes that no one is listening. Alison's friend Webster is mentioned, whom Jimmy declares he can't take tonight. Alison points out that Jimmy said Webster was the only one of her friends that he felt understood him a little bit.

A discussion of Jimmy's former mistress ensues, obviously annoying Alison. Jimmy then begins a fresh assault on Alison, who is visibly wearing down. We learn that there's a huge social gulf between Jimmy and Alison. Her family is upper-middle class military, perhaps verging on upper, while Jimmy is decidedly working-class. He had to campaign hard against her family's disapproval to win her. "Alison's mummy and I took one look at each other, and from then on the age of chivalry was dead", is one of the play's linguistic gems. We also learn that the sole family income is derived from a sweet stall in the local market — an enterprise that is surely well beneath Jimmy's education, let alone Alison's "station in life". As Act 1 progresses, Jimmy becomes more and more vituperative, transferring his contempt for Alison's family onto her personally, calling her "pusillanimous" and generally belittling her to Cliff. The tirade ends with some physical horseplay, resulting in the ironing board overturning and Alison's arm getting a burn. Jimmy exits to play his trumpet off stage. It is revealed to the audience that Jimmy

possesses not only contempt for her father, but for her entire family, including brother Nigel and her mother. He decrees that Alison is pusillanimous, which he defines as “wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage.” “Behold the Lady Pusillanimous!” Jimmy shouts. Alison continues ironing Cliff’s pants, keeping her composure, but just barely.

After a minute’s relative peace listening to a concert on the radio, Jimmy abruptly shuts it off, claiming Cliff’s paper and Alison’s ironing are making too much of a din. He begins yet another harangue of Alison regarding her “primitive hands,” and yells at the church bells when they interrupt him. Cliff begins a slapstick dance/ wrestling match with him, which Jimmy is in no mood for, and they end up crashing into Alison and her ironing board, burning her arm. Alison finally snaps, ordering Jimmy out of the room while Cliff bandages her arm. They discuss the awful state of Alison’s marriage. She acknowledges that it seems like it’s always the things that, for other marriages, are easy, that she and Jimmy can never get right; they can never just agree and move on without having some sort of bickering or needling. Jimmy’s constantly speaking in a tone of condemnation has begun to weigh upon the mind of Alison who is a sensitive kind of a woman. She is pregnant but she has not yet revealed her pregnancy to Jimmy. Cliff assures Alison that he won’t leave the flat, after which Alison reveals that she is pregnant, a rather desperate state considering the lack of money and the combative atmosphere. As there is a perfect understanding between Alison and Jimmy’s friend Cliff, and as Alison and Cliff are very fond of each other, Alison discloses the fact of her pregnancy to Cliff who advises her to inform Jimmy about it. She worries about telling Jimmy, saying that it would be all right at first, but after a while, he’ll just feel stifled and blame her. She reveals to Cliff that their courtship was very fast, based mostly on the fact that he was different from the privileged life she had known and seemed new and exciting, and he saw her as a rescue case from the wealthy. Cliff kisses Alison, and both ignore Jimmy when he re-enters.

After some much more light-hearted bantering, Cliff leaves to get cigarettes. Left alone, Jimmy and Alison are a bit awkward, and Jimmy shows a more vulnerable side after admitting that he burned her on purpose. They kiss and begin role-playing an odd game of squirrel and bear, of which there are two figurines on the chest of drawers. When Cliff goes out for a little while, there is a tender scene between Jimmy and Alison because basically they are in love with each other, although Jimmy is unsparing in his criticism of Alison and her family. In spite of this biting criticism of her family, Alison has said nothing in retaliation. In the course of this tender scene, both express their love for each other, and even talk about the game which they have been playing, the bears-and-squirrels game which consists in Jimmy’s treating Alison as “a beautiful squirrel”, and a treating Jimmy as “a really marvelous bear”. Alison is now on the verge of telling Jimmy about her pregnancy but Cliff suddenly comes back and Alison is not able to disclose the fact to Jimmy. Cliff comes back in with news of a telephone call from Helena Charles for Alison, and she leaves to take it. He rifles through Alison’s handbag while talking, and discovers a letter from her mother which she has hidden to avoid his arguments. This immediately angers Jimmy since she is a part of Alison’s old life. There is a telephone for

Alison from her friend Helena Charles who is an actress. Helena informs Alison on the telephone that she is coming to this town for theatrical engagement and that she will be staying with Alison. Alison comes back in and announces that Helena is coming to stay for a while. On learning about the impending visit of Helena, Jimmy again loses his temper because he has never liked Helena and because he regards her as one of his “natural enemies”. Jimmy immediately reveals his dislike for her friend, and begins to rant again against all her friends. Jimmy, after one last stab at Alison, exits, leaving Alison and Cliff standing in silence. Act I closes with perhaps the most offensive speech that Jimmy makes to Alison. He here says that he wants that something should happen to Alison to wake her out of her “beauty sleep”. If for instance, she could have a child which dies, a child who comes out of her body and flesh, he would be quite happy.

**Act 2** opens on another Sunday afternoon, with Helena and Alison making lunch. In a two-handed scene, Alison gives a clue as to why she decided to take Jimmy on — her own minor rebellion against her upbringing plus her admiration of Jimmy’s campaigns against the dereliction of English post-war, post-atom-bomb life. She describes Jimmy to Helena as a “knight in shining armour”. It is two weeks later, and Alison is making tea while Jimmy practices his trumpet offstage. Helena enters, attractive and dressed expensively, carrying a large colander. She works in the theater, and is a friend of Alison’s from her life prior to Jimmy. The women discuss Helena’s help during the week and the two men. Helena asks Alison if Cliff is in love with her, which Alison hesitatingly refutes. Alison says that there’s nothing substantial to their flirtation, and it’s completely innocent. She explains that Jimmy doesn’t mind because it is a “question of allegiances.” They begin to discuss Hugh Tanner, Jimmy’s childhood friend, who, with Hugh’s mother, started him off in the sweet business. Alison disliked Hugh immediately when they moved in with him on their wedding night.

Jimmy enters, and the tirade continues. Helena tells her that living with Jimmy is a big mistake. Helena says, firmly, “You’ve got to fight him”. She gets in touch with her family, and asks that they take her away. If his Act 1 material could be played as a joke, there’s no doubt about the intentional viciousness of his attacks on Helena. When the women put on hats and declare that they’re going to church, Jimmy’s sense of betrayal peaks. When he leaves to take an urgent phone call, Helena announces that she’s forced the issue. She’s sent a telegram to Alison’s parents asking them to come and “rescue” her. Alison is stunned but agrees that she will go.

Despite the fact that Jimmy is enormously dismissive of her, they argue bitterly when Alison leaves. And, they end up in each other’s arms. After a scene break, we see Alison’s father, Colonel Redfern, who has come to collect her to take her back to her family home. The playwright allows the Colonel to come across as quite a sympathetic character, albeit totally out of touch with the modern world (as he himself admits). “You’re hurt because everything’s changed”, Alison tells him, “and Jimmy’s hurt because everything’s stayed the same”.

Helena arrives to say goodbye, intending to leave very soon herself. Alison is surprised



that Helena is staying on for another day, but she leaves, giving Cliff a note for Jimmy. Cliff in turn hands it to Helena and leaves, saying "I hope he stuffs it up your nostrils". Almost immediately, Jimmy bursts in. His contempt at finding a "goodbye" note makes him turn on Helena again, warning her to keep out of his way until she leaves. Helena tells him that Alison is expecting a baby, and Jimmy admits grudgingly that he's taken aback. However, his tirade continues. They first come to physical blows, and then as the Act 2 curtain falls, Jimmy and Helena are kissing passionately and falling on the bed.

Alison and Cliff play a tender scene, during which she confides that she's accidentally pregnant and can't quite bring herself to tell Jimmy. Cliff urges her to tell him. When Jimmy returns, Alison announces that her actress friend Helena Charles is coming to stay, and it's entirely obvious that Jimmy despises Helena even more than Alison. He flies into a total rage, and conflict is inevitable.

Alison and Helena have an intimate conversation in the course of which A gives to Helena an account of the circumstances in which she had married Jimmy. Alison's parents had opposed the marriage, but A had disregarded their opposition. For several months after the marriage she had led a poor life with Jimmy because Jimmy did not even have any accommodation of his own to keep her. They had been living with Hugh Tanner, a friend of Jimmy's. She has never been able to like HT who was a most ill-mannered man. Alison also tells Helena that she has not yet revealed her pregnancy to Jimmy. She further tells Helena that she and Jimmy often play the bears- and -squirrel game, imagining themselves to be animals. When the two women are talking to each other, Jimmy is playing on the trumpet the sound of which is a cause of irritation to both of them. He says that this meaning fully applies to his wife, and he again calls her 'lady Pusillanimous' Jimmy's remarks produce a devastating effect on Alison but she is able to stop herself from screaming in desperation because she is used to "these carefully rehearsed attacks" from her husband. cliff says that he does not know how much longer he can go on watching Alison and Jimmy quarrelling with each other all the time.

Cliff and Jimmy now join the two women, and Jimmy begins to talk in his usual manner, criticizing things and people in general. Jimmy now feels especially annoyed to learn that Alison is going to church in Helena's company. Jimmy makes many mocking and disparaging comments on Alison, on Alison's mother, and on Helena. When Helena says that he deserves to be slapped for talking in this unpleasant manner. Jimmy says that if she slaps him, he will not hesitate to slap her in return. At that early age Jimmy had learnt more about life, betrayal and death, than Helena would know all her life, he says. However, Jimmy's sad account produces no sad effect on any of the listeners.

Helena cannot tolerate the kind of treatment that Alison is receiving from Jimmy. She therefore secretly sends a telegram to Alison's father to come and take away Alison. however she soon reveals to Alison what she has done, and she obtains Alison's consent that Alison will leave Jimmy and go away with her father.

Jimmy receives a telephonic message that Mrs Tanner has suffered a stroke and has been admitted to a London hospital in a serious condition. Jimmy gets ready to go to London in order to see Mrs Tanner. He would like A to go with him, but A refuses.

The next evening a's father Colonel Redfern, arrives in response to H's telegram. Colonel R is not happy to learn that A wants to leave Jimmy. The Col even admits that there is much truth in J's description of him as "just one of those sturdy old plants left over from the Edwardian Wilderness that cannot understand why the sun is not shining any more".

Jimmy then asks Helena what is she doing here. Helena, instead of answering the question, reveals to him the fact of his wife's pregnancy of which he was unaware. But Jimmy does not react to this information excitedly or jubilantly. On the contrary, he says that he does not care if his wife is going to have a baby. Jimmy then seizes Helena by her shoulder and, in a threatening manner, asks her to get out of his house. At this, H slaps his face savagely. But the very next moment Helena suddenly kisses him passionately and pulls him down beside her  
Act III Scene I Several months have passed, and it is a Sunday evening at the apartment. It is obvious that Helena has moved in, as her belongings have supplanted Alison's on the dressing table, and Jimmy and Cliff are up to their usual discussion of the Sunday papers. The prodding banter is the same, although Helena seems a little more opinionated than Alison was. She seems to be more attentive to their banter than Alison had been, and is ready with a response when asked. She is sometimes amused by Jimmy's declarations, and sometimes caught off guard by his sudden attacks. Jimmy and Cliff begin an old vaudeville routine, each playing a part, including song and dance and Helena also plays a part as the butt of the joke. Jimmy soon has enough and.....

Several months pass. Once again it is Sunday evening. A's personal belongings in the house have been replaced by Helena's. Helena has been living as Jimmy's mistress all these months, and there seems to be a perfect understanding between the two of them.

Cliff now decides to leave the sweet-stall and try his hand at something else. He also decides to leave his present abode and start living separately somewhere, because he would now like to get married and settle down.

This scene closes with an exchange of tender and loving expressions between Jimmy and Helena. Jimmy appreciates H for having always taken the initiative in showing her affection for him. Helena tells him that she loves him. Jimmy kisses her fingers, and she presses her head against her body. He appeals herto see that things do not go wrong between them, and she replies that she has always wanted him. He then says that he will close the sweet stall and they will both start a new life. Just then the door opens, and A enters, A's visit is most unexpected and both Jimmy and Helena are stunned by this unexpected development.

## Scene II

Jimmy goes out of the room without talking to Alison, while Alison and Helena enter into a conversation. Alison says that she is sorry to have come because she has no business to

interfere in the life of Jimmy and Helena. Helena, however says that Alison had every right to come here because she is, after all, Jimmy's wife. But Alison says that she is no longer believes in the sanctity of marriage. Alison adds that marriage can last only if the two partners can adjust themselves to each other. Helena now says that her relationship with Jimmy is of an objectionable kind. Helena also says that she has discovered what is wrong with Jimmy. In her opinion, Jimmy was born out of his time, and there is no place for people like him any longer either in sex or politics or anything else. Helena then says that her affair with Jimmy must come to an end, and that she would get out of this place. Neither Jimmy nor any one else can make her believe that she had been right in living with Jimmy as his mistress. Besides, there is a basic difference between her and Jimmy. Jimmy wants one kind of world, while she believes in another. Helena has also by this time observed that that Alison is no longer carrying a baby in her womb and that she must have had a miscarriage. She interprets this sad happening as a divine judgement on them all. Alison, however does not agree that there is any divine judgement involved in her miscarriage. Alison then urges Helena not to leave Jimmy because Jimmy needs her. But Helena has already made up her mind to leave. Jimmy too understands that Alison has had a miscarriage, but he does not show any sign of grief over Alison's loss of the baby. Helena says that she has realized that she cannot be happy when what she is doing is wrong and when her action is hurting someone else. Jimmy says that everybody wants to escape from the pain of being alive, and that everybody wants also to escape from love. He says that love demands strength and courage which few people have. Alison woman like Helena wants to maintain a nice and clean soul, and cannot therefore lead a life of the senses. Such a woman should become a saint because she cannot live like a human being. One can either lead a full-blooded life of the senses or lead a purely spiritual life. Helena leaves for the railway station to catch a train to London. Jimmy is very upset. Alison too now gets ready to leave, but Jimmy starts talking to her. He complains that Alison did not even send any flowers to Mrs tanner's funeral and that she had hurt his feelings by her callousness in this matter. He then says that, in spite of his tremendous energy of mind and spirit, he is a lonely man. Jimmy's words bring tears into Alison's eyes. She goes on to tell Cliff that Jimmy has got his own private morality which her mother describes as being "loose". Infact, Jimmy got quite upset on learning, after marrying her, that she had never slept with anybody before marriage and retained her virginity intact. Jimmy seemed to think at that time that he would be defiled by sexual contact with a woman who had remained a virgin before marriage. Jimmy is introduced to us as a tall, thin young man of about twenty five, wearing a worn tweed jacket and flannel trousers. He is addicted to smoking a pipe. He is disturbing mixture of sincerity and cheerfull malice, of tenderness and cruelty. He is restless and proud, and on account of this combination of restlessness and pride, he alienates everybody who comes in contact with him. Later in the play, he says to Cliff about her: "Don't think I could provoke her. Nothing I could do would provoke her. Not even if I were to drop dead". A little later he describes her as a "monument to non- attachment". He calls her "Lady Pusillanimous' and goes on to explain the meaning of the word "pusillanimous", a word which in his opinion is an exact description of his wife: "From the Latin pusillus, very

little, and animus, the mind. That's my wife!...Behold Lady pusillanimous. We must admit that Jimmy is a master not only of the language which he speaks but also of the art of rhetoric. In spite of the harsh, abusive, and almost violent manner in which Jimmy speaks about, and to, his wife, he loves her genuinely and tenderly. Jimmy in this brief interval shows his concern regarding Alison's arm which had been pushed against hot iron. He tells her that there is hardly a moment when he is not watching and wanting her. He also says that, although four years have passed since their marriage, he cannot stop sweating when he sees her doing anything, anything even as ordinary as her leaning over the ironing board. The most striking trait of her personality is imperturbability. In spite of the extremely offensive, and almost shocking manner in which Jimmy speaks to her and about her relations, she remains cool and calm most of the time. The author points out a contrast between Cliff and Jimmy in the following words: "If Jimmy alienates love, Cliff seems to exact it. . . . He is soothing natural counterpoint to Jimmy". Jimmy is heard blowing a trumpet in intermittent bursts in the room across the hall. Alison goes on with her narrative of past events, and tells Helena that the few months she spent with Jimmy at Hugh's flat in Poplar were a nightmare. She used to feel as if she had been dropped in a jungle. Alison replies that there is nothing wrong with Jimmy and that it was only to escape from their sordid life that Jimmy and she began to imagine themselves, an animal world in which they could behave like carefree creatures. They created this animal world of uncomplicated affection for each other because they could not bear the painful reality of their life as human beings. The world of animals represented their natural, uncomplicated affection for each other, the kind of affection which animals have in their cosy zoo, a kind of "silly symphony for people who could not bear the pain of being human beings any longer. Alison in a sarcastic tone, remarks to Helena, "Oh, don't try to take his suffering away from him-He'd be lost without it". Jimmy does most of the talking, and the major part of his talk is of the offensive, insulting kind with which we had already become acquainted in the first Act. Jimmy shows a lamentable lack of consideration for the feelings of everybody else. He is blunt to the point of savagery. In spite of Jimmy's bluntness, callousness, hardness, roughness, aggressiveness, and vehemence and violence of his temper, there is a gentle side to him, and this gentle side provides us with a clue to his anger, resentment, and fury. His unjust treatment of his wife particularly is appalling and his rage over her is almost diabolical. The bear and squirrel game occupies a special place in the play. It is a symbolic device which serves an important dramatic purpose. Simon Trussler says, "this game is a brave attempt by Jimmy and Alison to compensate themselves for the failure of their marriage. A few minutes after Jimmy leaves, his trumpet can be heard. Alison relates how many times she tried to come to the apartment, but she turned back before she got there. She fiddles with Jimmy's pipe and tells Helena about how she even purposely sat behind a man smoking one at the movies, even though she hates it. She laments about arriving there at all, and the two women apologize to each other for the wrongs they each have done. They argue about who is at fault between them, Alison for barging in, or Helena for taking up her place to begin with. Helena points out, quite accurately, that Alison has more of a right to be there than she, Helena, does, since Alison is still Jimmy's wife-revealing that they never

**The final act** opens as a deliberate replay of Act 1, but this time with Helena at the ironing-board wearing Jimmy's Act 1 red shirt. Months have passed. Jimmy is notably more pleasant to Helena than he was to Alison in Act 1. She actually laughs at his jokes, and the three of them get into a music hall comedy routine that obviously isn't improvised. Cliff announces that he's decided to strike out on his own. As Jimmy leaves the room to get ready for a final night out for the three of them, he opens the door to find Alison, looking like death. Instead of caring for her he snaps over his shoulder "Friend of yours to see you" and abruptly leaves.

After a scene break, Alison explains to Helena that she lost the baby — one of Jimmy's cruellest speeches in Act 1 expressed the wish that Alison would conceive a child and lose it — the two women reconcile but Helena realises that what she's done is immoral and she in turn decides to leave. She summons Jimmy to hear her decision and he lets her go with a sarcastic farewell.

The play ends with a major surprise — a highly sentimental reconciliation between Jimmy and Alison. They revive an old game they used to play, pretending to be bears and squirrels, and we are left to assume that they live, if not happily, at least in a state of truce in the class warfare, ever after. With the third act, we see that Helena replaced Alison, and she irons Jimmy's shirt. Their relationship seems to be better than the one between Jimmy and Alison, but the relative peace is broken by Alison returning. She tells Helena that she lost the baby that Jimmy fathered (and whose existence she hid from him earlier in the play). Then, Alison and Helena become friends once more.

The revelation makes Helena realize her own guilt in coming between them, and she determines to leave. Jimmy, as is his way, dismisses Helena sarcastically. However, the play does seem to end on a note of hope, with the possibility of a reconciliation between Alison and Jimmy, as they play a silly game that they once used to play. The animal images thus suggest love, cosy intimacy and profound concern even as they indicate an escape from a mental or conscious comprehension of the nature of their relationships.

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## 11.6 Critical Analysis of the Text

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The plot has the power to startle. The language, too, still has the power to shock, such as when Jimmy, unaware of Alison's pregnancy, says to her:

"If only something—something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die. Let it grow, let a recognisable human face emerge from that little mass of India rubber and wrinkles. Please—if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself. But I doubt it."

It is difficult, for example, to imagine jazz being quite as exotic as it is for Jimmy. Or to understand the intellectual courage of saying about a gay man, "He's like a man with a strawberry mark—he keeps thrusting it in your face because he can't believe it doesn't interest or horrify

you particularly. As if I give a damn which way he likes his meat served up". Alison says to him "You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it. Something's gone wrong somewhere, hasn't it?" It is clear from Osborne's script that there was no lack of a sense of life's difficulties around at the time. But the emphasis had shifted from the martyred expressions of the British ruling class and their "white man's burden", as represented in Colonel Redfern, to a more serious appraisal of life for those outside that ruling class. Helena on the other hand ultimately cannot stay with Jimmy precisely because of the destruction of all her old certainties.

Perhaps the only truly sympathetic character in the play is Cliff. From his role as Jimmy's foil in the early exchanges, to appearing as Alison's real friend, to the point when he decides that he does not want to stay in the flat, Hughes gives a magnificent portrayal of solidness. Whilst Alison is forced to accept Jimmy's rages because her family background has robbed her of any other viable option, Cliff is someone who is keeping the peace by hiding his real character—by playing along with all the games.

In Jimmy Porter, Osborne created what came to be seen as a model of the "angry young man"—railing at the lack of passion of his age, entreating Alison and Cliff to show some enthusiasm. He is marvellously, unreasonably idealistic in a wildly unfocussed way. Kenneth Tynan, who described Jimmy as "the completest young pup in our literature since Hamlet", criticised those who attacked the recklessness of Jimmy's attacks. "Is Jimmy's anger justified? Why doesn't he do something? These questions might be relevant if the character had failed to come to life; in the presence of such evident and blazing vitality, I marvel at the pedantry that could ask them. Why don't Chekhov's people do something? Is the sun justified in scorching us?"

Spluttering with indignation, retreating into his pseudo-literary takes on vaudeville, firing off his vindictive gags almost because he can do nothing else. Osborne, throughout his work, was fascinated by end-of-pier music hall and vaudeville. Here he has Jimmy and Cliff perform a variety-style number, "Don't be afraid to sleep with your sweetheart just because she's better than you", as well as trading cheap cracks in true hackneyed music hall style.

More than any other writer of his generation, Osborne was fascinated by the tragedy lurking at the heart of the light entertainment performance. Jimmy Porter shows the raging expression of the frustrations of the lower middle class. There is Jimmy's failed jokes and misplaced comments, as well as his more furious denunciations of the absence of passion.

Jimmy yearns for passion, and clings to the idea of it. When Alison returns to him he tells her "I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it needn't matter." There is a vision, however confused, of the possibilities of human existence. What makes Jimmy's statement so interesting is precisely the historical context in which it occurs.

Look Back in Anger, though revolutionary in content, is old-fashioned in form. Its structure resembles that of a conventional well-made play. The overall pattern of the play is

circular. The entire Act I is a tirade against a wide range of subjects-social, political, religious and literary, including class snobbery and the power of the US. But in Acts II and III, the public issues gradually recede into the background and the play becomes a domestic drama of sexual relationships. And the most powerful impression of the play is that of its undaunted and scathing misogyny and sexism-the first, the hatred of women by men, being expressed in the speeches and attitudes of Jimmy Porter, and the second, sexism, the stereotyping or prejudice against women is inherent in the orientation and trajectory of the play. The main target of Jimmy's anger is women. Jimmy's anger is directed towards Alison not only as an individual but as a representative, not of the entire upper class, not just of women, but of upper class women. Through his tirades he attacks not only his family the establishment: he attacks all the women of the world. Jimmy's anger is a complex response to life, a tirade against society and its women. Alison describes Jimmy's invasion of her upper class world as part of the class-war he is waging, with his wife as a hostage. Jimmy's anger is directed against the upper classes, the "Edwardian Brigade" that has not changed since the Edwardian times. Another reviewer also praised the play in no uncertain terms. According to him it is not a perfect play, but it is a most exciting one, abounding with life and vitality, and the life it deals with is like as it is lived at this very moment (i.e., at the time the play was written and produced). The three young people-Jimmy Porter, his wife Alison, and his friend Cliff Lewis-are crowded together in a top flat in some Midland town and are being slowly destroyed. Jimmy Porter, the protagonist, is a brilliant young intellectual adrift. Since he cannot find no other way of using his intelligence, he is employing it to punish himself and everyone around him. The way he does is so dazzling, and he knows it: but it is also monstrous, and he knows that too. But he cannot stop going on with it. He has seen through all the tricks of self deception by which people persuade themselves that life is worth living, and he debunks them in a brilliantly funny series of tirades. His is the genuinely modern voice-witty, relentless, pitiless, and utterly without belief in anything. Since he cannot find himself a place, he must compensate himself by making fun of all those who can: and his wit is stinging.

Jimmy's denunciations, though funny, are also offensive, and someone must suffer-the one who is nearest to him, namely his wife. She had the misfortune to have been better born socially than he, and he makes use of this fact incessantly and brutally. All she can do is suffer the assaults, though she is helped to some extent by the passive Cliff Lewis, Jimmy's dumb and loyal friend who is always the necessary third in this kind of marriage. John Osborne understands some aspect of life deeply and renders them truly. In a relationship both partners have to arrive at certain consensus about accepted patterns of behaviour. Hence, any relationship calls for constant introspection, discussion and renewed commitment. Marriage, then, calls for constant negotiation and contextualization; the patterns are always on high alert.

The unequal battle between Jimmy and his wife and his friend goes on repetitively in its squalid setting. The wife is temporarily driven out of the flat; she is replaced by her best girlfriend, Helena, but the latter also ultimately gives up. There is not enough action in the play, and not all of its convincing. But what remains completely convincing is the mood and

contemporary language in which it is expressed. One of the weaknesses of the play is the lack of any satisfactory motivation for the hero's predicament. Many critics saw great promise in Jimmy Osborne on the basis of *Look Back in Anger*. One of them felt that the English Stage Company had discovered a dramatist of outstanding promise, "a man who can write with a searing passion, but happens in this case to have lavished it on the wrong play" . . . what a brilliant play this young man will write when he has got this one out of his system and let a little sunshine into his soul" . . . Another critic remarked, "starts rich in promise but lets us down with a sickening melodramatic thud." As for the technical side of *Look Back in Anger*, Osborne's own opinion expressed in 1961, was that it was "a formal, rather old-fashioned play. In *Look Back in Anger* he was using a structure handed on to him from the most conventional theatrical craftsmen of his apprenticeship. It was only the force of Jimmy Porter's rhetoric which distinguished this play from such traditional pieces as Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*. Famously, the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan wrote that he could never love anyone who didn't want to see *Look Back in Anger*. This is the kind of overt, emotional response that the play created in a certain segment of the audience who saw it. Many hated *Look Back in Anger* when it was first performed. Like the man who wrote it, the play does have a number of flaws.

However, what it does capture is a certain essence of the time in which it was written and of the kind of people it was written for. *Look Back in Anger* became a banner for a whole generation of young men, who were leftist in their politics and idealistic in their mindsets. We can debate whether those men changed the world, but it is certainly true that *Look Back in Anger* changed modern theatre. Never again was ostentation lauded over psychological realism, and the real world was firmly put at the heart of what the theatre was about.

As in much of John Osborne's later work, the playwright used much of himself in his creation of Jimmy Porter, and large parts of *Look Back in Anger* are biographical. As such, it is probably to Osborne's credit that Jimmy can be seen both as a noble rebel against an awful society that is bearing down on him, as well as a cruel and misguided emotional idiot. His sarcastic and sometimes merciless taunts are directed at the two women and the class from which they emerged. While his taunts are horrible, his words are also somehow understandable.

Osborne does not give any easy answers to why Jimmy is angry. Like Marlon Brando in the film *The Wild One* (who, when asked what he is rebelling against, replies "What'ya got?"), Jimmy's disaffection is a general feeling about how the world is wrong to its core.

In a striking contrast, Jimmy is compared to Alison's father. He is an old man who, in his own way, is a little lost. But his problem is that the world has changed too much, whereas Jimmy's problem is that the world has not changed enough. Jimmy—like Osborne himself, and many men of his class—is a revolutionary spirit who wants to put an end to unfairness and poverty, but are frustrated by their inability to find the means to do so. Alienation and Loneliness

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. Although



he was educated at a “white-tile” university, a reference to the newest and least prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, the real power and opportunities were reserved for the children of the Establishment, those born to privilege, family connections, and entree to the “right” schools. Part of the “code” of the Establishment was the “stiff upper lip,” that reticence to show or even to feel strong emotions. 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 berates her in a coarse attempt to get..... Osborne himself claimed often that he put feelings on the English stage and identified vitality as the principal ingredient in the play. He wanted ‘to make people feel’. Reviewers like T.C. Worsley(*New Statesman*, 19 May 1956) and Kenneth Tynan(*The Observer*, 13 May 1956) saw immediately that the play was full of life and vitality.

For instance, Derek Granger wrote that John Osborne, ‘has raised the curtains to show us those contemporary attitudes that so many of the post- war generation have adopted and in particular that “raspberry blowing” belligerency....the result of a calm but absolute disillusionment. T.C. Worsley saw that the play as an exciting attempt to depict’ life as it is lived at the very moment’ and finds that the most convincing aspect of the play ‘is the mood and the language in which it is expressed’ and that ‘the play will speak for’ the young. ‘Kitchen sink drama’ was the term by which English critics began to call the post-war British drama because of their use of working class domestic settings-. John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* was perhaps the first English play in the consistently naturalistic mode that dealt with the lower middle class. Its immediate and resounding success was due to the fact that it reflected with stark realism the mood of disillusionment and rage among a large section of English youth against prevailing social and political conditions. *Look Back in Anger* is, arguably, the most popular among the deluge of ‘kitchen sink’ plays written in post-war Britain. The play is born of a void created by the changing world scenario in the English psyche. The young, educated English youth, portrayed in the novel is a confused soul. Rooted in time, the play bring into focus the different ‘isms’ that were changing the way people looked at the world and having an impact on contemporary society at the point in history. It is a play of protest, an outburst against a system, a work that fosters a realism that documents the destruction of the British hope of a brave new world. Osborne carefully crafts a series of symbols that eloquently create a discourse of hope, anguish, anger and protest. There is no easy solutions to Jimmy’s anguish nor are there any ‘brave causes left’ (89). Jimmy tries to get out of the rut of ineffectiveness all around, symbolically represented through the monotony of “Sunday”(54) afternoons in numerous futile ways, the most prominent being his seeking refuge in a make-belief animal existence. Jimmy’s search for an escape into the animal world seems hardly effective as, though the play ends with a semblance of peace being re-established in the Porter household. The play is almost completely dominated by Jimmy’s anguished rhetoric, when he falls silent his trumpet takes over and fittingly he chooses jazz as his medium. The impact Osborne had on British theatre is incalculable. With *Look Back in Anger* he brought class as an issue before British audiences. “Why don’t we have a little game?” he asks. “Let’s pretend that we’re human

beings, and that we're actually alive'. Osborne has often been criticised for not seeing a way out, and not explaining more carefully the crisis in which Jimmy finds himself. Robert Wright, reviewing the first production in the *Star*, wrote "He obviously wants to shake us into thinking but we are never quite clear what it is he wants us to think about. Is it the Class Struggle or simply sex?" This incoherence in Jimmy's rage is both strength and a limitation to the play.

It is apparent from the text that Osborne recognised this limitation, even tacitly. Helena criticises Jimmy, saying, "There's no place for people like that any longer—in sex, or politics, or anything. That's why he's so futile.... He doesn't know where he is, or where he's going. He'll never do anything, and he'll never amount to anything." It seems almost a recognition that within his own work there are insufficient answers. This goes hand-in-hand with Jimmy's statement that "people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer.... There aren't any good, brave causes left."

Such a statement could be read as the voice of pessimistic nihilism. John Osborne said himself, 'although *Look Back in Anger* was a formal rather old-fashioned play, I think that it broke out by its use of language. Osborne delighted in words and their use. He wrote, 'they're the only things we have left.' Osborne's principal aim is to create a powerful rhetorical effect through words and their combinations.

### 11.4.3 Style and Setting

The play takes place in the Porters' one-room flat, a fairly large attic room. The furniture is simple and rather old: a double bed, dressing table, book

Two sound images from off-stage are used very effectively in *Look Back in Anger*: the church bells and Jimmy's jazz trumpet. The church bells invade the small living space and serve as a reminder of the power of the established church, and also that it doesn't care at all for their domestic peace. 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." **Language**

Osborne's use of language is basically in the realistic tradition. The characters' speech and rhythms reflect their class "and education. Helena is very proper and conventional....

The problem, which even a fine revival like this production has, is with the melodramatic qualities of the narrative. Osborne's script became almost a template for the new school of writers, and it is difficult to present his work without being aware that there is a faint whiff of formula about it. But despite the plot's shortcomings (which were recognised even by such a fierce admirer as Tynan), it still has the power to startle. There was an audible intake of breath from the audience when Jimmy fell into Helena's arms. The language, too, still has the power to shock, such as when Jimmy, unaware of Alison's pregnancy, says to her:

"If only something—something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die. Let it grow, let a recognisable human face

emerge from that little mass of India rubber and wrinkles. Please—if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself. But I doubt it.” Some of the imagery and language doesn’t travel too well historically and reflects only the preoccupations of the era. It is difficult, for example, to imagine jazz being quite as exotic as it is for Jimmy. Or to understand the intellectual courage of saying about a gay man, “He’s like a man with a strawberry mark—he keeps thrusting it in your face because he can’t believe it doesn’t interest or horrify you particularly. As if I give a damn which way he likes his meat served up”. At the time homosexuality was still illegal in Britain. This enables it to show the play as standing at a crossroads both of the British stage and also of political and historical epochs. Alison says to him “You’re hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it. Something’s gone wrong somewhere, hasn’t it?” Helena on the other hand ultimately cannot stay with Jimmy precisely because of the destruction of all her old certainties. Perhaps the only truly sympathetic character in the play is Cliff. From his role as Jimmy’s foil in the early exchanges, to appearing as Alison’s real friend, to the point when he decides that he does not want to stay in the flat. Whilst Alison is forced to accept Jimmy’s rages because her family background has robbed her of any other viable option.

In Jimmy Porter, Osborne created what came to be seen as a model of the “angry young man”—railing at the lack of passion of his age, entreating Alison and Cliff to show some enthusiasm. He is marvellously, unreasonably idealistic in a wildly unfocussed way. Kenneth Tynan, who described Jimmy as “the completest young pup in our literature since Hamlet”, criticised those who attacked the recklessness of Jimmy’s attacks. “Is Jimmy’s anger justified? Why doesn’t he do something? These questions might be relevant if the character had failed to come to life; in the presence of such evident and blazing vitality, I marvel at the pedantry that could ask them. Why don’t Chekhov’s people do something? Is the sun justified in scorching us?”

It is just this “evident and blazing vitality” that Michael Sheen represents so well. Spluttering with indignation, retreating into his pseudo-literary takes on vaudeville, firing off his vindictive gags almost because he can do nothing else. Osborne, throughout his work, was fascinated by end-of-pier music hall and vaudeville. In *The Entertainer*, one year later, he used vaudeville and its washed-up performer Archie Rice in a brilliant take on the crisis in post-war British society. Here he has Jimmy and Cliff perform a variety-style number, “Don’t be afraid to sleep with your sweetheart just because she’s better than you”, as well as trading cheap cracks in true hackneyed music hall style. The subjective outpouring of *Look Back in Anger*.

More than any other writer of his generation, Osborne was fascinated by the tragedy lurking at the heart of the light entertainment performance. Michael Sheen adds another layer to this in his spluttering soliloquies, carrying with them an echo of Tony Hancock’s ridiculous suburban pretensions. It is a fascinating comparison: Hancock, the parodist of lower-middle-class aspirations, and Jimmy Porter, the raging expression of the frustrations of the lower

middle class. Sheen has a lightness of touch that suits Jimmy's failed jokes and misplaced comments, as well as his more furious denunciations of the absence of passion.

The impact Osborne had on British theatre is incalculable. With *Look Back in Anger* he brought class as an issue before British audiences. the realisation of a man who has reached the limits of the possibilities open to him but is struggling to retain his dignity. "Why don't we have a little game?" he asks. "Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive". Osborne has often been criticised for not seeing a way out, and not explaining more carefully the crisis in which Jimmy finds himself. Robert Wright, reviewing the first production in the *Star*, wrote "He obviously wants to shake us into thinking but we are never quite clear what it is he wants us to think about. Is it the Class Struggle or simply sex?" This incoherence in Jimmy's rage is both strength and a limitation to the play.

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Kenneth Tynan, who referred to the play's "instinctive leftishness" in his *Observer* review, wrote in a piece on "The Angry Young Movement" that Jimmy Porter "represented the dismay of many young Britons ... who came of age under a Socialist government, yet found, when they went out into the world, that the class system was still mysteriously intact."

It is the mistaken association of the post-war Labour government with the failure of socialism per se that accounts for Porter's frustration. Osborne, active in various protests at the time, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, articulated his own sentiments through his lead character. In this respect, it is possible to see in the play expressions of the political impasse that had been reached in Britain during the 1950s, as a result of the domination of intellectual life by Stalinism and social democracy.

Nonetheless, it is also possible to see a challenge, albeit confused and unclear, to that impasse. There remains somewhere at the play's core, even if it cannot be explained, hope. There remains a belief that somehow people can survive the worst and perhaps even overcome it; a belief in humanity, and the possibility of a way forward.

(All quotations from Kenneth Tynan are from *Tynan on Theatre*, Penguin, 1964.)  
Look Back in Anger has its unarguable importance as the beginning of a revolution in the British theatre, and as the central and most immediately influential expression of the mood of its time, the mood of the 'angry young man'.

Jimmy Porter was ideally constituted to be the all-purpose hero of the dissatisfied young.

Its author, a twenty-six year old actor of no particular distinction, had not had any play previously produced in London and had no literary reputation whatever. The English Stage Company liked the play and decided to put it on as their by a new author. Though the play got a good deal of critical attention on its opening, of which more in a moment, it did not immediately establish itself as a hit. The Company agreed to let an Act of it be shown on television. And at once the takings leapt up, nearly doubling in two weeks. Clearly the play, by being seen in part on television, by television's mass audience, had managed to leap the gap generally filled, if at all, by the theatre critics.

T.C. Worsley in the *New Statesman* wrote, '...But in these soliloquies you can hear the authentic new tone of the Nineteen-Fifties, desperate, savage, resentful and, at times, very funny. This is the kind of play which, for all its imperfections, The English Stage Company ought to be doing. In the *Daily Express* John Barber put the same view rather more briskly: 'It is intense, angry, feverish, undisciplined. It is even crazy. But it is young, young, young.'

Milton Shulman in the *Evening Standard*, 'Mr. John Osborne has a dazzling aptitude for provoking and stimulating dialogue, and he draws character with firm convincing strokes. According to Kenneth Tynan, 'It is the best young play of its decade.'

Look Back in Anger seems to me not a crudely propagandist play, as has sometimes been asserted, but a valid study of of a highly complex personality at odds with his world. Jimmy Porter is not a warm-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.

He suffers, is frustrated, and makes terribly wrong choices-as the last scene makes clear, even for those who imagine that his blasphemy against life when he hopes that Alison, 'will have a baby, and that it will die'.

Clues of the most explicit kind are provided in the first stage direction:

"Jimmy is a tall, thin young man about twenty five, wearing a very worn tweed jacket and flannels....He is disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and free-booting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. To many he may seem sensitive to the point of vulgarity. To others he is simply a loudmouth. To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal".

From Jimmy's first appearance his anger is no less ambiguous than himself.

In Jimmy Porter, one is confronted with a man whose anger undoubtedly starts in human idealism. Jimmy's sense of outrage is so little controlled by either selflessness, stoicism or any clear discipline of the mind that it readily degenerates into moods profoundly destructive to life. The alarming juxtapositions in his make-up, with a holy crusade against stupidity on the one side, and a neurotic shrinking from in-laws and church bells on the other, cannot be escaped. His motives are hopelessly mixed. One can never be sure whether his anger with Alison centres in a genuine desire to save her, or in an ugly type of possessiveness heavily disguised. His targets are inconsistent. He lashes at Cliff both for not reading the *New Statesman* and for reading it; he taunts his wife with her education and Cliff with his ignorance. From the start, it is clear that, rightly or wrongly, he has not acquired the normal techniques for accepting suffering, and that he regards his morbid sensitivity to it as evidence of moral superiority. He becomes convinced that he is the only one who really knows what suffering is. There are marked symptoms of a persecution complex, both in the tenacity with which he clings to his working-class origin as an occasion for masochism, and his readiness to see his wife's continued correspondence with her parents in terms of conspiracy and betrayal. His tenderness for his wife (the real tenderness implied in the bears-and-squirrels game as well as elsewhere) is unable to dispel the restless suspicions which turn love into conquest, marriage into revenge, and the normal reticences of others into insult. Much of the time, his deeds and imagery are deliberately calculated to shock. In attempting to hurt his wife, he outrages every decency of love and of life itself, the certainty of his moral mission to her merely justifying every savagery of tone and mood he can command. All of this goes, as one might expect, with a peculiar sensitivity to shock on his own part. He can accept neither life nor death with ease. The sound of church bells torments him with the thought of possible worlds other than his own.

Helena is an entirely honest character, from a world poles apart from Jimmy's own. She is middle-class not only by birth but by instinct and conviction; which is why she is essentially disruptive to Jimmy, both when she conspires against him, and when she seduces him (to his great surprise). This, also, is why she can never really hurt him as Alison can. She interferes with his marriage for Alison's good, since she honestly thinks that Alison will be better out of the 'madhouse'; and she takes Jimmy for herself because she finds that she desires him. And wants to have him for a time. She believes all along that her affair is sinful, 'terribly wrong' as she tells Alison, and she knows that in the end Alison has 'all the rights.' Helena is equally sure that the 'book of rules' is necessary to sanity, and says: 'at least, I still believe in right and wrong! Not even the months in this madhouse have stopped me doing that. Even though everything I have done is wrong, at least I have known it was wrong. When she leaves him, making the break with characteristics toughness.

Alison is far nearer to Jimmy, since he is trying to win not only her love, but her allegiance to his vision of life; a vision where the 'book of rules' must be closed at the outset, and committal worked out in individual terms. The most telling criticism of her attitude is made

(interestingly) by her father, who says that like himself she enjoys sitting on the fence. She is surprised, and even hurt by this: 'I married him, didn't I?' is her immediate reply.

The ending of the play is in these respects ambiguous. Jimmy confronted with her real suffering and degradation, and the appalling knowledge that this is what, in his anger, he has been demanding of her, himself breaks under the strain and has to appeal for mercy. The confrontation seems to awaken him to the blasphemy, and immaturity, of his excesses of anger, and possibly purges it in that moment. Alison, herself, having really suffered, and then come back, can be presumed to have realized her own defects, and to have returned with a deeper commitment to Jimmy's love. They revert to the bears-and-squirrels game, as a refuge from a world which sets 'cruel steel and traps' for its animals.

He is a dramatist of outstanding promise, a man who can write with searing passion. This play is about Jimmy, a university chap of working-class background who lives in a filthy attic with his pretty wife whom he harangues continuously in horribly, long, vicious, self-pitying speeches. He is looking back so angrily, apparently, because he watched his father die, hates his middle-class parents, and can't think of anything constructive to think about. Jimmy is supposed to represent the post-war generation. He pours out a vitriolic tirade against the world. His wild and whirling words damn poverty, damn tenderness, damn pity. His wife listens in silence. He is young, frustrated, unhappy. Jimmy Porter, with his grievances, his anguishes, his angers, his injustices, and his cruelty holds the centre of the stage. Of course, *Look Back in Anger* is not a perfect play. But it is a most exciting one, abounding with life and vitality, and the life it deals with is life as it is lived at this very moment. Jimmy Porter, the brilliant young intellectual adrift, and since he can find no other way of using it, he is employing his intelligence to punish himself and everyone around him. Alison has had the misfortune to be better born socially than and he uses this incessantly and brutally.

Orwell has characterized it as 'a formal, rather, old-fashioned play'. Certainly there is nothing much in the form of the piece to justify so much excitement: it is a well made play, with all its climaxes, its tightenings and slackenings of tension in the right places, and in general layout it belongs clearly enough to the solid realistic tradition. He is a university graduate and an enormous cultural snob (only the safe classics and the most traditional jazz, only good books and 'posh' Sunday papers), but he lives in a tumbledown attic flat in a drab Midland town and by making his living by keeping a sweet stall in the market. Everything in his life dissatisfies him, and the tone of his conversation (which is mainly monologue anyway) is consistently one of railing and complaint. The principal sufferer from all this is his wife Alison, whom he cannot forgive for her upper-middle-class background and who he constantly torments in order to extract some reaction from her, to bring her to her knees, while she, having discovered that her only defense is imperturbability, refuses as long as she can to react. And so they rend each other, under the sympathetic eye of Cliff, the helpless friend, until a fourth, Alison's actress friend Helena, arrives. Helena with her air of being 'the gracious representative of visiting royalty'. There are constant indications of his neurotic determination

to establish and keep his supremacy in any situation. His hysterical persecution of Alison, his childish petulance. Jimmy is the saintlike witness to right values in a world gone wrong, the mouthpiece of protest for a dissatisfied generation. The burning rhetoric of his great tirades: even if their motivation is to be found in pratty personal disputes and minor skirmishes in the battle of sexes, once Jimmy gets going they generate their own force and conviction; those around him put up with him and listen entranced instead of briskly telling him to shut up and not be so silly.

John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, produced on the Royal Court Theatre on May 8, 1956, was a 'fourth wall' realistic play. Katharine J. Worth says "What then was the reason for its tremendous impact on audiences everywhere? One answer, swiftly supplied by the play's first reviewers, was the immediacy of its subject-matter. Osborne astonished and fascinated by his feeling for the contemporary scene, and the mores of post-war youth, by his command of contemporary idiom, and his tart comments on subjects ranging from the 'posh' Sunday newspapers and 'white tile' universities to the Bishops and the Bomb". The evidence in *Look Back in Anger* is certainly incomplete, but there are already indications in the striking rhetorical power of the play that here is an imaginative vitality going beyond that commonly associated with the realistic prose drama. The genuine rhetorical force which sustains Jimmy Porter's long speeches: they are at the same time violent and controlled, sardonically humorous and in deadly earnest, evoking occasional echoes of both Shaw and Strindberg.

Although so many of these impressive tirades are concerned with the debased values of modern life, the action of the play is only very indirectly affected by such social questions as the class system. Alison describes Jimmy's invasion of her upper-class world as apart of the class war he is still waging, with his wife as a hostage. Imaginative suffering is a profoundly solitary experience and Jimmy knows it. 'The heaviest, strongest, creatures in this world seems to be the loneliest,' he says to Alison. 'Like the old bear, following his own breath in the dark forest. There's no warm pack, no herd to comfort him. The voice that cries out doesn't have to be a weakling's, does it?' Alison is speaking ironically when she says, 'Don't take away his suffering away from him. He'd be lost without it.' *Look Back in Anger* marks a watershed in the history of English theatre. Kenneth Tynan, who referred to the play's "instinctive leftishness" in his Observer review, wrote in a piece on "The Angry Young Movement" that Jimmy Porter "represented the dismay of many young Britons ... who came of age under a Socialist government, yet found, when they went out into the world, that the class system was still mysteriously intact."

It is the mistaken association of the post-war Labour government with the failure of socialism per se that accounts for Porter's frustration. Osborne, active in various protests at the time, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, articulated his own sentiments through his lead character. In this respect, it is possible to see in the play expressions of the political impasse that had been reached in Britain during the 1950s, as a result of the domination of intellectual life by Stalinism and social democracy.



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## 11.7 Let Us Sum Up

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*Look Back in Anger* had all the elements as; an alienated rebellious character who defies the world, surrounded by certain character types; intense marital tension and a certain love triangle; class-conflict, vitriolic satire on social, political and religious institutions; the structure of the well-made play; rhetorical speeches and role playing; and the creation of atmosphere through speech variations, sets and music, but within the framework of realism. *Look Back in Anger*, though already a period piece and a social document of the disoriented mid-1950's, does not date, but, if anything, seems better today, when a more balanced view is possible, then it did at that time, as a centre of excited controversy. What had worried some critics about *Look Back in Anger* was that Osborne seemed in to be dealing with a neurotic character whom he did not fully realize to be neurotic, and anyway he allowed him to win all the arguments and take on a heroic role by virtue of his sheer biting eloquence. However, Jimmy calls himself as, and seemingly identifies with, the working class but right from the beginning of the play one can see his attitude of intellectual superiority. As already said, most working class people moved to being middle class in the nineteen fifties with the majority living on the borders of middle class-being lower middle class. The anger that barriers of class were still up against them, that they had to inhabit the margins of privilege and power, the anxiety that they may slip back into the lower class(hence the emphasis on education in such families)' the desire to be part of the upper middle class- perhaps, it is this range of sentiments that the play expresses. The anger of the young and seemingly upwardly mobile lower middle class youth is what the play captures and this is why it became a cult play; This desire for power and for the accoutrements of upper class life-for participation in upper class cultural life, which is seen as the repository of national capital-is manifested in all the comments that Jimmy makes throughout the play about the English novel, about English music, about other forms of entertainment, newspapers, etc. "Under Plain Cover" might almost be a fourth act to *Look Back in Anger* showing what could have happened to Jimmy and Alison a few years after they were reunited. A substantial body of critical and popular opinion has subscribed to the view that Jimmy is a self-portrait of Osborne. Jimmy shares the same kind of anger as Osborne(when he wrote the play), has sprung from a similar socio-economic background, and has seen his father die in the prime of life from a similar disease. He also articulates Osborne's disillusionment with contemporary British society and empire, and serves as his mouthpiece in denouncing the Church, the Royalty, the Conservative Government, the upper class, and traditional morality. Above all he embodies Osborne's derision of the English notion of the stiff-upper lip, of detachment and apathy, of lack of enthusiasm. He complains, 'Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm.' Like Osborne, he feels there are no more brave causes left to fight for.

Finally, Alison's mother creates problems for him which are similar to those faced by Osborne when he courted Pamela Lane and married her much against her parents' wishes. At the same time, Jimmy is a fully drawn and individual character, and there are many significant aspects of his personality which one has no reason to attribute to his creator. As Osborne goes on to say, 'To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal.' It is remarkable that he does nothing to change the world he so ceaselessly and bitterly condemns. According to Dyson, 'His trumpet can mock the universe, but not sound a call to battle.' He also says, 'his sense of outrage is so controlled by either selflessness, stoicism, or any clear discipline of the mind, that it readily degenerates into moods profoundly and dangerously maladjusted.'

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## 11.8 Review Questions

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1. How does Osborne reflect in *Look Back in Anger* the mood and sentiments of the angry generation?
2. Comment on the ending of the play. What does it suggest?
3. Critically analyze the structure of the play.
4. What is the significance of the bears and squirrels game in the play?
5. Explain the sense of alienation, frustration, desperation and anger in the play.
6. In which ways is Jimmy stranded between an almost sentimental nostalgia for an idealistic past and his present-day world without ideals? Exemplify.
7. *Look Back in Anger* has been described as a monologue play, with only one fully realized character. Is this a fair account?

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## UNIT-12

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### SAMUEL BECKETT : *WAITING FOR GODOT* ( I )

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#### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 About the Author
- 12.3 About the Theatre of the Absurd
- 12.4 Introduction to the play
- 12.5 An Avant Garde Play
- 12.6 Critical Analysis
- 12.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.8 Review Questions
- 12.9 Bibliography

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#### 12.0 Objectives

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The objectives of this unit are to introduce you to the idea of tragicomedy, the theatre of the Absurd, and to enable you to appreciate how *Waiting for Godot* is different from other plays prescribed in your syllabus.

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#### 12.1 Introduction

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*Waiting for Godot* was originally written in French entitled *En attendant Godot* in 1952. The play broke new ground new theatre history and is rightly called an *avant garde play*. There are certain distinct features of it, which make it markedly different from other plays you may have read in this course. Some of the things which distinguish it from other plays could be:

- (i) the austere stage-setting,
- (ii) tramps as protagonists,
- (iii) use of language and linguistic devices such as, speech-pace, pauses silences etc.,
- (iv) static nature of the action,

- (v) absence of conventional plot, and

These features are meant to give you a sense of direction. You should try to apply these ideas as you read and reread the text.

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## 12.2 About the Author

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Samuel Beckett, born in 1906 in the town of Foxrock near Dublin, Ireland, won recognition as a playwright though he wrote novels, criticism and poems too. He was deeply influenced by post- first world war modernism in western literature which was marked by anti-realism and excessive concern for formal criteria. After completing BA with honours from Trinity College, Dublin, Beckett won two year fellowship to the École Normale supérieure in Paris. Here he was introduced to James Joyce whose style influenced Beckett's development as a writer. On his return to Dublin in 1930, Beckett took up teaching at Trinity. Dissatisfied with Catholic censorship of arts and morals and by Irish insularity to continental experimentalism, he left his job in 1931. For next six years he wandered from one place to another, travelling across London, Paris and Germany. He published a collection of short stories, poems and a novel.

Beckett settled down in Paris in 1937. In spite of political unrest due to rise of Hitler, civil war in Spain and the growing possibility of second world war, Beckett remained a political suppressor of all social references from his works. However, after German occupation of France in 1940, Beckett joined secret resistance group. In 1942 onwards, he had to spend terribly lonely and uncertain two and a half years, hiding in a remote mountain village of Raussillou. On his return to Paris in 1945, after German surrender, Beckett devoted himself entirely to writing. The next four years were the most productive and won him fame and recognition. *Waiting For Godot* too was written during this period.

Some of Beckett's best known works besides *Waiting for Godot* are play *Elzathia* and *Endgame*, Novels *Murphy*, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, volume of short stories *More Pricks than Kicks* and collection of poems *Echo's Bones and other Participates*. Beckett wrote both in French and English. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969

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## 12.3 The Theatre of the Absurd

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The *Theatre of the Absurd* represents trends apparent in literature of writers like Joyce and Kafka in the 1920s, or in the paintings of twentieth century artists as in Cubism and Abstract paintings. However, it took some time for the innovations of the two to filter down into a wider consciousness of public before playwrights could apply and showcase them. The popularity of *Waiting for Godot* when enacted at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris on 19 November 1957, and the wide acclaim won by plays by Ionesco, Adamov, Pinter and others, point to the inherent appeal of innovative application of language, approaches, ideas and new vitalizing

philosophy that aimed to transform established norms and conventions related to plays. The *Theatre of the Absurd* playwrights pursued ends which were very different from conventional plays.

The decline of religious faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was masked by nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. The substitute religions were in turn undermined by the war. By 1942, Albert Camus was questioning the very reason to live on. This sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human condition is the concern of the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Genet etc. The sense of 'senselessness' of human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach is expressed by the *Theatre of the Absurd*. There is an open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. It gave up arguing about the absurdity of human condition and presented it in concrete images. An integration of subject matter and form is affected.

Plays written in this new convention broke the old established ones. Instead of cleverly constructed story, there is no story or plot to speak of. Subtlety of characterization and motivation is replaced by almost mechanical puppet-like characters with unreliable motivation. If a good play was expected to have a fully explained theme, with neat exposure and final solution these have neither a beginning nor an end in conventional sense of word. Dialogues are neither pointed, clear or reliable. There is marked incoherence. And what passes in these plays are not events with a definite beginning and a definite end, but types of situations that will forever repeat themselves. That is why the pattern of Act I of *Waiting for Godot* is repeated with variations in Act II.

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## 12.4 Introduction to the Play

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*Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation. 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.' On a country road, by a tree, two old tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting. That is the opening situation at the beginning of act I. At the end of act I they are informed that Mr Godot, with whom they believe they have an appointment, cannot come, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Act II repeats precisely the same pattern. The same boy arrives and delivers the same message. Act I ends:

Estragon: Well, shall we go?

Vladimir: Yes, let's go.

(They do not move.)

Act II ends with the same lines of dialogue, but spoken by the same characters in reversed order.

The sequence of events and the dialogue in each act are different. Each time the two tramps encounter another pair of characters, Pozzo and Lucky, master and slave, under dif-

fering circumstances; in each act Vladimir and Estragon attempt suicide and fail, for differing reasons; but these variations merely serve to emphasize the essential sameness of the situation- plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

In accordance with the traditions of the music hall or the circus, there is an element of crudely physical humour: Estragon loses his trousers, there is a protracted gag involving three hats that are put on and off and handed on in a sequence of seemingly unending confusion, and there is an abundance of pratfalls- the writer of a penetrating thesis on Beckett, Niclus Gessner, lists no fewer than forty-five stage directions indicating that one of the characters leaves the upright position, which symbolizes the dignity of man.

As the members of a cross-talk act, Vladimir and Estragon have complementary personalities. Vladimir is the more practical of the two, and Estragon claims to have been a poet. In eating his carrion, Estragon finds that the more he eats of it the less he likes it, while Vladimir reacts the opposite way- he likes things as he gets used to them. Estragon is volatile, Vladimir persistent. Estragon dreams, Vladimir cannot stand hearing about dreams. Vladimir has stinking breath, Estragon has stinking feet. Vladimir remembers past events, Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened. Estragon likes telling funny stories, Vladimir is upset by them. It is mainly Vladimir who voices the hope that Godot will come and that his coming will change their situation, while Estragon remains sceptical throughout and at times even forgets the name of Godot. It is Vladimir who conducts the conversation with the boy who is Godot's messenger and to whom the boy's messages are addressed. Estragon is the weaker of the two; he is beaten up by mysterious strangers every night. Vladimir at times acts as his protector, sings him to sleep with a lullaby, and covers him with his coat. The opposition of their temperaments is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part. Yet, being complementary natures, they also are dependent on each other and have to stay together.

Pozzo and Lucky are equally complementary in their natures, but their relationship is on a more primitive level: Pozzo is the sadistic master, Lucky the submissive slave. In the first act, Pozzo is rich, powerful, and certain of himself; he represents worldly man in all his facile and shortsighted optimism and illusory feeling of power and permanence. Lucky not only carries his heavy luggage, and even the whip with which Pozzo beats him, he also dances and thinks for him, or did so in his prime. In fact, Lucky taught Pozzo all the higher values of life: 'beauty, grace, truth of the first water'. Pozzo and Lucky represent the relationship between body and mind, the material and the spiritual sides of man, with the intellect subordinate to the appetites of the body. Now that Lucky's powers are failing, Pozzo complains that they cause him untold suffering. He wants to get rid of Lucky and sell him at the fair. But in the second act, when they appear again, they are still tied together. Pozzo has gone blind, Lucky has become dumb. While Pozzo drives Lucky on a journey without an apparent goal, Vladimir has prevailed upon Estragon to wait for Godot.

A good deal of ingenuity has been expended in trying to establish at least an etymology for Godot's name, which would point to Beckett's conscious or subconscious intention in making him the objective of Vladimir's and Estragon's quest. It has been suggested that Godot is a weakened form of the word 'God'.

Whether Godot is meant to suggest the intervention of a supernatural agency, or whether he stands for a mythical human being whose arrival is expected to change the situation, or both of these possibilities combined, his exact nature is of secondary importance. The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition. Throughout our lives we always wait for something, and Godot simply represents the objective of our waiting— an event, a thing, a person, death. Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time in its purest, most evident form. If we are active, we tend to forget the passage of time, we pass the time, but if we are merely passively waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself.

If Godot is the object of Vladimir's and Estragon's desire, he seems naturally ever beyond their reach. It is significant that the boy who acts as go-between fails to recognize the pair from day to day. The French version explicitly states that the boy who appears in the second act is the same boy as the one in the first act, yet the boy denies that he has ever seen the two tramps before and insists that this is the first time he has acted as Godot's messenger. As the boy leaves, Vladimir tries to impress it upon him: 'You're sure you saw me, eh, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me before?' The boy does not reply, and we know that he will again fail to recognize them. Can we ever be sure that the human beings we meet are the same today as they were yesterday? When Pozzo and Lucky first appear, neither Vladimir nor Estragon seems to recognize them; Estragon even takes Pozzo for Godot. But after they have gone, Vladimir comments that they have changed since their last appearance. Estragon insists that he didn't know them.

In the second act, when Pozzo and Lucky reappear, cruelly deformed by the action of time, Vladimir and Estragon again have their doubts whether they are the same people they met on the previous day. Nor does Pozzo remember them: 'I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today.'

Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void. The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world. 'The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops.' One day is like another, and when we die, we might never have existed.

Still Vladimir and Estragon live in hope: they wait for Godot, whose coming will bring the flow of time to a stop. They are hoping to be saved from the evanescence and instability of the illusion of time, and to find peace and permanence outside it. Then they will no longer be



tramps, homeless wanderers, but will have arrived home.

Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot although their appointment with him is by no means certain. Estragon does not remember it at all. Vladimir is not quite sure what they asked Godot to do for them. It was ‘nothing very definite.....a king of prayer..... a vague supplication’. And what had Godot promised them? ‘That he’d see..... that he would think it over.....’

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## 12.5 Avant Garde Play

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*Waiting for Godot* is a landmark in modern drama. When it premiered in Paris, its originally-stunned audiences; no one had seen or heard anything like it before. Initially, some were disgusted; some were puzzled; and some were wildly enthusiastic. Within a short time, audiences came to the theatre prepared for a wholly new dramatic experience and went away with praises for Samuel Beckett. Let us now have a look at the distinct aspects of *Waiting for Godot* so as to highlight the devices which made it an avant garde play.

Compared to the elaborate stage-setting in other plays in your course, you will notice that in *Waiting for Godot*, the stage is almost bare and shorn properties. This is characteristic of Beckett’s plays. Compared to the stage-setting in some of his own plays the one in *Waiting for Godot*, is much barer: an open road, a mound of earth and a bare tree.

The religio-political and socio-cultural developments from the late 19th century to the middle of 20th century, brought about a profound sense of meaninglessness and rootlessness in life. Such a sense of meaninglessness naturally led to a loss of faith in a coherent and cohesive universe. This was further manifested in the breakdown of communication, and the inability of language to communicate the illogically of human situations. Thus the language of the absurd is very often at variance with the immediate action and is reduced to meaningless patter, to show the futility of communication. Sometimes what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts the words spoken by the characters.

Closely related to the distinct communicative devices are some of the non-verbal acts, accompanying them in *Godot*. Beckett makes extensive use of devices like gestures and mannerism employed in various other performing arts.

There is cross talk between a straight and a funny man, when they contemplate suicide,

Estragon: Let’s hang ourselves immediately!

Vladimir: From a bough?..... I wouldn’t trust it.

Estragon: We can always try.

Vladimir: Go ahead.

Estragon: After you.

Vladimir: No no, you first.

Estragon: If it hangs you, it will hang anything.

It reminds us of the typical aristocratic etiquette and mannerism of the Nawabs of Lucknow- “Pahle Aap”- (You first!), giving precedence to the other person over oneself. See how the two tramps give precedence to each other while suggesting suicide!

The last line of the play typifies the nature of action: “They don’t move.”

The entire action takes at one place. The only movement is from wings to the stage and vice versa. The plot lacks linear progression. There is no basic change in the protagonists situation.

The wait seems endless. The curtain goes up on the two tramps waiting for the elusive *Godot* and it comes down with the two tramps hinting to come the next day, and wait for him all over again. The only thing that really moves is time.

The static nature of the play is reinforced by the absence of a coherent story in it. The plot as a conventional play has an opening leading to a climax and finally the resolution. The play has two Acts. In both Acts, the two tramps meet, they are joined by Lucky and Pozzo, who leave the two of them together after sometime. The tramps are finally visited by the Boy who in both the Acts conveys an identical message. The structure is sustained by the refrain: “We are *Waiting for Godot*”.

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## 12.6 Critical Analysis

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Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, meet near a tree. They converse on various topics and reveal that they are waiting there for a man named Godot. The beginning of the play establishes Vladimir and Estragon’s relationship. Vladimir clearly realizes that Estragon is dependent on him when he tells Estragon that he would be “nothing more than a little heap of bones” without him. Vladimir also insists that Estragon would not go far if they parted. This dependency extends even to minute, everyday things, as Estragon cannot even take off his boot without help from Vladimir.

The beginning of the play makes Vladimir and Estragon seem interchangeable. For example, one of the characters often repeats a line that the other has previously said. This happens in the very beginning when the two characters switch lines in the dialogue, with each asking the other, “It hurts?” and responding, “Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!” In addition to demonstrating the way that the two characters can be seen as interchangeable, this textual repetition will be found throughout the play as an indicator of the repetitiveness of life in general for Vladimir and Estragon.

Vladimir’s discussion of the story of the two thieves brings up the question of textual

uncertainty. He points out that the four gospels present entirely different versions of this story, and wonders why one of these versions is accepted as definitive. This question about the reliability of texts might cause the reader (or audience) of this play to question the reliability of this particular text. Also, the repetition of the story by the four gospels might allude to the repetitiveness of the action of the play.

The repetitiveness of the play is best illustrated by Estragon's repeated requests to leave, which are followed each time by Vladimir telling him that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot. The exact repetition of the lines each time this dialogue appears, including the stage directions, reinforces the idea that the same actions occur over and over again and suggests that these actions happen more times than the play presents.

In this beginning section we get the only clue of the nature of Vladimir and Estragon's relationship with Godot. They mention that they asked Godot for "a kind of prayer...a vague supplication," which he is currently considering. This creates a parallel between Godot and God, also suggested by their similar names, and it seems that Vladimir and Estragon do consider Godot a kind of religious figure when they mention coming in on their hands and knees.

Pozzo enters, driving Lucky ahead of him by a rope around his neck. Vladimir and Estragon wonder if Pozzo is Godot, but he tells them that he is Pozzo and asks if they have heard of him. They tell him that they have not. Pozzo commands Lucky to put down his stool, and sits down and begins to eat some chicken. While he eats, Vladimir and Estragon circle around Lucky, inspecting him. They notice a sore on his neck and begin to ask him a question, but Pozzo tells them to leave him alone.

Estragon asks Pozzo if he can have the bones from his chicken, and Pozzo tells him that Lucky gets priority over them. Estragon asks Lucky if he wants the bones, but he does not reply, and Pozzo tells Estragon that he can have the bones. He comments that he has never known Lucky to refuse a bone and hopes that he is not sick.

Vladimir suddenly explodes with anger at Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, but then seems embarrassed at his outburst. Pozzo decides to go, but then decides to stay and smoke another pipe. Vladimir wants to leave, but Pozzo reminds him of his appointment with Godot.

Estragon begins to wonder aloud why Lucky does not put down his bags. Pozzo begins to answer the question, after much preparation involving his vaporizer spray, but gives a convoluted and contradictory response. Vladimir asks Pozzo if he wants to get rid of Lucky; Pozzo responds that he does and is taking him to the fair to sell him.

Lucky begins to cry, and Pozzo hands Estragon a handkerchief to wipe away his tears. Estragon approaches Lucky, but Lucky kicks him in the shins. Pozzo tells Vladimir and Estragon that he has learned a lot from Lucky, and that Lucky has been serving him for nearly sixty years. Vladimir becomes angry that Pozzo is going to get rid of Lucky after so much time, and Pozzo gets upset. Vladimir then gets angry at Lucky for mistreating Pozzo.

Pozzo calms down, but he realizes that he has lost his pipe and begins to get upset again. While Estragon laughs at Pozzo, Vladimir exits, apparently to go to the bathroom. He returns, in a bad mood, but soon calms down. Pozzo sits down again and begins to explain the twilight. When he finishes, he asks them to evaluate his performance and then offers to have Lucky perform for them. Estragon wants to see Lucky dance, while Vladimir wants to hear him think, so Pozzo commands him to dance and then think.

Lucky dances, and Estragon is not very impressed. Pozzo tells them that he used to dance much better. Vladimir asks him to tell Lucky to think, but Pozzo says that he cannot think without his hat. Vladimir puts Lucky's hat on his head and he begins to think aloud, spouting a long stream of words and phrases that amount to gibberish. As he goes on, the other three suffer more and more and finally throw themselves on him and seize his hat to make him stop. Pozzo tramples on the hat, and the men help Lucky up and give him all the bags.

Pozzo is about to leave, but finds that he cannot. He decides that he needs a running start, so he starts from the opposite end of the stage and drives Lucky across as they exchange good-byes.

After Pozzo and Lucky depart, Vladimir once again tells Estragon that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot. They argue about whether Pozzo and Lucky have changed, and Estragon suddenly complains of pain in his other foot.

A boy enters timidly, saying that he has a message from Mr. Godot. Estragon bullies the boy, who reveals that he has been waiting a while but was afraid of Pozzo and Lucky. When Estragon shakes the boy, badgering him to tell the truth, Vladimir yells at him and sits down and begins to take off his boots.

Meanwhile, Vladimir talks to the boy. He asks him if he is the one who came yesterday, but the boy tells him that he is not. The boy tells Vladimir that Mr. Godot will not come this evening, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Vladimir then asks the boy if he works for Mr. Godot, and the boy tells him that he minds the goats. The boy says that Mr. Godot does not beat him, but that he beats his brother who minds the sheep.

Vladimir asks the boy if he is unhappy, but the boy does not know. He tells the boy that he can go, and that he is to tell Mr. Godot that he saw them. The boy runs off the stage and, as he goes, it suddenly becomes night.

Estragon gets up and puts his boots down at the edge of the stage. Vladimir tells him that the boy assured him that Godot will come tomorrow. He tries to drag Estragon offstage to shelter, but Estragon will not go. Estragon wonders if they should part, but they decide to go together. As the curtain falls, they remain still.

Act II takes place the next evening, at the same time and place. The tree now has four or five leaves on it. Estragon's boots and Lucky's hat remain onstage when Vladimir enters, looks around, and begins to sing. Estragon enters and suggests that Vladimir seemed happier

without him. He says that he does not know why he keeps returning to Vladimir, since he too is happier alone, but Vladimir insists that it's because Estragon does not know how to defend himself.

Vladimir suggests that things have changed since yesterday, but Estragon does not remember yesterday. Vladimir reminds him about Pozzo and Lucky, and they begin to argue about whether Estragon has ever been in the Macon country. Estragon once again says that it would be better if they parted, but Vladimir reminds him that he always comes crawling back. They decide to converse calmly but soon run out of things to say, and Vladimir grows uncomfortable with the silence.

Vladimir looks at the tree and notices that it is now covered with leaves, although yesterday it was bare. Estragon says that it must be spring, but also insists that they were not here yesterday. Vladimir reminds him of the bones that Pozzo gave him and the kick that Lucky gave him and shows him the wound on his leg. He asks Estragon where his boots are and—when Estragon replies that he must have thrown them away—points out the boots on the stage triumphantly. Estragon, however, examines the boots and says that they are not his. Vladimir reasons that someone must have come by and exchanged his boots for Estragon's.

Vladimir gives Estragon a black radish, but since he only likes the pink ones, he gives it back. Estragon says he will go and get a carrot, but he does not move. Vladimir suggests trying the boots on Estragon, and they fit, but Estragon does not want them laced. Estragon sits down on the mound and tries to sleep. Vladimir sings him a lullaby, and he falls asleep, but soon wakes up from a nightmare.

Vladimir is pleased to find Lucky's hat on the ground because he believes it confirms that they are in the correct place. He puts on Lucky's hat and hands his to Estragon, who takes off his hat and hands it to Vladimir. This switch occurs several times until once again Vladimir wears Lucky's hat, and Estragon wears his own hat. Vladimir decides that he will keep Lucky's hat, since his bothered him. They begin to play Pozzo and Lucky's roles, with Vladimir imitating Lucky and telling Estragon what to do to imitate Pozzo. Estragon leaves, but quickly returns because he hears someone coming.

Vladimir is sure that Godot is coming, and Estragon hides behind the tree. He realizes that he is not hidden and comes out, and the two men begin a watch with one stationed on each side of the stage. When they both begin to speak at once, they get angry and begin insulting each other. After they finish their insults, they decide to make up and embrace. They briefly do some exercises and then do "the tree," staggering around on one foot.

While Vladimir and Estragon stagger about pitying themselves, Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo is blind and runs into Lucky, who has stopped at the sight of Vladimir and Estragon. They fall, along with all the baggage. Vladimir welcomes their arrival since it will help to pass the time. Pozzo calls for help while Vladimir and Estragon discuss asking him for another

bone. Vladimir decides that they should help him, but first he and Estragon discuss how they have kept their appointment.

Pozzo continues to cry for help, and eventually Vladimir tries to assist him. However, he falls also while trying to pull up Pozzo. Estragon threatens to leave, but Vladimir begs him to help him up first, promising that they will leave together afterward. Estragon tries to help him up, but ends up falling as well.

All four men now lie on the ground, and Vladimir and Estragon begin to nap. They are woken shortly by Pozzo's shouting, and Vladimir strikes Pozzo to make him stop. Pozzo crawls away, and Vladimir and Estragon call to him. He does not respond, and Estragon decides to try other names. He calls out "Abel," and Pozzo responds by crying for help. He wonders if the other one is called Cain, but Pozzo responds to that name as well, and Estragon decides that he must be all of humanity.

Vladimir and Estragon decide to get up, which they do with ease. They help Pozzo up and hold him, and Pozzo tells them that he does not recognize them since he is blind. They tell him that it is evening, and then begin to question him about the loss of his sight. He tells them that it came upon him all of a sudden and that he has no notion of time.

Pozzo asks the men about his slave, and they tell him that Lucky seems to be sleeping. They send Estragon over to Lucky, and Estragon begins kicking Lucky. He hurts his foot and goes to sit down. Vladimir asks Pozzo if they met yesterday, but Pozzo does not remember. Pozzo prepares to leave, and Vladimir asks him to have Lucky sing or recite before they leave. However, Pozzo tells him that Lucky is dumb. They exit, and Vladimir sees them fall offstage.

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## 12.7 Let Us Sum Up

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The information in this Unit is of two kinds: material that is not directly about the play but deepens our understanding of it which includes information about theatre of the Absurd and life and works of Beckett, and material directly about the play such as an avant grade play. Our purpose has been to familiarize you with the play as also sharpen your wits to examine it critically.

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## 12.8 Review Questions

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1. Does the language used in Act II express the sense of metaphysical anguish more explicitly than it did in the first Act?
2. What difference do you see in the relationship between Lucky and Pozzo? Is there reversal of roles in Act II?
3. How far, do you think, is Act II a repeat of Act I? Do you see any development in terms of plot, theme and characters in Act II?

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## 12.9 Bibliography

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## UNIT-13

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### SAMUEL BECKETT : *WAITING FOR GODOT* ( II )

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#### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Plot
  - 13.2.1 Act-I
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  - 13.3.3 Boys(s)
  - 13.3.4 Godot
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- 13.6 Defferent Perspectives
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#### **13.0 Objectives**

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To analyse the text of the play in the background of the distinct aspects of the play discussed briefly in the previous unit.



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## 13.1 Introduction

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Though difficult and sometime baffling to read view, *Waiting for Godot* is nonetheless one of the most important works of our time. It revolutionized theatre in the twentieth century and had a profound influence on generations of succeeding dramatists, including such renowned contemporary playwrights as Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. After the appearance of *Waiting for Godot*, theatre was opened to possibilities that playwrights and audiences had never before imagined.

Initially written in French in 1948 as *En Attendant Godot*, Beckett's play was published in French in October of 1952 before its first stage production in Paris in January of 1953 and in the English by Beckett himself as *Waiting for Godot*, the play was produced in London in 1955 and in the United States in 1956 and has been produced worldwide. Beckett's play came to be considered an essential example of what Martin Esslin later called "Theatre of the Absurd", a term that Beckett disavowed but which remains a handy description for one of the most important theatre movements of the twentieth century.

"Absurdist Theatre" discards traditional plot, characters, and action to assault its audience with a disorienting experience. Characters often engage in seemingly meaningless dialogue or activities, and, as a result, the audience senses what it is like to live in a universe that doesn't "make sense." Beckett and others who adopted this style felt that this disoriented feeling was a more honest response to the post World War II world than the traditional belief in a rationally ordered universe. *Waiting for Godot* remains the most famous example of this form of drama.

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## 13.2 Plot

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### 13.2.1 Act-I

*Waiting for Godot* follows two consecutive days in the lives of a pair of men who divert themselves while they wait expectantly and unsuccessfully for someone named Godot to arrive. They claim him an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him, admitting that they would not recognise him were they to see him. To occupy themselves, they eat, sleep, talk, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay" "Silence," says Beckett, "is pouring into this play like water into a sinking ship", arguably both true and ironic, given the play's wordy banter and patter.

The play opens with the character Estragon struggling to remove his boot from his foot. Estragon eventually gives up, muttering, "Nothing to be done." His friend Vladimir takes up the thought and muses on it, the implication being that nothing is a thing that has to be done and this pair is going to have to spend the rest of the play doing it. When Estragon finally succeeds in removing his boot, he looks and feels inside but finds nothing. Just prior to this, Vladimir peers into his hat. The motif recurs throughout in the play.

The pair discusses repentance, particularly in relation to the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus, and the fact that only one of the four Evangelists mentions that one of them was saved. This is the first of numerous Biblical references in the play, which may be linked to its putative central theme of the search for and reconciliation with God, as well as salvation: "We're saved!" they cry on more than one occasion when they feel that Godot may be near.

Presently, Vladimir expresses his frustration with Estragon's limited conversational skills: "Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a while?". Estragon struggles in this regard throughout the play, and Vladimir generally takes the lead in their dialogue and encounters with others. Vladimir is at times hostile towards his companion, but in general they are close, frequently embracing and supporting one another.

Estragon peers out into the audience and comments on the bleakness of his surroundings. He wants to depart but is told that they cannot because they must wait for Godot. The pair cannot agree, however, on whether or not they are in the right place or that this is the arranged day for their meeting with Godot; indeed, they are not even sure what day it is. Throughout the play, experienced time is attenuated, fractured or eerily non-existent. The only thing that they are fairly sure about is that they are to meet at a tree: there is one nearby.

Estragon dozes off, but Vladimir is not interested in hearing about his dream after rousing him. Estragon wants to hear an old joke about a brothel, which Vladimir starts but cannot finish, as he is suddenly compelled to rush off and urinate. He does not finish the story when he returns, asking Estragon instead what else they might do to pass the time. Estragon suggests that they hang themselves, but they quickly abandon the idea when it seems that they might not both die: this would leave one of them alone, an intolerable notion. They decide to do nothing: "It's safer," explains Estragon, before asking what Godot is going to do for them when he arrives. For once it is Vladimir who struggles to remember: "Oh ... nothing very definite," is the best that he can manage.

When Estragon declares that he is hungry, Vladimir provides a carrot, most of which, and without much relish, the former eats. The diversion ends as it began, Estragon announcing that they still have nothing to do.

Their waiting is interrupted by the passing through of Pozzo and his heavily-laden slave Lucky, who may, according to Beckett, "shatter the space of the play". Pozzo and Lucky have been seen to represent a sort of double of Vladimir and Estragon, with similar roles, anxieties and uncertainties. At one point, Vladimir observes that they are "tied to Godot" as Lucky is tied to Pozzo. Vladimir also refers to Estragon as a "pig" several times later in the play, echoing Pozzo's abuse of Lucky.

"A terrible cry" from the wings heralds the initial entrance of Lucky, who has a rope tied around his neck. He crosses half the stage before his master appears holding the other end. Pozzo barks orders at his slave and frequently calls him a "pig", but is civil towards the other two. They mistake him at first for Godot and clearly do not recognise him for the self-

proclaimed personage he is. This irks him, but, while maintaining that the land that they are on is his, he acknowledges that "[t]he road is free to all".

Deciding to rest for a while, Pozzo enjoys a pre-packed meal of chicken and wine. Finished, he casts the bones aside, and Estragon jumps at the chance to ask for them, much to Vladimir's embarrassment, but is told that they belong to the carrier. He must first, therefore, ask Lucky if he wants them. Estragon tries, but Lucky only hangs his head, refusing to answer. Taking this as a "no", Estragon claims the bones.

Vladimir takes Pozzo to task regarding his mistreatment of his slave, but his protestations are ignored. When the original pairing tries to find out why Lucky does not put down his load (at least not unless his master is prevailing on him to do something else), Pozzo explains that Lucky is attempting to mollify him to prevent him from selling him. At this, Lucky begins to cry. Pozzo provides a handkerchief, but, when Estragon tries to wipe his tears away, Lucky kicks him in the shins.

Before he leaves, Pozzo asks if he can do anything for the pair in exchange for the consort that they have accorded him. Estragon tries to ask for some money, but Vladimir cuts him short, explaining that they are not beggars. They nevertheless accept an offer to have Lucky dance and think.

The dance is clumsy and shuffling, and everyone is disappointed. Lucky's "think", induced by Vladimir's putting his hat on his head, is a lengthy and disjointed verbal stream of consciousness. The soliloquy begins relatively coherently but quickly dissolves into logorrhoea — the rubble of a collapsing house of intellect — and only ends when a het-up Vladimir, on the advice of a bored Pozzo, rips off Lucky's hat.

The soliloquy is full of classical references, as well as words that are distorted versions of ordinary words, slang and vulgar speech — "Belcher" as "belch", "Fartov" as "fart", "Testew" as "testes", "Cunard" as the French 'conard' ('idiot' or 'prat'), "possy" as "pussy" and "Feckham" as "fuck him". Most of these words, although crude, describe normal human functions, which in some ways bring the discourse "down to earth". They also, however, represent or indicate a disordered and disintegrating mind, one perhaps disturbed by too much waiting.

Some other unusual words include "apathia", which is synonymous with "apathy"; "aphasia", the loss of ability to understand or to express speech owing to brain damage; and "athambia", the meaning of which has been subject to debate, but which may be broadly interpreted, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, as "imperturbability". The implication may be that God is unfeeling, unseeing and inattentive. Also repeated is the word "quaquaqua", which may simply be meaningless sound, but which is similar to "quaquaversal", which means "pointing in every direction", appropriate to Lucky's roundabout discourse.

Broadly speaking, Lucky's speech falls into four gambits: "the first describes an impersonal and callous God, the second asserts that man 'wastes and pines', the third mourns an

inhospitable earth and the last attempts to draw the threads of the speech together by claiming that man diminishes in a world that does not nurture him." It may be summarized as follows:

Acknowledging the existence of a personal God, one who exists outside time and who loves us dearly and who suffers with those who are plunged into torment, it is established beyond all doubt that man for reasons unknown, has left his labours, abandoned, unfinished.

Once Lucky has been revived, Pozzo has him pack up his things and, together, they leave. At the end of the act (and its successor), a boy arrives, purporting to be a messenger sent from Godot, to advise the pair that he will not be coming that "evening but surely tomorrow." During Vladimir's interrogation of the boy, he asks if he came the day before, making it apparent that the two men have been waiting for an indefinite period and will likely continue to wait *ad infinitum*. After the boy departs, they decide to leave but make no attempt to do so, an action repeated in Act II, as the curtain is drawn.

### **13.2.2 Act-II**

Act II opens with Vladimir singing around about a dog which serves to illustrate the cyclical nature of the play's universe, and also points toward the play's debt to the carnivalesque, music hall traditions and vaudeville comedy (this is only one of a number of canine references and allusions in the play). There is a bit of realization on Vladimir's part that the world they are trapped in evinces convoluted progression (or lack thereof) of time. He begins to see that although there is notional evidence of linear progression, basically he is living the same day over and over. Eugene Webb writes of Vladimir's song that "Time in the song is not a linear sequence, but an endlessly reiterated moment, the content of which is only one eternal event: death."

Once again Estragon maintains he spent the night in a ditch and was beaten – by "ten of them" this time – though once again he shows no sign of injury. Vladimir tries to talk to him about what appears to be a seasonal change in the tree and the proceedings of the day before, but he has only a vague recollection. Vladimir tries to get Estragon to remember Pozzo and Lucky but all he can call to mind are the bones and getting kicked. Vladimir realizes here an opportunity to produce tangible evidence of the previous day's events. With some difficulty he gets Estragon to show him his leg. There is a wound which is beginning to fester. It is then Vladimir notices that Estragon is not wearing any boots.

He discovers the pair of boots, which Estragon insists are not his. Nevertheless, when he tries them on they fit. There being no carrots left, Vladimir offers Estragon the choice between a turnip and a radish. He opts for the radish but it is black and he hands it back. He decides to try and sleep again and adopts the same fetal position as the previous day. Vladimir sings him a lullaby.

Vladimir notices Lucky's hat, and he decides to try it on. This leads to a frenetic hat

swapping scene (which was mimicked by Harold Pinter in *The Caretaker*). They play at imitating Pozzo and Lucky, but Estragon can barely remember having met them and simply does what Vladimir asks. They fire insults at each other and then make up. After that, they attempt some physical jerks which don't work out well, and even attempt a single yoga position, which fails miserably.

Pozzo and Lucky then arrive, with Pozzo now blind and insisting that Lucky is dumb. The rope is now much shorter and Lucky – who has acquired a new hat – leads Pozzo, rather than being driven by him. Pozzo has lost all notion of time, and assures them he cannot remember meeting them the day before, and that he does not expect to remember the current day's events when they are over.

They fall in a heap at one point. Estragon sees an opportunity to extort more food or to exact revenge on Lucky for kicking him. The issue is debated at length. Pozzo offers them money but Vladimir sees more worth in their entertainment value since they are compelled to wait to see if Godot arrives anyway. Eventually though, they all find their way onto their feet.

Whereas the Pozzo in Act I is a windbag, since he has become blind he appears to have gained some insight. His parting words – which Vladimir expands upon later eloquently encapsulate the brevity of human existence: “They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.”

Lucky and Pozzo depart. The same boy returns to inform them not to expect Godot today, but he would arrive the next day. The two again consider suicide but their rope, Estragon's belt, breaks in two when they tug on it. Estragon's trousers fall down, but he doesn't notice till Vladimir tells him to pull them up. They resolve to bring a more suitable piece and hang themselves the next day, if Godot fails to arrive.

Again, they agree to leave but neither of them make any move to go.

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### **13.3 Characters**

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Beckett refrained from elaborating on the characters beyond what he had written in the play. He once recalled them when Sir Ralph Richardson “wanted the low-down on Pozzo, his home address and curriculum vitae, and seemed to make the forthcoming of this and similar information the condition of his condescending to illustrate the part of Vladimir . . . I told him that all I knew about Pozzo was in the text, that if I had known more I would have put it in the text, and that was true also of the other characters.”

#### **13.3.1 Estragon and Vladimir**

When Beckett started writing he did not have a visual image of Vladimir and Estragon. They are never referred to as tramps in the text. Roger Blin advises: “Beckett heard their voices, but he couldn't describe his characters to me. [He said]: ‘The only thing I'm sure of is

that they're wearing bowlers.' "The bowler hat was of course de rigueur for male persons in many social contexts when Beckett was growing up in Foxrock (when he first came back with his beret ... his mother suggested that he was letting the family down by not wearing a bowler), and [his father] commonly wore one." There are no physical descriptions of either of the two characters however the text indicates that Vladimir is likely the heavier of the pair. They have been together for fifty years but when asked – by Pozzo – they don't reveal their actual ages.

Vladimir stands through most of the play whereas Estragon sits down numerous times and even dozes off. "Estragon is inert and Vladimir restless." Vladimir looks at the sky and muses on religious or philosophical matters. Estragon "belongs to the stone", preoccupied with mundane things, what he can get to eat and how to ease his physical aches and pains; he is direct, intuitive. He finds it hard to remember but can recall certain things when prompted, e.g. when Vladimir asks: "Do you remember the Gospels?" Estragon tells him about the coloured maps of the Holy Land and that he planned to honeymoon by the Dead Sea; it is his short-term memory that is poorest and points to the fact that he may, in fact, be suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Al Alvarez writes. "But perhaps Estragon's forgetfulness is the cement binding their relationship together. He continually forgets, Vladimir continually reminds him; between them they pass the time."

Vladimir's life is not without its discomforts too but he is the more resilient of the pair. "Vladimir's pain is primarily mental anguish, which would thus account for his voluntary exchange of his hat for Lucky's, thus signifying Vladimir's symbolic desire for another person's thoughts."

Throughout the play the couple refer to each other by pet names, "Didi" and "Gogo" although one of the boys addresses Vladimir as "Mister Albert". Beckett originally intended to call Estragon, Lévy but when Pozzo questions him he gives his name as "Magrégor, André" and also responds to "Catulle" in French or "Catullus" in the first Faber edition. This became "Adam" in the American edition. Beckett's only explanation was that he was "fed up with Catullus".

Vivian Mercier – famous for describing *Waiting for Godot* as a play which "has achieved a theoretical impossibility—a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What's more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice." (Irish Times, 18 February 1956, p. 6.) – once questioned Beckett on the language used by the pair: "It seemed to me ... he made Didi and Gogo sound as if they had earned Ph.D.'s. 'How do you know they hadn't?' was his reply." They clearly have known better times, a visit to the Eiffel Tower and grape-harvesting by the Rhône; it is about all either has to say about their pasts. In the first stage production, which Beckett oversaw, both are "more shabby-genteel than ragged ... Vladimir at least is capable of being scandalised ... on a matter of etiquette when Estragon begs for chicken bones or money."

### 13.3.2 Lucky and Pozzo

Although Beckett refused to be drawn on the backgrounds of the characters this has not stopped actors looking for their own motivation. Jean Martin had a doctor friend called Marthe Gautier, who was working at the Salpêtrière Hospital, and he said to her: “Listen, Marthe, what could I find that would provide some kind of physiological explanation for a voice like the one written in the text?” [She] said: ‘Well, it might be a good idea if you went to see the people who have Parkinson's disease.’ So I asked her about the disease ... She explained how it begins with a trembling, which gets more and more noticeable, until later the patient can no longer speak without the voice shaking. So I said, ‘That sounds exactly what I need.’ “Sam and Roger were not entirely convinced by my interpretation but had no objections.” When he explained to Beckett that he was playing Lucky as if he were suffering from Parkinson's, Beckett said, “‘Yes, of course.’ He mentioned briefly that his mother had had Parkinson's, but quickly moved on to another subject.”

“When Beckett was asked why Lucky was so named, he replied, “I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations...”

Although it has been contended that "Pozzo and Lucky are simply Didi and Gogo writ large" there is a different kind of dynamic at work here. Pozzo may be mistaken for Godot by the two men but, as far as Lucky goes, Pozzo is his Godot, another way in which he is lucky. Their association is not as clear cut as it first seems however for “upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that Lucky always possessed more influence in the relationship, for he danced, and more importantly, thought – not as a service, but in order to fill a vacant need of Pozzo: he committed all of these acts for Pozzo. As such, since the first appearance of the duo, the true slave had always been Pozzo.” Pozzo credits Lucky with having given him all the culture, refinement, and ability to reason that he possesses. His rhetoric has been learned by rote. Pozzo's ‘party piece’ on the sky is a case in point, as his memory crumbles he finds himself unable to continue under his own steam.

We learn very little about Pozzo besides the fact that he is on his way to the fair to sell his slave, Lucky. He presents himself very much as the Ascendancy landlord, bullying and conceited. His pipe is made by Kapp and Peterson, Dublin's best-known tobacconists (their slogan was ‘The thinking man's pipe’) which he refers to as a “briar” but which Estragon calls a “dudeen” emphasising the differences in their social standing. He confesses to a poor memory but it is more a result of an abiding self-absorption. “Pozzo is a character who has to overcompensate. That's why he overdoes things ... and his overcompensation has to do with a deep insecurity in him. These were things Beckett said, psychological terms he used.”

Pozzo controls Lucky by means of an extremely long rope which he jerks and tugs if Lucky is the least bit slow. Lucky is the absolutely subservient slave of Pozzo and he unquestioningly does his every bidding with “dog-like devotion”. ‘Lucky’ is a dog's name. He struggles

with a heavy suitcase without ever thinking of dropping it. Lucky speaks only once in the play and it is a result of Pozzo's order to "think" for Estragon and Vladimir. Pozzo and Lucky had been together for sixty years and, in that time, their relationship has deteriorated. Lucky has always been the intellectually superior but now, with age, he has become an object of contempt: his "think" is a caricature of intellectual thought and his "dance" is a sorry sight. Despite his horrid treatment at Pozzo's hand however, Lucky remains completely faithful to him. Even in the second act when Pozzo has inexplicably gone blind, and needs to be led by Lucky rather than driving him as he had done before, Lucky remains faithful and has not tried to run away; they are clearly bound together by more than a piece of rope in the same way that Didi and Gogo are "tied to Godot". Beckett's advice to the American director Alan Schneider was: "[Pozzo] is a hypomaniac and the only way to play him is to play him mad."

"In his English translation . . . Beckett struggled to retain the French atmosphere as much as possible, so that he delegated all the English names and places to Lucky, whose own name, he thought, suggested such a correlation."

### **13.3.3 Boys(s)**

The cast list specifies only one boy.

The boy in Act I, a local lad, assures Vladimir that this is the first time he has seen him. He says he was not there the previous day. He confirms he works for Mr Godot as a goat herder. His brother, who coincidentally Godot beats, is a shepherd. Godot feeds both of them and allows them to sleep in his hayloft.

The boy in Act II also assures Vladimir that it was not he who called upon them the day before. He insists that this too is his first visit. When Vladimir asks what Godot does the boy tells him; "He does nothing, sir." We also learn he has a white beard – possibly, the boy is not certain. This boy also has a brother who it seems is sick but there is no clear evidence to suggest that his brother is the boy that came in Act I or the one who came the day before that.

As messengers from Godot, those who take a Christian interpretation of the play naturally cast the boys in the role of angels.

### **13.3.4 Godot**

The identity of Godot has been the subject of much debate. "When Colin Duckworth asked Beckett point-blank whether Pozzo was Godot, the author replied: 'No. It is just implied in the text, but it's not true.'

"When Roger Blin asked him who or what Godot stood for, Beckett replied that it suggested itself to him by the slang word for boot in French, godillot, godasse because feet play such a prominent role in the play. This is the explanation he has given most often."



“Beckett said to Peter Woodthorpe that he regretted calling the absent character ‘Godot’, because of all the theories involving God to which this had given rise. “I also told Richardson that if by Godot I had meant God I would [have] said God, and not Godot. This seemed to disappoint him greatly.” That said, Beckett did once concede, “It would be fatuous of me to pretend that I am not aware of the meanings attached to the word ‘Godot’, and the opinion of many that it means ‘God’. But you must remember – I wrote the play in French, and if I did have that meaning in my mind, it was somewhere in my unconscious and I was not overtly aware of it.” “Beckett has often stressed the strong unconscious impulses that partly control his writing; he has even spoken of being ‘in a trance’ when he writes.”

What if Godot were to arrive? The play suggests that were this to happen only one of the two tramps would benefit. Of the two thieves crucified along with Jesus only one was saved, of the two boys who work for Godot only one appears safe from beatings, “Beckett [even] said, only half-jokingly, that only one of Estragon’s feet was saved”; it is perhaps better for the pair of them that he does not come.

The name "Godot" is pronounced in Britain and Ireland with the emphasis on the first syllable in North America it is usually pronounced with an emphasis on the second syllable. Beckett himself said the emphasis should be on the first syllable, and that the North American pronunciation is a mistake. The T is silent.

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## 13.4 Setting

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There is only one scene throughout both acts. Two men are waiting on a country road by a tree. The script calls for Estragon to sit on a low mound but in practice – as in Beckett’s own 1975 German production – this is usually a stone. In the first act the tree is bare. In the second, a few leaves have appeared despite the script specifying that it is the next day. The minimal description calls to mind “the idea of the ‘lieu vague’, a location which should not be particularised”.

Alan Schneider once suggested putting the play on in a round – Pozzo has often been commented on as a ringmaster – but Beckett dissuaded him: “I don’t in my ignorance agree with the round and feel Godot needs a very closed box.” He once even contemplated at one point having “faint shadow of bars on stage floor” but, in the end, decided against this level of what he called “explicitation”. (See Beckett in Berlin) In his 1975 Schiller-Theatre production there are times when Didi and Gogo appear to bounce off something “like birds trapped in the strands of net”, to use James Knowlson’s description. Didi and Gogo are only trapped because they still cling to the concept that freedom is possible; freedom is a state of mind, so is imprisonment.

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## 13.5 Symmetrical Movements

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As the speeches are symmetrically assigned, so the two acts are symmetrically con-

structed, a Pozzo-Lucky incident in each preceding each time the appearance of the boy whose report is that Godot will not come today, 'but surely tomorrow'. The molecule of the play, its unit of effect, is symmetry, a symmetrical structure: the stage divided into two halves by the tree, the human race (so far as presented) divided into two, Didi and Gogo, then into four, Didi-Gogo and Pozzo-Lucky, then, with the boy's arrival, into two again, our sort, Godot's sort. And symmetries encompass opposites as well: Lucky's long speech in Act I, Lucky's utter silence in Act II. And symmetries govern the units of dialogue: at one extreme, the intricate fugue-like structure about the dead sounds and at the other extreme an exchange as short as this:

We could do our exercise.

Our movements.

Our relaxations.

Our elongations.

Our relaxations.

To warm us up.

To calm us down.

Off we go. Or even as short as this:

How time flies when one has fun!

-Three words and three words, pivoted on a 'when', and 'flies' alliterated with the incongruous 'fun'.

For nothing satisfies the mind like balance; nothing has so convincing a look of being substantial. The mind recoils from the random. That 'honesty is the best policy' seems a self-evident truth chiefly because the words are of metrical equivalence: honesty, policy. Proverbs work like that; sentences, even, work like that, and it is only by a difficult effort of attention, or else by the custom of the Civil Service, that a sentence with no balance can be constructed. Venture to utter a subject, and you will find your mind making ready a predicate that shall balance it. That is why we so seldom ask if lines of poetry make sense: the satisfactions of symmetry intervene. 'To be or not to be, that is the question,' or: 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.....' or: 'The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces.....' -such things derive much authority from equilibrium, and: 'In Xanadu sits Kubla Khan.....' exudes magic from its inversion of vowel sequence, -an, -u, -u, -an, despite our uncertainty about three of its five words. Beckett spent much time in his youth with the great virtuoso of such effects, James Joyce, whose last work, a sceptic's model of the universe, may be described as a system of intricate verbal recurrences to none of which a denotative meaning can with any confidence be assigned. And Laurel and Hardy would have been an utterly uncon-

vincing couple were it not for the virtual identity of their hats, two shiny black bowlers.

It is rather from the second act of *Waiting for Godot* than from the first that its finest verbal symmetries can be culled, for the play converges on symmetry:

Say, I am happy.

I am happy.

So am I.

So am I.

We are happy.

We are happy. (Silence.) What we do, now that we are happy?

Wait for Godot. (Estragon groans. Silence.)

The play also converges on certain very stark statements, the eloquence of which has sometimes left the impression that they are what the play 'means'. Thus Pozzo's 'They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more', has manifested an unlucky quotability. It is wrung out of Pozzo, in the play, by Didi's pestiferous questioning. The last straw, elicited by the discovery that Lucky, who spoke so eloquently in Act I, is 'dumb' in Act II, has been the question, 'Dumb! Since when?' Whereupon Pozzo ('suddenly furious') bursts out:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same say, the same second, is that not enough for you? (Calmer.) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (He Jerks the rope.) On!

This is to say, as so many things are to say, that we cannot be sure the play's who days are successive; to say that there are many days like these, that all waiting is endless, and all journeying. The striking metaphor is like Pozzo, that connoisseur of rhetoric. It sticks in Didi's mind, and a few minutes later, alone with the sleeping Gogo, he is reflecting that he too may be sleeping, so dream-like is the tedium.

Tommorrow, when I wake, or think I do what shall I say of to-day? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waiting for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his cattie, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?

Then he repeats the figure Pozzo used:

Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great daedner. (He looks again at Estragon.) At me too someone is looking, of me

too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said?

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## 13.6 Different Perspectives

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### 13.6.1 Beckett's interpretation

"Because the play is so stripped down, so elemental, it invites all kinds of social and political and religious interpretation," wrote Normand Berlin in a tribute to the play in Autumn 1999, "with Beckett himself placed in different schools of thought, different movements and 'ism's. The attempts to pin him down have not been successful, but the desire to do so is natural when we encounter a writer whose minimalist art reaches for bedrock reality. 'Less' forces us to look for 'more,' and the need to talk about Godot and about Beckett has resulted in a steady outpouring of books and articles."

Throughout *Waiting for Godot*, the reader or viewer may encounter religious, philosophical, classical, psychoanalytical and biographical especially wartime references. There are ritualistic aspects and elements literally lifted from vaudeville and there is a danger in making more of these than what they are: that is, merely structural conveniences, avatars into which the writer places his fictional characters. The play "exploits several archetypal forms and situations, all of which lend themselves to both comedy and pathos." Beckett makes this point emphatically clear in the opening notes to *Film*: "No truth value attaches to the above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience." He made another important remark to Lawrence Harvey, saying that his "work does not depend on experience it is not a record of experience. Of course you use it."

Beckett tired quickly of "the endless misunderstanding". As far back as 1955, he remarked, "Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out." He was not forthcoming with anything more than cryptic clues, however: "Peter Woodthorpe who played Estragon remembered asking him one day in a taxi what the play was really about: 'It's all symbiosis, Peter; it's symbiosis,' answered Beckett."

Beckett directed the play for the Schiller-Theatre in 1975. Although he had overseen many productions, this was the first time that he had taken complete control. Walter Asmus was his conscientious young assistant director. The production was not naturalistic. Beckett explained,

It is a game, everything is a game. When all four of them are lying on the ground, that cannot be handled naturalistically. That has got to be done artificially, balletically. Otherwise everything becomes an imitation, an imitation of reality. It should become clear and transparent, not dry. It is a game in order to survive."

Over the years, Beckett clearly realised that the greater part of *Godot's* success came down to the fact that it was open to a variety of readings and that this was not necessarily a

bad thing. Beckett himself sanctioned "one of the most famous mixed-race productions of *Godot*, performed at the Baxter Theatre in the University of Cape Town, directed by Donald Howarth, with two black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, playing Didi and Gogo; Pozzo, dressed in checked shirt and gumboots reminiscent of an Afrikaaner landlord, and Lucky ('a shanty town piece of white trash) were played by two white actors, Bill Flynn and Peter Piccolo. The Baxter production has often been portrayed as if it were an explicitly political production, when in fact it received very little emphasis.[citation needed] What such a reaction showed, however, was that, although the play can in no way be taken as a political allegory, there are elements that are relevant to any local situation in which one man is being exploited or oppressed by another."

### **13.6.2 Jungian interpretation**

"The four archetypal personalities or the four aspects of the soul are grouped in two pairs: the ego and the shadow, the persona and the soul's image animus or anima. The shadow is the container of all our despised emotions repressed by the ego. Lucky, the shadow serves as the polar opposite of the egocentric Pozzo, prototype of prosperous mediocrity, who incessantly controls and persecutes his subordinate, thus symbolising the oppression of the unconscious shadow by the despotic ego. Lucky's monologue in Act I appears as a manifestation of a stream of repressed unconsciousness, as he is allowed to "think" for his master. Estragon's name has another connotation, besides that of the aromatic herb, tarragon: "estragon" is a cognate of oestrogen, the female hormone. This prompts us to identify him with the anima, the feminine image of Vladimir's soul. It explains Estragon's propensity for poetry, his sensitivity and dreams, his irrational moods. Vladimir appears as the complementary masculine principle, or perhaps the rational persona of the contemplative type."

### **13.6.3 Existentialist interpretation**

Broadly speaking, existentialists hold that there are certain questions that everyone must deal with if they are to take human life seriously, questions such as death, the meaning of human existence and the place of God in that existence. By and large, they believe that life is very difficult and without an "objective" or universally known value: the individual must create value by affirming it and living it, not by talking about it. The play may be seen to touch on all of these issues.

Much can be read into Beckett's inclusion of the story of the two thieves from Luke 23:39-43 and the ensuing discussion of repentance. It is easy to see the solitary tree as representative of the Christian cross or, indeed, the tree of life. Similarly, an obvious conclusion to which many jump is that, because Lucky describes God as having a white beard, and Godot, if the boy's testimony is to be believed, also has a white beard, God and Godot are one and the same. Vladimir's "Christ have mercy upon us!" could be taken as evidence that that is at least what he believes.

This reading is given further weight early in the first act when Estragon asks Vladimir what it is that he has requested from Godot:

Vladimir: Oh ... nothing very definite.

Estragon: A kind of prayer.

Vladimir: Precisely.

Estragon: A vague supplication.

Vladimir: Exactly.

Much of the play, sated as it is in scriptural allusion, deals with the subject of religion. The boy claims to be a goatherd, while his brother, he says, is a shepherd: in the Bible, goats represent the damned and sheep those who have been saved. This would appear to be at odds with the boys' testimony that, although Godot treats him fairly well, he is not averse to beating his shepherd-brother.

### **13.6.4 Emotional interpretation**

All pairs in the play show a lack of compassion-sometimes brutally, as when the main characters, always looking at the advantage to themselves, seek to kick, instead of help, Pozzo, who is calling out piteously for help over and over again. Is the island, with its single tree, a place of purgatory in which the pairs eternally await an expression of compassion for their fellow, as one evildoer expresses towards the Christ on the Cross? Is Godot in fact not a man but a personification of compassion that only arrives when created in the breast of man himself?

The boy comes to say that Godot is not coming just after Didi and Gogo in focus have behaved with particular selfishness and callosity. The boy (or pair of boys) may be seen to represent meekness and hope before compassion is consciously excluded by an evolving personality and character, and may be the youthful Pozzo and Lucky; in which case, Lucky would be the brother allegedly beaten by Godot. That would make Pozzo Godot, but, since both of the main characters also beat Lucky, they, too, are Godot.

Thus Godot is compassion and fails to arrive every day, as he says he will. No-one is concerned that a boy is beaten. In this interpretation, there is the irony that only by changing their hearts to be compassionate can the characters fixed to the tree move on and cease to have to wait for Godot.

The leaves on the tree may signify decades or even centuries of circumlocution, like a prisoner counting off days of imprisonment. The men, like the pair crucified with "the saviour" (id est, Jesus Christ), find themselves fixed to a tree and faced with the certainty of death and the uncertainty of life. If one was compassionate, his destiny would be different to the other, for

he would await the "saviour" for life; the other would await the opportunity for exercising compassion, which is the purpose of human existence.

These notions may be seen to answer the riddle of who Godot is and why he never comes. Godot is "compassion", and, until compassion is present in the adult characters, Godot, although expected at any moment of the day, can not come. This interpretation also explains why only male characters are used: females are often seen as mother figures, symbolising compassion, and would obscure the play's fundamental interpretation in the hearts of any audience of any gender.

Finally, it has been seen to explain the famous plot in which nothing happens: nothing is lack of compassion and empathy for one's fellow on earth — a failure to love, which makes life pointless, whatever is pursued and however long one lives. This nothing, to the pair, seems infernally eternal. At many points in the play, there are opportunities for compassion to be shown, as in leading the blind Pozzo, which would have spirited the tortured souls away from the tree no longer as two but as four. The repeated answer that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot would not apply because they would recognise that he is already there and has eternally ended his hold on them. If there is a message in this play, under this interpretation it could be the uncomplicated one that loving others is the purpose of each day of life, and the alternative is to await the next day to avoid a futile existence.

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### 13.7 Parallelism

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In an extremely ingenious essay Lionel Abel has worked out the thesis that in the character of Pozzo Beckett may have portrayed his literary master, James Joyce, while Lucky stands for Beckett himself. Superficially the parallels are striking, Lucky is being made to perform a set piece of thinking, which Mr Abel argues, is in fact a parody of Joyce's style. Yet on closer reflection this theory surely becomes untenable; not because there may not be a certain amount of truth in it. (every writer is bound to use elements of his own experience of life in his work) but because far from illuminating the full content of a play, such an interpretation reduces it to a trivial level.

As a matter of fact, the parallels are by no means so close: Lucky's speech in *Waiting for godot*, for example, is anything but a parody of Joyce's style. It is, if anything, a parody of philosophical jargon and scientific double-talk - the very opposite of what either Joyce or Beckett ever wanted to achieve in their writing. Pozzo, on the other hand, who would stand for Joyce, is utterly inartistic in his first persona, and becomes reflective in a melancholy vein only after he has gone blind. And if Pozzo is Joyce, what would be the significance of Lucky's dumbness, which comes at the same time as Pozzo's blindness?

The experience expressed in Beckett's play is of a far more profound and fundamental nature than mere autobiography. It reveals his experience of temporality and evanescence; his sense of the tragic difficulty of becoming aware of one's own self in the merciless process of

renovation and destruction that occurs with change in time; of the difficulty of communication between human beings; of the unending quest for reality in a world in which everything is uncertain and the borderline between dream and waking is ever shifting; of the tragic nature of all love relationships and the self-deception of friendship, and so on.

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### 13.8 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you learnt the concept of *Theatre of Absurd*. Beckett's play is part of the theatre of the Absurd, which consists of plays that discuss the idea that life lacks meaning and purpose. The characters reflect that in *Waiting for Godot*. There is no clear plot or developed characters, instead there is absurd dialogue with dark humor. The 'plo' (or lack thereof) consists of characters waiting for the unknown. Nothing seems to happen in the story, characters seem to talk about illogical things and everything is seemingly meaningless. Beckett did this on purpose, to make the audience experience the endless with the characters.

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### 13.9 Review Questions

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1. Describe the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon. Why do you think they stay together, despite their frequent suggestions of parting?
2. What do you think is the most effective way that Beckett presents repetition in *Waiting for Godot*?
3. How does the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon compare with the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky? What is the effect created by the contrast between these two pairs of characters?
4. Beckett called his play a "tragicomedy." Do you agree with this classification? If not, how would you classify the play? Do you think the play contains more elements of tragedy or comedy?
5. What is the overall tone of the play? Is the reader left with a feeling of resignation that Godot will never come, and Vladimir and Estragon will continue to wait in vain, or is there some hope created?

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## UNIT-14

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### VIRGINIA WOOLF : *MRS DALLOWAY* (I)

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#### Structure

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 About the Author

14.3 About the Age

14.4 Introduction of the Novel

14.4.1 Detailed Summary with Critical Analysis of the Text (Chapter 1 to 5)

14.5 Let us Sum up

14.6. Review Questions

14.7 Bibliography

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#### **14.0 Objectives**

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) know about the life and works of Virginia Woolf;
- (ii) know about the Stream of Consciousness technique;
- (iii) know the social, cultural and literary background of the age;
- (iv) know the story of the novel; and
- (v) to know the critical appreciation of the novel.

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#### **14.1 Introduction**

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The stream of consciousness technique used by James Joyce in *Ulysses* caught Virginia Woolf's fancy. It had a far-reaching impact on the mind and art of Virginia Woolf. In James Joyce she found a writer using the technique of the stream of consciousness, breaking the distinction between the subjective and the objective and rendering that very. "Luminous halo, the semitransparent envelope", etc.; which, according to Mrs. Woolf's theory, must be the subject of every novelist. After this, Mrs. Woolf's work was never to be the same as before. Her first two novels-*the Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*-are largely traditional. The narrative proceeds chronologically, and there is no attempt to go very far into the minds of her characters. After reading Joyce, Mrs. Woolf cast aside the traditional techniques and used

them no more.

*Mrs. Dalloway* was Virginia Woolf's first novel in which she used the technique of the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue. She continued to use the same technique in her subsequent novels as well. In fact, she was not satisfied with the traditional method of writing novels. In an essay, "Modern Fiction", she had criticized novelists like Arnold Bennet and John Galsworthy for the "naturalistic" manner in which they had written their novels. It was the inner consciousness for the characters that James Joyce had probed; and it was the same inner consciousness which Virginia Woolf probed in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and in her subsequent novels as well. The human mind is constantly at work. There is a ceaseless flow of thoughts going on through the consciousness of every human being in his leisure moments. This flow of thoughts has been given the technical name of "the stream of consciousness". Similarly every human being, not otherwise occupied, keeps talking to himself in his own mind about various things and about various persons. This talk, which a man holds within himself, has technically been called "the interior monologue". Both these devices have abundantly been used by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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## 14.2 About The Author

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### Birth and Parentage

Virginia Stephen, born in London, January 26, 1882, was one of the younger children of a distinguished literary family. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was the author of critical, biographical and philosophical essays, and the friend of scholars and men of letters during a brilliant period of English literature. The Stephen family in their London house at Hyde Park Gate must have resembled the Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse*, with the older and younger boys and girls. Virginia Woolf in her fiction and her *Diary* seems very much at ease with young people of both sexes. Her relation with her sister Vanessa was very close, and with her brother Thoby, whose sudden death at the age of twenty-five, during a holiday in Greece in 1906, had a profound effect upon her work. This sudden extinction of promise is the story of Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, of Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, and of Perceval in *The Waves*.

### Literary and Cultural Background

Leslie Stephen was fifty years old when Virginia Woolf was born, and the great days of his life were over. His athletic feats on the river and in the mountains were to be no more. Although he had already published his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* and *The Science of Ethics*, he still wrote daily and methodically in his study at the top of the house, books scattered around him in a circle. She recalls how he would take his hat and his stick and, "calling for his dog and his daughter, he would go out for a walk into Kensington Gardens. The habit of walking through the parks and squares and streets of London, established thus early with her father, remained one of the most persistent of Mrs. Woolf's occupations, fruitful of ideas for her work, of background for her novels, and the subject of one of her most charming essays, *Street Haunting*."

Virginia Woolf in her memoirs stresses the atmosphere of freedom in their family life—“the right to think one’s own thoughts and to follow one’s own pursuits”, and choose one’s own profession. Her father did not like to see women smoke, but the freedom his daughters had in other ways was worth thousands of cigarettes. Though her father referred shyly to, “certain facts” he yet said, “read what you liked”; and his only lesson in the art of reading was, “to read what one liked because one liked it, never to pretend to admire what one did not”; and the only lesson in the art of writing, “to write in the fewest possible words, as clearly as possible, exactly what one meant”.

### **The Distinguished Visitors**

Visitors at the house in Hyde Park Gate were many and distinguished. James Russell Lowell stood godfather to Virginia. Thomas Hardy, when Mrs. Woolf had tea with him in 1926, recalled seeing her, “or it might have been my sister, but he thought it was me, in my cradle”. Henry James was a frequent guest of the Stephen family when the children were young. James felt, years later, when he saw the Stephen girls at Rye, that they and their friends were not quite upto the ladylike standard which belonged to the Hyde Park Gate. But they were very ladylike when Leonard Woolf first met them, at a tea party in their brother Thoby’s rooms at Cambridge, in the company of their cousin, the Principal of Newnham. It was a summer afternoon, Vanessa and Virginia in white dresses, with large hats and parasols, looked, “the most Victorian of Victorian young ladies”, whose beauty, “literally took one’s breath away”. Yet there was a look in their eyes that warned the observer to be cautious, “a look of great intelligence, hypercritical, sarcastic, satirical”.

### **Bereavements**

The death of her mother, when Virginia was thirteen, was the first of the losses that affected her deeply. Her half sister, Stella Duckworth, took charge of the household for several years, till Vanessa Stephen was old enough, and then Stella married—dying soon after the birth of her first baby. How Virginia herself was affected at the moment, she recalls in her *Diary* soon after the death of Roger Fry. She came to regard life as an arbitrary trickstar.

### **Literary Interests: The Bloomsbury Group**

During these years, just before and after the turn of the century, the young men of the family and their friends were studying at Cambridge. Virginia, whose health did not permit conventional schooling, was educated at home, learning among other things Greek with a teacher, Janet Case. After Sir Leslie Stephen’s death in 1904, Vanessa and Virginia, Thoby and Adrian, rented a house in Bloomsbury Square, a literary district which later became famous as the locale of the Bloomsbury Group, a literary club founded by Virginia Woolf. Thoby died in 1906; Vanessa married Clive Bell in 1907 and the Bells took over the Gordon Square house, Adrian and Virginia moving to nearby Fitzroy Square. Between 1907 and 1912, Clive Bell was to some extent Virginia’s literary confidant. She had begun to write literary reviews in 1905, when the connection with the *Times Literary Supplement*, which lasted more than

thirty years, was established. She continued to be closely associated with the Bloomsbury Group, among whose members was Lytton Strachey, who had been Thoby's friend at Cambridge. Many entries in the *Diary* are evidence of the deep respect Virginia Woolf had for his opinion of her work and several of her essays on the art of biography contain interesting estimates of his achievements.

### **Marriage : Formative Influences**

Leonard Woolf had gone to Ceylon to take up a post in the Civil Service in 1904. Not long after his return on leave, Virginia Stephen announced her engagement to him in a note to Strachey, June 6, 1912. They were married soon after. Some of the deepest interests that were to shape her work-she had at thirty published only book reviews-are very clear in retrospect. She was a Londoner born and bred, and London is seldom absent from her novels. The summers spent in her childhood at St. Ives in Cornwall left sea memories that haunt her work; especially, of course, the sea novels. She had haunted libraries over the years as she had haunted streets, before she could write of the experience in a magical pattern of thought and imagery. There is no clue as to when she wrote *The Reading*. It was among the papers in a drawer where she put sketches and stories. This work expresses her delight in reading, the sense of the long past of English history, the sharp realization of the present moment-the inner and the outer streams mingling-and the continuing interplay of life and literature-all to be found in the disciplined critical writing of *The Common Reader*.

### **The War : Ill Health**

Two years after Virginia Woolf's marriage, the First World War broke out, ending that period of relative security and stability which all those at least, in the Western World, who grew up before 1914, looked back upon with nostalgia. "Then suddenly, like a chasm in a smooth road, the war came." For Virginia Woolf's sensitive soul, war was a horrible and nerve shattering experience. She was weak and sickly, and now she suffered from constant fits of depression. However, she continued to work, and work hard. She was living in London, and as the wife of Leonard Woolf and the daughter of Leslie Stephen, and by virtue of her own attainments, she was highly honoured in the Bloomsbury circle whose other members were among the greatest men of letters of the day. Association with this literary club was an enriching experience and a constant source of inspiration for her. It did much to stimulate her to creative activity.

### **The Hogarth Press**

*The Hogarth Press* was started in 1917 by Mr. and Mrs. Woolf as a "hobby of printing rather than publishing". They also had a lease of Ashcham House near Lewes in Sussex, where they spent weekends and holidays, until in 1919 they bought Monks House, Rodmell, near Lewes. From 1924 until August, 1939, their London home, and the home of the Press was at 52, Tavistock Square in Bloomsbury. During these years, while her reputation as a writer was slowly growing. Virginia Woolf's life was filled with her writing, the

activities of the *Hogarth Press*, holidays abroad and in England, occasional illnesses, and many interests of her family and her friends.

### **Over-work and Death**

Mrs. Woolf went with her husband to the Labour Party conferences, but, “in public she took little part in discussions, in private she supported her husband”. At one Labour Party meeting at Brighton, she was moved by a speech of George Lansbury and was worried if her duty as a human being required her to work at altering the structure of society. She continued to work hard and produced her novels in quick succession in addition to numerous articles and essays and the work of the press.

Ever since the war she had suffered from fits of depression and ill-health. The strains to which Mrs. Woolf was subjected, whatever interpretation has been placed upon them proved too great. The outbreak of the Second World War destroyed her will to live. “When on March 21, 1941, she disappeared, she opened that closed door and sought death in the river near her home, leaving her hat and walking-stick on the bank.” She committed suicide by drowning.

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## **14.3 About The Age**

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### **General**

Every writer is a product of the age in which he is born and bred, and in which he works and creates. His writings express his age in various ways, and his works cannot be understood without an understanding of the times in which he lived. This is more so the case with the novel which reflects the time-spirit to a much greater extent than other art forms. In this chapter, we shall first consider the social and cultural milieu in which Mrs. Virginia Woolf matured and created, and then the main literary trends which influenced her and determined the tone of her novels.

### **(A) Social And Cultural Background**

#### **Increasing Urbanisation: Its Evils**

The year 1890 may be regarded as a landmark in the literary and social history of England. It ushered in an era of rapid social change, and this change is to be noticed in every sphere of life. By the last decade of the 19th century, there was a complete breakdown of the agrarian way of life and economy. It meant the end of rural England and the increasing urbanisation of the country. Industrialisation and urbanisation brought in their wake their own problems. There rose problems like the problem of over-crowding, housing shortage, a significant increase in vice and crime, fall in the standards of sexual morality, and a rapidly increasing ugliness. The atmosphere increasingly grew more and more smoky and noisy, and city slums raised their ugly heads on all sides. There was a loosening in sex taboos and an increase in sexual promiscuity, for public opinion does not operate as a check in a crowded

city. The anxiety and agonising loneliness of life in a big city are all brought out by novels like *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, the change has been beneficial in one respect at least: it has brought about a more healthy pattern in social relations. The Victorian ethics of competition and money-relationship has given place to a new concept of social responsibility and social morality. The new age has seen the emergence of the concept of the welfare state: the society or the state is now held responsible for education, health and well-being of the individual. "Divorce today carries no moral stigma comparable to that of exploiting the poor, or of ill-treating a child." The sphere of social morality, in terms of public good, has expanded at the expense of private morality.

### **Relationalism : Break-down of Values**

The century ushered in an era of loss of moral vashing. The rise of the scientific spirit and rationalism led to a questioning of accepted social beliefs, conventions and traditions. In matters of religion, it gave rise to scepticism and agnosticism. No doubt there was much questioning, much criticism of traditional beliefs in the Victorian era also, but the Victorian writer was not critical of the very fundamentals, of the very basis of his social and moral order. On the whole, his attitude was one of acceptance. Dickens and Thackeray are both critical writers, but they criticise only a few evils inherent in their social system. Basically, they accept their way of life, and are proud of it. By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, we find writers like Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy criticising the very basis of the existing social, economic and moral system.

### **Increased Inwardness**

The break-down of accepted values has resulted in increased inwardness, in an increased withdrawal of the individual within his own shell. This inwardness, this atmosphere of perplexity, confusion and anxiety, has been further accentuated by the long strides forward that the study of psychology has taken since the times of Freud. Freud emphasised the power of the unconscious to effect the conduct. Intellectual convictions, he pointed out, were rationalisations of emotional needs. Human beings are not so rational as they are supposed to be: their conduct is not guided and controlled by the conscious, rather it is at the mercy of the forces lying buried deep within the sub-conscious and the unconscious. Jung and Bergson carried Freud's ideas to their logical conclusion. In this way, a new dimension has been added to the assessment of human behaviour and more and more emphasis is being laid on the study of the unconscious. The abnormal is no longer regarded as a sign of degeneracy; it is now recognised that even the normal are abnormal and neurotic to some extent. This has had a profound influence on the 20th century moral attitudes, especially in matters of sex. Thus Freud and his followers have shown conclusively that repressed sex instincts are at the root of much neurosis and other signs of abnormality. His theory of the *Oedipus Complex* has caused a sensation and is being freely exploited by 20th century writers. The study of sub-conscious, even the unconscious, is a major theme of modern literature. Intellect is no longer regarded as the means of true and real understanding, and emphasis is laid on feeling and intuition. Ratio-

nalism, and along with it Humanism, is at a discount. The role of the irrational in determining human conduct is being emphasised more and more.

### **Modern Psychology**

As a result of the teaching of modern psychology, man is no longer considered as self-responsible or rational in his behaviour. The theory of the *Oedipus Complex*, mentioned above, has had a profound impact on private and family relationships. Jealousies are recognised where no such imputations would have been made previously. *Hamlet* has been interpreted by T.S. Eliot in terms of the *Oedipus Complex*; it is the theme of D.H. Lawrence's major novel, *Sons and Lovers* and mothers are supposed to be jealous of their daughters-in-law. Sexual renunciation has ceased to be a theme of literature, interest in sex-perversion has grown, and there is a free and frank discussion of sex. Victorian taboos on sex are no longer operative. There is break up of the old authoritarian pattern in family relationships, the assessment of the relative roles of the sexes has changed, woman has come to her own, and the notion of male superiority has suffered a serious blow. "The war of the generations", of the old and the young, has resulted in a reorientation of parent-child relationship. The greater mobility resulting from the railway train and the automobile has weakened the authority of the old over the young and increased the rootlessness of man. This rootlessness has brought in its wake its own problems and frustrations. The novelists of the day reveal a harrowing consciousness of this phenomenon of 20th century city life.

### **Revolt against Authority : Anxiety and Neurosis**

The First World War further strained the authoritarian pattern of family relationships and increased tensions, frustrations, and neuroses. The reaction of the post-war world has been to suspect all manifestations of authority. It may be called an era of revolt against authority. Political and religious scepticism, general disillusionment, cynicism, irony, etc., have become the order of the day. The dictum "Power Corrupts" is a symbol of the revolt of the post-war generation. The temper of the age is 'anti-heroic', and 'action' and 'success' in a worldly sense have become questionable values. Interest has shifted from the "extrovert" to the "introvert" from the 'outer' to the 'inner'. 'Neurosis' and spiritual gloom are widespread. Economic depression, unemployment, overpopulation, acute shortages, etc., have increased the hardship of life, and caused stresses and strains and nervous breakdowns. The hero in the inter-war novel is a person to whom things happen: he is an 'anti-hero', a neurotic, a "cripple" emotionally, if not physically. There is an atmosphere of moral unease and uncertainty, a collapse of faith in the accepted patterns of social relationships and a search for new patterns. Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence *Sons and Lovers* and *Mrs. Dalloway* in Virginia Woolf's novel of the same name, for example, are representations of the stress and strains to which the individual is subjected in the post war world.

### **Weakening of Religious Faith**

Though there has been an occasional revival of Christianity even in its orthodox forms,



as in the works of T.S. Eliot and Graham Greene, the 20th century, under the impact of science and rationalism, has witnessed a gradual weakening of religious faith. Religious controversies no longer exercise any significant influence on public issues. Moral and ethical values are no longer regarded as absolute. Philosophy and Metaphysics, instead of concerning themselves with the nature of God, show a keen interest in the study of the nature of man. To Freud man is a biological phenomenon, a creature of instincts and impulses; to the *Marxist* he is an outcome of economic and social forces. The pessimism and despair of the age is seen in the picture of man, "as but the outcome of chance collocations of atoms". Gone are the days of the Victorian optimism when man was regarded as essentially rational, acting in his best interests, which, his reason was supposed to teach him, were identical with social good. The same perplexity and uncertainty is to be seen in the field of political theory.

### **Cheap Literature**

The modern age has witnessed a phenomenal rise in literacy. Cheap books, magazines, papers, etc., have been pouring out in their tens of thousands with the result that the spread of education has been almost universal. However, there has been a visible decline in quality. The old culture of the people expressed in folksong, dance, rustic craft, etc., has been destroyed. The cinema, the radio, the popular literature, full of crime or love stories, have exploited the people for commercial purposes. There has been an increase in vulgarity, brutality and coarseness. Human relationships have been coarsened and cheapened: man has become incapable of loving fine and subtle emotional responses and relationships. Further, the cinema, the television, and the cheap novel, have fostered a kind of day-dreaming and a proportionately weakened grasp of reality. "Many people live fantasy existences derived from the shadow lives of the screen." This lowering of tastes has had an adverse effect on art and literature. Bad art and cheap literature, 'pot boilers', have become the bane of the new age.

### **The Modern Writer : The Consciousness of His Age**

Generally, the modern writer is intensely conscious of his age, and does not fail to reflect it in his works. To what extent is the age reflected in the novel of the period shall be examined in the following section.

### **(B) The Literary Background : Trends In The Contemporary English Novel**

#### **The Novel : Its Popularity**

The one thing, which stands out prominently in the history of the English novel, is its immense popularity in the 20th century. It has eclipsed the poetry and the drama, it is the only literary form which has competed successfully with the radio and the cinema, and it is in this genre that work of the greatest merit is being produced. Numberless of novels pour out of the press practically everyday and are received by the public with enthusiasm. This immense popularity may be accounted for by the fact that while compression is the characteristic feature both of poetry and drama, the modern man under the influence of science requires

discussion, clarification and analysis. This is possible only in the novel and hence the preference for it.

### **Variety and Complexity**

Another prominent feature of the modern English novel is its immense variety and complexity. Novels are being written practically on all possible themes and subjects. A number of different trends are to be noticed. There are the traditionalists like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy who, while they propound new ideas and open out new vistas to the human mind, still follow the Victorian traditions as far as the technique of the novel is concerned. On the other hand, there are the innovators, like Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who revolutionised the technique of the novel with their probings into the subconscious. While H.G. Wells fully exploits modern science in his scientific romances, novelists of purpose or novelists of social reform, like Galsworthy, make the novel form a vehicle for the discussion of the baffling socio-economic problems of the day. Biographical novels, regional novels, satirical novels, sex novels, detective novels, war novels, and novels of humour, like those of P.G. Wodehouse, continue to flood the market and the list is by no means exhaustive.

### **Greater Realism**

The modern novel is realistic. It deals with all the facts of contemporary life, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant, the beautiful as well as the ugly, and does not present merely a one-sided view of life. Life is presented with detached accuracy, regardless of moral or ideological considerations. The woes and sufferings of the poor, their misery and wretchedness, as well as the good in them, their sense of social solidarity, their fellow-feeling and sympathy are all realistically presented. Thus in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* we get a realistic account of the life and suffering of the colliers. The modern age is an era of disintegration and interrogation. Old values have been discarded and they have not been replaced by new ones. Man is to-day caught between, "two worlds, the one dying, the other seeking to be born". The choice between capitalism and communism, science and religion, God and the Atom Bomb, is a difficult one, and the result is that man is baffled and confused. The modern novel presents realistically the doubts, the conflicts and the frustrations of the modern world. It is, therefore, pessimistic in tone. This is more so the case with the novel of the inter-war and post-war years. There is large scale criticism, even condemnation, of contemporary values and civilisation. E.M. Forster is undisguised in his attack on the business mind and the worship of bigness in industrialised England. Somerset Maugham reflects the bitter cynicism and frustration of the post-war generation. Aldous Huxley analyses the disease of modern civilisation and searches for a cure, and D.H. Lawrence is the leader of the revolt against reason and intellect, believing, as he does, that, "the flesh is wiser than the intellect". He has thus evolved a kind of pagan religion to free man from the mechanical slavery of a machine age.

### **Sex : Free and Frank Treatment**

This realism of the modern novel is nowhere seen to better advantage than in the

treatment of sex. The novel has entirely broken free from the Victorian inhibition of sex. There is frank and free treatment of the problems of love, sex and marriage. Sex both within marriage and outside marriage is a common theme of the novelist today. The theories of psychologists, like Freud and Havelock Ellis, new biological theories and methods of birth control, and the boredom, frustration and brutality caused by the war, go far to explain the pre-occupation of the contemporary novel with sex-themes. D.H. Lawrence is a great author of sex-novels. *His Lady Chatterley's Lover* was pronounced to be pornographic and his *Sons and Lovers* is also regarded as a great sex-novel. He has been charged with obscenity. However, as he himself said, he regards sex as a great spiritual passion, not merely a physical union between a man and a woman, as the only way for the realisation of God. Thus he seeks to sublimate the sexual act.

### **Novel as a Serious Art Form**

The modern novel is not merely an entertainment, not merely a light story meant for after-dinner-reading. It has evolved as a serious art form. It is compact in body and integrated in form and everything superfluous is carefully avoided. There is no place in the modern novel for the "moralising and the dear reader" of a Thackeray or of a Dickens. It is like a well-cut garden rather than a tropical jungle which the Victorian novel was. The modern novel is very well-constructed, having nothing loose or rambling about it. As **Albert** point out, "*Henry James* and *Conrad* evolved techniques which revolutionised the form of the novel. Basically, they amount to an abandonment of the direct and rather loose biographical method in favour of an indirect or oblique narrative, with a great concern for the aesthetic considerations of pattern and composition, and a new conception of characterisation built upon the study of the inner consciousness." Disproportionate attention is being given to theories of fiction; the novel is now judged by severely aesthetic considerations. Novelists like Mrs. Virginia Woolf give careful thought to the aesthetic of the novel, and propound their own theories. Narration, description and style must satisfy high and exacting technical standards. Moreover, the novel to day also embodies the writer's philosophy of life, his message, his view of the human scene.

### **Decay of Plot**

Edwin Muir is right in pointing out that story seems to have died out of the 20th century English novel. For the Victorian novelist, life easily fell into the mould of a story; but for the novelist of to-day it refuses to do so. "The great modern novels, like *Ulysses*, are still stories, but they are stories without an ending, and the characteristic modern novel is a story without a grammatical construction is ingenious; we admire the writer's skill in insinuating explanatory and qualifying clauses and all sorts of parenthesis; but the sentence remains hanging in the air." In other words, the modern novelist has grasp of origins but not of ends. The modern novel is like an incomplete sentence, and, "its incompleteness is a reflection of the incompleteness of a whole region of thought and belief". Under the influence of new psychological theories, life is not regarded as a continuous flow, but as a series of separate and successive moments. Hence the novelist concentrates on a particular psychological moment or ex-

perience; instead of telling a story with an eye on the clock and the calendar, he probes deeper and deeper into the human consciousness and moves freely backward and forward in time. The unities of time and place have no meaning or significance for him.

### **Decay of Character**

Just as the story, so also the character has decayed in the modern novel. Previously two different methods were adopted for the delineation of character: the method of direct narration and the dramatic method. More often than not there was a combination of both these methods. The externals of personality—the habits, manners, physical appearance, etc.—were vividly and graphically described and further light was thrown on the nature of a character by his own words and actions and by what others said of him. But the modern novelist rejects such characterisation as superficial. He has realised that it is impossible to give a psychologically true account of character by such means. He probes deep into the sub-conscious, even the unconscious, and loses himself in the complexities and subtleties of inner life; instead of depicting a conflict between different personalities, he depicts an individual at war with himself. He is not concerned with any overt strife, but with the conflict that grows on in the sub-conscious regions of the human mind. A character is sketched not by extension but by probing the depths. Character is thus presented outside time and space. Not only are we given the past of a character, but also the possibilities of his nature in the future are revealed. Thus we know *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* completely, though the respective novelists have presented only a few hours in the lives of these characters. This psychological probing into the depths of human nature has been the death of both the hero and the villain in the traditional sense. Just as no man is a hero to his own valet, so also no man can be a hero to a “Psychoanalyst”. The heroism of a man dissolves when we come too close to him. And this is equally true of the villainy of the villain. However, we may here add that in the works of some novelists, like D.H. Lawrence, much that is largely traditional, both in plot and characterisation, persists side by side with much that is new and unconventional.

### **Impact of New Psychology**

As the foregoing discussion has already indicated, the modern novel is predominantly psychological. It was in the early years of the 20th century that Freud and Jung shook the foundations of human thought by their revolutionary discoveries in the field of Psychology. They revealed that human consciousness has very deep layers and, buried under the conscious. Thoughts buried deep in the unconscious and the sub-conscious constantly keep coming to the surface and an account of human personality cannot be complete and satisfactory unless these hidden elements are given their due weight. Novelists like Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Elizabeth Bowen have made the English Novel extremely psychological in nature. Virginia Woolf describes the methods of the new fiction in *The Common Reader* in the following words: “The mind receives a myriads of impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms. ...life is not a series of gig lamps

symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. It is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and the external as possible”.

### **Stress on the Individual**

The impact of the new psychology on plot and character has already been noted above, Its impact has been equally far reaching on the theme of the novel. The traditional novel was largely social, its aim being to uphold accepted recognised social values. But in the modern novel there are no such universally acknowledged values of social conduct which the individual must uphold and cherish. Hence it is that there is a shift in the theme of the modern novelist. The individual is more important for him than society. The psychological probings into sub-conscious reveal that every individual has a separate personality peculiar to him, and that one particular personality can never merge or become one with another. Each individual is a lonely soul, and, as David Daiches puts it, the theme of the modern novelist is not the relationship between gentility and morality but, “the relation between loneliness and love”. The novelist to-day is not concerned with the great society, i.e., society at large but with the achievement of “little society” which can be achieved, if at all, only through great patience and care. Both Lawrence and Forster regard “the great society” as the enemy of the individual and want it to be reformed. Lawrence points out that individuals before they can come into any true contact with others must respect the ‘otherness’ of other individuals. True love consists in realising this ‘otherness’ of the object of love and respecting it. Love should not be possessive and dominant, rather it should be a considerate and sympathetic in the psychological sense of the word. Marriage is thus not a consummation of true love, but rather an uncertain beginning of it. True love may result only later when an adjustment of individual sensibilities has taken place.

### **Conclusion**

Such are the currents and cross-currents in the modern English novel. It is an extremely vital and living form of art, and we can safely predict a bright and glorious future for it. New influences, especially the Russian and the American, are daily widening its horizons and renewing its vigour and vitality. Cinema, music, painting, and the other fine arts are all influencing the technique of the novel to-day. New experiments are being made, some temporary and fleeting, others of a more permanent significance. The caravan of the English novel goes on ever changing, becoming and growing.

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## **14.4 Introduction Of The Novel**

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### ***Mrs Dalloway* : Its Popularity**

*Mrs. Dalloway*, (1925), is the best known and the most popular of the novels of Mrs. Woolf. Its popularity is brought out by the fact that it has been translated into a number of

languages-French, Danish, German, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, etc. It has been praised by one critic after another. David Daiches calls it, “the first wholly successful novel that Virginia Woolf produced”, and Joan Bennett characterizes it as, “one of her satisfying novels”. E.M. Forster writing in the *Criterion*, (April 1926), says : “*it is perhaps her masterpiece, but difficult, and I am not altogether sure about every detail, except when my fountain pen is in my hand.*”

### **The Story of the Novel**

The story of the novel is quite simple and can be told in a few words. Mrs. Dalloway, a middle-aged woman of over fifty, belonging to the upper middle class London society, living with her husband, Richard, and her grown up daughter, Elizabeth, in her comfortable Westminster House, is to give a party in the evening. She is occupied during the June day with preparations abroad and at home; a rejected lover, Peter Walsh, comes unexpectedly and calls on her, and the party brings together several other friends from her younger days; and the party comes off successfully.

The time of the novel is a few years after the war. It is a fine morning in June, and the weather is nice for walking. Nearly everybody walks, mostly through the West End of London-Clarissa, Richard, Peter Walsh, Elizabeth Dalloway, Septimus Smith, the shell-shocked soldier, and his little Italian wife, Rezia. The ground covered includes the Green Park, Regent’s Park, Russel Square, the Strand, Piccadilly, Bond Street, Whitehall; all enjoy their respective walks.

The events are trivial. But seemingly unimportant happenings stir memories, associations, and feelings in the minds of the different characters, so that the inner and the outer aspects of experience are interwoven. Peter, for instance, walking to Bloomsbury for dinner at his hotel, hears the bell of the ambulance that has picked Septimus up, and reflects upon triumphs of civilization and the spirit of fellow-feeling of London society and he recalls exploring London with Clarissa from the top of a bus, and the talks they then had about those, “unseen parts of us” that might survive; and then he thinks of other meetings with Clarissa in the old days. So, later in the evening, at the end of the party, we can feel with Peter the mingling of terror and ecstasy at the sight of Clarissa-the extraordinary excitement. Paths of the different characters, cross and re-cross. Septimus and Rezia see the same airplane as Clarissa, at the same movement; stand on pavement with her to let a royal car pass, sit on a bench in Regent’s Park where Peter is resting, and Septimus, driven almost mad by the ministrations of a famous psychiatrist, Dr. Bradshaw, jumps from a window on the very night of the party, at which the psychiatrist, a guest, mentions this very sad case, and shocks Clarissa with the thought, “death at my party”.

There are deeper connections between Clarissa and Septimus suggested by patterns of imagery in their consciousness. The original idea, as Mrs. Woolf tells us in the Preface to the Modern Library Edition of *Mrs Dalloway*, was that Clarissa would kill herself, but in some odd way Septimus entered the picture and became Clarissa’s double. Only Septimus

has slipped beneath the surface where Clarissa still keeps her footing, because of her wealth, her social position, and the protection which she enjoys. "She felt somehow very like him.... She felt glad he had done it- thrown it away." She has a brief moment of self-realization, of how her own life has been tarnished by lies, silly chatter, corruption, scheming. Septimus has preserved something she has lost, and his death is a defiance of the evil represented by Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist-a portrait inspired by the novelist's malice and hatred of those who dominate others, specially under cover of humanity. "The naked, the defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless, received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped, he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combinatin of decision and humanity that endered Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims."

### **The Theme : The Double Plot**

The novel is about the life and personality of Mrs Dalloway. But Mrs Dalloway is both an individual and a representative character, and through her the novelist has presented a vivid, but critical picture of the outward facade of contemporary civilisation, with all its silly chatter and incessant parties, its hypocrisy, its snobbery, its materialism and affectation. The theme of the books is also the life and personality of Septimus Warren Smith, a shell-shocked neurotic. He is Clarissa Dalloway's double in the sense that he is the objectification of the deadness of her soul, as well as of the deadness of contemporary civilisation. Together they constitute a terrible indictment of the materialistic society in which they live and move, and which causes, "the death of the soul". The world of the Dalloways and the world of Septimus-Rezia are poles apart, but still taken together they constitute a single whole. They are two facets of the same society; a society with a glittering body, but a troubled 'dead' soul.

### **Poetic Under-pattern : Universality**

Thus *Mrs Dalloway* has a double plot, closely knit and coherent. It has also an under-pattern, a poetic-pattern, suggested through symbol and imagery. While the prose pattern builds a picture of contemporary society, the under-pattern, deeper and poetic, serves to suggest the universals of life, the tension between life and death, between the need of spiritual privacy and independence, and the urge for love and social contact. Mrs. Dalloway has horrors both of love and religion which are too possessive and dominating; and Septimus Warren Smith's horror of 'human nature' is so acute that he commits suicide. Dr. Bradshaw is a satiric portrait of insolent, aggressive worldlings out to dominate, and so destroy the soul of others.

### **Form and Order : The Narrow Frame-work**

*Mrs Dalloway* is a stream of consciousness novel with a vigorous structure. The unique achievement of Mrs. Woolf in the novel is that she has succeeded in imposing form and order on what is, by its very nature, incoherent and chaotic. This is achieved by providing the novel with a narrow frame-work. The action is limited temporally (in time) to a single day in June, spatially (in space) to London, and emotionally to the relationships between a few major characters, though in the background there are a number of minor characters filling up the

canvas. Despite her theories, Mrs Woolf has put up her sign posts carefully. There is a skilful confrontation of 'psychological time' with 'clock-time'; whenever the London clocks strike we may be sure that there is going to be a transition from the past to the present, or from one personality to another. The omniscient narrator is not altogether absent, and reappears on the scene from time to time to guide the readers. This is seen in the frequent use of the pronoun one in place of *I*. The result is that in the novel there is no confusion, no incoherence, the apparently chaotic has been disciplined and ordered, and so the book constitutes satisfying reading.

### **Skilful Use of the Stream of Consciousness Technique**

The novelist has shown great skill in the use of the 'interior monologue' or 'the stream of consciousness' technique for the portrayal of life and character. As David Daiches rightly remarks, "The whole novel is constructed in terms of the two dimensions of space and time. We either stand still in time and are led to contemplate diverse but contemporaneous events in space or we stand still in space and are allowed to move up and down temporally in the consciousness of one individual. It would not be extravagant to consider personality rather than space as one dimension, with time as the other, we might divide the book quite easily into those sections where time is fluid and personality stable or where personality is fluid and time is stable, and regard this as a careful alternation of the dimensions. So that at one point we are halted at a London street to take a peep into the consciousness of a variety of people who are all on the spot at the same moment in the same place, and at another we halted within the consciousness of one individual moving up and down in time, within the limits of one individual's memory."

### **Clever Manipulation of Time**

"The added dimension afforded by allowing the persons of the novel to move back and forth in time to encompass an entire life in a few seconds of thought enriches not only the personality of the characters but, in great measure, the philosophical depth of the book." Mrs Dalloway is the central figure, and she emerges a thoroughly rounded and life-like personality because we see her through her own 'stream of consciousness', through 'the stream of consciousness' of the other characters of the novel, and we are also present with her at crucial moments in her life. Indeed, the use of the technique of the "interior monologue" has enabled the novelist to break free from the shackles of chronological time-sequence. The action moves backward and forward freely in time.

## **14.4.1 Detailed Summary With Critical Analysis Of The Text**

### **(Chapter-5)**

#### **( I )**

Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway is a middle-aged woman, over fifty. She is the central figure



in the novel, which is largely concerned with the depiction of her life and her world. She is the wife of Richard Dalloway, a conservative member of parliament, expected soon to become a cabinet minister. They are well-to-do people living in Westminster, a rich and fashionable locality of London.

It is a fine morning early in June, soon after the end of the First World War. Mrs. Dalloway is to give a dinner party in the evening. As the maid servant Lucy is very busy with the arrangements, Mrs. Dalloway herself goes out to buy some flowers for her party. Though she is over fifty, white after a recent attack of influenza, she has not yet lost the capacity to enjoy life. She enjoys the beauty of the morning which to her seems, fresh as if issued to children on a beach. She is still charming, having a touch of the bird about her. They have been living in Westminster for over twenty years, but still she enjoys the scenes and sounds around her with zest, as if she were seeing them for the first time. She listens to the striking of the Big Ben, the Church clock, and considers the sound musical. She loves Victoria Street, so full of life and movement, people of all sorts, some dejected and some happy, the roar and thud of carriages, trams, cars, buses, etc., and the sounds of brass bands, barrel organs, or the zooming of some aeroplane overhead, or the galloping of horses on some mysterious errand. She is attracted by laughing girls in their muslin frocks, and lovely diamond brooches in the shop windows. She would have liked to purchase one of them for her daughter, Elizabeth, but then she must economise. The war is, no doubt over, but its after-effects are to be seen in the form of rising prices, and the suffering of those mothers, wives, sisters and daughters who lost their dear ones in the war. Historic times thus are brought in, in the form of references to the war and its after-effects.

The mechanical or clock time is a June morning in the present, but the psychological time is also Mrs. Dalloway's girlhood thirty years ago. The setting is London, but it is also Bourton, the town where Mrs. Dalloway lived with her parents before her marriage. The fine June morning sets her memory working and reminds her of equally fine mornings at Bourton in the countryside where she lived with her parents, a young, unmarried girl of twenty. We see her stream of consciousness. She remembers how at Bourton she would go out for walks on the mornings when the air came, like the flap of a wave: the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp. She is reminded of one Peter Walsh, an intimate friend, who loved her and wanted to marry her, but she did not marry him. Peter Walsh was a strange sort of man. She still remembers his eyes, his pocket-knife, and his smile, but more particularly she remembers the fine things he used to say. Once, as she was standing in a field and enjoying the beauty of nature around her, Peter Walsh came up and asked, "Musing among the vegetables?" and added, "I prefer men to cauliflowers." This Peter Walsh was in India at the time, but was expected back any day.

Passing through Victoria Street, Mrs. Dalloway enters St. James Park. Strangely enough, there was perfect silence in the park with ducks swimming slowly. There she encounters an old friend of hers, Hugh Whitbread, who has a little job at court. At present he is

carrying a dispatch box with Royal Arms on it, showing that he is out on an important mission. He tells Clarissa that they had come up to London because his wife, Evelyn, was ill again, and they had to consult the doctors. Hugh Whitbread pays Clarissa the complement that, she looked like a girl of eighteen, and goes away, promising to come to her party in the evening.

The chance meeting with Hugh Whitbread further stimulates her memory and scene after scene from her early unmarried life at Bourton come to her mind. The connections in the novel are not logical, but emotional. This Hugh Whitbread was a nice man, in his own way, but Peter Walsh never liked him, and called him an imbecile. Richard, her husband, too, did not like him. But Hugh Whitbread was very dutiful to his mother, and absolutely unselfish. She does not understand why Peter Walsh could not like him and regarded him as a man ‘with no heart and no brain and the manners of a country gentleman.’ She had been separated from Peter for a very long time, but still she could not forget him. She never wrote to him, and thought his letters dry. Still, some petty scene or sight, a trifle, would bring him back to her mind, and she would be reminded of the terrible scene by the fountain in the garden of her Bourton home, where she had finally rejected him and turned to Richard, her present husband. She still remembers his manners, and hundreds of fine things, he used to say. He called her, a perfect hostess, and foretold that she would marry a Prime Minister. She had cried over his remark that she had the qualities of a perfect hostess, for it meant that she was insincere and hypocritical. Soon after she had broken with him, he had gone to India, married a woman he met during the voyage, and his life had been a failure. He had capacity, but still he failed. His whole life was a failure, and this made her angry. The scene in which he proposed and she rejected him again comes to her mind, it sticks like an arrow in her heart. But she was right in not marrying him. Even after marriage one must have some privacy, some independence, some freedom to go one’s own way. Richard gave her this freedom, but with Peter, everything had to be shared.

Mrs. Dalloway is over fifty, yet she feels very young. She always had a “divine vitality”, she always adored, and she adored still, to dance, to ride. She continued to muse, as she has very little knowledge; she knows no history, no language, but she has the gift of knowing people almost by instinct. For a moment, she would remember the people she had known, specially Sally Seton, her girlhood friend, then her attention would be diverted by some object or person in the scene she is passing through, and then she would think of death, of the time she would cease to be. She has a strange feeling of being invisible, unseen, as she moves up Bond Street.

As she passes by the window of a glove shop, she thinks of her daughter Elizabeth who does not care at all for gloves. She cares for her dog most of all. And she cares-seemed almost to be in love with-for her tutor Miss Doris Kilman, a lady in green Mackintosh, bitter and frustrated because she had been dismissed from school during the war. She was a big, coarse and brutal creature, who made one conscious of one’s inferiority and of her own superiority. It was, for this reason that Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway hated her with a hatred which

caused her almost physical pain, and spoiled her pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved, in making her home delightful.

Musing in this way, with diverse thoughts fleeting through her mind, Mrs. Dalloway reaches the shop of the florist, Mr. Mulberry. She is greeted by Miss Pym, the saleswoman, whose hands were always red, as if they had stood in cold water with the flowers. As she goes from flower jar to flower jar, and makes her purchases, the tyre of a motor car bursts out with a loud explosion which makes Mrs. Dalloway jump. It is caused by a motor car outside the shop, with blinds drawn, Everybody looks at the car, and speculates as to who was in the car, the Prime Minister, the Queen, or the Prince of Wales. It must be some one of importance, they all think. It seems as if all movement had come to a standstill with the attention of all passers by focused at the car. They are fascinated by it, for after all it must be the car of royalty, the symbol of the greatness of the nation.

Mr. Dalloway looks at the car, and Septimus Warren Smith, passing along with his wife Lucrezia—a little woman with large eyes—also looks at it. In this way, the Septimus-Rezia story—which forms the sub-plot of the novel—is emotionally connected with the story of Mrs. Dalloway and the action now shifts to the consciousness of Rezia. They had been married four years. She was only twenty-four without any friends in England, for she had left Italy, her country, for his sake and come to England. He was a mere piece of bone, a nervous-wreck who would not talk with to would jump and startle at trifles, and frighten poor Lucrezia (or Rezia) by saying, “I will kill myself”, whenever she addressed him and thus broke his reverie.

The car moves along Piccadilly, and from Piccadilly to the Mall. The traffic is excessive for the time of the day, and often the way is blocked. But the car is allowed passage by the traffic police; there must certainly be royalty within it. It is going to Buckingham Place where the Queen lives. The war had orphaned and widowed thousands, but still the adoration of the British people and their loyalty to their rulers remains unshaken. They forgot their own misery at the sight of the mysterious car passing through them. A number of other people also look at the car, and in this way is created a sense of the life of average humanity that goes around.

Just as the car created a sensation, so another sensation was created by the roar of an aeroplane overhead, which seemed actually to be writing something in the sky. It was advertising, “Toffee.” All now looked at it, watched its movements, and tried to make out what it was writing. Mrs. Dalloway looked at it and so also did Lucrezia and Septimus Warren Smith witting together on a bench in Regent’s Park. Septimus had fought bravely in the war, but now his nerves were shattered. He would jump at trifles with fear. He would constantly talk of killing himself. Dr. Holmes had told Lucrezia that her husband was not ill. Only she must make him take interest in things outside himself. So she pointed out the aeroplane to him, but he only thought that it was signalling to him, and tears flowed down his cheeks. He stared wildly at the trees, and thought they were coming to life and nodding to him. He shut his eyes so that he might not go mad. He would sit for hours using in this way; and everything Lucrezia pointed out to him would strike him as terrible. She felt that her husband was going

mad, but she could not tell it to anyone, for after all she was his wife. She was lonely and loneliness was unbearable for her. She suffered from deep spiritual anguish, but she could not talk of her suffering to anyone. Maisie Johnson, passing by, thought them a queer couple. Perhaps they were quarrelling and about to separate. There was such a look of horror on the face of the youngman (Septimus); she felt inclined to weep. In this way, it is not directly, but through the consciousness of others—here a chance passer-by—that we are given a full idea of the suffering of Septimus and Rezia.

## II

Having made her purchases (flowers) Mrs. Dalloway returned home. She felt, like a nun withdrawing from the world. She was happy, she felt blessed and purified, and grateful to Richard who provided her with all those good things of life. It was an exquisite moment. She was informed by Lucy, her maid, that Richard would lunch out that day with Lady Bruton. Mrs. Dalloway felt disappointed; she suffered from deep anguish. Lady Bruton had not invited her, she had invited her husband alone, without her. The exquisite moment was over, she shivered, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers.

Mrs. Dalloway's thoughts now turn to Lady Bruton. She was an old lady, with wrinkles on her face, and in her face she could read her own fate. She feared time, the time which was making her old, the time which was cutting down her share of life. She had a feeling that she had suddenly grown shrivelled, aged and breastless. All her pleasure in that exquisite June morning was gone.

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs to her bedroom. She felt an indescribable sense of loneliness, lonely and neglected like an attic room. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. The critical searchlight is still focused on her, she continues to analyse her own self. There was something cold and virginal about her which accounted for her lack of response to Richard's love-making on various occasions. She did not lack beauty; she did not lack brains. But something or the other she lacked, which made her so cold and frigid. But she was more responsive to the charms of women, women confessing, as they often did, to her some act of folly. At such moments she felt for women what men feel for them. Such moments were brief but they were moments of sudden inner illumination. They would soon be over, and then she would again be back to her spiritual loneliness, "her attic room.

Thoughts of love, of falling in love with women, put her in mind of her girlhood friend, Sally Seton. Their friendship was almost like love. Sally Seton was a queer girl. Mrs. Dalloway remembers many things about her. She remembers, how she would sit on the floor, with her arms round her knees, and smoke cigarettes. She had a beauty of an extraordinary kind, with dark, large eyes, and a sort of abandonment which she herself lacked. During her first introduction to Sally, she could not take her eyes off her. Then during the summer she came to stay with them at Bourton. She had quarrelled at home, and ran to them in great anger. She was intelligent, knew much about the world, and very soon they were close friends.

They discussed for long hours the ways and means of reforming the world. Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. She had a charming way of handling flowers, and once she did run naked along the passage to get her sponge, and this shocked the other members of the family. But Mrs. Dalloway could not help liking this strange, but clever girl. They spoke of marriage as a catastrophe which would part them. She felt for Sally a strange sort of protective feeling. Her charm was over-powering and even though she smoked and bicycled round the parapet, Mrs. Dalloway could not help liking her. One day, there came the most exquisite moment of her own life; passing a stone urn with flowers in it, Sally stopped; picked a flower; presented it to her, and kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down. This was love, pure love, the love not possessive but protective; conspiratorial against the world of fraud and pretence. It was a moment of sudden illumination, never to be forgotten.

Next, Mrs. Dalloway's thoughts turn to Peter Walsh. Whenever, she thought of him, she thought of the quarrel which separated them. She always valued his opinion, because he was a clever man. She knew that if he were to return then (he was in India at the time) he would at once remark that she had grown much older, and that she had turned almost white. But she had not yet completed her fifty-second year. She looked at herself in the mirror and found her face, "pointed; dart-like' definite", as usual.

Mrs. Dalloway decided to wear a green dress for the evening party, and as it was torn at one place, she took it to the drawing room to mend it herself. Arrangements for the party were being made, and Mrs. Dalloway was pleased, had a sense of well-being. She knew that all her servants liked her, loved her, and wanted to be helpful. This was so because she herself was gentle, generous, and large-hearted, always ready to extend a helping hand to those in trouble. She was calm and contented like a person lying in repose on the beach. Suddenly, the door-bell rang, someone was coming in. Mrs. Dalloway tried to hide her dress, like a person protecting chastity, respecting privacy. It was Peter Walsh who had returned after five long years in India. Clarissa was utterly taken aback to have him arrive so unexpectedly that morning.

Peter Walsh kisses the hands of Clarissa. He is agitated, ill at ease, and to hide his agitation plays with his big pocket-knife. Clarissa thinks that he is exactly as he used to be before he left for India. Now we also see Clarissa through the eyes of Peter. He thinks that perhaps during all the time he had been journeying and having adventures, and working hard, she had been leading an idle, comfortable life in her home, sheltered from the cares of the world. He thinks that nothing in the world is so bad as marriage and a conservative husband, as Richard was.

Both of them are agitated. They cannot help remembering the past. Despite their best efforts, their thoughts move back, and the past rises before Peter like, 'a ghastly beautiful moon'. He tells her, his wife being dead, he is now in love with a major's wife with two children, and has come to London to arrange for divorce, etc. Clarissa is surprised that

though fifty-two, he is still capable of making love. Perhaps she committed a mistake in refusing him. There was her Richard, lunching alone with lady Bruton. She thought, "he has left me, I am alone for ever." She looked at him with tearful eyes, and the thought, "Take me with you" passed impulsively through her mind. whole life-time. The moment was soon over.

Peter Walsh, too, was unable to control his agitation, despite his large pocket-knife and his Daisy (the major's wife whom he loved). Suddenly, he burst into tears, and impulsively Clarissa kissed him. At once she felt extraordinarily light-hearted, and thought, "If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day." Now she had only the attic room, the lonely soul. Peter was supposed to be a failure in the wordly sense, and the Dalloways very successful. But were they really successful? Does real happiness lie in material comforts? We know, it does not, Mrs Dalloway is unhappy in spite of all her material comforts; she would have been much more happy with her "old, dear friend Peter", Peter who really loved her, and would not have gone out to lunch with Lady Bruton without her.

As Peter asks, "Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard...?" Elizabeth comes in, and Clarissa introduces her as, "This is my Elizabeth." Big Ben strikes 11.30 a.m. and Peter suddenly takes leave of him. Clarissa shouts after him, "Remember my party to-night", and her voice sounds distant and hollow. *Mrs. Dalloway* is an experiment with Time. One of the important aspects of the manipulation of time in this novel is the confrontation of clock-time with psychological time. The transitions from one personality to another or from one point in space to another are always marked by the chiming of some London-clock. In this way, has Mrs. Woolf, provided signposts for her readers.

### III

Till now we have seen the important characters of the novel, Peter Walsh, Sally Seton, and Richard Dalloway, through, "the stream of consciousness" of Mrs. Dalloway. Now we shall see Clarissa, Richard, Sally Seton, and their past at Bourton through "the stream of consciousness" of Peter Walsh. It is a novel about human beings, their motives and actions, and they are explored from different angles and studied from different points of view.

Just as Clarissa in the morning, so now Peter Walsh, goes through Lodon streets with the words of Clarissa, "Remember my party remember my party", ringing in his ears.

He, Peter Walsh, was alone in London, a solitary individual back, only last night, from India where he had administered a large Province with complete success, and yet he was regarded a failure by people like the Dalloways and Hugh Whitbreads. He cannot keep Clarissa out of his mind, and his thoughts keep returning to her from the contemplation of the sense around him. He feels that Clarissa has grown hard, and a little sentimental. He does not like the way, she said, "My Elizabeth", why not simply, "Elizabeth." The Lord My shows the shape of pride and possessiveness. Perhaps, Elizabeth also did not like it, she was a large grown up girl, and looked rather proud and independent.

His thoughts return again to Clarissa. She was rather cold. As a girl, she was timid,

and in middle age this timidity has become conventionality. Perhaps, he annoyed her by being emotional and weeping. He had certainly made a fool of himself, and told her everything, “as usual, as usual..” And then he thought that Clarissa had refused him. Well, it was all over and he had grown old and dry. He might be a failure in a worldly sense, in the eyes of people like the Dalloways, still the future of civilisation lies in the hands of young men, as he was thirty years ago, with their love of abstract principles, with their love of science and philosophy, and things of the intellect. Thus we are reminded of a different world, a world of intellectual integrity and effort, a real world, no doubt, but an entirely different world from the world of material success, the world of the Dalloways. With which of the two worlds does the future lie? It is for us to ponder, judge and conclude.

As Peter Walsh walked on, his attention was diverted for a moment by boys in military uniform marching along. Peter Walsh tries to keep pace with them, failed and lagged behind. The boys in uniform represent the world of duty, the love of England, of military glory, different in its own way from the world of Peter Walsh, as well as from that of the Dalloways. In this way, does the novelist paint a complete picture of the contemporary world?

Peter Walsh felt extraordinarily young, and had a sense of exquisite delight. He saw a young lady walking in front, thought her extraordinarily beautiful, the very woman he had always had in mind, “young, but stately, merry but discreet, black, but enchanting”, in short the very picture of Clarissa as she was thirty years ago. Peter Walsh followed her. Other people came between them, but still he followed her, till she reached her home, and entered in. Clarissa’s voice sang in his ears, “Remember my party, remember my party.” But he was satisfied, he had had his fun.

It was only 11.30 as yet, and he searched somewhere to sit till it was time to go to his lawyers in Lincoln’s Inn. He turned towards Regent’s Park. It was a fine morning: “Like the pulse of a perfect heart, life struck straight through the streets.” At the instant a motor car stopped before him, and a girl alighted from it. Straight she entered her home, and Peter saw the interior through the open door and approved of it. It was the world of the Dalloways, of material comfort and success, quite different from his own life which, was “a failure.” He was proud of England, and liked all her splendid achievements, her world of doctors, businessmen, and politicians, and material splendour.

Peter Walsh sat on a seat beside a grey nurse and snored. He woke up with the extreme suddenness with words, “The death of the soul”, ringing in his brain. The words attached themselves to a past, and to a place. They reminded him of that summer at Bourton, when he was so passionately in love with Clarissa. There were a number of people there, when Sally Seton, whom Clarissa liked so much, suddenly asked if it would make any real difference in one’s feelings to know that a woman had a baby before marriage. It was a bold thing to say, all were stunned at her immodesty, and Clarissa exclaimed, “Oh I shall never be able to speak to her again!” Her manner at the time was hard, arrogant, and prudish, and Peter Walsh was annoyed with her. There was something hard and intolerant about her. At

that moment, he had said to himself instinctively, "The death of her soul." There was some strange, mystic understanding between them, and Clarissa at once knew that he was criticising her.

The past at Bourton keeps flowing through Peter's consciousness. He remembers the evening when Richard Dalloway first came to Bourton, and he saw Clarissa talking with him. Instinctively, he said to himself, "She will marry that man." Clarissa introduced the young man as Wickham, and Dalloway corrected her saying, "My name is Dalloway." It seemed to her a good joke, but one evening Clarissa rebuked her rather sternly for the joke, "We have had enough of that feeble joke." Peter felt at once that all was over with him, and that Clarissa would surely marry Dalloway. Perhaps he, Peter, was too troublesome, perhaps he created scenes too much, perhaps he demanded too much from her, but he certainly loved her.

He decided to settle the matter one way or the other. They met by the fountain at a distance from the house, concealed from view by trees and shrubs. He asked her, pressed her, to tell him the truth. He felt that she was unyielding, like iron, like flint, rigid up to the backbone. After he had spoken for hours she firmly said, "It is no use, it is no use, this is the end." Tears ran down his cheeks, it was as if she had struck him on the face. "She turned, she left him, she went away." It was awful, terribly awful for him. It was all over between them. He went away that very night; he never met her again.

In this way, the novelist has shown us Mrs. Dalloway at the most crucial moments in her life, and a fully rounded personality is gradually emerging. Mrs. Woolf's command over the stream of consciousness technique is perfect.

#### IV

Peter Walsh sitting in the sun in Regent's Park, thought how one gets over things, even frustration in love. He looks around him, and after five years in India, finds London beautiful. A child runs off from its nurse into the legs of a lady, and Peter enjoys the fun of it.

The lady is Lucrezia (Rezia) Warren Smith who had been sitting with her husband on another seat all the time. And in this way by a natural transition, we are taken to the mind of Rezia and given a peep into her. "stream of consciousness." Like Peter, she too is unhappy. Her husband, Septimus, was no longer Septimus. She suffered intensely, and thought the world wicked which caused her such suffering. She had done nothing wrong, and still she suffered terribly. Her thoughts turn to the past, that past, five years ago when she lived happily with her sisters in their home in Milan, Italy, making hats. But she left Italy and now her life was a torture. Her husband talked to himself; he talked to the dead, and she was exposed to suffering and cruelty. But she must do her duty; it was now time for her to take Septimus to Sir William Bradshaw, the medical specialist. It was for his sake that she had given up her home and had come with him to London. But every day he had been growing stranger and stranger. He frequently had hallucinations; he 'saw' his friend, Evans, who had been killed in the war, and talked to him. He fancied that people were talking behind the bedroom walls, and some



times he 'saw' his friend, Evans, who had been killed in the war, and talked to him. This was all so very terrible for her. But he could also be quite happy when he liked, as on the occasion when they went to Hampton Court on the top of a bus. But then all of a sudden he said, "Now we will kill ourselves." Whenever he saw a river, or a moving vehicle, he would argue with her about killing themselves. Then he would tell her that he knew the meaning of everything, that he knew the thoughts of people, and would try to explain them to her. When back at home, he lay on the sofa and felt that he was falling down, into the flames. He said that he saw faces laughing and calling him horrible names. Then he would talk loudly of Miss Isabel Pole, whom he loved before he married her, and of death. All this caused intense suffering to poor Rezia, and she felt she could tolerate it no longer. Still she did her duty. She called Dr. Holmes, a nice man and he assured her there was nothing with him. Only he must have some hobby, he must take interest in things outside himself.

Despite Dr. Holmes assurance, his condition worsened. He now imagined that he knew the secret and meaning of life. He had realised the truth about life. He heard voices; he felt that he must tell his secret to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. His secret was that the trees are alive, that in the world there is no crime, and no love. Then again seeing a dog he fancied that it was turning into a man; it was horrible, no doubt, but he searched for a scientific explanation for the phenomenon. At other times, the beauty of nature pleased him, and he would mutter, "Beauty was everywhere."

Rezia returned to the seat where Septimus was sitting, silent and dreaming as usual. She told him it was time for them to go to the doctor. At this Septimus sang an ode to Time, and fancied the dead Evans, too, sang from behind the trees. The branches parted, and Septimus fancied that Evans, dressed in grey, was coming towards him. He was terrified and shouted, "For God's sake do not come."

Actually, it was Peter Walsh. London clocks chime. It was a quarter to twelve and he was now on his way to his lawyer. As he passed the seat where Rezia and Septimus sat, he thought that these young people were having a serious quarrel, and that is why they looked so desperate. What could be the cause of that quarrel, he wondered. However, the beauty of the scene soon claimed his attention. After five years in India, he found London beautiful and much improved. He thought every woman he passed by beautiful, and fell in love with her. People dressed better, even the poor and the fashions were more pleasant. And the cosmetics, the ladies used, made them look more charming. Manners had changed, and young people, boys and girls, mixed up more freely than before. He remembers that on board the ship there was a young lady, Betty, who carried on freely with young men, and one day she would marry and live comfortably, "in a rich house near Manchester." But why did he think of Manchester? Did any one he knew married a rich man and lived there? Of course, he soon remembers it was Sally Seton, the wild, the daring, the romantic Sally, who had married and who lived in a large house at Manchester.

Thus by a natural easy transition, the stream of his consciousness flows back to Bourton,

to Clarissa, and her friends. Impressions and memories are linked up emotinally and not logically; by association one event recalls another. Sally was the best of them. One strong bond between them was their common hatred of Hugh Whitbread. Hugh had the most extraordinary respect for the British Aristocracy. While Clarissa was taken in by his affection, by his show of love for his mother, Sally could at once see through him, and once in great anger she exclaimed, "He represented all that was most detestable in British middle class life." She later on told Peter that he was vulgar, "he has read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing." She had a grudge against Hugh, for he had once tried to kiss her in the smoking room. Hugh was the greatest snob of all the people whom Peter had ever met. He was a downright prig, who could be useful like a valet, for doing odd jobs. He married Evelyn, and now had a little job at court, probably that of looking after the king's cellar or polishing his shoe-buckles. But he earned five or ten thousand a year, while he, Peter, much more capable, was in search of a job, say of five hundred a year. Whitbread, no doubt, could secure the job for him, but instead of requesting him, he would prefer to request Richard Dalloway who was also in a position to help him.

In this way, by a natural transition, Peter's, "stream of consciousness", is now focused on Richard Dalloway, and we now see him from a different point of view, the point of view of Peter. He was a thorough good sort, a bit limited, a bit thick in the head, yes, but a thorough good sort. He was sensible, he was practical, but he lacked imagination and brilliane. He was wasted in politics; he ought to have been a country gentleman with his dogs and horses. Peter remembers an incident when Clarissa's dog was hurt, and Richard rendered first aid with remarkable ease and promptness. He was very practical. Probably, it was for such things that Clarissa liked him.

And so, by another natural transition, Peter's consciousness is now back to Mrs. Dalloway once again. Peter is surprised how Mrs. Dalloway could accept Richard's view on poetry and Shakespeare. Once, for example, he expressed the view that no decent man should read Shakespeare's sonnets, and Clarissa swallowed this view and thought him the most original mind she had ever met. But Sally disliked Richard, at once knew that he had his eyes on Clarissa, and wanted him, Peter, to save her from such people who would, "stifle her soul", and "make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness." And in this matter, Sally was right. Clarissa was much more shrewd than Sally, but she was taken in by Richard and married him. Peter remebers with rapture that Clarissa had the feminine gift, "of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be" and impressing everybody present. There was nothing strikingly beautiful or clever about her, but still she could impress and attract.

Peter assures himself by the thought that certainly he was no longer in love with her. No doubt, ever since he saw her in her drawing room mending her dress, his thoughts constantly returned to her. But this was because he wanted to account for, to explain away, her faults. She was very worldly, cared too much for rank and position, for getting on in the world. She, no doubt, hated failures like him, and had great respect for the British aristocracy. These were serious faults, but they resulted from the influence or Richard. This is the tragedy of

married life. “With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes.” All her parties were for his sake; all her visiting and social courtesies were aimed at his advancement. She was a thorough going skeptic, considered that the gods were cruel ruffians who took delight in torturing the poor and thwarting mankind. This bitterness against the gods was the result of an accident in which, Sylvia, her sister, was killed by the falling of a tree. She continued to do good, not for the sake of god or religion, but for the sake of goodness itself. There was no bitterness in her, and she enjoyed life immensely. She had a zest for life, for all the good and beautiful things of life, as meeting people, lunching, dining, giving parties, etc. She was immensely helpful to Richard, and very proud of her daughter Elizabeth. The last time when he saw her (five years ago) she was a large, “round-eyed, pale-faced girl”, fond of playing hockey.

Now she had grown up, and most probably thought him an old foggy. No doubt, he was fifty-three, but old age means more of experience, and more of capacity of enjoying life without personal involvement. Now he would never suffer again, as he suffered for Clarissa; now he did not think of his Daisy for hours together, even though he loved her. Peter now indulges in a piece of heart-searching to find out if he still loved Clarissa. He concludes that he did not love her any longer. Now it was she who loved him. That was why when he sailed for India, he found in his cabin, cigars, rugs, and such other tokens of affection sent by her. But then why was he so much agitated in the morning? Why did he weep? The reason was not love, but jealousy, jealousy that she had married another and was the wife of another. He had taken all the trouble of coming over to England, not because he wanted to marry Daisy, but because he wanted to prevent her from marrying some one else.

At this point, Peter reached a crossing where a poor, old woman was begging. As he stepped into a taxi, he gave her some money. Rezia also, with Septimus, reached this very crossing, heard the song of the old woman, “If some one should see what matter they?”, and thought that the song meant good fortune, that Dr. Bradshaw would take care of her husband, and everything would be set right.

As Rezia and Septimus do not come into direct contact with the other principal characters, and cannot be seen through their “stream of consciousness”, the novelist is obliged to resort to some direct description. She assumes the role of the omniscient narrator, and tells us that Septimus had a distinguished appearance. He looked like a clerk of the better sort. He had left home and come to London because he could see no future for a poet in Stroud; since then he has had experiences, ‘such as change a face in two years from a pink innocent oval to a face lean, contracted, hostile’. He became a clerk, and his employer had a high opinion of him. He fell in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road about Shakespeare. He was one of the first to volunteer for the war. “He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole, in a green dress, walking in a square.” He developed manliness in the trenches, was promoted, became friendly with his officer, Evans. But Evans was killed, and Septimus felt nothing. He congratulated himself on this lack of feeling. But soon his lack of feeling frightened him ‘When peace came he was in Milan, lodged in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubes, little tables in

the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the youngest daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him-that he could not feel'.

Again and again in Mrs. Woolf's novels marriage is used to bolster up insufficiency. This fear of not being able to feel, grew and grew. Septimus was shell-shocked. He married to find security, he was sacrificing Lucrezia to his own fear. She is intelligent, artistic; at first she thought only, 'The English are so silent', and she liked that. She wanted to see London. At the office, they gave him a responsible post. He read Shakespeare again; but the beauty of the language had vanished. All Septimus could see now was, how Shakespeare loathed humanity- 'the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and belly'. Septimus refused to have children, though they had now been married for five years and Rezia wanted a son. In the end, he gave up the effort to live, wanted to kill himself, and Rezia sent for Dr. Holmes. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing of the matter with him, suggested a music-hall and two tablets of bromide at bed time. It was no good. He talked of killing himself. He seemed to be going mad; he frequently 'saw' Evans and talked to him. Dr. Holmes, therefore, advised them to consult Sir William Bradshaw, the great specialist.

It was exactly twelve o'clock (Big Ben struck the hour) when a number of actions were taking place, all at the same time but at different places. It was at this very moment that Clarissa Dalloway finished mending her dress and placed it on the bed. It was exactly at this hour that Rezia and Septimus reached Dr. William Bradshaw of Harley Street. As William Bradshaw and Lady Bradshaw, too, are not seen through the stream of consciousness of the other characters in the novel, the novelist has to indulge in some direct description in giving us a pen-portrait of the doctor, a portrait, complete and of a certain magnitude, of the professional type. It is a satiric portraiture of the finest quality.

First, as is appropriate, we are introduced to his car, "low powerful, grey, with plain initials interlocked on the panels, as if the pomps of heraldry were incongruous, this man being the ghostly helper, the priest of science'. Sir William is the son of a shopkeeper, he has risen by hard work, and now a wall of gold is mounting steadily every minute between him and all shifts and anxieties. he has a son at Eton. Sir William is himself no longer young, but he makes a fine figure-head at ceremonies and speaks well.- "All of which had by the time he was knighted, given him a heavy look, a wary look (the stream of patients being so incessant, the responsibilities and privileges of his profession so onerous), which weariness together with his grey hair, increased the extraordinary distinction of his presence and gave him the reputation (of the utmost importance in dealing with nerve cases) not merely of lightning skill and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis, but of sympathy, tact, understanding of the human soul."

Sir William immediately diagnoses Septimus' case as grave-complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage. He gets from Rezia the confession that her husband has threatened to kill himself. Septimus, he decides, must go to a delightful home, in the country, away from Rezia. And if he does not wish to go? Rezia asks Sir William explains kindly, that it is a question of the law. Septimus has threatened to kill

himself. That is enough. The machinery has been set in motion. "Once you fall", Septimus repeated to himself, "human nature is on you." Holmes and Bradshaws are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless. So the Warren Smiths leave Sir William, who gives three-quarters of an hour to each of his patients, and invokes for all of them silence and rest in one of his homes, away from friends. They must regain a sense of proportion, they must come to think like Sir William. "Worshipping proportion," says the novelist satirically, "Sir William not only prospered himself, but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade child-birth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw's if they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son), so that not only did his colleagues respect him, his subordinates fear him, but the friends and relations of his patients felt for him the keenest gratitude for insisting that these prophetic Christs and Christesses, who prophesied the end of the world, or the advent of God, should drink milk in bed, as Sir William ordered; Sir William with his thirty years experience of these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is sense, his sense of proportion."

Virginia Woolf gives us in William Bradshaw a brilliant and drastic picture of the professional man. The evil Sir William can do is rendered all the more horrible by the consideration that he is technically regarded as a healer; that society looks up to him, rewards him, and fails to look below the surface. He is the product that is, of spiritual apathy, of ignorance, of the brute weight of non-awareness that afflicts our twentieth-century world. We live all the time in the realm of appearance. We worship power, and distrust pity and intuition. We send the Septimus Warren-Smiths to the Sir William Bradshaws.

Sir William Bradshaw worshipped proportion; he worshipped conversion as well. A man of dominant will and quick and firm decision, he liked to impose his will on others. He imposed it on Lady Bradshaw and now she thought and acted exactly as her husband wanted, and as a consequence felt bored with life. Sir William was a master of his own actions, and his patients had to submit to him. There were others who broke down, others who wept and sobbed, and still others who called Bradshaw a humbug. But the doctor was admired by the friends and relatives of the ill, because of his energy, his decision, self-confidence. His practice grew, his income was more than two thousand a year, and he found life good. It was all due to his sense of proportion.

But there were others who did not like him and Rezia was one of them. He wanted to separate her from her Septimus, to keep him away from her in a 'home' (his nursing home). This was intolerable to her. She returned home in greater anguish than she had ever known before.

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## 14.5 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have introduced to you *Mrs Dollaway* as Virginia Woolf's first novel

written in stream of consciousness technique. The unit also throws light on the social, cultural and literary background of the age. The story in brief (chapter 1 to 5) and a critical appreciation of the novel help you in judging the novel with a critical eye.

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## 14.6 Review Questions

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1. Comment on the statement that *Mrs. Dalloway* is at the centre of the novel named after her.
2. Write a note on Virginia Woolf's use of symbols in *Mrs Dalloway*.
3. Attempt a critical evaluation of the role of the party in *Mrs Dalloway*.
4. *Mrs Dalloway* is a satirical commentary on contemporary civilization. Discuss.
5. Discuss that Virginia Woolf's method is poetic and the unity in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a poetic unity.
6. In *Mrs Dalloway* Virginia Woolf's treatment of love is original and psychological. Discuss.
7. What do you understand by 'Stream of Consciousness Technique'? Illustrate it with reference to Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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## 14.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT - 15

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### VIRGINIA WOOLF : *MRS DALLOWAY* ( II )

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15.0 Objectives

15.1 Introduction

15.2 About the Author

15.3 Introduction of the novel

15.3.1 Detailed Summary with Critical Analysis of the Text (Chapter 6 to 10)

15.4 Let us Sum up

15.5 Review Questions

15.6 Bibliography

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#### 15.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) get an introduction of *Mrs. Dalloway*;
- (ii) know the art and technique of Virginia Woolf;
- (iii) know the critical appraisal of this novel;
- (iv) know the story of the novel; and
- (v) know the analysis of the text.

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#### 15.1 Introduction

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The credit of poetising and musicalising the novel of subjectivity must go to Virginia Woolf. Her prose-style is a poetic style with poetic rhythms, repetitions and poetic imagery. Like the diction of poetry, her style is highly allusive and suggestive. Her words suggest much more than they actually cannot. Significant words and phrases are repeated, and such repetitions are very close to the refrain of a song. This trick of ‘echoing’ sounds and significant words carries assonance, “perilously close to rhyme” Poetic refrains, rhymes, assonances, rhythms and cadences, all contribute to the music of her works, and are the distinctive features of Mrs Woolf’s style.

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#### 15.2 About The Author

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##### Her Technical Skill : Its Evolution

Virginia Woolf is a great novelist who advanced the frontiers of the English novel by

adopting a revolutionary technique for the expression of her vision of life and human nature. She used the 'stream of consciousness' technique to get close to the mind of her characters, and express exactly the impact of life on their personality. Her skill in the use of this technique which, it is said, she learned from James Joyce, underwent a gradual evolution till near perfection was attained.

### **The Early Traditional Phase**

Her first two novels, the novels of her early immature phase, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day*, (1919), are largely traditional in their technique. *The Voyage Out* is an immature work, and the immaturity is most manifest in its imperfect form. It lacks unity, for the most part it is simply a series of satiric observations of 'civilised' life. In its formal aspects, her second novel also is an exercise in traditional modes of expression. But, taken as a whole, it represents a significant advance towards maturity inasmuch as it has greater coherence and unity, and there is more of poise and sanity. The main defects of these two novels arise from a kind of "double vision", from an inability to reconcile the ideal and the real. The novelist was as yet in the workshop.

### **The Middle Phase : Maturity**

(1) ***Jacob's Room***: Novels of her middle phase-*Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*- represent Mrs. Woolf's coming of age as a novelist. It is in the *Jacob's Room*, written when she was forty, that Mrs Woolf finds her own 'true voice'. It is her first real and successful attempt at the use of "the stream of consciousness" technique; it is now for the first time that she puts her theory of the craft of fiction into practice. She sets out to relate the life and death of Jacob Flanders, "but whereas a traditional novelist would have given us a direct description of Jacob himself, his progress through a series of well-defined incidents and his relations with a series of well-defined characters", here we find that what we are given is an impression of the significance of Jacob's personality which is allowed to emerge from a statement of a few incidents taken from different stages of his life, (A.D. Mody) and from what he thinks and says, and from what others think and say of him. The "story interest" has been reduced to a minimum, and the novelist has concentrated on the "inner life" of Jacob Flanders.

(2) ***Mrs Dalloway: Perfection of Technique***. Mrs. Woolf began using the stream of consciousness technique with the *Jacob's Room*, and the technique is carried, "to its highest level of achievement", in her next two novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. In these novels, she has demonstrated the possibilities of this technique for the artistic portrayal of life. The success has been achieved, says R.L. Chambers, by, "a rigorous process of selection and clarification of her material; each of these books has a vigorous and positive structure". According to the mechanical or clock time, the action of the first novel is limited to a single day in the life of its principal character, Mrs Dalloway, and in space to a single place, London, and emotionally to the relations of Mrs. Dalloway with a few other people. The



action is presented through the mind of these few characters, and as the mind ranges without any limitations of time or space, the novel is actually concerned more with the past of its characters than with the present of a single day, as much with other scenes as with London. The narration does not move forward in a chronological order, but there is much backward and forward movement. We move in Mrs Dalloway's mind from London to her girlhood in her family home at Bourton, and back again to London. Thus the world of a pleasant London morning fuses and blends with the world of her memories, and in this way, with great rapidity and economy, we are given intimate knowledge of the characters and their relationships. Just as the action moves in time and space, so it also moves from one consciousness to another, and this movement throughout is an alternating one. From the consciousness of Mrs Dalloway we move to the consciousness of Septimus, Rezia, Peter Walsh, Kilman and others, and are then back again to the consciousness of Mrs Dalloway. "*It is on this pattern that the whole structure of the book is carefully built up, and the interesting result is that out of a series of incomplete pieces a complete whole is constructed*" (R.L. Chambers).

In the novel, she has succeeded in imparting form and coherence to the apparently formless "stream of consciousness" technique. Mrs Dalloway emerges as a rounded figure, one of the immortals of literature, and her character has been closely integrated with her world, a society which is spiritually hollow, which is based on false assumptions, and which causes, "the death of the soul". We are thus given a vital picture both of Mrs Dalloway and the upper middle class London world in which she lives and moves.

(3) ***To the Lighthouse: Formal Clarity and Balance.*** Her next novel *To the Lighthouse* reveals increased maturity and even greater command over the technique. The characters are now placed in a remote and isolated environment, and their limited environment brings out their 'spiritual' interests and experiences. Cut off from the outer life of action, the characters concentrate more on inner experience, and so quite naturally there is that internalisation of action which is the essence of, "the stream of consciousness technique". The change of scene is only slight, and the movement from one consciousness to another is natural and easy. The novel represents a perfect compromise between the need for formal clarity and the requirements of "the stream of consciousness" method. In this novel.

### **The Last Phase : Fresh Experiments**

The novels of her last phase-*Orlando*, *The Waves*, *The Years* and *Between the Acts*-do not follow the logic of artistic development along lines laid down in her works of the middle period. Mrs. Woolf was a tireless experimenter, and in the novels of the last phase, instead of carrying the stream of consciousness method to its logical completion, Mrs Woolf strikes out into separate and unconnected byways. These novels contain much that is of great value and great beauty-but they do lack the sanity and balance of the novels of the middle phase.

***The Waves: Its Faults.*** *The Waves* consists wholly of the mental monologues of its six characters, and in this way the novelist has tried to eliminate altogether the subjective

element. In the earlier novels, the stream of consciousness of the novelist obdurates constantly and fuses and blends with the stream of consciousness of her characters. The omniscient narrator keeps popping in constantly. Thus there is much direct description in the case of Rezia-Septimus and the Bradshaws. *The Waves* is designed to eliminate the subjective element, the consciousness of the novelist, completely, and this is its weakness. Such total elimination of the artist may be, 'logic of argument', but it is not, 'artistic logic'. "The stream of consciousness" does not require complete elimination of the artist, but its peculiar beauty arises from its fluidity of atmosphere in which the author's and the character's impressions are convincingly compounded. A balance between the two must be struck and it was struck as perfectly as it had ever been struck in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. In these novels, "she reached the logical conclusion of artistic development in her method." She injured the structure of the novel.

***The Years: Retrogression.*** After six years, Mrs Woolf published *The Years*. In this novel, she reverts to the manner of her earliest phase which is largely traditional. The presentation is objective, but it lacks life and vitality. "*The Years*" has neither formal clarity, striking characterisation, zest, nor driving purpose." It is difficult to remember, "what it is all about". There might be a few striking scenes, there might be beauties of style, but the novel, on the whole, is a failure. Instead of progression it shows retrogression.

***Between the Acts : Lack of Unity.*** Her next novel, *Between the Acts*, is also a baffling work, baffling in its symbolic significance as well as in its technique and construction. Isabella and Giles are the two central figures and in the presentation of their characters there is an interesting development of technique. The two characters are presented through "the stream of consciousness technique", but our knowledge of much else that is presented comes through objective description and straightforward statement by the author. "The continual movement in and out from the mind of the characters to objective statement and back again, effectively develops that fluidity of atmosphere to which we have referred before" (R.L. Chambers). In this respect, it is an improvement over the novels of the middle phase, and seems to be the logical and natural development of the stream of consciousness technique. In this respect, it seems to be the finest achievement of the novelist. But then it suffers from a serious fault of construction. It has a crack which splits the fabric of the book from end to beginning. In the novel a pageant is staged. In the intervals between the acts of this pageant, the novelist digs deep into the mind of her characters, but then we return to the pageant, and to the greater part of the novel we listen to the dialogues of the pageant. In this way, the world of the novel is split into two. There are two emotional centres, and there is no inherent and necessary connection between the two. The novel lacks unity both of purpose and design.

***A Fantasy-biography: Orlando.*** *Orlando*, a fantasy-biography, belongs to a class by itself. It stands apart and unrelated in the works of Mrs Woolf. In this novel, the contemporary world of everyday disappears completely, and with its disappearance, the novelist loses her grasp on fact and reality completely. *Orlando* thus becomes a historical fantasy,

tracing the biography of a family through three and a half centuries of English history in the person of a single character.

### **Conclusion**

Thus Mrs Woolf was a great experimenter who tried many methods and gave to, “the stream of consciousness technique”, so many twists and turns. She rarely repeated herself. She increasingly acquired mastery over her craft, and achieved complete success in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. They are her supreme achievements.

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## **15.3 Introduction Of The Novel**

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### **Mrs Woolf-a Pure Aesthete**

Mrs. Woolf was an artist and not a philosopher or a moralist. Also she was an aesthete and so her purpose was to convey her own joy in the beauty of life, her own sense of the pleasure of living. Thus she selects the beautiful aspects of life, and ugliness is brought in only by the way of contrast. She presents life as her men and women experience it, yet she is conscious both of life’s loveliness, and of life’s ugliness. She is conscious of the intense joy of living, as well as of the horror of death, and her novels move between these two extremes. Mrs Dalloway loves life, and her intense joy in life is vividly conveyed. But side by side with it there is also the horror and chaos of life: Septimus is overwhelmed by it and courts death. The conflict between an intense love of life, and an equally intense perception of its terror is closely linked, for Mrs Woolf, as for Keats, she perceives both the misery and the luxury of life, the beauty of life and its transitoriness, simultaneously.

### ***Mrs Dalloway* : Largely a Pessimistic Novel**

If pessimism means looking largely at the dark side of life and not paying enough attention to the bright side, then the novel *Mrs Dalloway* is largely a pessimistic novel. Virginia Woolf’s picturisation of human life in this novel is largely disheartening and depressing. After we have gone through this novel what remains in our minds is the picture of suffering and misery which human beings have to undergo in the course of their existence on this earth.

However, the two chief forms of human misery that most haunt Mrs Woolf’s novels are poverty and war. Just as there is tension in her novels between the love of life and hatred of life so also there is tension between *doing and contemplating*. Virginia Woolf communicates this tension through the minds of her characters.

### **Human Misery Represented through Septimus and Lucrezia**

Septimus Smit and his wife Lucrezia represent the most striking picture of human misery and suffering. Septimus is first seen in the novel, in the company of his wife, Lucrezia and is already in a state of advanced insanity. His condition at this time is pitiable, and so is the condition of Lucrezia who finds herself “all alone” in a city where even after five years she finds

herself an alien. Then, through the stream of consciousness technique we are told that Septimus Smith had suffered a shock in the course of the war in which he had fought bravely, and that he had almost lost the capacity to feel. He had got married to an Italian girl, Lucrezia, and had brought her to London where he had rejoined his pre-war job. But his experience of war had left him a mental wreck. In the course of the past five years, he has steadily been losing his sanity. He has begun to talk to himself aloud. He has been observing hallucinations. He imagines that the birds were speaking to him in Greek and giving him a message from the other world. He occasionally talks of killing himself. Indeed, his condition had been causing great anxiety to Lucrezia because the treatment by Dr. Holmes and also by Sir William Bradshaw, who is a specialist, has brought about no improvement in his condition. This whole account of Septimus Smith's plight is deeply pathetic and profoundly moving. The climax is reached when this man commits suicide. Lucrezia, whose marriage had proved a complete disaster and who had also been feeling finally frustrated because Septimus had refused to give her a child, is now more miserable than ever before. Septimus's death ends his misery but increases, Lucrezia's misery who faints with shock.

### **Peter Walsh Represents Pathos**

Although Peter's condition is far better than that of Septimus, yet he cannot be considered as a happy man. His love for Clarissa had come to nothing. The most miserable day of his life was the one on which she had rejected his proposal of marriage in favour of Richard Dalloway. He had wept on the day when she had refused his offer of marriage; and he had cried out pathetically: "Clarissa, Clarissa". He had then gone away to India where his marriage to another woman had also not proved a happy one. Now at the age of fifty-two Peter has fallen in love with a married woman of twenty-four who already has two children and who would first have to divorce her husband in order to be able to marry Peter. On his return to London after a long stay in India, Peter calls on Clarissa and, in the course of his talk with her, he bursts into tears because of the accumulated weight of disappointments upon his mind. His extreme emotional agitation on meeting Clarissa after five years, his bursting into tears, etc., shows his deep hidden love for Clarissa. The unfinished question which he asks her, "Does Richard ....?", and which means, "Did Richard love her, and take care of her?", certainly shows extreme love and solicitude for the woman he loved, and still loves in his heart of hearts.

Later as he sits on a seat in Regents Park, he thinks of his own past life as having been fairly successful in a worldly sense, he is rather proud of his own attainments, but Hugh Whitbread, Richard Dalloway, Lady Bruton all regard the admirable Peter as an unfortunate failure.

### **Clarissa's Moments of Depression**

For all her love of life and her zest for living, Clarissa also has her moments of depression. There are moments in her life when the thought of death makes her despondent. Lady Bruton's failure to invite her to lunch has a depressing effect on Clarissa because this omission

on Lady Bruton's part makes her think that her life is dwindling. To make up for such moments of depression at the thought of death, she has evolved a theory that a human being continues to live even after death in the memories of other people. But this theory does not imply happiness in her life. Besides, Clarissa burns with hatred for Miss Kilman who seems to be a most contemptible person; and she also hates men like Sir William Bradshaw who make other people's lives intolerable. After her sister Sylvia's premature death, Clarissa had begun to think that human beings were a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship. Clarissa had felt very bitter about this tragedy in her family.

Subsequently, she turns to social triviality and frivolity-she gives incessant parties- in order to forget her spiritual emptiness for the time being. Thus she is painfully conscious of her own spiritual sterility, of the lack of purpose and direction in her life.

### **Joy of Living : Represented through Clarissa Dalloway**

Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway is the only major character in the novel who represents the joy of living. She enjoys life, and enjoys it immensely. In fact, she enjoys every instant of her existence. In the course of her thoughts, she says : "What she lived was simply life". Her reason for giving the parties, of which both Richard and Peter strongly disapprove, is that she loves living, and that she wants to bring people together. The parties, which she gives, are an expression of her affirmative attitude towards life. Clarissa is in love with life; and this love appears at the very outset of the novel when she decides to go out for a walk and to buy the flowers for her party. The morning is fresh; the air is gentle like the flap of a wave or like the kiss of a wave, just as it used to be when she was a girl of eighteen. Whatever might be Clarissa's shortcomings as revealed to us subsequently through her own thoughts and through Peter's thoughts, those shortcomings pale into insignificance by the side of her extraordinary ability to respond affirmatively to anything that happens around her. She loves life; she loves London; and she loves that day of the month of June when she is to give a party. This rare gift which she possesses- "to be, to exist, to sum it all up in the moment"-distinguishes her from everyone else in the novel. Here, then, is the sense of exultation, or the joy of living which offers a striking contrast to the dark side of life as represented chiefly by Septimus and Lucrezia but also by Peter.

### **Lack of True Happiness in the Novel**

The happiness of Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw as depicted in the novel is a negative kind of happiness because their happiness results from their infliction of misery upon their patients, even though they are not aware of the fact that their treatment of their patients is a torture to those patients. Actually their patients are their victims.

Richard Dalloway's happiness is of a superficial kind, because he could not realize that life is full of joy. The happiness of Lady Bruton and Hugh Whitbread too is of the same kind. They have no grievance against life, and are happy with what they have got. Sally Seton, one of the proudest women in the country because of her wealth and her five sons, has also her moments of despondency. Sometimes she feels hopeless about human relations and

her peace of mind is then disturbed. On such occasions she goes into her garden and derives more peace from the sight of flowers and plants than human beings have ever given her.

### 15.3.1 Detailed Summary with Critical Analysis of the Text

#### CHAPTER - 6

It was half-past one as Rezia and Septimus walked towards their home, and it was exactly at this very time when Hugh Whitbread was going to the luncheon with Lady Bruton. As in the case of Dr. Bradshaw, Rezia and Septimus, much direct description mingles with the “stream of consciousness” of Hugh Whitbread. He was a man conscious of his own importance, a man who cut a magnificent figure as he walked. *He had been afloat on the cream of English society, for fifty-five years.* He had a little job at court, people said that he kept guard at Buckingham Palace. But whatever job he had, he did it efficiently. He had known Prime Ministers, and he had one or two small reforms to his credit of which he was proud. He had known Lady Bruton for twenty years and he would never lunch with her without bringing her a bunch of flowers, and asking her secretary, Miss Brush, about the welfare of her brother in South Africa. Lady Bruton herself preferred Richard Dalloway to Hugh, because he was a much finer man. She invited Hugh only because he had been so kind to her in the past, and because he could write such fine letters. And it was to write an important letter for her that she had invited him on this particular day. Richard Dalloway had been invited so that she might get the benefit of his advice. The two reached at the same time. Indeed, they met on the doorstep.

Then we are given a satiric-ironic pen portrait of Lady Millicent Bruton, a thorough-going conservative, the descendant of a family of Generals, herself like a General, a warrior, in many ways a proud upholder of conventions and traditions, proud and dignified. She is a perfect Mayfair hostess, polite; hospitable and observing all social proprieties. Then we are given an account of the lunch itself, -a lunch lasting for an hour and the small talk that accompanies it. The exquisite lunch gives the impression that it appears by magic, that no one has to pay for it. Old Lady Bruton, more interested in politics than in people, a lady who, does not like Clarissa’s habit of discriminating between one perfect gentleman and another (for do we not all belong to the same side?) gives the information to her guests that Peter Walsh is in town. And they all remember Peter’s hopeless passion for Clarissa, her rejection of him, his voyage to India, how he had been a failure; made a mess of things. Still, “Richard Dalloway had a very great liking for the dear old fellow too.” And Richard thinks that he will go home directly after lunch and tell Calrissa in so many words that he loves her.

In this way, interesting sidelight is thrown on othe character of Peter Walsh. We see him through the eyes of Lady Bruton and others.

Virginia Woolf puts a good deal of comedy into this lunch at Lady Bruton’s; but it is a comedy with a strong undercurrent of irony. Lady Bruton is a member, an ineffectual member, of Sir William Bradshaw’s clan of power-maniacs. She has called her two friends together to

help her draft a letter to *The Times*. She wants to expound a, “project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada. She exaggerated. She had perhaps lost her sense of proportion. Emigrating was not to others the obvious remedy, the sublime conception, the emancipation which it was to her.” Lady Bruton, we learn, cannot write this letter herself; there is a certain difficulty about marshalling her thoughts and getting them down on paper; in one from the lower orders, says a housemaid, it might be called stupidity, but in Lady Bruton, with her statesman-like scheme of public welfare, it is rather a minor question of tactics, in which, it is said, great strategists are seldom successful. So she calls in Hugh Whitbread, who, undoubtedly, possesses the art of writing letters to *The Times*; she consults Richard on what precisely is to be said; and Hugh on how precisely to say it; and thus, miraculously, Lady Bruton’s tangles are reduced to sense and her English to grammar.

“It is a serious indictment of society that Virginia Woolf is building up, slowly, from the beginning, by cross-references and allusions—now directly, now ironically, now with the undertones of pity and terror” (Bernard Blackstone). This solid structure of London—of what does it really consist? This parade of civilisation and culture, which can gladden the heart of Clarissa Dalloway because it is life and because she does not look below the surface, what does it hide? We are shown first of all its colour and movement on a fine June day; then the great symbol of Royalty moves in a closed car along the road; all is impressively knit together. Hugh Whitbread with his little job at court, so happy and polite; the flower-shop, Clarissa’s home, cool and dignified; the soldiers marching to the Cenotaph. “But then in the smooth structure cracks appear, another order of reality thrusts itself forward.” Peter Walsh comes home from India, critical, intransigent, loving truth. Should I have married him?, thinks Clarissa. She regrets the lost opportunity. There is the attic room, and loneliness. On the outskirts of her world, unseen by her but terribly real, move the tragic figures of Rezia and Septimus. Under the genial mask of Sir William what harshness and cruelty; overhead, the aeroplane, that but lately has been raining down bombs and will again shortly, traces the word ‘Toffee’.

“But, because she is fair, Mrs Woolf shows us the decencies of civilisation too; a man like Richard Dalloway, a product, a product of the system but not so deeply involved in it that he cannot see some of its faults and want to cure them (as he tries his best to do, in the House).” Not very wise, not very intelligent, but decent, simple and affectionate, with no illusions regarding the London Police, about whose malpractices he is collecting information, “and those coster-mongers, not allowed to stand their barrows in the streets; and prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn’t in them, or in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth; and of which he considered, could be seen considering, as he walked across the Park to tell his wife that he loved her.”

## CHAPTER - 7

Lunch was over, and Lady Bruton, having seen off her guests, went to her room ponderously, majestically, and lay down drowsy and heavy, “like a field of clover in the sun-

shine, this hot June day.” As she slept, Hugh and Richard walked homeward. Richard did not care a straw about emigration, and cared even less for Hugh whom he considered, “an intolerable ass.” So they parted, and Richard purchased some flowers for Clarissa. He would like to present flowers to her and tell her that he loved her. He had never told her so for years. He was jealous of Peter but felt reassured because Clarissa was weak, she wanted support, and he, and not Peter, could give her that support. He felt pleased with himself, for his life was almost a miracle; he had been so successful. Surveying the panorama of misery and wretchedness that met eye all along the way, he felt that he had been really lucky in having escaped the misery and suffering of life.

Notice how, constantly, there is confrontation of clock-time with psychological time. It is in this way that the novelist has imposed form and pattern on her material. Richard reached home exactly as Big Ben struck three and a half hour. Exactly at this time, Clarissa sat worried at her writing table. She had not invited Ellie Henderson to her party because she did not like her, but to her great irritation, her friends, Mrs. Marsham, invited her on her own on Mrs Dalloway’s behalf. Another source of irritation was the fact that Elizabeth was locked in with Doris Kilman, her tutoress, and the two were, probably, at prayer at the time. Richard gave her the flowers but could not say, “I love you.” It was a pleasant surprise for Clarissa and she at once proceeded to pour her troubles into the ears of her husband, especially the way in which the horrid Kilman was trying to influence the soul of their Elizabeth. But Richard was in a hurry; he had to attend a meeting. So he left after a few moments, asking his wife to sleep for an hour according to the advice of the doctor. Clarissa was alone once again with her memories.

We again follow her stream of consciousness and get a further peep into her troubled soul. There is a dignity in people; a solitude even between husband and wife, a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching Richard open the door and going out, for one would not part within oneself, or take it, against his will, from one’s husband, without losing one’s independence, one’s self-respect something, after all priceless. She is unhappy, though, when he goes, something is missing, something hurts. Something that has happened earlier in the day. It is not the memory of Sally Seton saying that Richard will never be in the cabinet because he has a second-class mind; it is not Elizabeth and Miss Kilman praying upstairs. Now she has it-it was Peter laughing at her parties. He thinks she is a snob, a lion-hunter. But she knows that it is life she loves; her parties give her the flavour of life. But if Peter asks her: what is the sense of her parties, what is she to reply? ‘Peter makes out that she complicates life, which is really perfectly simple; but who is Peter to say that, Peter who is always in love with the wrong woman?’ But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. “Here was So and So in South Kensington; someone up in Bays-water; and somebody else, say in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt



if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?" Mrs Dalloway has no answer to the question.

Mrs. Dalloway gave parties to bring people together and make them happy. Still, she herself was unhappy. She missed something. Her life, her soul, was empty, lonely like an attic. Perhaps, she was unhappy because she lacked a cause, an ideal, to which one's whole life should be devoted.

Her reverie is interrupted by the arrival of Elizabeth, "dark, had Chinese eyes in a pale face: an oriental mystery; was gentle, considerate, still." As a child she had a perfect sense of humour, but now at seventeen she had become very serious, like a hyacinth sheathed in glossy green. She had come to tell her mother that she was going out with Miss Kilman who stood outside the door in her mackintosh, Miss Doris Kilman who hated Clarissa and Clarissa hated her. She was a frustrated and embittered soul. Ugly, with an awkward figure, poor, degradingly poor, Miss Kilman had a grudge against the world. She lost her job as a school-teacher when the War broke out, because she was suspected of having German sympathies. She felt that she had been cheated, and ever since wanted to have her revenge against the whole world. Bitter and burning, she felt the call of religion two and a half years ago, and ever since, whenever she suffered spiritual anguish, she prayed to God. On seeing women like Clarissa, refined and delicate, leading a sheltered life, with no knowledge of poverty and suffering, her one intense desire was to humiliate them, to make them cry, to have a victory over their soul, and make them conscious of her own spiritual power and superiority. Clarissa, on the other hand, hated this vulgar woman who had taken her daughter from her, and was trying to possess her soul. Could such a woman represent love and religion, could she be in touch with invisible presences, could she understand the meaning of life? She was clumsy, thought Clarissa, jealous, bitter, domineering, hypocritical, eaves dropping, trying to convert every one. She was out to destroy the soul of her daughter, to intrude into the privacy of her soul. This was intolerable. It was for this that she hated Miss Kilman most of all. Both religion and love are destructive of the human soul. Both are intolerant. Both are fatal to human freedom. Love was the weakness of Peter Walsh.

He was always in love, and always with the wrong woman. His love, too, was over-possessive, out to invade the privacy of the soul, and so she was right in rejecting him. She is a caricature, a satiric portrait of a religious type.

Through Miss Kilman, Virginia Woolf is making her criticism of an all-too-common religious type; to which, she believes, not only frustrated women like Doris Kilman belong, but also a good number of clergymen. "It is a type in which the love of power is hidden under a religious cloak; a love of power mingled with invincible stupidity. In themselves insignificant, they are dangerous as a body, as a vested interest with a big say in the life of the community. What kind of say this may be Virginia Woolf shows us in the person of Miss Kilman." Doris Kilman is in the Dalloways' house to teach history to Elizabeth aged seventeen. Elizabeth is at an impressionable age. What a wonderful opportunity, thinks Miss Kilman, to get hold of

Elizabeth's soul (her face and body, also are so beautiful) and bring it to God; to make her see her mother as she really is, to make her hate and despise her mother, and love and honour Miss Kilman. Elizabeth is young, beautiful, full of life, she loves the country; she does not like parties so much, and she thinks young men are silly, comparing her to popular trees and hyacinths; but it is very exciting. "Miss Kilman does not want her to love these things; but it is very exciting. "Miss Kilman does not want her to love these things; she wants to capture her for God, and keep her with her in the cage she has constructed."

And Clarissa Dalloway, who has that gift of seeing into the heart, has seen into Miss Kilman and knows that she is evil. But she knows, too, that she must not try to separate Elizabeth from her by force, by giving an order. This would hurt Elizabeth, and make her revolt. So she left Miss Kilman and took Elizabeth out for shopping at the stores.

We are now given Kilman's stream of consciousness and in this way get a peep into her soul, and our pity is enlisted on her behalf. It is for possession and power that Miss Kilman thirsts for as she has tea with Elizabeth in the Army and Navy Stores. Mrs. Dalloway has laughed at her; she is ugly and clumsy; but at least she has got Elizabeth. Miss Kilman eats with vengeance, and this puzzles Elizabeth, who does not realise that, 'eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her. (Pretensions to spirituality, we note, result in unrestrained animality. 'Seeking to be more than man, we become less', says Blake.) Miss Kilman also indulges in self-pity; 'people don't ask me to parties .... I'm unhappy'. She knows it's idiotic to talk like this to Elizabeth-it's the way to lose her' but go on she does, pushed by some inner necessity. Then Elizabeth takes leave of her, glad to escape from the stuffy stores and Miss Kilman. Off she goes, in her very well-cut clothes, boarding an omnibus, sailing down Whitehall.

She is enchanted, like her mother, with the sheer movement of life. "She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand." We look through her eyes at the Strand. It is a world different from the Westminster world. It is the world of trade, commerce, and business, the world where crowds of people keep moving busily at all hours of the day. Elizabeth would like to be a doctor or a farmer. She would like to enter some profession, even be a member of parliament. As her bus moved through the Strand, she thought of business, of law, and of administration. She moved towards St. Paul and liked the mingled uproar of the rattlings, the trumpets, and martial music. Then the clock struck, and Elizabeth remembered the party. She would not like to be late, and so she boarded a bus, homeward bound.

## **CHAPTER - 8**

As Elizabeth was returning home, black clouds appeared in the sky. Elizabeth looked at the clouds, and Septimus Warren Smith lying in his room also looked at them, but with different feelings altogether. Elizabeth admired the beauty of them, and was anxious to reach home at the earliest; Septimus, too, admired its beauty, but also read a hidden meaning, a secret message in the play of light and shade at the window of his room.

He is not afraid any more, he, Septimus Warren Smith, was lying on the sitting room sofa, watching the light and shadow pass over the wall. Has it a meaning, some significant message? He sits up, and takes an interest in what Rezia is doing. She is making a hat for Mrs Filmer's married daughter. He asks the lady's name. He thinks the hat is too small. He says it is like an organ-grinder's monkey's hat, and makes Rezia laugh as she has not laughed for weeks. He laughs and jokes and is perfectly all right. Then Rezia leaves the room, and he becomes frightened again; she returns, and he is happy. But there is Sir William Bradshaw in the background, who has said they must be separated. Rezia is sure that no one can separate them against their will. Nobody can hurt them, now that Septimus has laughed again. But who is that coming up the stairs? Rezia runs down. It is Dr Holmes. Rezia tries to prevent Dr Holmes from coming up. They are so happy just at the moment, and she does not want their happiness to be spoiled. Septimus can see her with his mind's eye, like a little hen, with her wings spread, barring his passage. But it is all in vain; Dr Holmes pushes Rezia aside and enters the room. Septimus is afraid. He does not want, human nature to be upon him. He gets panicky. First, he searches for a razor but finding none, he thinks of the window. He sits on the sill, and as Holmes enters the room, flings himself down with great force. He is badly mangled and is pronounced dead a few minutes later. Rezia is in a trance.

The ambulance bearing Septimus' body passes by Peter Walsh on his way to his hotel. All make way to let it pass. He regards it, as one of the triumphs of civilisations. He admires the speed, the efficiency, the way in which every cart or carriage draws aside of its own accord to let the ambulance pass. To him, it is a sign of fellow-feeling, of the spirit of brotherhood, but his words, "one of the triumphs of civilisation", are an instance of unconscious irony. By juxtaposing the Rezia-Septimus story with the story of Mrs. Dalloway and her circle, Virginia Woolf has built up, step by step, 'a terrible indictment of western civilization. Is the ambulance carrying the body of Septimus a triumph of civilisation' or a condemnation of the neurosis and heart-breaks, which it generates? It is for us to ponder over and reach a conclusion.

## CHAPTER - 9

Peter Walsh walks towards his hotel. The sight of the ambulance has made him morbid and sentimental. He would have liked to weep. Indeed, over-susceptibility has been his undoing. The readers are once again given a peep into his, "stream of consciousness", and follow the phantasmagoria of his brain. As usual, his thoughts turn to Clarissa. He remembers the numerous rides on the top of buses they took together through the streets of London. They were young then and were trying to work out a theory to explain their feeling of affinity with other people. The influence of Clarissa on his life has been immeasurable; she, "influenced him more than any person he had ever known." Sometimes, he saw her, "Cool, lady-like, critical" and other times, "ravishing, romantic, recalling some field or English harvest." Memories of his stay at her home in Bourton during summers crowd in upon him. He remembers the delicious long walks they used to have together, alone in each other's company, for

Clarissa could walk long distance, despite all her delicacy. They discussed people, poetry, politics, etc.

Immersed in his reverie, Peter Walsh reaches his hotel. A letter from Clarissa is waiting for him, but he would not read it, for as usual she must have written, "How heavenly it was to see you." Had they married, they would have changed the world. She was full of such vitality and energy, toughness and endurance, and power of overcoming obstacles. As regards himself, no doubt, there were some who thought that he was a, "little cranky, gave himself airs", but, on the whole, he was liked and respected. He was ever a great favourite with ladies. There is, for example, his Daisy, mother of two children, but only twenty-four, violently in love with him, and ready to do anything for his sake.

With his mind full of ideas, Peter Walsh dines in the common room of the hotel. He talks with Mrs. and Mr. Morris who take a fancy to him. It is evening. The evening is very beautiful: "Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue, the day changed, put off stuff, look gauze, changed to evening." Peter Walsh is tempted by the beauty of the evening, and decides to go to Clarissa's party.

London streets are full. It seems to Peter Walsh as if all were dining out that night. Young people beautifully dressed, in pink stockings and pretty shoes, attract him, and he feels London has much improved during the last few years. He reaches Clarissa's street. A number of carriages are standing by; gaily dressed women are alighting from cars. The house is brilliantly lighted; its doors are wide open. Courage fails Peter Walsh. However, the soul must brave itself to endure. So, "he opened the big blade of his pocket-knife", and entered in.

## **CHAPTER - 10**

Clarissa's party is on. The guests have arrived and the rooms are full. Those assembled represent a cross-section of British society. There are the servants, the dependents and hangers on the the rich-Lucy, the maidservant, Mrs. Walker, the cook, Mrs Parkinson (hired for parties), old Ellen Barnet, been with the family for forty years, and Mr Wilkins (also hired for parties). There are lovely, unwanted women, like Ellic Henderson, critical of the whole affair, but eager to know and observe anything, so that they may tell of it to their daughters at home. There are lords and ladies, and grand majestic women like Lady Burton. There are Colonels, there are professional men, there are poets and phiosophers, and well-known artists, old women like Calrissa's aunt Helen Peary, and women who can talk of nothing but of Burma. A rich panorama of British society in all its pomp and splendour, in its grandeur, and gaiety, as well as as in all its snobbery., hypocrisy and insincerity passes before our eyes, as we move with Clrissa from room to room so full of people, and so full of noise. The party is a grand success, no doubt, but at every moment, one is made conscious of the artificiality- the insincerity, the ugliness, the pain and the suffering that lies beneath. It is a satirical picture of contemporary western civilisation that Mrs Woolf has painted and the picture, the satire, is completed by bringing in the tragic story of Septimus.

It is in this party that all the threads of the day are gathered up, as earlier Mrs Dalloway had gathered up the threads of her green dress. It is this party to which the several events of the day have led. "The Prime Minister himself is there, the symbol of the majesty of England, as the closed car had been its symbol in the early morning." Peter Walsh is there, wishing he had not come-how effusive Clarissa is, how insincere! (She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticising him, there, in that corner)'. There is Lady Rosseter-who is Sally Seton,-after all these years,-come without an invitation. Old Lady Bruton, talking to the Prime Minister: Hugh Whitbread, 'snuffing round the precincts of the great'; Richard, looking very pleased. And there were the Bradshaws, whom Mrs Dalloway disliked. Why did the sight of Sir William, looking so distinguished, disgusted her? He was a great doctor, deciding questions of appalling difficulty. 'Yes-what she felt was, one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; something to do with the deferred effects of shell-shock; they must get some provision in the Bill about that. Lady Bradshaw tells Clarissa that a young man has killed himself. And so Septimus Warren Smith, too, comes to Mrs Dalloway's party, not in life, but in death.

Mrs. Dalloway is annoyed: What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party-the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself-but how? "Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly of an accident, her dress flamed, her body burnt." He had thrown himself from a window. "Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation, a blackness. So she was it. But why had he done it?" Dr had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscure evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage-forcing your soul, that was it-if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now): Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

"Clarissa sees the truth. This is her triumph, her justification for us in the book (and, Mrs Woolf would say, the justification for women like her in life) in spite of her love of parties, her shrinking from experience-that she sees, she knows, she pierces below the surface." Says Blackstone, "it is a dramatic moment this, the unveiling of Sir William Bradshaw; for though the discovery is only in Clarissa's mind, though the great doctor will continue his smooth destructive course to the end, something has completed, a tragic *anagnorisis* (discovers). And Clarissa is identified with Septimus. There is emotional unity between the two. She feels that it is she who has failed. And then she feels glad he has done it-as we, the readers, felt glad (despite the waste of it) when he heard Dr. Holmes burst the door open, and knew that Septimus had escaped."

Our last glimpse of Clarissa shows her pity and understanding. She goes away from her party, steps aside into a little room, to be alone with the thought of this young man who

killed himself. Peter Walsh wonders where she has gone to-no doubt, he thinks, she is talking to one of her celebrities. He sits chatting with Sally, laughing at Clarissa and her parties, her snobbery. It is easy to find fault with her. And all the time he is wanting her to come. Sally rises to go.

“I will come”, said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? What is this ecstasy?, he thought to himself. “What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa.” He does not want to leave without talking to her. And, “there she was.”

Further light is thrown on the character of Mrs Dalloway. We see her through the eyes of Peter and Sally Seton, as they talk of their past. There was always something snobbish about her, says Sally, and Peter Walsh, a close friend, agrees with her. Clarissa did not like to go to Manchester and stay with Sally, because she thought Sally had married beneath her. Clarissa was always priggish, hard and cold, but then, Sally remembers with enthusiasm, she was also always so generous to friends. And Peter cannot force himself to depart without talking to her. It is she who has spoiled his life; a man can love only once. She might be insincere, she might be a perfect hostess, standing on the staircase and welcoming everybody. “How delightful to see you”, but she is pure-hearted, an adorable creature all the same. So Peter Walsh thinks only of her as he fidgets with his knife. All love Mrs Dalloway, like her and love her, with all her faults and weaknesses. Really an adorable creature she is!

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## 15.4 Let Us Sum Up

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In continuation with the previous unit, this unit summarizes the story of the novel further (Chapter 6 to 10) which helps us have a greater insight into the critical appreciation of the novel.

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## 15.5 Review Questions

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1. No novel of Virginia Woolf is as saturated with the pain and the exultation of living, the obsession with death, the terror of loneliness as in *Mrs Dalloway*. Comment.
2. Virginia Woolf represents the feminisation of the English novel. Comment.
3. Virginia Woolf’s theme is a constant one, the search for a pattern of meaning in the flux of myriad impressions. Discuss with reference to her novel *Mrs Dalloway*.
4. Virginia Woolf stood apart from her age. Comment.
5. In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa’s ‘comedy of manners’ is matched by the ‘tragedy of life’ in Septimus Smit. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

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## 15.6 Bibliography

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2. Bernard Blackstone : Virginia Woolf
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  4. C.M. Bowra : The Heritage of Symbolism
  5. Clive Bell : Old Friends
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  9. R.L. Chambers : The Novels of Virginia Woolf
  10. David Daiches : The Novel and the Modern World
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  12. Elizabeth Drew : The Novel
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## UNIT-16

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### JAMES JOYCE : *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN* (I)

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#### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 About the Author
- 16.3 About the Age
- 16.4 Introduction of the Novel
  - 16.4.1 Detailed Explanation (Chapter 1 - 3)
  - 16.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text
- 16.5 Let us Sum up
- 16.6 Review Questions
- 16.7 Bibliography

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#### 16.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) get an introduction to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*;
- (ii) know the biographical sketch and major works of James Joyce;
- (iii) know the background of the novel;
- (iv) know the story of the novel ; and
- (v) to know the critical evaluation of the novel

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#### 16.1 Introduction

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Elizabeth Drew's remarks on the introduction of *A Portrait* is quite praiseworthy. She writes: "At the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce dated the book : Dublin 1904; Trieste 1914. It was the result, therefore, of ten years' gestation and creation before it satisfied him that it was completed in final form. Richard Ellmann tells us in his biography of Joyce that he wrote the first sketch for it when he was twenty-one, then extended it under the title *Stephen Hero* to over a thousand pages. This was completed in 1907 and immediately Joyce decided to scrap the whole thing and recast and concentrate it into a third



of its length, with its present title. Joyce had his usual troubles over publication, and when it finally appeared in America in 1916 and in England the following year, its reception was very mixed. One reviewer called it “a study in garbage” and another, “a brilliant and nasty variety of pseudo-realism.” But it was also hailed as “one of the most remarkable confessions outside Russian and French Literature”; Ezra Pound said it contained the best prose of creative invention; while the English magazine *The Nation* called Joyce “a new writer with a new form.”

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## 16.2 About The Author

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### Joyce’s Birth and his Education

Joyce, James (Augustine Aloysius) 1882-1941: an Irish novelist, short-story writer and a poet was born in Dublin and educated at Jesuit schools (Clongowes Wood College, Kildare; Belvedere, Dublin) and University College, Dublin, where he studied modern languages. He graduated in 1902.

### Early Phase of his Career

His first published piece was an essay on Ibsen (*Ibsen’s New Drama*) written as an under-graduate and published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1900. He cultivated the acquaintance of (among others) Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory and George Russell (‘A.E’) who were fostering the Irish cultural renaissance, but in 1902, dissatisfied with the narrowness of Irish life, he spent a year in Paris. Though he lived in poverty, he read widely-notably Dujardin’s experimental novel *Les Lauriers sont coupes* (1888), upon which he later modelled his own stream-of consciousness technique.

### His Marriage and Stephen Hero

He returned to Dublin on his mother’s death in 1903, and during the following year he met Nora Barnacle, whom he lived with for the whole of his life and eventually married in 1931. In the same year he began working on a long autobiographical novel, *Stephen Hero* (later reworked as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916). and he and Nora moved to Zurich. However, Joyce failed to obtain work there and they soon moved to Trieste, where he was employed at the Berlitz school in 1905.

### Chamber Music and Dubliners

*Chamber Music* (1907), a volume of poetry, was published in London but made no money. This was followed by *Dubliners* (1914), a collection of technically conventional but delightfully evocative stories based around his native city. After a dispute with the Irish publishers over several references to the British royal family, Joyce withdrew the book and it was published in London. Ezra Pound reviewed it enthusiastically in *The Egoist*; he also read parts of the autobiographical novel and arranged for its publication in serial form: *A Portrait*

*of the Artist as a Young Man* appeared in *The Egoist* in 25 instalments from February 1914 to September 1915. The complete volume was published the following year.

## **Later Phase of his Career**

Joyce was obliged to leave Trieste during the First World War and he moved back to Zurich. With the support of Yeats and Pound, he received a grant from the Royal Literary Fund and a Civil List Grant (1916) while working on his next novel, *Ulysses* (1922). Like his earlier book, it too began publication in serial form (in *The Little Review*, New York), appearing between April 1918 and December 1920, when the periodical was prosecuted for publishing obscene matter. *Exiles* (1918), a play in three acts, was unsuccessfully performed in Munich in 1919, but had to wait until 1926 for its first London performance, by the Stage Society. *Ulysses* was finally published in Paris (2 February 1922) where Joyce, Nora, and their two children had finally settled in 1920. Harriet Shaw Weaver (coeditor of *The Egoist* till 1919), a lifelong friend and benefactress, arranged for the novel's sale in England. Copies were seized by the Customs and those which reached New York were burned by the United States postal authorities. The first English edition appeared in 1936.

In 1923, Joyce began the composition of *Finnegans Wake* which was published as *Work in Progress* in 12 parts between 1928 and 1937. It was completed in 1939. *Poems Penny each*, a small collection of new poems, appeared in 1927.

## **Death of Joyce**

Joyce suffered from a lifelong eye complaint, provoked by an attack of rheumatic fever during his twenties and complicated by glaucoma in 1917. Despite several operations his sight steadily grew worse. Then in 1932 his daughter Lucia was diagnosed as schizophrenic and his general health began to deteriorate. With the outbreak of the Second World War the family returned to Switzerland, where Joyce died after an operation on a duodenal ulcer on 13 January 1941.

## **Conclusion**

*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* were viewed by many writers and critics as modern masterpieces (most notably by T.S. Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Hemingway and Arnold Bennett), though others (including Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein and the critic Walter Allen) showed far less enthusiasm, Joyce's influence on the development of modernism (especially stream of consciousness) is undisputed, however, and his work has attracted an immense amount of critical exegesis.

## **Major Works**

### ***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

An autobiographical novel by James Joyce, published in one volume in 1916. It was

originally published in serial form in *The Egoist*, February 1914-September 1915.

Stephen Dedalus (representing Joyce), an intelligent but frail child, struggles towards maturity in Ireland at the turn of the century. The novel traces his intellectual, moral, and artistic development from babyhood to the completion of his education at University College, Dublin.

Stephen's individuality is stifled by many levels of convention, dictated by the family, Catholicism and Irish nationalism. As a child he witnesses a fiery political dispute between the supporters of Parnell and anti-Parnellites, and suffers unjust punishment at the hands of a stupid and brutal priest, Father Dolan. Adolescent sexuality causes him moral torment, and this is exacerbated at a school 'retreat' where he hears Father Arnall's famous 'hell fire' sermon.

Rejecting the call to the priesthood, Stephen begins to assert his own identity. At University College he embraces the wider and more rewarding world of literature, philosophy and aesthetics, and by the end of the novel he has freed himself from the claims of family, church and state. He resolves to leave Ireland for Paris to encounter 'the reality of experience' and to forge 'the uncreated conscience' of his race.

The novel was developed from an earlier work, *Stephen Hero*, which Joyce had begun in 1904. Part of this earlier work survived and was published in 1944, edited by T. Spencer. Stephen Dedalus reappears as one of the principal characters in *Ulysses* (1992).

## **Ulysses**

A novel by James Joyce, published in Paris in 1922. Chapters of the novel had appeared in *The Little Review* between April 1918 and December 1920, when the periodical was prosecuted for publishing obscene matter. Foreign copies were banned in America until 1933, and in England until 1936, when the first English edition appeared.

The novel encompasses events during a single calendar day in Dublin, 16 June 1894 (now known as 'Bloomsday'). Its main protagonists are: Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertisement canvasser; his unfaithful wife Molly, a concert singer; and Stephen Dedalus, a young poet, the hero of Joyce's earlier autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). The principal action follows Bloom and Stephen as they wander separately around Dublin, until they eventually meet, and each episode loosely corresponds with an episode in Homer's *Odyssey*. Bloom represents Odysseus, Latinized as Ulysses, while Molly is Penelope, and Stephen Telemachus. Their largely mundane, and occasionally sordid lives are therefore ironically framed within an epic dimension. A highly allusive style, parodying numerous literary forms, interweaves great erudition with banal and scatological references.

Local landmarks visited during the course of the day include a public bath, a newspaper office, a cemetery, the National Library, a maternity hospital, a brothel, and various public

houses. At the end of the novel Bloom and Stephen return to their starting-point, and neither has apparently found any answer to the bewildering sense of futility, frustration and loneliness within them. Molly Bloom alone achieves self-gratification, and much critical attention has been paid to her erotic monologue in the final chapter, a 20,000-word *tour de force* which employs the stream of consciousness technique.

## **Finnegans Wake**

An experimental novel by James Joyce, published in 1939. He began the work in 1922, and individual sections had previously been published as *Work in Progress* during the 17 years of its composition.

This was the last and most revolutionary work by Joyce, representing his most extreme experiments with language and making extensive use of stream of consciousness. Puns, verbal compounds, and foreign words are combined with allusions from every conceivable source to create an obscure and densely structured text. Its apparent aim is to relate the minimal central story to a much wider, historical, psychological, religious and artistic cosmology, a procedure which has been likened to that of scholasticism and medieval allegory.

On a literal level, the novel presents the dreams and nightmares of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (a Dublin tavern-keeper) and his family (wife Anna, their sons Shem and Shaun and daughter Isabel) as they lie asleep throughout one night. This, however, provides only a rationale for what is really a novel without narrative or plot, and in which all human experience is ultimately viewed as fragmentary. Major sources of influence have been identified in Vico's ideas of cyclical repetition, Freud's dream psychology, and Bruno's theory of the complementary but conflicting nature of opposites.

The title is itself a compound of Finn MacCool, the Irish folk-hero who is supposed to return to life at some future date to become the saviour of Ireland, and Tim Finnegan, the hero of a music-hall ballad, who sprang to life in the middle of his own wake.

## **Stephen Hero**

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, also known as Stephen Hero is actually a fragment of an independent book *Stephen Hero*. After writing *A Portrait*, Joyce had destroyed most of the material of *Stephen Hero*. There are several events in the the remaining material of *Stephen Hero* that is not utilised in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. For example, the death of Stephen's sister. The leftout portion of *Stephen Hero* deals with about two years of Stephen's life at the university and may perhaps more appropriately be called a portrait of the young artist than the work which at present enjoys a title of this significance. In the manuscript of Joyce there are 383 pages that correspond to the last 93 pages of *A Portrait*. In both, Stephen is the same-poor, arrogant, lonely and young. For example, in one book, Hero is invited to write an essay for the college magazine and wants to know whether

he could get something for his contribution, while in the other he is asked to sign a memorandum for world peace and asks : “Will you pay me anything if I sigh.” The major distinguishing feature between the two books is that in *A Portrait* there is practically nothing of the writer’s comment. :*In the Portrait* .... form start to finish there is not a single comment or generalisation; every thought, every feeling is particularly Stephen’s. Now and then, to be sure, the author reports as author, but he never comments.” ‘It was the very spirit of Ibsen himself,’ Joyce wrote in *Stephen Hero*, ‘that was discerned moving behind the impersonal manner of the artist’; so again to be certain, it is Joyce’s spirit that is discerned moving behind the objective manner of the artist of *A Portrait*. The transformation of *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait* presents the progression from the novel of partisan manager to that of the invisible and impersonal director. To sum up, it could be said that *Stephen Hero* is an absorbing document, exact, explicit and characterized by a fullness of statement that Joyce neglected in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

### ***Dubliners***

A volume of short stories by James Joyce, published in 1914. Some of it had originally appeared in the magazine *Irish Homestead*, under the pseudonym *Stephen Dedalus*, in 1904 and the last, “The Dead”, was finished in 1907. The book’s publication was delayed, much to Joyce’s exasperation, because a printer objected to passages in the story “Two Gallants”. Joyce told his publisher, Grant Richards, that it was not his fault if ‘the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hung around his attempt to ‘write a chapter in the moral history of my country’. He had chosen Dublin ‘because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis’. The stories were arranged by Joyce to present Dublin in four of its aspects-childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life-and he claimed to have written them in a style of ‘scrupulous meanness’.

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## **16.3 About the Age**

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### **Dominance of the Novel in Twentieth Century Literature**

In the twentieth century, novel became the dominant literary form in English. It is a very popular literary genre in the modern age. The film, the radio and the T.V. are gaining popularity but novel is the only literary form which can compete with them. The modern novelists can claim its importance with enthusiastic response. In the Restoration period, a new comedy by Congreve and Dryden was received with applause; in Victorian age the poet laureate Lord Tennyson’s newly published poems were admired and believed to add great lustre to English literature.

In the twentieth century, the novel holds the supreme place in the realm of literature, while poetry has lost its position. The change from poetry to novel meets the needs of the modern world. To a semi-educated modern taste, prose fiction was (and still is) more palat-

able than poetry, which is a more sophisticated taste, while, by its nature, it is more accessible to the masses than drama. In addition, the novel is admirably suited as a vehicle for the sociological studies which attracted most of the great artists of the period. Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce were all poets but they have changed from poetry to fiction; their permanent reputation is likely to rest on their novels. We may quote examples of other fiction writers like Edith Setwil and Virginia Woolf who have enriched fiction by bringing to it some of the luminous insights of poetry. They were poets but diverted their attention to fiction. Virginia's *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *The Waves* are experiments which have a strong influence over poetry and drama and they were treated as the richest genre of English literature. Right from Chaucer to the Victorian age, poetry and drama have played a dominant role.

The novel in the twentieth century has gained an undoubted ascendancy over all other literary forms, an ascendancy it has maintained until very recent years. Its growing importance has been accompanied by serious study of the art of the novelist; and from a technical point of view, the progress of novel throughout the century, is unequalled in all its previous history.

### **Characterization in the Twentieth Century Novels**

The nineteenth century characters do not develop, they are called flat characters. The novelist does not depict unimportant modifications, that is, they remain as they are from the beginning to the end. All the important characters of 19th century-Heathcliff Micawber, Uriah Heep, Amelia Sedley, Fred Bayham, Mr. Proudie-remain unchanged Mrs. Micawber is a very important character from a novel of the nineteenth century. She repeats the same matter from the beginning to the end. In this sense, nineteenth century characters are static and not dynamic. Thus, the chief concern of the nineteenth century novelist was to create memorable characters and to convey a moral but the modern novelist's object is to portray the characters realistically or as they are. In this process he makes a psychological research, reveals the character from within, dissects his mind and soul; and in conducting this research they get to know that man is a complex creature, not a simple and innocent one. Man is made of both virtues and vices. According to psychology, man is like a river, running sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes clear or turbid; he presents a different form at every moment. Like in the Victorian age, women in the modern novel, are treated as virtues or the reverse, made of golden clay, present savagery or sunlight. Now it is obvious that on account of the complexities of human personality the novelist can not portray him straightforwardly as a simple, memorable creature. He can not let him free to act according to the predictions. Thus the modern characters, when analyzed from within, do not enjoy the reputation of being memorable characters.

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## **16.4 Introduction Of The Novel**

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*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a very strange and exotic title for a novel, and at first glance the articles in this title appear to be put rather irrationally, but a closer

observation would reveal that the title is a very significant one and that the articles are indeed accurate. Joyce himself notified conspicuously that the last four words in the title were significant and should not be neglected. Actually, this was earlier done by some of the earlier critics of the book. Interpreting the appropriateness of the title, William M. Schutte stresses that the novel presents the portrait of the artist, and not just any artist. The next problem, however, emerges out of the words 'the artist'. Does it imply Joyce himself, and is the book to be estimated as the autobiography of Joyce, or is it that Joyce has built the particular artist the subject of his novel? One of Joyce's remarks to his friend reveals his intention of making the novel a self-portrait: "I haven't let this young man off very lightly, have I? Many writers have written about themselves. I wonder if any of them has been as candid as I have."

Most of the previous readers, reviewers and critics of Joyce regarded the novel as a self-portrait. "Many of its incidents closely parallel incidents in Joyce's life. What is more, Joyce's schoolfellows at Clongowes Wood school became Stephen's school fellows at Clongowes Wood under their real names; men still walking Dublin's streets also walked through the Portrait bearing their own names; and numerous well-known Dublin figures, including Joyce's mother and father and some of his university friends, were immediately recognisable beneath their pseudonyms. Small wonder that the early reviewers saw the book as a thinly disguised autobiography."

### **16.4.1 Detailed Explanation (Chapters 1-3)**

#### **CHAPTER -1**

##### **Early Impressions**

The beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* depicts the earliest impressions of an infant. These impressions are represented in a language that carries associations of incoherent experience and the supremacy of outward impressions symbolical of the baby's mind. The child remembers with peculiar acuteness, sights and sounds, smells, colours and noises. A few incidents of his very young life pass temporarily before us. There is the incident in which the child Stephen listens about a 'moo-cow'. There is another example of the child recalling how he once wetted his bed, and how mother sang to him. It seems that the child has arrived at the stage where it has become easy for him to systematize and evaluate some of these experiences.

##### **The Family of Dedalus**

Then is introduced the family of Dedalus. There is Simon Dedalus, the father of Stephen. His mother's name is May Dedalus. Living with them are a few relatives like uncle Charles and Mrs. Riordan (called Aunt Dante). There is also an introduction of the girl Stephen wants to marry. She is called Eileen Vance.

## **The School Experiences of Stephen**

There is a deep impression on the mind of Stephen of his first school experiences. He was sent to a boarding school named Clongowes Wood College. Stephen recollects how he bade farewell to his parents when he first left for the school. He also recalls that playground where he played football. He remembers the school library and the evening prayer. He recalls how his rough classmate Wells had pushed him into a ditch of dirty water and how he caught a cold due to this. He had to take resort in the school infirmary and Brother Michael looked after him. There he met Athy, the son of a racehorse owner. Stephen is too frightened and disheartened and fears that he is going to die. He somehow comforts himself with the thought that if he died prematurely, the notorious Wells would be filled with repentance and remorse. Stephen is almost in delirium and recalls the story of a ghost that his old servants had told him.

### **The Dinner at Christmas**

Stephen recalls very clearly the Christmas that he spent at home with his mother and father. Stephen had grown up and it was for the first time that he was permitted to sit at table with the elderly people. At dinner an argument started on politics. As the argument became more heated, May Dedalus did her best to maintain order and to calm them down but all in vain. Ultimately the dinner was spoiled and it left painful memories in the mind of Stephen. The main subject of the discussion had been the Irish patriot Parnell whose death had recently come to their knowledge. Mr. Casey was a steadfast supporter of Parnell and thought that Parnell had been treated badly by the Irish Catholic Church. The cause for the condemnation of Parnell was that he had kept a mistress. Aunt Dante was in support of the Catholic Church and became too furious at the criticism of the church. She left the room out of anger banging the door behind her.

### **Stephen's Girlfriend, Eileen**

Stephen remembers the girl Eileen. Once he had put her ivory coloured hand into his own pocket, then they started playing together. He had been threatened for playing with her because she was a Protestant, but he somehow associated her with the Virgin Mary, and phrases used by the Catholics to describe Virgin Mary got linked with Eileen in Stephen's mind.

### **School Punishment**

Stephen recalls how he was wrongly punished at school by his Latin teacher. Stephen's spectacles were broken, thus he had been unable to study. Though Stephen had explained this to the Latin teacher, Father Dolan, yet he made fun of him and gave the marks of pandybat on his hand. Stephen felt extremely disgraced. Other boys pressed him to meet the Rector and report against Father Dolan; Stephen did that. The Rector had shown sympathy and assured



Stephen that this would not happen again.

## **CHAPTER - 2**

### **Uncle Charles**

Uncle Charles was all the time smoking tobacco through the pipe. Simon Dedalus did not like the strong smell of tobacco, it seemed to him like gunpowder and he declared that Uncle Charles should smoke his pipe outside the house. Uncle Charles accepted this disgrace with joy. During the summer vacation Uncle Charles became the regular companion of Stephen when he came home for the vacation. Both went for shopping or to the park where a former athlete Mike Flynn would give Stephen running lessons. At this time Stephen also took delight in the world of books. His dearest book was *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

### **Education Discontinued**

The economic condition of Mr. Dedalus had so deteriorated that he decided that Stephen should not go back to the expensive school. Several alterations took place in the household to effect economy and it caused great depression to Stephen. He started taking resort in reveries and dreamt about the time when he would become a man, a mature and experienced man.

### **New Educational Institution**

As a consequence of the influence exercised by Stephen's father, Stephen and his younger brother were sent to a new preparatory school that was named 'Belvedere College'. Now Stephen felt himself quite superior, and this sense of superiority is projected in his behaviour towards the other boys of the school. Stephen and Heron became the unrivalled heroes of the school.

### **Stephen is thrashed**

One of the teachers of Stephen accused him of heresy in one of his weekly essays. Stephen was openly scolded for this. Some boys decided to punish Stephen for his heresy. They gripped him for a few days after the public humiliation of Stephen. Stephen was stopped by three boys when he was walking along the road. These boys were, Heron, Boland and Nash. These boys interrogated Stephen as to whom he thought was the best poet or the best prose writer. Stephen told them that he liked Byron a lot as a poet, and that he regarded Cardinal Newman as the greatest prose writer. The boys said that Byron was heretical and immoral. They persisted that he should take back his opinion about the eminence of Byron but Stephen would not do that. He refused, and was thus beaten by them callously with a cane and a cabbage stump.

## **The Play at School**

Stephen remembers the night when a play was staged in his school. His mind was again pervaded by the girl of his fancy. He imagined that she was sitting among the audience. It filled him with shame to perform his part because he felt that his role was a disgraceful one. His role was of a humorous teacher. After the play he ran away, anguished, humiliated and full of “wounded pride.”

## **Stephen’s Visit to Cork**

Stephen went to the city of Cork with his father. Mr. Dedalus was going there to dispose of some of his property but he also wanted his son to be familiar with the places where he spent his childhood. In the course of the journey he talked constantly about his friends of old days. During his talk he, now and then, took a gulp of brandy from his flask. Stephen was getting terribly bored with his conversation, and at the end fell off to sleep. In Cork, Stephen’s father took him to the college where he had studied. The name of his college was the Queen’s College. He was taken round the campus. His father told him several stories about his classmates that he had narrated to him innumerable times before. On the whole, this visit was full of boredom for Stephen.

## **Stephen gets an Award**

Stephen won the essay contest and got a prize. He spent the money to give pleasure and entertainment to his family that was facing ill-days. He took them to theatre and bought expensive gifts for them. Thus it was a momentary excursion for them and soon after that they were back to their old world of poverty.

## **Stephen Commits a Moral Sin**

Stephen’s mind was filled with intense longings and he wanted to go away from the gloomy and monotonous atmosphere of his school as well as his home. One night while wandering in the streets, he reached a brothel. He saw a woman standing at the door of her home. She stopped him and called him lovingly to her room. Stephen surrendered his body and mind to that woman.

## **CHAPTER - 3**

### **Stephen’s Self-Estimation**

While sitting in the classroom Stephen’s mind was taking delight in the thoughts of that evening when he had taken meal and pleasure in the brothel. As he contemplated over this sinful act he had to admit that he was leading a torn life and putting his soul to the danger of eternal damnation. Yet he knew he was not going to repent, because he felt “a dark peace had

been established between his body and soul.” He had stopped going to Mass but still offered prayers to Mother Mary.

### **The Period of Retreat**

In honour of the patron saint of the school, Saint Francis Xavier, a three day retreat was to be observed. During retreat the master encouraged them to observe meditative silence. He also talked to them about death and damnation. Stephen felt that every word was particularly addressed to him. He recalled all the sins he had committed, big or small. He remembered the obscene pictures that he kept and the indecent letters which he wrote and left out in the anticipation that some girl would read them.

### **The Terrible Description of Hell**

The most horrifying lecture was the one on hell. The speaker had vividly described all the torments that the body was put to in hell. Stephen felt great terror. He felt as though he were already dead and going through the very same torments mentioned by the speaker, but the presence of the teacher and his friends convinced him that he was still alive. Stephen knew there was no escape. He had to confess, but dreaded the thought of doing so among his school companions.

### **The Final Lecture on Spiritual Torments**

The final lecture was regarding the spiritual tortures that the damned have to face in hell. The speaker explained that the first such torture they had to face was that of a sense of loss, for they must understand that their sin had deprived them of God’s loving care. The second plight they had to suffer was that of deep regret. The third plight would be the acknowledgement that their suffering was endless, infinite and beyond the limits of time. He described this by giving the instance of a bird who carried away a grain of sand from the mountain of sand once in every million years. In God’s eye even a single sin counts. This lecture had terribly shaken Stephen. He tried to examine his conscience but felt incapable of the task. In the evening he went to a nearby old priest and confessed all his sins. Thereafter he felt greatly unburdened and relieved. He received Holy communion the next morning and decided firmly to lead a new life.

## **16.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text**

### **Plot and Structure**

Joyce was very specific about providing a formal structure to his novels, this is the reason why his major novels have a compact and precise form. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is divided into five chapters and all of them end with a note of balance or ‘stasis’. It has been said that each chapter starts with a series of thematic statements; but it does not

appear justified to ratify this view, though it is convincing in the context of chapter one, where the themes of paternity, religion, apology, punishment and song are all encompassed in the first two pages.

Joyce defined this novel as “the curve of an emotion”. All the five chapters present five versions of the same curve, proceeding from various different experiences, through conflicts to a state of ephemeral peace, when-to use Stephen’s words-”the mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.” As an artist, Joyce feels satisfied in the organisation of his sensible and intelligible matter for an aesthetic end. And once one understands the pattern of the novel, our admiration for it is heightened.

Elizabeth Drew says that the “structure of the novel, as critics have pointed out, is in the form of a series of trial flights. At the end of each chapter, Stephen makes some assertion of his own identity which frees him for a time from the particular outer and inner pressures of confusion and despair which constrict him. The diary form at the end of the book, in spite of much of its “flip” tone of cynicism, hints of doubts and wavering distrust.”

Chapter one deals with the childhood of Stephen in Bray and Clongowes. It closes with the proud victory of Stephen over Father Dolan’s wrong cruel punishment. Chapter two interprets the events in Blackrock, Dublin, Belvedere College and Cork. It deals with Stephen’s slow detachment from his family and his surroundings. His romantic imagination reaches its climax ironically when he visits a prostitute. The truth that Stephen really feels the need of being held firmly in her arms’ suggests that he is still a child who needs comfort and care. But the chapter ends with another kind of stasis-the ‘swoon of sin.’

Chapter third opens with references to all the seven deadly sins and concentrates on the sermons depicting the horrible picture of hell. Stephen’s repentance and communion gives another moment, this time of pious calm as the concluding note of equilibrium.

At the opening of chapter four, Stephen is leading a pure life but he rejects the offer given by the rector to become a priest. His homely life has become wretched, but his father makes arrangements for him to join the university. His quest for beauty finds its objective when he sees the bird-girl on the sea-shore; and his swoon of pleasure provides another end of the chapter in stasis.

In the opening scene of the last chapter, emphasis is laid on the wretchedness of Stephen’s home as he looks at the louse-marked lid of the box of pawn-tickets. Then follows the discussion with Davin on patriotism. He discusses art or aesthetic theory with the Dean of Studies. Thereafter, he talks about international politics with Cranly, patriotism with Davin, with Lynch he discusses art and with Cranly, religion.

Throughout these discussions and conversations Stephen tries to justify his own point; and ultimately he concludes that in order to do so, he must accept the state of exile. The novel finally closes with another note of stasis as Stephen gets ready to quit his family and country.

## **Theme and Content of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

The most conspicuous theme of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* lies in its title—the portraiture of the development of a young man as an artist. Besides, there are various secondary themes in the novel that are dealt with through recurrent symbols and motifs. For instance, the theme of the quest for a father substitute, the theme of flight and fall, the theme concerning the severance of cramping ties and the theme of the sacred nature of artistic creativity.

The main content of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the development of a young Stephen from ‘creature’ to ‘creator’. The novel begins with the babyhood of Stephen to his decision to quit family, religion and country in pursuit of his true vocation of an artist. It essentially depicts the plight of an artist, his sensibility, his passion, his arrogance, his essential irresponsibility, his fights to raise himself above his mates.

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is built on the proposition that art is a main artery in the body of life. All that nourishes art is living : All that stifles art is dead. Joyce works outwards from the conviction that the artist, as artist, must have no loyalties, must make no judgements except in distinguishing between what is relevant or irrelevant to his art. It is with art, not with himself or his environment, that Joyce is pre-occupied in this book.”

The theme of the novel is that an artist is necessarily an individual who can develop only after being free of all assimilative predicaments and commitments in the external world. It is not relevant here to discuss whether Stephen can, on the basis of the villanelle be called a promising artist. Joyce is simply depicting the minimum conditions required for the nourishment of the will to create art. Stephen regards family, church and nationality as nets preventing the flight of the artistic soul. Stephen seeks unshaken and perfect freedom that is an essential requirement for the expression of his spirit. He is not ready to serve that in which he no longer believes, even if it is his family, religion or country; he would attempt to discover himself in some mode of life or art as liberally and as perfectly as he could, applying silence, exile and cunning as his weapons to defend himself.

Stephen’s consciousness and mind are interesting not only in themselves but also because they possess a symbolic significance. “Our knowledge of Stephen is now going to come to us mediated through his own developing consciousness. That consciousness is to be the theatre of whatever drama the book attempts to present, and at the same time a territory sufficiently broad for the exercise of the vigorous naturalism which Joyce has been learning from continental masters.” Yet with a quite transparent naturalism he is no longer content and on the second page we find him putting inconspicuously into operation a different kind of machinery:

“The Vances lived in number seven. They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen’s father and mother. When they were grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He

hid under the table. His mother said :

O, Stephen will apologise.

Dante Said :

O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes-

Pull out his eyes,

Apologise,

Apologise,

Pull out his eyes.”

“The whole Portrait is an apologia : at the same time its cardinal assertion is that Stephen will not apologise; rather he awaits the eagles. Joyce’s eyes, moreover, were in actual fact threatened from the first; presently in the *Portrait* Stephen as a schoolboy is going to be unjustly punished as a consequence of defective vision; the master who beats him makes an observation suggesting that his guilt is to be seen in his eye; the complex of ideas thus established remains with Stephen and is several times resumed in *Ulysses* in a manner fully intelligible only to a reader equipped with the relevant memories of the *Portrait*. This technique of weaving elusive symbolic themes through the strongly realistic fabric of his writing is something that Joyce is to exploit more and more. His prose at length becomes a vast hall of echoes-and one fatally adapted (the toiling inquirer must feel) to the conflicting voices of scholasts. Eventually, Joyce appears to have enjoyed playing up to his commentators.

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## 16.5 Let us Sum up

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This unit introduces you to ‘a new writer with a new form whose work ‘*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has been hailed as one of the most remarkable confession outside Russian and French literature’ and a brilliant and nasty variety of pseudo-realism.

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## 16.6 Review Questions

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1. Critically examine Stephen’s conflicts that make him choose the life of an artist and reject the call of religion. Answer with references to Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
2. Critically examine Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as the story of Stephen Dedalus, his development and growth into an artist.
3. Elaborate flight and fall as the central theme of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
4. Discuss the relation of structure to the themes in the novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. What devices are used by Joyce to give artistic unity to this novel?

5. Would you regard *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a stream of consciousness novel? Elaborate your answer with references to the novel.

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## UNIT - 17

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### JAMES JOYCE: A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN (II)

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#### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 About the Author
- 17.3 About the Age
- 17.4 Introduction to the Novel
  - 17.4.1 Detailed Explanation (Chapter 4-5)
  - 17.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text
- 17.5 Let us Sum up
- 17.6 Review Questions
- 17.7 Bibliography

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#### 17.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- (i) become familiar with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*;
- (ii) know the evaluation of James Joyce as a novelist;
- (iii) know the use of the stream of consciousness technique in the 20th century novel;
- (iv) know the story of the novel (Chapters 4-5); and
- (v) to know the critical aspects of the novel.

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#### 17.1 Introduction

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The book received a mixed response when it was published. A critic called it “a study in garbage” while another found in it “a brilliant and nasty variety of pseudo-realism.” But it was also welcomed as one of the most striking confessions outside Russian and French Literature. Ezra Pound remarked that the novel contained the best prose of the decade and was one of the few works that presented creative invention; while the English magazine, *The Nation* hailed Joyce as a new writer with a new form.



## 17.2 About The Author-James Joyce : An Overview

### His Subjects

Joyce is a serious novelist, whose concern is chiefly with human relationships-man in relation to himself, to society, and to the whole race. This is true also of his latest work, though his interest in linguistic experiments makes it difficult to understand his meaning. Acutely aware of the pettiness and meanness of modern society, and of the evils which spring from it, he is unsurpassed in his knowledge of the seamy side of life, which he presents with startling frankness. He is a keen and subtle analyst of man's inner consciousness, and, in common with the psycho-analysts of his day, he is much preoccupied with sex.

### His Technique

In the quest of the twentieth-century novelists for a new technique by which to present the contemporary human dilemma, Joyce is a pioneer, and his lead has been followed by many major writers. He was a ceaseless experimenter, ever anxious to explore the potentialities of a method once it was evolved, and in his use of the 'stream of consciousness' technique, and in his handling of the internal monologue, he went further and deeper than any other. His sensitiveness, his depth of penetration into the human consciousness, give to his character-study a subtlety unparalleled in his day, and if, in his attempts to catch delicate and elusive shades of feeling and fix them in words, he has frequently become incomprehensible, the fact remains that a character like Leopold Bloom is a unique and fascinating creation.

### His Style

Joyce's style develops from the straightforward, simple writing of *Dubliners* to the complex allusiveness and the bewildering originality of *Finnegan's Wake*. In the latter, a broken narrative, with abrupt transitions, and logical sentence links omitted, together with a new vocabulary, produces writing which is often purely 'private' in its significance; for words are coined by the breaking up of one word and the joining of its parts to parts of other words similarly split, and roots of words from many languages are employed. Joyce's interest in language and his eager experimentation are unequalled in any period of our literature. He has a sensitive ear for verbal rhythms and cadences, and uses language in his books as part of an elaborately conceived artistic pattern, in which much of the unity of his work lies. With the beauty of language for its own sake only he is usually little concerned, yet his writing is often of great imaginative power and has a musical quality which enables even his incomprehensible passages to be read aloud with considerable pleasure. His genius is for the comic rather than the tragic view of life, and his work is full of wit, puns (often in several languages), and startling conceits. The humour varies from broad comedy to intellectual wit, but is mainly sardonic in tone.

## **17.3 About The Age**

### **Stream Of Consciousness Novel (The Modern Psychological Novel)**

In the modern fiction, the point of interest lies very often in the dark places of psychology. Psychology is the science of mental life, both of the phenomenon and of their conditions which are concerned with feelings, desires, cognition, reasoning and decisions of the mind. Hence, the stream of consciousness emerges out of psychology. In this genre of novel, let us call it the stream of things, of consciousness or of subjective life; the supporters of this kind of novel have endeavoured to portray the depth and complexity of human consciousness as faithfully as possible. Hence the story or plot may crumble; ruin might seize upon the characters. It has been called the stream of consciousness novel, a novel of the silent or an internal monologue. It is a modern analytic novel, catching the very atmosphere of the mind. The modern novelists have turned fiction away from external to internal reality. We may elaborate by saying that the novel of stream of consciousness is a journey of exploration into the realm of feeling and sensations. Modern novelists have discarded the traditional story. In the novel, the story involves a conscious or unconscious presentation of man's experience of life. Hence there are no falsifications of facts. The new psychology has shifted the goal of the novelist. There is no adorning of a tale by attaching a moral tag to the story.

In the stream of consciousness novel, the aim is to get nearer to life. Whereas in traditional novel there was a flatness, in stream of consciousness novel the novelist it out to catch the psychological movement which leads to many interesting elements.

### **Human Consciousness and Association of Ideas**

The main emphasis of the stream of consciousness novel is to expose the inner recesses of the human mind. The novelist mainly exposes the passive state of mind of the characters which has repercussion on their actions and situation. The traditional novel is quite the reverse, it ignores ninety-nine percent of what goes on within the human consciousness in order to elucidate a definite course of external action. The new novel presents human consciousness which shapes the actions and reactions. Hence the stream of consciousness fiction does not present a coherent and logical pattern of life. It breaks away from the tradition of revealing characters systematically and does not follow the formal or traditional style of telling a story. Thus, the stories do not have the kind of shape which conventional novels had in the nineteenth century. The Stream of consciousness technique is a process, not a specific state of mind. It does not arbitrarily formalize or lay emphasis on the superficial traits of personality, external idiosyncracies and humours. Ben Jonson's humours have evaporated in the 20th century; the novelist is mainly concerned with the uncircumscribed like Hamlet; stress is laid on capturing the flux of consciousness linked with the subconscious. To sum up, in modern fiction there is richness and certainty of psychic life.

## **The Technique of Stream of Consciousness**

The novelist uses a different technique in the stream of consciousness novel. It is directly or indirectly an interior monologue and omniscient description. It is a prose soliloquy which is handled very skilfully by the novelist who is capable of carrying various devices, strategies, symbols and wonderful craftsmanship to highlight all the associated ideas. In the direct interior monologue the writer completely detaches himself and offers no guidance or comments. Flaubert well said that, "the author ought to be in his work like God in His creation, invisible and powerful. Let him be felt everywhere but seen nowhere." He should render, not narrate what is going on. In the indirect, interior monologue, the omniscient author presents unspoken materials as emerging directly from the character's consciousness. He does it with the help of commentary and description. Soliloquies and omniscient description are used effectively in this kind of novel. Because stream of consciousness presents the flux of consciousness, thus it lacks form, coherence and logical sequences. Therefore it seems essential to impose order and form on psychic contents and this requires much attention, organisation and rigid artistic control of complex material. To impose a formal pattern the writers have to rely on the unities, musical structure, cyclic schemes and symbolism.

### **Space and Time in Stream of Consciousness Novels**

The important characteristic of psychological fiction is its freedom from rigid notions of time and space. There is no chronological sequence of events; past, present and future are dove-tailed. The stream of consciousness technique is a means to escape from the tyranny of time and dimension. Retrospect and anticipation constitute the very essence of consciousness at any specific time. The past and future impinge upon the present conditions and situations. The present gets the vision of the past and future. All these reminiscences occur in an illogical pattern, thus they cannot be confined within the boundary of time and place. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, is concerned with one individual's memory. It is about a woman who walks through a London street. She is making preparations for a party in the afternoon. In her reflections, she thinks of her life at Bourton twenty years ago and remembers Peter Walsh who loved her. Time, montage and free associations of ideas and images condition the flow of her consciousness. The past, present and future interchange in her egomaniacal consciousness. Then we move in space from the consciousness of Clarrisa Dalloway to that of the enchanting influences of the Tenth Episode in *Ulysses*. In this, Joyce mentions about eighteen unrelated scenes taking place in various parts of Dublin at the same time.

Hence we may sum up this freedom from space and time by disregarding the selfish reality of life and lay stress on the time in which clock is artificial but mental time is natural. Thus life is constituted by the processes of the mind. The inside object is presented by intuition and irrational process rather than surveying the ideas from outside. There is a flux of interpenetrated elements, unhampered by the intellect. It is called anti-mechanical mode of thinking.

## Conclusion

Several critics were against the stream of consciousness technique and made severe attacks on it. Wells hates the “copious emptiness” of novels using this technique. Herbert Read detests its “terrible fluidity” and the disintegration of form and structure especially in the works of Joyce and Proust. J.W. Beach has condemned this technique by showing its applicability to only neurotics. But in spite of these criticisms it can not be denied that this kind of novel has discovered a new realm of experience and exposed the unimaginable depths and fluidity of human consciousness. It is a new province in the history of novel that reveals the deepest recesses of the human mind with remarkable artistic skill.

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### 17.4 Introduction to The Novel

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J.I.M. Stewart, the critic, catches our attention to the fact that the different styles used in the *Portrait* are worthy to be called a museum of old and new styles, next only to *Ulysses*. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce does away with that aggressively economical and monotonous prose, pervading Stephen Hero, out of that he had developed the excessively expressive, ‘scrupulous meanness’ of *Dubliners*. Syntax, vocabulary and rhythm are now frankly diversified to accentuate the contours of the hidden emotion, and Joyce is thus starting to deploy his resources as an expert of imitative form: “*Ulysses*, considered in point of prose style, is to reveal itself quite frankly as a museum displaying as in a series of show-cases all the old ways of using English and a great many new ones as well. *The Portrait* although in some degree looking forward to this, renders an overriding impression of unity, since each of the styles reflects one fact of Stephen, who is a highly unified creation.” ‘He chronicled with patience what he saw,’ we are told, ‘detaching himself from it and tasting its mortifying flavour in secret.’ This Stephen is best represented in some of the conversations-which, as a Dubliner, are based upon an ear and intellect so alert as to combine a maximum of significant statements with a minimum of apparent selection. The early scene in which Stephen’s father and Mrs. Riordan quarrel over Irish politics during dinner on Christmas day is Joyce’s early masterpiece of this kind. When Stephen ceases to be merely a recording intelligence, and responds actively to the challenge of a world he finds so largely inimical, the style reaches out at once for weapons and armour, its whole tone becoming an extension of Stephens’ most caustic and arrogant condemnations; of Dublin which has ‘shrunk with time to a faint mortal odour, of Ireland ‘the old sow that eats here farrow,’ of her church which is ‘the scullery-maid of Christendom.’ Stephen himself is ‘a priest of the eternal imagination,’ and he speaks in cold exalted phrases constant with the role.’

As far as the technique is concerned, it is the interior monologue. Joyce’s subtlety of insight into the complex and intricate mind of the adolescent Stephen is astonishingly remarkable. For instance, in Chapter II, section IV, we meet the application of this technique: “Stephen walked on at his father’s side, listening to stories he heard before, hearing again the names of the scattered and dead revellers who had been the companions of his heart. He recalled his own equivocal position in Belvedere, a free boy, a leader afraid of his own authority, proud

and sensitive and suspicious, battling against the squalor of his life and against the riot of his mind....” The key feature of this technique is the mental flux created on account of the association of ideas rather than the inexistence of formal sentence structure. The impact of Father Arnall’s sermons on Stephen is represented to us through a technique that successfully grips every movement—rise and fall, turn and twist of Stephen’s long persisting spiritual toil. First the crudeness of the unrepentant heart is presented : “A cold lucid indifference reigned in his soul.... what did it avail to pray when he knew that his soul lusted after its own destruction?” (Chapter III, Section I). But every moment, a happening has begun to inform him and even a mathematical exercise at school makes him feel that the fundamental cause of his trouble is not very much lust but pride. “The equation on the page of his scribbler began to spread out of widening tail, eyed and starred like a peacocks’ ...” (Chapter III, Section I).

Stephen’s plight on listening to Father Arnall’s sermon is also explained by a method

akin to interior monologue : “Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher’s knife had probed deeply into his diseased conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin.... the sordid details of his orgies stand under his very nostrils: the sootcoated packet of pictures which he had hidden in the flue of the fire-place and in the presence of whose shameless or bashful wantonness he lay for hours sinning in thought and deed....” (Chapter III, Section II).

#### **17.4.1 DETAILED EXPLANATION (CHAPTERS 4-5)**

##### **CHAPTER -4 Routine Full of Purity**

Stephen’s understanding of the nature of sin made him adopt a routine of great piety. He went through many purificatory exercises and subjected his body to mortification to conquer himself. He daily attended Mass, offered prayers and recited the rosary that he always carried in his pocket. He found himself successful in bringing all the senses under control through this tough process of discipline. He started to believe in the reality of love, for it appeared to him that God had forgiven him and bestowed grace only because of his love for sinful humanity. Stephen’s control over his emotion, however, was still suspect, akin to interior monologue : “Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret. Sometimes doubts entered his mind, sometimes within him was still dragging him towards sin, and that one act of sin would undo all the spiritual progress that he had made through great perseverance and torment.

##### **Director’s Offer of Priesthood**

The director of the school was highly impressed by the discipline and pious routine of Stephen. He suggested to Stephen the vocation of a priest and asked him if he would like to join in. For a while priesthood seemed very attractive but later reflection convinced Stephen that he was under an illusion and that he must drop the idea of becoming a priest. He was able to persuade himself to quit his idea about priesthood. He also began to have fresh fears that he

might fall from the graceful state for it was with extreme difficulty that one was capable of averting such a downfall even for the shortest time. He also remembered that his family was making a great sacrifice for his education and it made him feel bad for his brothers and sisters. His family was under great debt yet Stephen's father was determined to educate him at the university.

### **Joyce's Use of Epiphany**

Stephen was walking by the seashore. As his friends called out his name to invite him for a swim, Stephen, at once, recollected that Dedalus, his namesake, was a 'famous artificer in Greek mythology'. He imagined himself soaring up in the sky, and the thought made him shiver with thrill. He felt anew the strong urge to live life fully and it seemed that his soul had suddenly risen from the grave where it lay imprisoned during his boy hood. His movement into the water is symbolical of his journey of self discovery. He saw a beautiful girl in front of him in the water. Stephen gazed at her face for a considerable length of time. He felt a spiritual change in him. Stephen was suddenly capable of seeing himself and his life with all the possible clarity. He now, realized how he must live his life.

### **Stephen's Friends**

Stephen had developed close friendship with a companion named Cranly who shares most of his aesthetic and literary interests. Actually their relation is more like that of a priest and a disciple. Stephen shared all his desires and aspirations without any restraint to Cranly. Another friend of Stephen's named Davin was an Irish patriot. Stephen has a rather low opinion of his intelligence. Still he feels great attraction for this man, because he speaks a very picturesque language, that is a blend of quaint Elizabethan expressions and forceful Irish idioms. Stephen begins to consciously follow Davin's style. He and Davin have a wonderful encounter when they go out together for a walk one evening.

Stephen discussed with the Dean of studies the relative claims of the fine arts and useful arts. Their talk took the form of the nature and goal of art. Stephen said that the target of an artist was to create something beautiful, which he explained as those things whose perception gives pleasure to the mind. The aesthetic theory of Stephen is largely derived from Aquinas. He thought that a true artist's concern is with the beautiful only whereas the productive artist's job is the production of good and useful things. He believed that art must produce a stasis and it should only end in the satisfaction of the beholder's aesthetic senses. Art that produces kinesis is only useful art, like rhetoric and not poetry like fine art. The vision of the beautiful needs integritas, consonantia and claritas. All art can be ranked among the three categories-lyrical, epical, dramatic.

### **Memories of the Girl**

That beautiful girl whom Stephen had seen on the seabeach perpetually haunts his imagination. He writes a poem on her. Watching the birds flying high in the sky, Stephen again recalls Dedalus and imagines himself soaring like his mythical hero. It appears to him as an

unavoidable requirement to quit his home, religion and nationality in order to achieve perfect freedom. Stephen follows the girl over a little distance.

## **Chapter-5**

### **Stephen Enters The University**

Stephen now joins the University. One morning Stephen is getting late for the class. His father shouts at him for his slackness. His mother also says that University life has changed Stephen. Stephen has now become a grown-up, matured intellectual who completely indulges in the quest for beauty and the essence of art. Cranly, Stephen's companion, shares his aesthetic interests. Cranly has a serious nature in contrast to Stephen's other friends at the university. These friends are referred to throughout the chapter and their several encounters are described. For example, Davin, an ardent Irish patriot, is considered by Stephen to be a "dullwitted loyal self." But Stephen who was obsessed with language found himself trapped by Davin's speech- "an interesting mixutre of Elizabethan English and quaint Irish idioms. Davin's description of an incident after a hurling match provides Joyce with an opportunity to demonstrate his proficiency in imitating the Irish vernacular speech." The incident is in reference to a lonely walk home late at night when Davin stops at an isolated cottage to ask for water. A peasant woman who opens the door scares the young student by her mysterious behaviour and her keen request that he should get in and spend the night there. He leaves the house quickly but can never forget this incident.

### **A Conversation on Art**

On reaching the University, Stephen goes to the physics theatre and meets the Dean of studies who is lighting a fire in the hearth. Now follows a discussion in which they discuss the useful arts as against liberal arts. This leads to a theoretical conversation on the artist's goal. Stephen says that the target of the artist must be the creation of the beautiful. The Dean asks what he considers beautiful. Stephen answers with a quote from St. Thomas Aquinas, "Those things are beautiful the perception of which pleases." Stephen is sincerely trying to evolve a clear conception of the fundamental questions in art and literature. He tries to form his own aesthetic doctrine, and he uses various persons (the Dean, Cranly and Lynch) to examine his ideas. He tells the Dean that he uses Aquinas' ideas as a lamp to light his own views. There can be no such thing as free thought because all thinking needs to be bound by its own laws. This conversation with the Dean ends as the Professor of physics and other students enter the hall, and the class begins.

### **Stephen and his Classmates**

When the class is over, Stephen meets Cranly. A group of students are involved in enlisting students to sign a petition for disarmament and world peace. Stephen says that he has no interest in this matter. Temple also walks off with Stephen and Cranly. Davin and Lynch accompany Stephen and Cranly to watch a hurling match. Stephen condemns the blind pa-

triotism of Davin, stating that he does not share the other's strong devotion to his country. "Ireland is an old sow that eats her farrow", he says coldly. He is sure that one need not sacrifice anything for such a country. In fact, he has decided to leave it for good. Lynch and Stephen are parted and Stephen begins to hold forth on his aesthetic philosophy. His aesthetic doctrine which he calls "applied Aquinas", is given below.

### **Stephen's Aesthetic Theory as Influenced by St. Aquinas**

1. We can regard a thing as beautiful if its perception pleases.
2. The good is that towards which the appetite inclines. This suggests :
  - (a) That creation of the beautiful is the only concern of a creative artist.
  - (b) The interest of the productive artist is only in the production of good.

Other aspects of Stephen's doctrine are derived from Greek thought:
3. 'Stasis' must be produced through art; it must satisfy the aesthetic sense of the observer. 'Stasis' means balance or note of equilibrium.
4. Art must not be kinetic, that means it should not excite an emotion like desire or loathing. It is the function of useful art to produce such emotions.
5. Three things are essential for the perception of beauty; these also show the influence of Greek thought:
  - (a) integritas or wholeness
  - (b) consonantia or harmony
  - (c) claritas or radiance

Stephen explains it through the instance of a basket. First, one sees the basket as one thing, then a thing with parts (harmony) and ultimately as that thing and not anything else. Stephen tells Lynch that beauty and truth produce a stasis in the observer's mind. He quotes from Plato: "Beauty is the splendour of the truth".

### **Divisions of Art**

Stephen divides art into a development of three forms:

- (1) Lyrical : The projection of the artist himself, his views or experiences.
- (2) Epic : The image is present in close relation to the artist and to others.
- (3) Dramatic: The image is presented in close relation to others. The personality of artist is refined out of existence in this type of art. It is totally impersonal or objective.



## **Compostion of a Poem**

As it starts raining, Lynch and Stephen return to the library of the college. Lynch points out Stephen's girl as she walks off with her friends. Stephen watches her keenly from afar and pays no attention to Lynch's talk.

He is wrapt in the thoughts of this girl. One morning, Stephen wakes up to a "tremulous morning knowledge, a morning inspiration." Ecstatic, and full of passion, verses began to form in his mind. He manages to write a villanelle, complete with six stanzas, in honour of that girl.

## **Stephen's Determination**

Stephen is standing on the steps of the library watching the birds flying in a circle over his head. It reminds him of the flight of Dedalus. Stephen decides firmly, that he would not only leave his family but also his religion and nationality. In contrast to Stephen's seriousness other students are gayful, joyous. Stephen sees the girl again and pursues her for a short distance while Dixon, Cranly, Glynn and Temple discuss where unbaptized infants go when they die.

## **A Discord with the Mother**

Stephen tells Cranly that he had argued about religion with his mother. She had told him to perform his Easter duty, that is to go to Mass and communion which Stephen refuses to do. He declares to Cranly the non serviam of Lucifer: "I will not serve". The analytical Cranly marks the irony of Stephen's inner involvement with a religion in which he does not believe any more. They discuss the parents of Stephen. He loves his mother but regards his father merely "a praiser of his own past". Stephen does not want to hurt his mother but he can not denounce his principles either. Cranly tells Stephen that he should not accept the request of his mother if he does not believe in the religious rituals. Stephen answers that he neither believes nor disbelieves, but admits that he is not adamant enough to disbelieve to risk making a sacrilegious communion. Stephen shows his respect for the rituals of church by refusing to observe them. He says that he does not want to become a protestant, 'forsaking a logical and coherent absurdity for an illogical and incoherent one'. He decides that he must go far away to attain perfect spiritual freedom. Stephen is determined to sacrifice everything that comes in his way of attaining spiritual freedom. He declares that he cannot serve that in which he no longer believes whether it be home, church or country.

## **Entries in Stephen's Diary**

At the end of Chapter 5 a series of dated entries in Stephen's diary is depicted which relate to his last moments before leaving Ireland. The date of first entry is March 20th and last one is April 27th. Stephen records his last meetings with Lynch, Cranly, and Davin and in brief, his thoughts and impressions. He tells his mother that he can not go back to church; that he can not repent. He describes his last meeting with his girl friend at which both feel disheartened.

He turns on “his spiritual heroic refrigerating apparatus invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri” thereby linking his prolonged romance with the unrealized ideal love and devotion of Dante to Beatrice. In the last entry, he invokes the old ancient artificer Daedalus, for inspiration : “April 26.... so be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. April 27..... old father, old artificer, stand by me now and ever in good stead.”

Therefore, like Dedalus, Stephen spreads his wings to escape the labyrinth (jail) of Dublin and fly toward the realm of artistic freedom.

## **17.4.2 Critical Analysis Of The Text**

### **Introduction**

The central focal point of Joyce’s, eminent novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is Stephen Dedalus. The whole novel deals with Stephen’s experiences, his outward and inward changes, his journey from childhood to manhood, his discovery of his own destiny. Stephen is tied down by family, religion and country but he liberates himself from all these in order to discover his true career in the liberated and uncommitted life of an artist. He has to quit all his loyalties to strengthen his sense of devotion to art. In other words, the novel studies the development of a young man from ‘creature’ to ‘creator’. Stephen develops by liberating himself from various chains that were made to mould and restrict his mind. The novel essentially interprets the torment of the artist, and his conflict and struggle to free himself, as he revolts against the reality of contemporary Ireland-family, country and religion.

### **Child Stephen’s Growth in the Chapter I**

Stephen rebels against all constituted authority in its various manifestations. He finds that the ‘conscience of his race’, as it is shown in the statements of his own childhood adolescence and youth, is consistently corrupt and callous. Even in the short prelude that contains impressionistic glimpses of his earliest memories, the fear of authority is one ingredient in the homely atmosphere. ‘He hid under the table’-and the only way to escape from punishment was ‘to submit’. If he did not ask for apology, the eagles would come and ‘pull out his eyes’. The child is surrounded by grown-ups who have inflexible and readymade codes of conduct which he must follow. At Clongowes outward reality takes the form of perplexing and incomprehensible odds, of private sin and vague guilt, of a crowd of pushing, noisy school-boys, ‘the whirl of the scrimmage’ of snobbish nature and of crude injustice which can allow a boy’s being thrown into a ditch full of mud if he does not submit to the demands of a bully. However, Stephen wins when, after being unjustly thrashed by Father Dolan, he reports the callousness to the rector and gets the latter’s sympathy and favour. He is praised by his school-fellows for his courage in facing the rector, and he feels delighted and ‘free’.

### **Stephen’s Development in the Chapter II**

But his feeling of happiness and freedom can not sustain itself very long, they end very

soon. Chapter The Second depicts Stephen's life at the age of sixteen. He has to struggle again to maintain his identity in a cruel environment. It is the atmosphere of an unintelligible family, of caustical Jesuit priests, and of crude, insensitive torturous family, of casuistical Jesuit priests, and of crude, insensitive torturous schoolboys. He finds himself overpowered with exhortations wanting him to be athletic and patriotic, a nice son, a refined fellow, and a decent Catholic above all. He feels his only escape is through day-dreaming. Meanwhile, the needs of his growing body overpowered everything else and became uncontrollable. He wants to satisfy the intense longings of his heart before which everything else is abandoned, useless and alien. He is possessed by erotic fancies. He is perpetually haunted by lecherous thoughts and he experiences a storm of sensuality in himself. The fierce lustful feeling is ultimately satisfied in the hands of a whore. His experience with the prostitute, with which this chapter closes is entirely different from his dreams of romance concentrated on E-C- an Mercedes, but it is explained as a kind of victory for him. It is the first step. The gas flames of yellow colour burn as if 'before an altar'. The groups of women in the street appear to be "arrayed as for some rite." Stephen feels a new world. He yields in front of a prostitute with a sense of joy and relief, he surrenders himself completely from body and mind and feels all of a sudden 'strong and fearless and sure of himself.' The natural man achieves a short-time fulfilment here.

### **Stage of Spiritual Man**

Third chapter depicts Stephen as a spiritual man. We now become familiar with the methods employed by the church and its priests to stimulate the feelings of repentance among those who listen to religious sermons. The sermons, delivered by Father Arnall to his, "dear little brothers in Christ", are intended to arouse deep feelings of fear in the boys. The reader cannot fail to perceive the irony that Joyce uses, the priestly sermons interpreting the physical and mental torments created out of God's eternal love for his sinful children. Stephen does not see any irony. Under the direct emotional attack he feels 'a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul.' In the plight of fear he goes to a distant place of the town and confesses his sins to a priest, coming back home "whole and happy". "He strode homeward, conscious of an invisible grace pervading and making light his limbs. He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more." He would now get another life-a life of grace, virtue and delight.

Fascinated by Stephen's religious devotion and piety, the director offers to Stephen the vocation of priesthood. The post of a priest of a parish is not only sacred but has abundant prestige. The director says that the power of a priest of God is more than that of a king, or a saint. Stephen thinks of the offer and finds it quite attractive. As a priest he would gain secret knowledge, and come to know of the secret things hidden in the heart of others; he would hear the sinful desires and thoughts but without himself being touched by them. But simultaneously Stephen also realizes the disadvantages of being a priest. His life as a priest would be 'grave and ordered and passionless'. He would have to discard freedom that is so important to him. He also recollects his bad experiences at Clongowes Wood under the charge of Jesuit priests

: “He smelt again the moist warm air which hung in the bath in Clongowes above the sluggish turf coloured water.” He feels that the job of priest is not for him; he can never swing the censor before the tabernacle. He is subjected “to learn his own wisdom among the snares of the world.” His inner conflict makes him decide that he should not accept the offer of priesthood. And thus an artist is born. When he was wandering all alone on the sea beach, he notices a girl who seems to him like a sea bird. He thinks about her deeply, without any desire or ulterior motive of any sort; he is enjoying the artistic view of life. And as he looks, he is overwhelmed with joy: “Heavenly God! cried Stephen’s soul, in an outburst of profane joy.” It is ‘profane joy’, the artist’s delight in life. A short while ago his school fellows lightly and jokingly called him as ‘Stephenos’ and as ‘The Dedalus’. These addresses seemed to him a prophecy. He had fancied a hawk-like man soaring high and high upwards from the waves of the sea. This fictitious vision was a prophecy of the end he had taken birth to serve; it was “a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new, soaring, impalpable, imperishable being.” The scene of the bird-girl now affirms his belief that his job is to become a priest, not of the church but of the imagination and fancy. The girl’s sight deeply touched his soul; her eyes haunt him and beckon him, his soul jumps at that call. It is an invitation “to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life.” It means it is an appeal to make him ready to devote himself to art. This is the most crucial stage in Stephen’s career, and it indicates the climax of the novel. Stephen now realizes what he is not to serve and what he is to serve. (It means he is to serve art and not to serve the church).

The moment Stephen recognizes what is in store for him, (he is to become an artist), he proceeds instantly to reject his other loyalties or commitments. He had always felt alienated from his father since childhood. He is aware of the recent rift between him and his mother. His mother had initially been against Stephen’s joining the university but later “he was made aware dimly and without regret of a first noiseless sundering of their lives.” He does not like his friends much, nor his school mates. McCann, Dixon, Cranly, Lynch, Davin—they are of very little significance to him even though he has given outlet to all the storms of his soul into Cranly. McCann was right when he said: “Dedalus, you’re an antisocial being, wrapped up in yourself.” Even E-C-, the girl who was haunting his thoughts in spite of his distrust of her, can not now stop him from taking to the road that he has selected for himself. He has, also developed an aesthetic principle of his own (although it is very much influenced by Aquinas and though he requires a new terminology and a new personal experience to explain some of his beliefs in respect of ‘artistic conception, artistic gestation, and artistic reproduction’). He is not too interested in his country’s politics or in world’s politics; he refuses to sign a petition for world peace, and he is of the opinion that the people of his country had perpetually been deluding their national leaders. He calls his country- ‘the sow that eats its own farrow’. In brief, Stephen refuses to serve that in which he does not believe any more—for instance home, country and church. He decides to express himself without any restraint, using for his rescue the instruments ‘silence, exile, and cunning.’ He is ready to take the risk of keeping himself isolated from others and of having not even a single friend. Now he thinks about leaving his

country and going into voluntary exile. When his mother tells him that she is quite hopeful that he would learn in his life of exile, being far from home and friends, what the heart is and what it feels he answers : “Amen. So be it.” Stephen’s invariable decision to set on the life of an artist is full of spiritual delight. He is about “to encounter the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race.” And he invokes the mythological architect Daedalus to help him on his journey.

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## 17.5 Let Us Sum Up

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Throughout the novel Stephen’s struggle with his outward surroundings is blended with the development of his own inner life. First, he was unconscious revolting against his surrounding, and later he becomes conscious in his revolt. In this way, he has been forming a positive identity of his own. From the first he acquires the artist’s abnormal acuteness of the sense impressions. With the passing of time he learns that words are as mysterious as experience in the real world. He learns words eagerly even when he does not understand what they mean. He is too indecisive and timid to kiss the willing E-C- on the tram, but the next day, when he starts writing a poem about her, he becomes an imaginative artist “by dint of boarding on the incident.” Many years later when he composes his villanelle, he is pervaded by the same ‘enchantment of the heart’. Throughout, the words he hears around him seem displeasing to his mind and ear : the drawling jargon exchanged by the harlots; a heavy long phrase used by Cranly that disappoints his hearts as he compares his skill with the rare phrases of Elizabethan England, or absurdly turned Irish peasant idioms. As he walks on the streets of Dublin, he feels that he should be entirely detached from his environment and he does that when the time arrives.

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## 17.5 Review Questions

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1. What is the significance of the name Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*?
2. Discuss the significance of the rose symbol in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

OR

What do you understand by ‘Symbolism’ Bring out the implications of the rose symbolism in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

OR

Point out the correspondence of the rose symbol to the mind and personality of Stephen in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

3. Discuss the source of the hell-fire sermons of Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

OR

What are the sources of the hell-fire sermons in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*? Bring out the parallels in them.

4. Justify Stephen as an anti-romantic hero on the basis of his views on the relationship between truth and beauty in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Critically examine Stephen's view about the relationship between truth and beauty in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

OR

What are the inadequacies of Aquinas' theory of beauty as revealed by Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*?

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## UNIT-18

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### D.H. LAWRENCE: *SONS AND LOVERS* (I)

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#### Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 About the Age
- 18.3 About the Author
- 18.4 About the Novel : *Sons and Lovers*
  - 18.4.1 Introduction to the Novel
  - 18.4.2 Detailed Summary
  - 18.4.3 Critical Analysis
  - 18.4.4. Structure
  - 18.4.5 Theme
  - 18.4.6 Vision of Life
- 18.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 18.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 18.8 Review Questions
- 18.9 Bibliography

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#### 18.0 Objectives

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In this unit we propose to familiarise you with the genre of modern novel. This form of writing was most suited to this age of Science and Commerce. Socio-economic scenario of Britain changed a lot during the Victorian age. A direct impact of these changes, mainly due to scientific and industrial innovations and progress, could be seen in the literary writings of the first quarter of the twentieth century. You are given to study *Sons and Lovers* in this Unit. It is an autobiographical novel of D.H. Lawrence. You have also to understand about the Modern Age, the literary genius of D.H. Lawrence and characteristics of the literary trends. All these readings will enable you to:

- (i) read and understand concepts, trends and features of the Modern Age;
- (ii) read and analyse the novel in the twentieth century,

- (iii) read and understand the novel *Sons and Lovers*,
- (iv) evaluate Lawrence's place and position in the realm of fiction,
- (v) critically analyse and understand the qualities of D.H. Lawrence as a novelist; and
- (vi) answer the questions in your own words.

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## 18.1 Introduction

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The closing decades of the Victorian age may be described as the seed-plot of many tendencies which eventually built up the fabric of modern consciousness and determined the general outlook in art and literature.

In the eighties, a cleavage between the high art and the popular art became clear and unmistakable. The growth of the industrial population and the measures undertaken to diffuse literacy with the passing of the Education Act of 1870 brought the bitter truth home to the artists that the new public was ill-fitted for the appreciation of the literary and cultural values.

The period also saw the rise of new philosophies in political and social spheres and new techniques in art and literature which gradually crossed the barriers of the countries of their birth and made the whole of Europe a single intellectual, literary and cultural unit.

The most important movement in art which influenced the technique of the novel was the scientific realism. Realism, of course, had entered fiction with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and had remained more or less organically connected with it since then. But what the new realists were now emphasizing was the scientific detachment, impersonality and disinterestedness on the part of the artist in observing and rendering the visible and tangible reality with as much precision and fidelity as possible.

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## 18.2 About The Age

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This period was almost completely overshadowed by the two World Wars – the after-effects of the first and the forebodings of the second. After the Treaty of Versailles attention in England was still mainly concentrated on foreign affairs – the growing pains of the new League of Nations, uncertainty in the Middle East, and troubles in India and Ireland. The Treaties of Locarno (1925) diminished, at least temporarily, anxieties in Europe, and home affairs began again to dominate English political thought. The General Strike of 1926 was a major manifestation of the post-War slump.

Of no period is it more true to say that the spirit of the age is perfectly reflected in its literature. Novel, poetry, drama, and miscellaneous prose, all mirror the perplexity and uncertainty of aim which sprang from the post-War breakdown of accepted spiritual values. The multiplicity of reactions to the contemporary situation is equalled by the variety of literary work.

The pre-War years had seen a relative eclipse of poetry, and the dominance of the



novel and drama as literary forms. The demand, long before expressed by W.B. Yeats, for a new and living poetical tradition was met between the Wars in his own work and in that of the new poets – T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, and Louis MacNeice. Poetry again became a vital literary form closely in touch with urban life, and if it did not oust the novel from its primacy it certainly outstripped the drama.

It is doubtful whether any period of English literature saw experiments so bold and various as those of the inter-War years. A natural corollary of the quest for new values and for a new vital tradition was the desire for new forms and methods of presentation, and in all the major literary genres, the age produced revolutionary developments.

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### **18.3 About The Author**

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Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. He was the fourth child of his parents. His father Arthur Lawrence was an uneducated, uneducated coal-miner, who barely knew how to write his name. He remained a miner till he was quite old and enjoyed his work in the pit.

The married life of the Lawrence's parents was quite unhappy. It was an endless battle between sophistication and coarseness, decency and drunkenness, education and ignorance. Lydia was educated and had even worked as a teacher for a little while before her marriage. She could not stand the dialect spoken by Arthur. Nor did she ever allow her children to speak like their father. She considered herself a superior lady.

Lawrence was first sent to the Local Board School in 1898. Though not exceptionally brilliant, he was fairly good at studies. He won a scholarship and was then sent to the Nottingham High School. The fifteen pounds a year that he was granted as scholarship money being highly inadequate, his mother had to sacrifice a great deal to enable him to remain at the high school for three years. As a student he was quiet and shy, and showed no signs of the eminence he was to achieve in future.

In December 1904, Lawrence had taken the King's Scholarship Examination for uncertificated teachers. In 1906, he joined the Teachers' Training Department of Nottingham University College. He stayed there from September 1906 to June 1908 and qualified for the Board of Education Teachers' Certificate. But he was disillusioned with this college also. He felt that it lacked contact with real, living men. In October 1908, Lawrence accepted a teaching assignment the Davidson Road School at Croydon, South London. This was one of the largest and most fully equipped schools of its kind and he generally liked his work. It was in the congenial environment of this school that Lawrence the writer began to emerge. It was Jessie Chambers who 'launched' Lawrence as a writer. She sent a group of his poems to Ford Madox Hueffer, the editor of *The English Review*, who published them in its issue of November 1909 under the general title *A Still Afternoon*. Lawrence later wrote about this event, "The girl had launched me so easily, on my literary career, like a princess cutting a thread, launching

a ship.” After his break off with Jessie in early 1913. Lawrence met Frieda, whom he was to marry in the near future. She was the wife of Ernest Weekley, one of his former professors at Nottingham. Frieda was originally a German. Frieda and Lawrence instantly fell in love with each other. Lawrence and Frieda kept wandering from place to place till they got married in June 1914 after she had secured divorce from Prof. Weekley. Their life was punctuated by bitter quarrels, but they always made it up.

In 1916, the Lawrences moved to Cornwall. But here the German origin of Frieda created problems for them. They were suspected to be German spies and were badly tortured by the British agents. They were first ordered to leave the district and live somewhere inland and in October 1917 were finally allowed to leave England for Italy. *Women in Love* was written during this period though printed in an American edition in 1920.

After the end of the First World War in 1918, the Lawrences were free to travel abroad. They started wandering from place to place. From Italy they went to Ceylon, Australia and America, and finally settled in New Mexico. When Lawrence’s condition worsened, he was removed to a sanatorium in Venice, France. After some time he was taken to a nearby villa, where he died on March 2, 1930.

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## **18.4 About the Novel : *Sons And Lovers***

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### **18.4.1 Introduction to the Novel**

Lawrence wanted to re-create his early years and attempt some kind of catharsis. But in addition to this, he also wanted to trace the dis-integrating influence of industrialisation on the simple life in the countryside. Lawrence refers to *Sons and Lovers* as ‘the colliery novel’ also. The early chapters of the novel give a strong, straightforward picture of the working class engaged in the mining industry. But it is unlikely that Lawrence had even heard Freud’s name when he was writing it. Frieda had met a disciple of Freud, and in 1912 she and Lawrence often discussed his theories. Her knowledge of Freud did not materially alter the conception of the novel. All it did was ‘to set a theoretical seal on a situation that had been thoroughly explored in actuality’. *Sons and Lovers* is definitely the first Freudian novel in English, but its Freudianism was never inspired by text-book theories.

### **18.4.2 Detailed Summary**

#### **PART-I**

#### **Chapter-I : The Early Married Life of the Morels**

A big industrial concern, Carston, Waite & Co., dug there many mines. To accommodate the large number of miners working in these mines, Carston, Waite & Co. erected the Squares and the Bottoms. Mrs. Gertrude Morel was thirty one years old and had been married for eight years. She had come down to the Bottoms in July, and in September,

she expected her third baby. She did not much relish her contact with the Bottoms women, for on account of her middle class inheritance, she thought herself superior to them. It satisfied her vanity to live in an end house which she had to pay a slightly higher rent.

She met Walter Morel a miner at a Christmas party and was just fascinated with his dialect. The next Christmas they were married and for three months she was perfectly happy ; for six months she was very happy. But soon this happiness began to fade away. Temperamentally they were too unlike each other to be harmoniously adjusted. The estrangement between the husband and the wife gradually increased and Mrs. Morel drew towards William for affection. William too was greatly attached to her.

### **Chapter-II : The Birth of Paul and Another Battle**

After the quarrel on his return from excursion, Mr. Morel became a little penitent. He tried to make up for his earlier misconduct by doing little things for her and making her situation easier. Mr. Heaton, the clergyman, often came to the Morels to have tea with them. Mrs. Morel discussed with him religion and philosophy, and Walter, unable to participate, felt offended. One day when Mr. Heaton was there talking to Mrs. Morel, Walter Morel entered, feeling rather savage.

A few days later, Walter Morel pinched a six-pence from his wife's purse, obviously for a drink. It was discovered but he denied having stolen the money. Mrs. Morel was again severe on him. Walter got ready and left the house threatening never to come back. It made the children a little anxious, but he returned at night. Mrs. Morel knew very well, he could not go. As she saw him slink quickly through the inner doorway, holding his bundle, she laughed to herself; but her heart was bitter, because he had loved him.

### **Chapter-III : The Casting off of Morel. The Taking on of William**

A little while after the last episode, Mr. Morel took ill from an inflammation of the brain and got confined to bed. During this time, there was a comparative fall in the house, but it was a lull foreboding a fierce storm.

During Mr. Morel's recuperation, both he and his wife made an effort to recover their initial cordiality, but it was really over between them. Mrs. Morel's love was gradually transferred to her children and Mr. Morel was alienated. Once Mrs. Morel defended William and prevented Mr. Morel's heavy hand from striking him and ordered him to go out of the house. Though trivial in itself, the differences over this incident marked the casting off of Mr. Morel. After this he was merely reduced to an economic unit, a supplier of funds.

At nineteen, William got a job in Nottingham at thirty shillings a week. Paul, in the meanwhile, was getting on well with his French and German. he was learning these languages from the clergyman. Annie was studying to be a teacher and Arthur was at the Board school and they said that he would soon get a scholarship for the High School in Nottingham.

#### **Chapter-IV : The Young Life of Paul**

The young Paul was built like his mother, slightly and rather small. He was a pale, quiet child, with eyes that seemed to listen. He was extremely conscious of what other people felt, particularly his mother. All the children but particularly Paul, were against their father. Morel continued to bully and to drink. Often he made the whole life of the family a misery. Once Paul came home to see his mother with her eye swollen and discoloured, his father standing on the hearth-rug, feet astride, his head down, and William just home from work, glaring at his father. Mr. Morel was shut out from all family affairs. No one told him anything. The children told their mother all about their day's happenings. In fact nothing had really taken place in their life until it was told to their mother. But as soon as the father came in, everything stopped. He would have liked the children to talk to him, but they could not. Paul was rather a delicate boy, subject to bronchitis. This was another reason why his mother felt more for him than for the other children. Once during a fit of bronchitis, Paul's father tried to stay with him for a few minutes, but Paul could not stand him.

#### **Chapter-V : Paul Launches into Life**

Paul knew French, German and Mathematics, and was a clever painter for his age. He was called for an interview at Jordan's manufacturers of surgical appliances at Nottingham. He went there in the company of his mother, and though he could neither read the letters properly nor could he answer well the questions, he was engaged at eight shillings a week. His work was to copy out letters. It was rather tiring to go all the way to Nottingham from his home and back again everyday. However, he liked the place ; particularly he got quite intimate with the girls. He felt proud when he brought home his eight shillings. It was a routine for him to tell his mother whatever had happened during the day. His life-story like the *Arabian Nights*, was told night after night to his mother. It was almost as if it were her own life.

#### **Chapter-VI : Death in the Family**

Financially, the family was gradually improving. Arthur had won a scholarship and was staying at Nottingham. Annie had become a junior teacher in the Board School. Paul stuck to his painting and to his mother. Once Mrs. Morel and Paul went to Willey Farm to meet Mrs. Leivers, a friend of Mrs. Morel. There Paul was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Leivers, Edgar Geoffrey, Maurice and Miriam. Miriam was then about fourteen years old, had a rosy, dark face, a bunch of short black curls and very fine and free and dark eyes. She was shy, questioning and a little resentful of strangers. At their first meeting, Paul reacted warmly and responsively to her particularly when he discovered that she could recite poetry so well.

In the first week of October William again came home, alone. He was looking weak and pale. And soon after his going back, they received a telegram that he was not well. Mrs. Morel went to see him and found him with bloodshot eyes and a discoloured face. He looked at her, but did not see her. He died that very night in a dreadful paroxysm. After this, Mrs. Morel could not be persuaded to talk and take her old bright interest in life. She remained shut

off. Somehow she felt that by coming in the way of his love for Gyp, she had made him suffer extreme anguish and caused his death.

## **PART-II**

### **Chapter-VII : Lad and Girl Love**

Miriam was very sensitive and she was often made to feel humiliated by her brothers. Gradually she was drawn towards Paul, who was active, who had knowledge and who could be sad and gentle. At any rate, he had come into her life before she made any mark on his. Paul offered to teach Miriam Algebra and French. While teaching he often stormed at her, got ashamed, continued the lesson, and grew furious again, abusing her. She listened in silence but never reproached nor was she ever angry with him. Miriam used to call at Paul's house every Thursday. But the insulting attitude of his family had injured her feelings, so she decided not to go there. Paul would never admit that they were in love. The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract. Paul did not know himself what the matter was. He was so young and their intimacy was so abstract, he did not know he wanted to crush her on to his breast to ease the ache there. The fact that he might want her as a man wants a woman had in him been suppressed into a shame.

### **Chapter-VIII : Strife in Love**

Paul, often coming home from his walks with Miriam, was wild with torture. He knew that his mother suffered badly. And whenever he thought of his mother, he felt cruel towards Miriam and almost hated her. And then, once again he felt a rush of tenderness and humility towards her. Once while going to market, Mrs. Morel asked Paul to take care of the bread in the oven. Beatrice and Miriam were present. The bread got burnt. On her return, Mrs. Morel was furious. There followed a quarrel and Mrs. Morel behaved as if she were very jealous of Miriam. Just then Mr. Morel came and remarked venomously, "At your mischief again." There was a bitter quarrel between Paul and his father while Mrs. Morel fainted. When she came back to senses, Paul asked his mother to sleep with Annie and not to sleep with his father.

### **Chapter-IX : Defeat of Miriam**

Paul now realised that the deepest of his love belonged to his mother. When he felt he had hurt her, or wounded his love for her, he could not bear it. Ever since the last scene of the preceding chapter, he had been feeling dissatisfied with Miriam. Paul went with Miriam into the back garden of Willey Farm. Paul hated Miriam bitterly at that moment because he made her suffer, but she knew he loved her, he belonged to her, his soul wanted her. She guessed that somebody had been influencing him. She asked him what they had been saying at home. But he said that it was not that. After this, they talked very little.

Miriam asked him to come to Willey Farm and meet Mrs. Clara Dawes. Paul was excited at the idea of meeting her. He met her and was much attracted towards her. He realised that the upward lifting of her face was misery and not scorn. He told his mother about

Clara and she was somehow glad that Clara was available to Paul. Mrs. Morel was not hostile to the idea of Clara as she was towards Miriam because she felt that she would take his body but leave his soul to her. Mrs. Morel had a small inheritance left to her by her father. She used this money to buy Arthur out of the army. Arthur felt quite happy at this. He had always been fond of Beatrice Wyld, and he now picked up with her again. And Annie got married and left the house.

### **Chapter-X : Clara**

Paul started mixing with the socialist, suffragette, unitarian people in Nottingham on account of his association with Clara. Once he went to Clara's place to deliver her a message from a common friend of theirs. Clara lived in very humble quarters and was rather discomfited to be visited there. Paul was a little touched to find her so humble and lonely and his heart went out to her. He also got introduced to her mother Mrs. Radford. Paul and Clara frequently walked out together at dinner time. Clara was thirty and Paul twenty-three. He felt comfortable with her because she was married and possessed the fruit of experience. Clara and Paul were talking about Miriam. Paul said that she wanted a sort of soul union, to which Clara remarked that he had not found out the very first thing about her. "She doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you."

### **Chapter-XI : The Test on Miriam**

While talking to Miriam, Paul suggested to her that they had been a bit too fierce in their purity. He also started kissing her passionately, and asked her for sexual surrender. Miriam, as expected, was a little hesitant. It wasn't for lack of trust. She said.

Miriam was alone in her grandmother's cottage. And Paul often went there. For a week he had of her whatever he wanted. First he saw only her beauty and was blind with it. And then he wanted her. But as he went forward to her, her hands lifted in a little pleading movement, and he looked at her face and stopped. Gradually Paul took up with Clara again. He often walked with her at lunch time at Jordan's. Clara had beautiful arms and Paul made many sketches of them. Paul now decided to break off with Miriam. He told his mother that he was going to do so. She just remarked that she had never thought Miriam was suited to him.

### **Chapter-XII : Passion**

Paul and Clara. After breaking off with Miriam, Paul went off almost straight to Clara, his Queen of Sheba. He touched her and tried to smooth her dress on her breast, which made both of them aflame with blushes. Once while walking by the riverside with Clara Paul felt that her mouth was offered him, her eyes were half-shut, her breast was titled as if it asked for him. He flashed with a small laugh, shut his eyes and met her in a long, whole kiss. Her mouth fused with his ; their bodies were sealed and annealed. Later he made love to her by the riverside. When Miriam saw Clara after this, it suddenly dawned upon her that it was accomplished between them. But she concluded that Paul must get rid of his passion before he could return to her and consoled herself that this must be the proper way to regain him for herself.

### **Chapter-XIII : Baxter Dawes**

In the bar, Paul offered Baxter a drink, which the latter scornfully declined. Then somehow Baxter made a reference to the theatre where he had seen Paul and Clara together the previous night. Paul found himself in an awkward situation indeed. Another embarrassing remark from Baxter provoked Paul to such an extent that he threw half a glass of beer in his face. One day Paul and Baxter Dawes quarrelled with each other in the office. Mr. Jordan dismissed Baxter from service. In the spring Paul and Clara went together to the seaside. They passionately made love to each other. And all the while the peewits screamed in the field. There was nothing but the naked hunger and inevitability of his loving her and she submitted to him. Mrs. Morel was not well. She attended a doctor at Nottingham. Her heart and digestion were bad. Paul took the ailment of his mother very seriously.

### **Chapter-XIV : The Release**

There seemed to be an unearthly bond between Paul and Baxter Dawes. Both of them hated each other but both seemed to have come to some sort of agreement and achieved some respect for each other. Soon after, Baxter fell ill and felt that he was soon going to die. Paul helped him during this illness. When Clara came to know about his condition, she was obviously moved. Mrs. Morel suffered much but did not die. Paul could not bear her suffering like this. He consulted the doctor if something could be done to put an end to her life and relieve her of the pain. Paul felt very sad after her death. He hated his father for sentimentalising over the death of his wife. Baxter Dawes was recovering slowly. Clara too wanted her husband back. Paul looked paltry and insignificant to her now. She was happy to be back to Dawes as his wife.

### **Chapter-XV : The Derelict**

After Clara's departure with Baxter, there came a sense of vacuum in Paul's life. A kind of nothingness overcame him. Things started looking unreal. Nothing seemed to please him. But then he decided he would not give in. He was now walking towards the city's gold phosphorescence. 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.

### **18.4.3 Critical Analysis**

*Sons and Lovers* has two themes : the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of her son ; and the 'split' between kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kinds represented by two young women, Clara and Miriam. The two themes should of course, work together, the second being, actually, the result of the first : this 'split' is the 'crippling'. The discrepancy suggests that the book may reveal certain confusions between intention and performance. The first of these is the contradiction between Lawrence's explicit characterizations of the mother and father and his tonal evaluations of them. It is a problem not only of style but of point of view. Morel and Lawrence are never

separated, which is a way of saying that Lawrence maintains for himself in this book the confused attitude of his character.

This is a psychological tension which disrupts the form of the novel and obscures its meaning, because neither the contradiction in style nor the confusion in point of view is made to right itself. Lawrence is merely repeating his emotions, and he avoids an austerer technical scrutiny of his material because it would compel him to master them. Paul is unable to love Miriam wholly, and Miriam can love only his spirit. The contradictions appear sometimes within single paragraphs, and the point of view is never adequately objectified and sustained to tell us which is true. *Sons and Lovers* is a book about modern civilization as well as about forms and perversions of love. Indeed, all Lawrence's novels are about modern civilization. But for Lawrence problems of civilization must always be focused through problems of personal relationships, for civilization is judged by the kind and qualities of human relationships it makes possible.

#### **18.4.4 Structure**

The novel has a structural pattern determined by the nature of its human relationships. A wave-rhythm distinguishes, in beat and counterbeat the major involvements of the characters : those of Walter and Gertrude Morel. Paul and his mother, Paul and Miriam, and Paul and Clara. In each of these relationships, separate episodes focus – in dramatically enacted dialogue, description, and action – aspects of each character-inter-connection. Each event is a successive wave, and the movement of the relationship is the full tide which is its consummation. After that consummation, there are wave-like returns to the achieved tension in that relationship, but now each wave shows a diminishing strength and intensity.

#### **18.4.5 Theme**

The most inclusive theme in *Sons and Lovers* is the familiar romantic one of bondage. Its chief expression is the 'bondage' exerted upon Paul by his mother, whom he both 'loves' and 'hates' and from whom he earns final release by mercy killing. The recurrence of words like 'bond', 'bound', 'bound up', 'imprisoned', 'fastened', 'tied up', 'caught' and their cognates – 'get away from', 'run away from' – establishes a rhetoric of paradox suited to this story about birth, love and death ; each is a release but also a form of capture by the forces of life and dissolution.

#### **18.4.6 Vision of Life**

The vision conveyed by his characteristic novel is not political in any way, even in a destructive anarchist way. He is concerned always with human relationships, with the relation of the self to other selves, with the possibilities of fulfillment of personality, and with exposing all the old formulas – about romantic love, about friendship, about marriage, about good life – which can cause so much deadness of frustration or distortion in the life of the individual.



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## 18.5 Self Assessment Questions

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1. Consider *Sons and Lovers* as a fictional transmutation of the facts of Lawrence's personal life.
2. Comment on the Freudian Oedipus Complex in *Sons and Lovers*.
3. Comment on the title of *Sons and Lovers*.
4. Discuss *Sons and Lovers* as a social study.
5. Comment on Paul-Clara relationship.

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## 18.6 Let Us Sum Up

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You have been advised to read about the twentieth century English society and the literary trends before coming to the particular study of D.H. Lawrence and his novel *Sons and Lovers*. After having read and understand those, you will be able to:

- (a) know about the twentieth century scenario of socio-economic life of English people and literature written during that period;
- (b) have knowledge about life and literary genius of D.H. Lawrence;
- (c) understand structure, theme and plot of the novel;
- (d) discuss qualities of the novel;
- (e) evaluate D.H. Lawrence as a novelist; and
- (f) critically analyse the novel and answer questions in your own words.

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## 18.7 Answers Self Assessment Questions

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1. While the assertion that Lawrence was using *Sons and Lovers* for his catharsis could not be denied, nor its autobiographical aspect ignored, it should be borne in mind that Lawrence had a definite point of view to project in this novel. He is trying to reinterpret his life as well as that of his parents in the light of that point of view.
2. *Sons and Lovers* has been described as the first Freudian novel in English. It does present the Freudian Oedipus Complex, but the concept of its story was not altered by Freud's theories. Lawrence had already completed the first draft of his novel before he became acquainted with the ideas of Freud.
3. The significance of *Sons and Lovers* lies in the investigation of the causes that destroy the married life of the Morels as well as the exploration of the three relationships in which Paul is involved. The novelist establishes the inadequacy of all three to suggest the need of polarisation and the synthesis of the reason and impulse, and the soul and flesh.

4. The aspect of social study of the life of the miners is quite obvious. Even quite late in its composition, Lawrence himself refers to *Sons and Lovers* as 'the colliery novel'. It seems quite likely that the original idea was a well made story of the colliery life.
5. There is so mutuality in their relationship and the movement apart begins. Their sexual activity acquires a new 'muddy' sensuality and perversity, stimulating itself by danger ; Clara realises that he has never given himself to her, and he finds her insignificant compared with the great sea of life.

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## 18.8 Review Questions

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1. "D.H. Lawrence's peculiar strength as a novelist lies in his insight into the emotional life. "Discuss.
2. Write a brief note on the women characters in *Sons and Lovers*.
3. For all its intensity Paul-Miriam love affair does not click. Who is to blame for this?
4. Who do you think prevents a permanent relationship between Paula and Clara and why?
5. *Sons and Lovers* is a good blend of psychology and literature. Illustrate.
6. Justify that *Sons and Lovers* deals with sex without being sexy.
7. Write a note on the relationships between the main characters of *Sons and Lovers*.
8. Consider *Sons and Lovers* as a record of the contemporary social life.
9. Lawrence gives his symbolism an astonishingly immediate presence. Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.
10. Discuss the influence of the mother's love upon the life of the son (Paul Moral) in *Sons and Lovers*.
11. Attempts a character-sketch a Paul Moral.

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## UNIT-19

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### D.H. LAWRENCE: *SONS AND LOVERS* (II)

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#### Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 About the Age
- 19.3 About the Author
- 19.4 Introduction to the Novel
  - 19.4.1 Major Characters
    - (a) Paul Morel
    - (b) Miriam Leivers
    - (c) Gertrude Morel
    - (d) Walter Morel
    - (e) Clara Dawes
    - (f) Baxter Dawes
  - 19.4.2 Minor Characters
    - (a) William Morel
    - (b) Lily Louisa Weston (Gyp)
    - (c) Beatrice Wyld
    - (d) Mrs. Radford
    - (e) Mrs. Leivers
  - 19.4.3 Oedipus Complex
  - 19.4.4 Feminist View
  - 19.4.5 Characterisation
- 19.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 19.8 Review Questions

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## 19.0 Objectives

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In this unit we propose to guide you to read, understand and analyse the characters of the novel and identify various techniques of the novel. You will understand the psyche of a character when you try to go into the insight of the behaviour and emotions of a character in the novel. You are given to study and evaluate major and minor characters in *Sons and Lovers*. You will be made familiar with some other aspects of D.H. Lawrence's life, his literary genius and early twentieth century period of society, which were not dealt in the previous unit. This would enable you to have a holistic view of D.H. Lawrence as a master craftsman and socio-economic scenario of the first quarter of twentieth century. All these readings will enable you to:

- (i) understand and analyse concepts, trends and features prevalent during first quarter of twentieth century;
- (ii) analyse and evaluate various characters in a the novel;
- (iii) analyse and evaluate special features of the novel;
- (iv) analyse various aspects of Lawrence's art as novelist;
- (v) evaluate D.H. Lawrence's special place in realm of novel; and
- (vi) answer the questions in your own words.

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## 19.1 Introduction

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This very supermacy, combined with the elasticity of its form and content, inclined the inter War generation to look to the novel for an interpretation of the contemporary scene. Of the serious novelists, some attempted to establish new values to replace the old once others were content to portray the complexities of inter-War life with no attempt at deeper purpose. A third group, which includes some of the most important writers of the period, found itself driven by this lack of generally accepted values to focus attention on the impact of life on the individual consciousness. Character, rather than action, is the interest of this group, character which it aims to present rather than analyse or explain. In the work of this group an interpretation of life is often implicit, rarely directly stated. The master of the pre-War novelists was Henry James; of the inter-War years the most significant writers were D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce.

To the influence of Freud, as well as to the general breakdown of Victorian moral attitudes, must be ascribed the preoccupation with sex, which is one of the dominant features of the inter-War novel, while the psycho-analysts and Dostoevsky probably share the responsibility for the contemporary interest in morbid mental states. D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf were among major writers whose work reflects strongly the influence

of modern psychology.

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## 19.2 About The Age

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In the Victorian age, social security was guaranteed by an established political order, strong social conventions and a strong belief in the existing moral values. In modern age, this sense of security broke down under the impact of several forces such as labour legislation, rapid spread of education and of democratic ideals, the dissemination of scientific ideas and improvement in the means of transport and communication. Besides, the scientific advancement was too rapid to allow the evolution of strong, durable convictions that form the basis of emotional stability. On account of his loss of faith in God and religion, man lost his moorings and developed a feeling of rootlessness. This caused acute anxiety. Anxiety was one of the most important characteristics of the age of Lawrence, as it is of ours.

The repudiation of the male authority and the assertion of the rights of the women was a part of a general movement, gaining strength almost imperceptibly, towards a break-up of the entire authoritarian pattern. The early years of the twentieth century, particularly the postwar era, saw a complete dethronement of authority.

The psychological theories propounded by Freud and later by Jung and Bergson brought about the revolutionary change in the assessment of human behaviour. Freud's findings were rooted in the theory of biological instincts. He affirmed that the unconscious plays a very significant role in shaping human conduct.

The psychological discoveries exercised a profound influence in the spheres of private and family relationships. It was accepted that mothers could be jealous of their daughters, that sons were more attached to their mothers and daughters to their fathers, and that it was sex at the back of such attachments.

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## 19.3 About The Author

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Lawrence was a prolific modern writer. In the nineteen years between his first published novel and his death he produced over forty volumes of fiction (novels and short stories), poetry, plays, treatises, and essays, and not a year passed without the publication of something from his pen. It is however, as a novelist that he is chiefly remembered. *The White Peacock* (1911) is a story of unhappy human relationships set in the area he knew so well, and, if the book lacks the depth and seriousness of his later work, it already reveals his concern with one of his chief themes, the conflict between man and woman, and much of his remarkable gift for fine description and lyric emotion. A smaller work, *The Trespasser* (1912), was followed by the largely autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* (1913), an extremely powerful novel of deep sincerity, which studies with great insight the relationship between son and mother. By many it is considered the best of all his work. Then came *The Rainbow* (1915), suppressed as obscene, which treats again the conflict between man and woman.

It was as a poet that Lawrence first appeared in print with magazine contributions in 1910, and he continued to write poetry throughout his life. Its most striking feature is its fundamental similarity to his prose. We may see a parallel to the strong autobiographical element of *Sons and Lovers* in the intensely personal poems of his early collections.

Lawrence used the novel to present to his reader his own interpretation of life; concerned with the basic problems of human existence, man's relationships with his fellows and with the universe beyond himself. He combined a violent hatred of the values of modern mechanized civilization with the love of the primitive and natural.

Lawrence is the prophet of the primitive instincts and passions; his own appeal is to the heart rather than the head. He seeks to persuade, not by the reasoning faculty, but by the emotional impact of his writing.

In spite of his many failings, Lawrence is undoubtedly a writer of great imaginative force, whose best work has a spontaneous vitality seldom equalled in the novel.

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## **19.4 Introduction to the Novel**

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*Sons and Lovers*, originally titled *Paul Morel*, was published in 1913. It is largely autobiographical. Mrs. Morel, a lady of cultivated and refined taste, married to a miner, Walter Morel, is very unhappy with her marriage. When her sons grow up, she selects them as lovers. After the death of the elder son William, she is strongly attached to Paul Morel. The attachment has a very disastrous effect on the mental health of Paul, who fails to establish satisfactory relationships with any other woman. Paul has an affair with Miriam. She awakens the artist in him; but on account of the mother-pull, the two fail to achieve harmony. Paul then goes for Clara Dawes. For a while they are passionately in love, but the consummation of their love brings only momentary satisfaction.

*Sons and Lovers* is the most popular novel of Lawrence. Its plot is well knit and is free from all superfluities. The characters are seen from the outside as well as emotionally realised from within. A very striking feature of the novel is a faithful description of life in the mining village of Bestwood.

### **19.4.1 Major Characters**

#### **(a) Paul Morel**

Paul is the third child of Gertrude and Walter Morel. The marriage of his parents has already degenerated into a series of unending quarrels before he is born.

In his childhood, Paul is rather weak and delicate. When he is slightly grown up, 'a rather finely made boy, with dark brown hair and light blue eyes', his features also grow rough and rugged. His paleness persists throughout his life, but his eyes are bright with light and animation.

The uncongenial domestic atmosphere has a threefold effect on Paul's mind. Firstly, he often falls into fits of depression. At times, he cries without any specific reasons. The mother tries to reason him out of his depression, to amuse him.

Secondly, he develops an abiding hatred for his father. The very sight of his father is an irritant to him. When he wins a prize for the first time, he comes home running to tell his mother.

Thirdly, it creates an unnatural bond of inter-dependence between Paul and his mother. And this leads to further complications in his emotional life. Paul has a very artistic bent of mind. He wins recognition as a skilful painter. One of his paintings wins the first prize at Nottingham Castle Exhibition and is immediately sold for a handsome amount of twenty guineas.

Mrs. Morel's is the most powerful and abiding single influence on Paul's life. His early life, as also his development in youth, is conditioned by his mother's love for him. Initially their relationship draws its strength from their inter-dependence on each other.

As Paul enters adulthood, he gradually becomes a husband-substitute for his mother. On their way to Nottingham, he chats with her and she is gay like a 'sweetheart'. They walk down the station street, 'feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together'. Once Mrs. Morel complains to him that she never has had a husband and he, in order to comfort her strokes her hair and his mouth is on her throat. She kisses him with a long fervent kiss, which is followed by a gentle stroking of her face by Paul. The sexual overtones of this scene are too evident to need any comment. Again when Mrs. Morel is ill, he speaks to her in a language which only a lover can use for his sweetheart.

This Oedipal relationship between Paul and his mother destroys his capacity to love and to form healthy emotional relationships with other girls. In spite of the fact that they have unusual intensity to their relationship, it gradually disintegrates till they decide to break off. If Miriam is too spiritual in her outlook, Clara is all fire and passion. She suffers from no complexes and admits no restraints. Her body exudes sexuality. Paul is just swept off by her physical charm. The swelling of her breasts, her curves, and her plump arms overwhelm him. His relationship with Clara gives him extreme physical satisfaction. For a while, he appears to have attained perfect bliss. But this relationship is too superficial to be lasting. In the closing pages of the novel, Paul is a broken and disintegrated man. Mrs. Morel is dead. With Miriam, he has broken off. Clara has been restored to her husband. In the end, he does make a false show of courage. He decides not to give in, turns his back on the village, and walks towards the faintly humming, glowing town quickly.

#### **(b) Miriam Leivers**

Miriam is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers of the Willey Farm. When she is first introduced to us, she is only fourteen and has 'a rosy, dark face, a bunch of short black curls, and very fine and free and dark eyes'. Later, when she is sixteen, Lawrence again tells us that she is very beautiful, with her warm colouring, her gravity, her eyes dilating suddenly like an ecstasy'.

Being romantic, she thinks herself to be different from other folks, and her ambitious



nature does not allow her to 'be scooped up among the common fry'. Learning is the only distinction to which she thinks to aspire. One of the reasons why she is attracted towards Paul is that 'he could paint and speak French and knew what Algebra meant'.

Miriam's sense of insecurity breeds in her a possessive attitude to things. She knows that her hold on the objects around her is rather precarious. So, in an effort to hold her own, she tried to grab at them. The result is an over-possessive attitude that occasionally looks frenzied.

She is rather afraid of sex experience. "Mother said to me, there is one thing in marriage that is always dreadful, but you have to bear it, and I believed it," she tells Paul. She also thinks sex to be ugly. "You have taught me it is not so", she frankly admits to him. This type of attitude to sex, to say the least, is very unhealthy. Like her mother she is inclined to be mystical. She is like such women 'as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils'. This extremely religious fervour of hers impedes the natural flow of her emotions and causes a psychic disorder that threatens her natural relationships with others.

Even when Miriam submits to Paul's sexual demands in the second phase of their love, she is not able to overcome her early inhibitions. She submits to him religiously, as if to a sacrifice. She lies there like a creature awaiting immolation. This makes his blood fall back. Nevertheless, the sincerity of her love cannot be doubted. It is his welfare that is always uppermost in her thoughts.

### (c) **Gertrude Morel**

Mrs. Gertrude Morel is the central character in *Sons and Lovers*. The novel deals with her disillusionment in marriage, the gradual rejection of her husband Mr. Morel, the taking on of her sons, first of William, and then of Paul, as her lovers, and the disastrous effect of this unnatural but unbreakable bond on their emotional life.

She is short statured, with a frail, delicate body, but her hair is bright as copper and gold. From the Coppards she has inherited clear, defiant blue eyes, a broad brow, a proud, unyielding temper, a fierce variety of puritanism, and other typical middle class values, including a streak of vanity and snobbishness. She is married to a miner but, on account of her middle class inheritance, does not relish the contact of the mining community.

It is made amply clear in the novel that much of the responsibility for destroying the marriage lies with Mrs. Morel herself. She is drawn towards Walter Morel because he is unlike her; later she hates him for being unlike her. The most deplorable aspect of this relationship is that not only does she despise her husband herself but imparts this hatred to her children also. The children regard their father as a drunken bully who is devoid of any human feelings. All the children are hostile to their father; Paul, in particular, cannot even stand him.

Unable to find any fulfilment in her relations with her husband, Mrs. Morel gradually casts him off and turns to her sons – first William and then Paul – for emotional satisfaction.

The sons too are deeply attached to her. The pity is that Mrs. Morel fails to realise the principle of 'polarity' in her relationships with her sons. She is so domineering, so over-possessive, that she does not respect the 'otherness' of other individuals. Her failure to recognise that her husband and her sons possess distinct personalities with individual emotional requirements is the root cause of disharmony and disintegration of the entire family.

**(d) Walter Morel**

Walter Morel is twenty-seven when Gertrude meets him for the first time. He is only a miner, but he has such a fascinating personality that she is virtually bowled over. "He was well set-up, erect and very smart. He had wavy black hair that shone again, and a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved. His cheeks were ruddy and his red, moist mouth was noticeable because he laughed so often and so heartily. He had that rare thing, a rich, ringing laugh."

Their marital antagonism begins with the discovery of Walter's lies about owning the house and about the unpaid furniture bills. Frankly, these are innocent lies told by a poor miner with a view to hiding his poverty from the lady he has just married. They cannot be equated with the calculated lies unabashedly indulged in by the so called cultured people. After the birth of William, Mrs. Morel seeks exclusive consolation in him and gradually casts away Walter Morel. He had virtually abstained from drinking after his marriage, but now he resumes his drinking bouts and often returns home drunk.

Walter Morel may be crude and unrefined in his manners, but he is essentially noble at heart. His repentance after he has shut his wife out on a moonlit night, or when he has hurt her by the drawer he has flung, is quite genuine. He has real love for his sons although they, under the influence of their mother, never respond to it. A good workman. Walter Morel is adept in making things with his hands. The happiest moments of his life are when he is engaged in some such work as cobbling the shoes or mending the pit bottle. Then he is able to arouse enthusiasm among the children who crowd around him handing him things and feel fascinated as they watch him work.

Walter Morel is the primitive man who lives by instinct. His response to life is instinctive, hence natural. According to Lawrence the sophisticated man's responses are conditioned.

**(e) Clara Dawes**

A foil to Miriam. Clara Dawes is the daughter of an old friend of Mrs Leivers. Her husband, Baxter Dawes, is a smith at Jordan's. She is separated from her husband and is temporarily lodged with her mother. Clara is a woman of considerable physical appeal. She has a skin like white honey and a full mouth. Her bare shoulders and arms and her curvacious body have a strong fascination for Paul. Basically Clara is a simple, affectionate and unambitious girl. She is neither sensitive nor intellectual like Miriam. But there is an air of sincerity in her and she is not intellectual like Miriam. She feels humiliated by the brutality of her husband and affects a scornful attitude towards all men. When Paul meets her for the first time, he is struck

by her. Clara is, however, an independent and emancipated woman. She is too self-respecting to take down lying all the cruel strokes of fate. She refuses to meekly submit to her husband's inhuman behaviour and leaves him. She now lives with her mother and earns an independent living by working at the Jordan's. At the factory, on account of her pride and dignified bearing, she keeps aloof from the other women who scornfully give her the title of 'the Queen of Sheba,' Sensuous and passionate. After breaking with Miriam, Paul goes off almost straight to Clara. Clara does not make any spiritual demands on him. She is sensuous and passionate. She realises that Paul needs passion and she offers him that 'immensity of passion which Miriam could not'.

**(f) Baxter Dawes**

Like Walter Morel, he is 'the primitive man' and has none of the refinement and sophistication that we associate with Paul. His function is to serve as a contrast to make us fully aware of Clara's character and attitude. In his behaviour with others, he displays an utter lack of self-control. He indulges in unrestrained vulgarity. And there is absolutely no decency or gracefulness about him to redeem his grossness. In brief, the first impression he leaves is rather unfavourable. One is bound to be repelled by his coarseness and brutality.

As a husband, Baxter is just brutal. He makes no efforts at a finer understanding of Clara, nor does he show any respect for her sentiments. He treats her only as an instrument for the gratification of his animal passion. However, he is fully able to satisfy Clara sexually ; and this is one of the aspects in which he is contrasted with Paul. He is the real he-man and does not suffer from any inhibitions. As a lover, Clara definitely prefers him to Paul.

He grows in stature as the story progresses and as Clara discovers Paul's inadequacy as a lover in comparison with Baxter. He is touched by Paul's humanity. When Paul brings Clara back to him, he gladly accepts her. He reveals his human side when he requests Clara to stay with him and, hiding his face on his shoulders, asks "Do you want me again?" At this moment he appears a much better man.

## **19.4.2 Minor Characters**

**(a) William Morel**

William Morel, the eldest son of the Morels, is a very active lad, fair-haired, freckled, with a touch of the Dane or Norwegian about him. Though very young, he has a definite air of distinction around him. When he goes to school, he is at the top of the class and is said to be the smartest boy in the school. At thirteen, he finds a job in the co-operative office. He also goes to the night school and by the time he is sixteen he is the best shorthand clerk and book-keeper in the office. He is an active boy and wins several medals and prizes. He learns dancing and makes friends with a number of girls, who often come to his house enquiring after him.

William's loathing for his father is balanced by his inordinate love for his mother. He loves her dearly, for she is so lady-like, so tender and fascinating. Mrs. Morel, disillusioned

and disgusted with her husband, turns to her eldest son for love and fulfilment. She showers all her love on William and thus gradually comes to possess his soul. The relationship between the two soon assumes Oedipal complexion.

**(b) Lily Louisa Weston (Gyp)**

'Gyp' or Lily Louisa Weston is of a different social class from anyone else in the novel. She is the girl William gets infatuated with while he is in London. At first, she seems merely a society girl dependent on her men friends for presents, but later she appears to be quite in love with William. With her false standards and values, she is quite pathetic. She thinks in terms of clothes and the appearance and impression that she is creating all the time. She has only her beauty, she has no integrity, no taste, and is completely incapable of having a conversation which does not deal with frivolous society matters.

**(c) Beatrice Wyld**

Beatrice Wyld, who becomes Arthur's wife, is a positive personality, full of life and vivacity, though she occasionally suffers from bad health. She is intelligent, has a good though tomboyish sense of humour and a strongly sensual nature. She is forward and self-confident. She relapses into dialect in the moments of loving and is capable of tomboyish wrestling as a prelude to love making.

**(d) Mrs. Radford**

Mrs. Radford Clara's mother, is a very sharp woman, stately and almost martial. She is blunt to the point of outspokenness and rules Clara in the home. She has a very keen perception. She gives a very accurate summing-up of Miriam's character. She understands and is practical and realistic.

**(e) Mrs. Leivers**

Mrs. Leivers, Miriam's mother, lives at Willey Farm. Hers is the greatest influence on Miriam. She is one of those women who treasure religion inside them. We are told that she 'exalted everything – even a bit of housework – to the plane of a religious trust'. This extreme religiosity is extremely resented by the family with the exception of Miriam, who tends to be her mother's confidante.

### **19.4.3 Oedipus Complex**

The term Oedipus has been derived from the name of the King Oedipus of Thebes, who, though in ignorance, married his own mother and had children by her. Freud used this term to explain the manifestation of infantile sexuality in the relation of the child to its parents. The Oedipus complex "is a state in which a person shows excessive affection for the parent opposite in sex to him or herself, and a corresponding distaste for his or her other parent. The whole situation in *Sons and Lovers* presents the Oedipus imbroglio in almost classic completeness". Disillusioned with her husband Walter Morel, Mrs. Morel gradually casts him

off and takes her two sons William and Paul as husband substitutes one after the other, thus wrecking their emotional life. In fact, throughout the second half of the novel, Paul's relation with his mother is that of a husband substitute. He instinctively sticks to her as if he were her man. On their visit to Nottingham, he chatted away with his mother and she was gay like a 'sweetheart'. Later 'they walked down the station street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together.

#### **19.4.4 Feminist View**

Feminist criticism has been valuable in opening up *Sons and Lovers* to political interpretation. Gender and sexuality are central issues in the novel and feminist criticism helps us to understand Lawrence's attitude towards them. Most of the feminist critics have appreciated Lawrence's understanding of women and of their social and historical situation but have condemned what they call his 'male chauvinism'. Their judgment becomes erroneous when they refuse to distinguish between autobiography and fiction and when they identify a little too closely with the women characters. They do not give sufficient importance to those cultural and Oedipal elements that make up Paul's complex situation. The novel shows a committed political perspective with the aesthetic aspects of Lawrence's fiction.

#### **19.4.5 Characterisation**

Lawrence's main intention and preoccupation are such as accord ill with 'dramatic' tendencies' in novel technique. His characters are not so much unitary souls arranged in patterns, as centres of radiation quivering with the interchange of impulses. It is not the situations in which they find themselves which primarily concern him, but the feelings they have toward one another ; and not so much the feelings on one side or the other as the interplay of feelings. His all embracing intention is, seemingly, to show the materialization in human lives of the elemental life impulse. Lawrence was gifted with that 'deeper sense' more than most other novelists; that is why he could present the 'unrecognisable' individual quite life-size.

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### **19.5 Self Assessment Questions**

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1. Bring out the autobiographical elements in *Sons and Lovers*.
2. Comment on the philosophy of Lawrence with reference to *Sons and Lovers*.
3. Comment on the personal relationships in the novel *Sons and Lovers*.
4. Write a critical note on the art of characterization in *Sons and Lovers*.
5. Comment on the use of symbols in *Sons and Lovers*.

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### **19.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this Unit you have been made familiar with certain other aspects of the Age of Lawrence and his creative writing techniques which were not dealt in the previous Unit. All the

major and minor characters have been analytically described to make you understand them in a better way. After reading the contents of the Unit you will be able to :

- (a) analyse the characters in *Sons and Lovers*;
- (b) evaluate D.H. Lawrence as a novelist;
- (c) understand and analyse various writing techniques of Lawrence;
- (d) discuss the qualities of an autobiographical novel;
- (e) analyse and evaluate special qualities of *Sons and Lovers*; and
- (f) answer the questions with a clear understanding and analytical insight.

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### 19.7 Answers To Self Assessment Questions

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1. *Sons and Lovers* is an autobiographical novel. Lawrence was a tortured soul for the full forty-five years of his life. He being highly sensitive, reacted sharply, suffered intensely. His parents never enjoyed conjugal felicity. Not only did the characters resembling Paul, Miriam, Walter and Gertrude exist in real life but also the places and the incidents that took place. Bestwood in the novel is actually Eastwood, the village where Lawrence was born. He had spent there most of his childhood and had minutely observed the mining activity carried on near the village. So in the novel he has given a very realistic description of the atmosphere including that of the Breach (The Bottoms in the novel).
2. Lawrence could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget the dark presence of the 'otherness' that lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind. This special sensibility was accompanied by a prodigious power of rendering the immediately experienced 'others' in terms of literary art.
3. Personal relationships constitute the main subject which Lawrence proposes to himself in *Sons and Lovers*, and it is the development of personal relationships which dictates the structure of the novel. Of plot, in the contrived and mechanical sense, there is very little, though the storyline is firm and clear; the progress of the novel is chronological and the crucial stages are marked by the endings of old relationships and beginning of new ones.
4. The characters of *Sons and Lovers* are less complete in their detail, there is a blur in many of them, so that we are not always sure of the focus, but they are life-size. "They are as big as Lawrence is." It is true that the characters are less complete in their detail, but only the external detail ; for the externals do not much interest Lawrence. This shows his art of characterization in the novel.
5. D.H. Lawrence has made a very clever use of symbols. The novel abounds in symbolic objects and events. Yet they are so well integrated with the narrative that they hardly

ever appear obtrusive. We can read the novel without being conscious of the symbols, with no adverse effect on our enjoyment of the novel ; but if we understand them, it adds to the intrinsic richness of the novel and enhances our appreciation of it.

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## 19.8 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the Mother and Son relationship in *Sons and Lovers*.
2. “Lawrence comes very close to the kind of life of working-class people.” Illustrate.
3. “*Sons and Lovers* traces the growth of the protagonist’s consciousness.” Discuss.
4. Why do you think that Paul-Miriam episodes are the essential core of *Sons and Lovers*?
5. Analyse the portrayal of human relationships by D.H. Lawrence.
6. Give a character sketch of Clara.
7. Discuss the humane nature of Baxter Dawes.
8. Discuss William-Gyp relationship.
9. Show how Lawrence, in *Sons and Lovers*, concretely and sensuously relates his characters to human environment.
10. Analyse the portrayal of sex and love in D.H. Lawrence’s novel, *Sons and Lovers*.

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## UNIT – 20

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### ALDOUS HUXLEY : *BRAVE NEW WORLD* (I)

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#### Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 About the Novelist
- 20.3 A Detailed Analysis of Brave New World
  - 20.3.1 Summary
  - 20.3.2 Synopsis
  - 20.3.3 Characters in the Novel
  - 20.3.4 Comparisons with George Orwell's *1984*
- 20.4 An Acquaintance with Brave New World Revisited
- 20.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.6 Review Questions
- 20.7 Bibliography

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#### 20.0 Objectives

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In this unit we intend to acquaint you with the twentieth century English fiction by presenting to you a detailed analysis of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

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#### 20.1 Introduction

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*Brave New World* (BNW) is a fable which depicts a scientific Utopia of the Wellsian conception. In this world of the future, men are scientifically conditioned to perfect happiness. Human babies are not 'born', they are 'decanted' out of test tubes. They are treated chemically according to the functions, they will perform as grownups. They are divided into four classes: Alpha, Beta, Delta and Epsilon – a classification analogous to the Hindu hierarchy of caste. The numbers in each class are strictly regulated by the needs of the community. All conceivable civilized comforts, including unlimited sex are provided for each class according to its status in the hierarchy. In case of fatigue or tension, one has only to take a tablet or two of 'Soma', a miracle drug. The problem of transport is solved by helicopters which take off from the roofs of sky-scrappers. For entertainment among other things, there are 'feelies', something like the cinema but far more intimately enjoyable. Their era is that of "our Ford".



Into this world comes a Savage from the outlawed ancient world who quotes Shakespeare. He is disgusted with its mechanical perfection; finding neither art, beauty or religion on the one hand, nor squalor and sin on the other, he hangs himself.

A state of perfect happiness is frightfully dull and unendurable. Man has no independent choice; all his thoughts and actions are conditioned, predetermined. Drowned, as it were, in a sea of happiness, he loses his most precious possession, his personality, individuality. He ceases to be human. It is better to be stupid and free than rational and fettered. In brief, BNW is a satire ridiculing the scientific Utopia of Wells.

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## 20.2 About the Novelist

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Aldous Huxley (1894 - 1963) the grandson of T.H. Huxley and the grand nephew of Matthew Arnold, combined the brilliance of both the strains. He was essentially an idealist and a teacher, though this aspect of his is more fully expressed in his poems, essays and such travel books as *The Jesting Pilate* (1926) and *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934). His novels, the most brilliant, the most stimulating and the most enlightening of the century, afford a most interesting study of the progress of an acutely sensitive mind from uncertainty and doubt to certainty and conviction. His early novels produced in the 20s – *Chrome Yellow Mortal Coils*, *Antic Hay*, *These Barren Leaves* and *Point Counterpoint* – are cynical, disgusting and pessimistic pictures of human degradation amidst which the author seems to be groping for a possible solution to the problems of a world emptied of all moral values. His later novels of the 30s and 40s beginning with BNW (1932) reflect a gradual shift to optimism culminating in the firm conviction of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1943). He discovers in the *Gita*, the true recipe for happiness, viz. detachment from the material world on possessions and attachment to the Universal spirit which supports it.

Huxley's later novels are : *Brave New World*, *Eyeless in Gaza*, *After Many a Summer*, *Time Must Have a Stop*, *Ape and Essence*, *The Genius and the Goddess*, *Brave New World Revisited*, *Island*.

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## 20.3 A Detailed Analysis of *Brave New World* (BNW)

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This section presents to you the summary, synopsis and characters in BNW. You are, however, advised to go through the BNW before reading the following part.

### 20.3.1 Summary

The world the novel describes is a utopia, albeit an ironic one: humanity is carefree, healthy and technologically advanced. Warfare and poverty have been eliminated and everyone is permanently happy due to government-provided stimulation. The irony is that all of these things have been achieved by eliminating many things that humans consider to be central to their identity — family, culture, art, literature, science, religion (other than idolization of “our

Ford”, Henry Ford, who is seen as the father of their society), and philosophy. It is also a hedonistic society, deriving pleasure from promiscuous sex and drug use, especially Soma, a powerful psychotropic taken to escape pain and bad memories through hallucinatory fantasies, referred to as “Holidays”. Additionally, stability has been achieved and is maintained via deliberately engineered and rigidly enforced social stratification.

*Brave New World* is Huxley’s most famous novel. The ironic title comes from Miranda’s speech in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene I:

“O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is!

O brave new world

That hath such people in’t!”

Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1932 while he was living in France and England (a British writer, he moved to California in 1937). By this time, Huxley had already established himself as a writer and social satirist. He was a contributor to *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* magazines, had published a collection of his poetry (*The Burning Wheel*, 1916) and four successful satirical novels: *Crome Yellow* in 1921, *Antic Hay* in 1923, *Those Barren Leaves* in 1925 and *Point Counter Point* in 1928. *Brave New World* was Huxley’s fifth novel and first attempt at a dystopian work.

*Brave New World* was inspired by H.G. Wells the Utopian novel *Men Like Gods*. Wells’s optimistic vision of the future gave Huxley the idea to begin writing a parody of the novel, which became *Brave New World*. Contrary to the most popular optimist utopian novels of the time, Huxley sought to provide a frightening vision of the future. Huxley referred to *Brave New World* as a “negative utopia” (see *dystopia*). somewhat influenced by Wells’s own *The Sleeper Awakes* and the works of D.H. Lawrence. Yevgcy Zamyatin’s novel *We*, completed ten years before in 1921, has been suggested as an influence, but Huxley stated that he had not known of the book at the time.

Huxley visited the newly-opened and technologically-advanced Brunner and Mond plant, part of Imperial Chemical Industries, or ICI, Billingham and gives a fine and detailed account of the processes he saw. The introduction to the most recent print of *Brave New World* states that Huxley was inspired to write the classic novel by this Billingham visit.

Although the novel is set in the future, it contains contemporary issues of the early century. The Industrial Revolution was bringing about massive changes to the world. Mass production had made cars, telephones and radios relatively cheap and widely available throughout the developed world. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the First World War (1914-1918) were resonating throughout the world.

Huxley was able to use the setting and characters from his futuristic fantasy to express widely held opinions, particularly the fear of losing individual identity in the fast-paced world of the future. An early trip to the United States gave *Brave New World* much of its character. Not only was Huxley outraged by the culture of youth, commercial cheeriness and inward-looking nature of many Americans, he also found a book by Henry Ford on the boat to America. There was a fear of Americanisation in Europe, so to see America firsthand, as well as read the ideas and plans of one of its foremost citizens, spurred Huxley to write *Brave New World* with America in mind. The “feelies” are his response to the “talkie” motion pictures, and the sex-hormone chewing gum is parody of the ubiquitous chewing gum, which was something of a symbol of America at that time. In an article in the May 4, 1935 issue of *Illustrated London News*, G. K. Chesterton explained that Huxley was revolting against the “Age of Utopias” - a time, mostly before the First World War, inspired by what H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw were writing about socialism and a World State.

### 20.3.2 Synopsis (Chapter 1-6)

The novel begins in *London* in the ‘year of our Ford 632’ (AD 2540 in the *Gregorian Calendar*). In this world, the vast majority of the population is unified as The World State, an eternally peaceful, stable, plentiful society where everyone believes everyone is happy. In this society, natural reproduction has been done away with and children are born and raised in Hatcheries and Conditioning Centres. Society is rigidly divided into five castes, which are carefully engineered by these centres. The castes are: the Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons (with each caste further split into Plus and Minus members). Alphas and Betas are the top level of society: they make decisions, teach, and dictate policy. Each Alpha or Beta is the product of one egg being fertilized and developing into one fetus in artificial wombs located on an assembly line in Hatchery and Conditioning Centres. The other castes, however, are not unique biologically but multiple clones of one fertilization, created using the Bokanovsky process.

All members of society are conditioned with the values that the World State idealizes. Children are trained to be identify was by their caste they co-operate, copulate, and enjoy anything that is good for Society, and hate anything that is bad for Society. Constant consumption is the bedrock of stability for the World State; one thing everyone is encouraged to consume is the ubiquitous drug, Soma. Soma is a mild hallucinogen that makes it possible for everyone to be blissfully oblivious. It has no short-term side effects and induces no hangover; however, long-term abuse leads to death by respiratory failure.

Heterosexual sex is also widely consumed. In The World State, sex is a social activity rather than a means of reproduction and is encouraged from early childhood. Regular reproduction can occur, but is viewed by society as unnatural and repugnant; the few women who could reproduce are conditioned to take birth control. As a result, sexual competition and emotional, romantic relationships are obsolete. Marriage is not only unnecessary, it is considered an antisocial dirty joke because, as the conditioning voice repeats at night, “everyone belongs

to everyone else”. In World State society, natural birth or pregnancy is smut of the most vulgar kind. To call someone a mother or a father is the lowest insult.

Spending time alone and reading are considered outrageous wastes of time. People are taught to associate in groups and consume entertainment. Also, the World State tries to stop its citizens from having thoughts that are different from the rest of Society.

In the World State, people typically die at the age of 61 having maintained good health and youthfulness their whole life. Death isn't feared; children are conditioned to view hospitals as happy playgrounds. Since no one has family, they have no ties to mourn.

All consumption is encouraged; no one waits long for anything they desire. Everyone gets everything he or she is conditioned to want and is therefore happy. The caste system eliminates the need for professional competitiveness; people are literally bred to do their jobs and want no other. There is no competition within castes; each caste member receives the same food, housing, and Soma rationing.

In order to grow closer with members of the same class, citizens must participate in mock religious services called Solidarity Services. The twelve people consume large quantities of Soma and sing hymns. As the ritual progresses, the participants lose their concept of individuality and become one unified body. This is symbolized when the group breaks out into an orgy and the Arch-Community Songster sings orgy-porgy hymns.

In geographic areas that are non-conducive to easy living and consumption, The World State allows well controlled, securely contained groups of “savages” to live. (One such “Savage Reservation” is located in the western desert of the United States.) On reservations, savages reproduce normally.

In its first chapters, the novel describes life in the World State and introduces Lenina and Bernard. Lenina, a Beta, is an average, beautiful, desired woman, while Bernard, a psychologist, is an outcast. Although an Alpha, Bernard is shorter in stature than the average of his caste — a quality shared by the lower castes, which gives him an inferiority complex. He also defies social norms and secretly stew in a hatred of his equals. His work with sleep-teaching has led him to realize that people's deepest values are really just repeated phrases. Courting disaster, he is vocal about being different, once stating he dislikes soma because he'd “rather be himself, sad, than another person, happy”. Bernard's differences fuel rumors that he was accidentally administered alcohol while incubated, a method used for creating shorter stature in Epsilons.

Bernard is obsessed with Lenina, attributing noble qualities and poetic potentials to her despite evidence otherwise. A woman who seldom questions her own motivations, Lenina is reprimanded by her friends because she is not promiscuous enough. Both fascinated and disturbed by Bernard, she responds to Bernard's advances to dispel her reputation for being too selective and monogamous.

Bernard's only friend is Helmholtz Watson, an Alpha-Plus lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering (Department of Writing). Helmholtz is also an outcast, but unlike Bernard, it is because he is too gifted and handsome. Helmholtz, successful, charming, attractive, is drawn to Bernard as a confidant: he can talk to Bernard about his desire to write poetry. Bernard likes Helmholtz because, unlike anyone else, Helmholtz likes Bernard. He is also, Bernard realizes jealously, everything Bernard will never be.

### **The Reservation and the Savage (Chapter 7-9)**

Bernard, desperately wanting Lenina's attentions, tries to impress her by taking her on holiday to a Savage Reservation. The huge reservation, located in New Mexico and surrounded by electric fences, holds a society of Malpais, who live and reproduce in natural, unsanitized, conditions. From afar, Lenina thinks it will be exciting. In person, she finds the aged, toothless natives who actually mend their clothes rather than throw them away, repugnant, and spends most of the time on Soma. Bernard, however, is fascinated, although he realizes his seduction plans have failed.

In typical tourist fashion, Bernard and Lenina watch what at first appears to be a quaint native ceremony. The village folk, who live similarly to Pueblo peoples such as the Hopi and, begin by singing, but the ritual quickly becomes a passion play where a village boy is whipped to unconsciousness.

Soon after, the couple encounters Linda, a woman formerly of The World State who had accidentally been left behind years ago when she was brought here on a date not unlike the one Bernard and Lenina are having. Impregnated and abandoned by the man who brought her to the reservation, she gave birth to a son, John (later referred to as John the Savage) who is now eighteen.

Through conversations with Linda and John, we learn that their life has been hard. For eighteen years, they have been treated as outsiders: Linda was hated for sleeping with all the men of the village—as she was conditioned to—and John was mistreated for his mother's actions. John's one island of joy was that his mother had taught him to read although he only had two books: a scientific manual from his mother's job and a collection of the works of Shakespeare (a work banned in The World State). John has been denied the rituals of the village, although he has watched them and even has had some of his own religious experiences in the desert.

Old, weathered, Linda wants desperately to return to London; she is tired of a life without soma. John wants to see the "brave new world" his mother has told him so much about. Bernard wants to take them back for his own self-serving reasons: as revenge against Bernard's boss, Thomas, who threatened to reassign Bernard to Iceland because of Bernard's antisocial beliefs. Bernard arranges permission for Linda and John to leave the reservation.

### **The Savage visits the World State (Chapters 10-18)**

Upon his return to London, Bernard is confronted by Thomas, the Director of the Hatchery and Conditioning Centre who, in front of an audience of higher-caste Centre workers, denounces Bernard for his antisocial behavior and again threatens to send him to Iceland. Bernard, thinking that for the first time in his life he has the upper hand, defends himself by presenting the Director with his lost lover and unknown son, Linda and John. Because the concepts of parents and natural birth are anathema, the inexorably humiliated Director resigns in shame.

Bernard's new pet savage makes him the toast of London. Pursued by the highest members of society, able to bed any woman he fancies, Bernard revels in attention he once scorned. Everyone who is anyone, it seems, will endure Bernard to dine with the interesting, different, beautiful John. Even Lenina grows unnaturally fond of the savage, while the savage falls increasingly and chastely in love with her. Bernard, intoxicated with attention, falls in love with himself. At last, he has won.

The victory, however, is short lived. Linda, decrepit, toothless, friendless, goes on a permanent soma holiday while John, appalled by this empty society, refuses to perform for one more of Bernard's parties. With the savage show over, society quickly and cruelly drops Bernard. Alone, he turns to his one true friend, only to see Helmholtz fall into a quick, easy camaraderie with John. Bernard is left an outcast yet again as he watches the only two men he ever connected with find more of interest in each other than they ever did in him. John and Helmholtz discuss writing and Shakespeare while Bernard is left to make childish, uninformed comments from the sidelines.

John and Helmholtz's island of peace is brief. John grows increasingly frustrated by a society he finds wicked and debase. He is deeply moved by Lenina, but also hates her for her sexual advances, which revolt and shame him. Finally, he is heartbroken when his mother succumbs to soma and dies in a hospital. John witnesses his mother's death, and, maddeningly, his grief bewilders and revolts against the hospital workers. Their cold reaction to Linda's passing prompts John to try to force humanity from the workers by throwing their soma rations out a window. The ensuing riot brings the police who soma-gas the crowd. Bernard and Helmholtz arrive to help John, but only Helmholtz helps him, while Bernard stands to the side.

When they wakeup, Bernard, Helmholtz and John are brought before Mustapha Mond, the Resident World Controller for Western Europe. Bernard and Helmholtz are told that they would be sent to live in Iceland and the Falkland Islands, two of several island *colonies* reserved for exiled citizens. Helmholtz looks forward to living on the remote Falkland Islands, where he can become a serious writer. Bernard grovels, begs and betrays his friends. Mond reveals that exile to the islands, a frequent threat to prevent unorthodox thinking, is where freethinkers are released, rather than repressed. After Bernard and Helmholtz leave the room, a philosophical argument between Mustapha and John leads to the decision that John will not

be sent to an island. Mustapha says that he too once risked banishment to an island because of some experiments that were deemed controversial by the state. In the final chapters, John isolates himself from society in a lighthouse outside *London* where he finds his hermit life interrupted from within by lust for Lenina. To atone, John brutally whips himself in the open, a ritual the Indian in his own village had said he wasn't capable of. His self-flagellation, caught on film and shown publicly, destroys his hermit life from without as hundreds of gawking sightseers, intrigued by John's violent behavior, fly out to watch the savage in person. Even Lenina comes to watch, crying a tear John does not see. The sight of the woman whom he both adores and blames, is too much for him; John attacks and whips her. This sight of genuine, unbridled emotion drives the crowd wild with excitement, and — handling it as they are conditioned to — they turn on each other, in a frenzy of beating and chanting that devolves into a mass orgy of soma and sex. In the morning, John, hopeless, alone and horrified by his drug use, debasement and attack on Lenina, makes one last attempt to escape civilization. When thousands of gawking sightseers arrive that morning, frenzied at the prospect of seeing the savage perform again, they find John dead, hanging by the neck.

### **20.3.3 Characters in the Novel**

#### **In order of appearance**

- Thomas “Tomakin”, Alpha, Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning (D.H.C.) for London; later revealed to be the father of John, the Savage.
- Henry Foster, Alpha, Administrator at the Hatchery and Lenina's current partner.
- Lenina Crowne, Beta-Plus, Vaccination-worker at the Hatchery; loved by John, the Savage.
- Mustapha Mond, Alpha-Plus, one of the World Controllers for Western Europe.
- Assistant Director of Predestination.
- Bernard Marx, Alpha, psychologist.
- Fanny Crowne, Beta, embryo worker; a friend of Lenina.
- Benito Hoover, Alpha, friend of Lenina; disliked by Bernard.
- Helmholtz Watson, Alpha-Plus, lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering (Department of Writing), friend and confidant of Bernard Marx and John, the Savage.

#### **At the Solidarity Service**

- Morgana Rothschild, Herbert Bakunin, Fifi Bradlaugh, Jim Bokanovsky, Clara Deterding, Joanna Diesel, Sarojini Engels, and “that great lout” Tom Kawaguchi.
- Miss Keate, headmistress of the high-tech glass and concrete *Eton College*.

- Arch-Community Songster, a quasi-religious figure based in Canterbury.
- Primo Mellon, a reporter for the upper-caste news-sheet *Hourly Radio*, who attempts to interview John the Savage and gets assaulted for his troubles.
- Darwin Bonaparte, a paparazzo who brings worldwide attention to John's hermitage.

### **Of Malpais**

- John the Savage ('Mr. Savage'), son of Linda and Thomas (Tomakin/ The Director), an outcast in both primitive and modern society.
- Linda, a Beta-Minus. John the Savage's mother, and Thomas's (Tomakin/The Director) long lost lover. She is from England and was pregnant with John when she got lost from Thomas in a trip to New Mexico. She is disliked both by savage people because of her "civilized" behaviour, and by civilized people because she is fat and looks old.
- Pope, a native of Malpais. Although he reinforces the behavior that causes hatred for Linda in Malpais by sleeping with her and bringing her alcohol, he still holds the traditional beliefs of his tribe.

### **20.3.4 Comparisons with George Orwell's *1984***

Social critic Neil Postman contrasts the worlds of *1984* and *Brave New World* in the foreword of his 1986 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He writes:

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In *1984*, Orwell added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

Journalist Christopher Hitchens, who has himself published several articles on Huxley and a book on Orwell, notes the difference between the two texts in the introduction to his 1999 article "Why Americans Are Not Taught History":

We dwell in a present-tense culture that somehow, significantly, decided to employ the telling expression "You're history" as a choice reprobation or insult, and thus elected to speak



forgotten volumes about itself. By that standard, the forbidding dystopia of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* already belongs, both as a text and as a date, with *Ur Wand Mycenae*, while the hedonist nihilism of Huxley still beckons toward a painless, amusement-sodden, and stress-free consensus. Orwell's was a house of horrors. He seemed to strain credulity because he posited a regime that would go to any lengths to own and possess history, to rewrite and construct it, and to inculcate it by means of coercion. Whereas Huxley rightly foresaw that any such regime could break but could not bend. In 1988, four years after 1984, the Soviet Union scrapped its official history curriculum and announced that a newly authorized version was somewhere in the works. This was the precise moment when the regime conceded its own extinction. For true blissed-out and vacant servitude, though, you need an otherwise sophisticated society where no serious history is taught.

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## 20.4 An Acquaintance with *Brave New World Revisited*

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*Brave New World Revisited* (Harper & Row, 1958), written by Huxley almost thirty years after *Brave New World*, was a non-fiction work in which Huxley considered whether the world had moved towards or away from his vision of the future from the 1930s. He believed when he wrote the original novel that it was a reasonable guess as to where the world might go in the future but in *Brave New World Revisited* he concluded that the world was becoming much more like *Brave New World* much faster than he thought.

Huxley analysed the causes of this, such as overpopulation as well as all the means by which population can be controlled. He was particularly interested in the effects of drugs and subliminal suggestion. *Brave New World Revisited* is different in tone due to Huxley's evolving thought, as well as his conversion to Vedanta in the interim between the two books.

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## 20.5 Let Us Sum Up

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This is an introductory unit to Huxley's *Brave New World*. The unit contains.

- Introduction to *Brave New World*.
- Introduction to Aldous Huxley as a 20<sup>th</sup> century novelist.
- Summary and Synopsis of *Brave New World*.
- A brief description of characters in *Brave New World*.
- Comparisons of *Brave New World* with Orwell's *1984*.

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## 20.6 Review Questions

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1. What is a Fable ? Discuss *Brave New World* as a fable.
2. Do you agree that *Brave New World* is a satire ridiculing the scientific Utopia of H.G. Wells? Discuss.

3. What are the salient features of Twentieth Century Scientific Fiction ? Discuss.

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## **20.7 Bibliography**

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1. Aldous Huxley; Brave New World, Perennial, Reprint edition, September 1, 1998.
2. Aldous Huxley; Brave New World Revisited, Perennial, March 1, 2000
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## UNIT – 21

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### ALDOUS HUXLEY : BRAVE NEW WORLD (II)

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#### Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Features of Huxley's *Brave New World*
  - 21.2.1 False Happiness
  - 21.2.2 Totalitarianism
  - 21.2.3 Anthropocentrism
  - 21.2.4 Caste - bound
  - 21.2.5 Philistinism
  - 21.2.6 Consumerism
  - 21.2.7 Loveless Society
  - 21.2.8 Things Go Wrong
- 21.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.4 Review Questions
- 21.5 Bibliography

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#### **21.0 Objectives**

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In continuation of the previous unit we intend to present an indepth analysis of Huxley's *Brave New World* (BNW) by providing a detailed description of the features of Huxley's *Brave New World*.

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#### **21.1 Introduction**

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Huxley's *Brave New World* is a satirical piece of fiction, not a scientific prophecy. It is an unsettling, loveless and sinister place. This is because Huxley endows his "ideal" society with features calculated to alienate his audience. In this novel, Huxley contrives to exploit the anxieties of his bourgeois audience about both Soviet – communism and Fordist American Communism. In *Brave New World*, however, the most significant agenda is to warn the readers against scientific utopianism. He succeeds well in doing so. Although, we tend to see other people not least the notional brave new worlders, as the hapless victims of propaganda and disinformation, we may find it is we ourselves who have been the manipulated dupes.

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## 21.2 Features of Huxley's *Brave New World*

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In the following section we have discussed in detail for you the features of the world depicted by Huxley in his *Brave New World*.

### 21.2.1 False Happiness

Huxley implies that by abolishing nastiness and mental pain, the brave new worlders have got rid of the most profound and sublime experiences that life can offer as well. Most notably, they have sacrificed a mysterious deeper happiness which is implied, but not stated, to be pharmacologically inaccessible to the utopians. The metaphysical basis of this presumption is obscure.

There are hints, too, that some of the utopians may feel an ill-defined sense of dissatisfaction, an intermittent sense that their lives are meaningless. It is implied, further, that if we are to find true fulfilment and meaning in our own lives, then we must be able to contrast the good parts of life with the bad parts, to feel both joy and despair. As rationalizations go, it's a good one.

But it's still wrong-headed. If pressed, we must concede that the victims of chronic depression or pain today don't need interludes of happiness or *anaesthesia* to know they are suffering horribly. Moreover, if the mere relativity of pain and pleasure were true, then one might imagine that pseudo-memories in the form of neurochemical artefacts imbued with the texture of "pastness" would do the job of contrast just as well as raw nastiness. The neurochemical signatures of *deja vu* and *jamais vu* provide us with clues on how the reengineering could be done. But this sort of stratagem isn't on Huxley's agenda. The clear implication of *Brave New World* is that any kind of drug-delivered happiness is "false" or inauthentic. In similar fashion, all forms of human genetic engineering and overt behavioural conditioning are to be tarred with the same brush. Conversely, the natural happiness of the handsome, blond-haired, blue-eyed Savage on the Reservation is portrayed as more real and authentic, albeit transient and sometimes interspersed with sorrow.

The contrast between true and false happiness, however, is itself problematic. Even if the notion is both intelligible and potentially referential, it's not clear that "natural", selfish-DNA-sculpted minds offer a more authentic consciousness than precision-engineered euphoria. Highly selective and site-specific designer drugs [and, ultimately, genetic engineering] won't make things seem weird or alien.

On the contrary, they can deliver a greater sense of realism, verisimilitude and emotional depth to raw states of biochemical bliss than today's parochial conception of Real Life. Future generations will "re-encephalise" emotion to serve us, sentient genetic vehicles, rather than selfish DNA. Our well-being will feel utterly natural and in common with most things in the natural world, it will be so.

If desired, too, designer drugs can be used to trigger paroxysms of *spiritual* enlightenment - or at least the *phenomenology* thereof - transcending the ecstasies of the holiest mystic or the hyper-religiosity of a temporal-lobe epileptic. So future psychoactives needn't yield only the ersatz happiness of a brave new worlder, nor will euphoriant abuse be followed by the proverbial Dark Night of The Soul. Just so long as neurotransmitter activation of the right sub-receptors triggers the right post-synaptic intracellular cascades regulated by the right alleles of the right genes in the right way indefinitely - and this is a technical problem with a technical solution - then we have paradise everlasting, at worst. If we want it, we can enjoy a liquid intensity of awareness far more compelling than our mundane existence as contemporary sleepwalking *Homo Sapiens*. It will be vastly more enjoyable to boot.

If sustained, such modes of consciousness can furnish a far more potent definition of reality than the psychiatric slumlands of the past. Subtly or otherwise, today's unenriched textures of consciousness express feelings of depersonalisation and derealisation. Such feelings are frequently nameless - though still all too real - because they are without proper contrast: anonymous angst-ridden modes of selfhood that, in time, will best be forgotten. Authenticity should be a design-specification of conscious mind, not the fleeting and incidental by-product of the workings of selfish DNA.

Tomorrow's *neuropharmacology*, then, offers incalculably greater riches than souped-up *soma*. True, drugs can also deliver neurochemical wastelands of silliness and shallowness. A lot of the state-spaces currently beyond our mental horizons may be nasty or uninteresting or both. Statistically, most are probably just psychotic. But a lot aren't. *Entactogens*, say, [literally, to "touch within"] may eventually be as big an industry as diet pills; and what they offer by way of a capacity for self-love will be of far more use in boosting personal self-esteem.

"Entactogens", "empathogens", "entheogens" - these are fancy words. Until one is granted first-person experience of the states they open up, the phraseology invoked to get some kind of intellectual handle on Altered States may seem gobbledygook. What on earth does it all mean? But resort to such coinages isn't a retreat into obscurantism or mystery-mongering. It's a bid to bring some kind of order to unmapped exotica way beyond the drug-naïve imagination.

One can try to hint at the properties of even seriously altered states by syntactically shuffling around the lexical husks of the old order. But the kind of consciousness disclosed by these extraordinary agents provides the basis for new primitive terms in the language of a conceptual apparatus that hasn't yet been invented. Such forms of what-it's-likeness can't properly be defined or evoked within the state-specific resources of the old order. Ordinarily, they're not neurochemically accessible to us at all. Genetically, we're action-oriented hunter-gatherers, not introspective psychonauts.

So how well do we understand the sort of happiness Huxley indicts?

Even though we find the nature of BNW-issue “soma” as elusive as its *Vedic* ancestor, we think we can imagine, more or-less, what taking “soma” might be like; and judge accordingly. Within limits, plain “uppers” and “downers” are intelligible to us in their effects, though even here our semantic competence is debatable - right now, it’s hard to imagine what terms like “torture” and “ecstasy” really denote. When talking about drugs with (in one sense) more far-reaching effects, however, it’s easy to lapse into gibbering nonsense. If one has never taken a particular drug, then one’s conception of its distinctive nature derives from analogy with familiar agents, or from its behavioural effects on other people, not on the particular effects its use typically exerts on the texture of consciousness. One may be confident that other people are using the term in the same way only in virtue of their physiological similarity to oneself, not through any set of operationally defined criteria. Thus until one has tried a drug, it’s hard to understand what one is praising or condemning.

This doesn’t normally restrain us. But are we rationally entitled to pass a judgement on any drug-based civilisation based on one fictional model?

No, surely not. Underground chemists and pharmaceutical companies alike are likely to synthesise all sorts of “soma” in future. Licitly or otherwise, we’re going to explore what it’s like; and we’ll like it a lot. But to suppose that the happiness of our *transhuman* descendants will thereby be “false” or shallow naïve. Post-humans are not going to get drunk and stoned. Their well-being will infuse ideas, modes of introspection, varieties of selfhood, structures of mentalese, and whole new sense modalities that haven’t even been dreamt of today.

*Brave New World*-based soma scenarios, by contrast, are highly conceivable. This is one reason why they are so unrealistic.

### **21.2.2 Totalitarianism**

*Brave New World* is a benevolent dictatorship - or at least a benevolent oligarchy, for at its pinnacle there are ten world controllers, We get to meet its spokesman, the donnish Mustapha Mond, Resident Controller of Western Europe. Mond governs a society where all aspects of an individual’s life, from conception and conveyor-belt reproduction onwards, are determined by the state. The individuality of BNW’s two billion hatchlings is systematically stifled. A government bureau, the Predestinators, decides a prospective citizen’s role in the hierarchy. Children are raised and conditioned by the state bureaucracy, not brought up by natural families. There are only ten thousand surnames. Value has been stripped away from the person as an individual human being; respect belongs only to society as a whole. Citizens must not fall in love, marry, or have their own kids. This would seduce their allegiance away from the community as a whole by providing a rival focus of affection. The individual’s loyalty is owed to the state alone. By getting rid of potential sources of tension and anxiety - and dispelling residual discontents with soma - the World State controls its populace no less than Big Brother.

*Brave New World*, then, is centred around control and manipulation. As ever, the fate of an individual depends on the interplay of Nature and Nurture, heredity and environment: but

the utopian state apparatus controls both. Naturally, we find this control disquieting. One of our deepest fears about the prospect of tampering with our natural (i.e. selfish DNA-driven) biological endowment is that we will ourselves be controlled and manipulated by others. Huxley plays on these anxieties to devastating effect. He shows the fear that a future world state may rob us of the right to be unhappy.

It must be noted that this right is not immediately in jeopardy. Huxley, however, evidently feels that the threat of compulsory well-being is real. This is reflected in his choice of a quotation from Nicolas Berdiaeff as *Brave New World's* epigraph. "Utopias appear to be much easier to realize than one formerly believed. We currently face a question that would otherwise fill us with anguish: How to avoid their becoming definitively real?" Perhaps not all of the multiple ironies here are intended by *Brave New World's* author.

Huxley deftly coaxes us into siding with John the Savage as he defends the right to suffer illness, pain, and fear against the arguments of the indulgent Controller. The Savage claims the right to be unhappy. We sympathise. Intuitively but obscurely, he shouldn't have to suffer enforced bliss. We may claim, like the Savage, "the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind". Yet the argument against chemical enslavement cuts both ways. The point today - and at any other time, surely - is that we should have the right not to be unhappy. And above all, when suffering becomes truly optional, we shouldn't force our toxic legacy wetware on others.

But what will be the price of all this happiness?

It's not what we might intuitively expect. Perhaps surprisingly, freedom and individuality can potentially be enhanced by chemically boosting personal wellbeing. Vulnerable and unhappy people are probably more susceptible to brainwashing - and the subtler sorts of mind-control - than active citizens who are happy and psychologically robust. Happiness is empowering. In real life, it is notable that mood- and resilience-enhancing drugs, such as the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, tend to reduce submissiveness and subordinate behaviour. Rats and monkeys on SSRIs climb the pecking order, or transcend it altogether. They don't seem to try and dominate their fellows - loosely speaking, they just stop letting themselves be messed around. If pharmacologically and genetically enriched, we may all aspire to act likewise.

Admittedly, this argument isn't decisive. It's a huge topic. Humans, a philosopher once observed, are not *rats*. Properly-controlled studies of altered serotonin function in humans are lacking. The intra-cellular consequences of fifteen- plus serotonin receptor sub-types defy facile explanation. But we do know that a dysfunctional serotonin system is correlated with low social-status. Enhancing serotonin function - other things being equal - is likely to leave an individual less likely to submit to authority, not docile and emasculated. *Brave New World* is an exquisite satire, but the utopia it imagines is sociologically and biologically implausible. Its happy conformists are shallow cartoons.

Of course, any analysis of the state's role in future millennia is hugely speculative. Both minimalist "night-watchman" states and extreme totalitarian scenarios are conceivable. In some respects, any future world government may indeed be far more intrusive than the typical nation-state today. If the *ageing process* and the inevitability of death is superseded, for instance, then decisions about *reproduction* – on *Earth* at least simply cannot be left to the discretion of individual couples alone. This is because we'd soon be left with standing room only. The imminence of widespread human cloning, too, makes increased regulation and accountability inevitable - quite disturbingly so. But challenges like population-control shouldn't overshadow the fact that members of a happy, confident, psychologically robust citizenry are far less likely to be the malleable pawns of a ruling elite than contented fatalists. A chemically – enslaved underclass of happy helots remains unlikely.

### 21.2.3 Anthropocentrism

*Brave New World* is a utopia conceived on the basis of species-self-interest masquerading as a universal paradise. Most of the inhabitants of our planet don't get a look-in, any more than they do today.

Statistically, most of the *suffering* in the contemporary world isn't undergone by human beings. It is sometimes supposed that intensity and degree of consciousness - between if not within species - is inseparably bound up with intelligence. Accordingly, humans are prone to credit themselves with a "higher" consciousness than members of other taxa, as well as - sometimes more justifiably - sharper intellects. Non-human animals aren't treated as morally and functionally akin to human infants and toddlers i.e. in need of looked after. Instead, they are wantonly *abused, exploited, and killed*.

Yet it is a striking fact that our most primitive experiences - both phylogenetically and ontogenetically - are also the most vivid. For *physical* suffering probably has more to do with the number and synaptic density of pain cells than a hypertrophied neocortex. The extremes of pain and thirst, for example, are excruciatingly intense. By contrast, the kinds of experience most associated with the acme of human intellectual endeavour, namely thought-episodes in the pre-frontal region of the brain, are phenomenologically so anaemic that it is hard to *introspect* their properties at all.

Hardcore paradise-engineering - and not the brittle parody of paradise served up in *Brave New World* - will eradicate such nastiness from the living world altogether. None of Huxley's implicit criticism of the utopians can conceivably apply to the rest of the *animal kingdom*. For by no stretch of the imagination could the most ardent misery-monger claim animal suffering is essential for the production of great art and literature - a common rationale for its preservation and alleged redeeming value in humans. Nor would its loss lead to great spiritual emptiness. Animal suffering is just savage, empty and pointless. So we'll probably scrap it when it becomes easy enough to do so.



Whether pain takes the form of the eternal Treblinka of our Fordist factory farms and conveyor-belt *killing factories*, or whether it's manifested as the cruelties of a living world still governed by natural selection, the sheer viciousness of the Darwinian Era is likely to horrify our morally saner near-descendants. A few centuries hence - the chronological details are sketchy - hordes of self-replicating *nanorobots* armed with retroviral vectors and the power of on-board quantum supercomputers may hunt out the biomolecular signature of aversive experience all the way down the phylogenetic tree; and genetically eliminate it. Meanwhile, depot-contraception, not merciless predation, will control population in our wildlife parks. Carnivorous killing-machines - and that includes dear misunderstood *kitty*, a beautiful sociopath - will be reprogrammed or phased out if the *abolitionist project* is to be complete. Down on the *farm, tasty*, genetically-engineered ambrosia will replace abused sentience. For paradise-engineering entails global *veganism*. Utopia cannot be built on top of an ecosystem of pain and fear. Unfortunately, this is an issue on which *Brave New World* is silent.

How is it possible to make such predictions with any confidence?

Properly speaking, one can't, or at least not without a heap of caveats. But as science progressively gives us the power to remould matter and energy to suit our desires - or whims - it would take an extraordinary degree of malice for us to sustain the painfulness of *Darwinian life* indefinitely. For as our power increases, so does our *complicity* in its persistence.

Even unregenerate humans don't tend to be sustainably ill-natured. So when genetically-engineered *vat-food* tastes as good as dead meat, we may muster enough moral courage to bring the animal holocaust to an end.

#### **21.2.4 Caste-bound**

In *Brave New World*, genetic engineering isn't used straightforwardly to pre-code happiness. Instead, it underwrites the subordination and inferiority of the lower orders. In essence, *Brave New World* is a global caste society. Social stratification is institutionalised in a five-way genetic split. There is no social mobility. Alphas invariably rule, Epsilons invariably toil. Genetic differences are reinforced by systematic conditioning.

Historically, dominance and winning have been associated with good, even manically euphoric, mood; losing and *submission* are associated with subdued spirits and depression. *Rank theory* suggests that the far greater incidence of the internalised correlate of the yielding sub-routine, *depression*, reflects how low spirits were frequently more *adaptive* among group-living organisms than *manic* self-assertion. But in *Brave New World*, the correlation vanishes or is even inverted. The lower orders are at least as happy as the Alphas thanks to soma, childhood conditioning and their braindamaged incapacity for original thought. Thus in sleep-lessons on class consciousness, for instance, juvenile Betas learn to love being Betas. They learn to respect Alphas who "work much harder than we do, because they're so frightfully clever." But they also learn to take pleasure in not being Gammas, Deltas, or the even more witless Epsilons. "Oh no," the hypnopedia tapes suggest, "I don't want to play with Delta

children.”

One might imagine that progress in automation technology would eliminate the menial, repetitive tasks so unsuitable for big-brained Alphas. But apparently this would leave the lower castes disaffected and without a role: allegedly a good reason for freezing scientific progress where it is. It might be imagined, too, that one solution here would be to stop producing oxygen-starved morons altogether. Why not stick to churning out Alphas? The Controller Mustapha Mond informs us that an all-Alpha society was once tried on an island. The result of the experiment was the civil war. 19000 of the 22000 Alphas perished. Thus the lower castes are needed indefinitely. The happiness that they derive from their routine-bound lives guarantees stability for society as a whole. “The optimum population”, the Controller observes, “is modelled on the iceberg - eight-ninths below the waterline, one-ninth above”.

There are evidently counter-arguments and rebuttals that could be delivered against any specific variant of this scenario. But Huxley isn't interested in details. *Brave New World* is a deeply pessimistic blanket-warning against all forms of genetic engineering and eugenics. Shouldn't we keep the status quo and ban them altogether? Let's play safe. In the last analysis, Nature Knows Best.

As it stands, this argument is horribly facile. The ways in which the life sciences can be abused are certainly manifold. Bioethics deserves to become a mainstream academic discipline. But the idea that a living world organised on principles of blind genetic selfishness – the bedrock of the Darwinian Era - is inherently better than anything based on rational design is surely specious. *Selfishness*, whether in the technical or overlapping popular sense, is a spectacularly awful principle on which to base any civilisation. Sooner or later, simple means-ends-analysis, will dictate the use of genetic engineering to manufacture constitutionally happy *mind/brains*. Reams of philosophical sophistry and complication aside, that's what we're all after, *obliquely* and under another description or otherwise; and biotechnology is the only effective way to get it.

For despite how frequently irrational we may be in satisfying our desires, we're all slaves to the *pleasure principle*. No one ever leaves a well-functioning *pleasure-machine* because they get bored: unlike the derivative joys of food, drink and sex, the delightfulness of intra-cranial self-stimulation of the pleasure-centres shows no tolerance. Natural selection has “encephalised” emotion to disguise our dependence on the opioidergic and mesolimbic dopamine circuitry of *reward*. Since raw, unfocused emotion is blind and impotent, its axonal and dendritic processes have been recruited into innervating the neocortex. All our layers of cortical complexity conspire to help self-replicating DNA leave more copies of itself. Thus we fetishise all sorts of irrelevant cerebral bric-a-brac [loosely, what we're happy or upset “about”] that has come to be associated with adaptively nice and nasty experiences in our past. But the attributes of power, status and money, for instance, however obviously nice they seem today, aren't inherently pleasurable. They yield only a derivative kick that can be chemically edited out of existence. Their cortical representations have to be innervated by limbically-generated

emotions in the right way - or the wrong way - for them to seem nice at all.

Rationally, then, if we want to modulate our happiness so that it's safe and socially sustainable, we must genetically code pre-programmed wellbeing in a way that shuts down the old dominance-and-submission circuits too. Such a shut-down is crudely feasible today on serotonergics, both recreational and clinical. But the shut-down can be comprehensive and permanent. Germ-line gene therapy is better than a lifetime on drugs.

A revolution in reproductive technologies is imminent. Universal pre-implantation diagnosis may eventually become the norm. But in the meantime, any unreconstructed powertrippers can get a far bigger kick in *immersive VR* than they can playing *primate* party-politics. If one wants to be Master of The Universe, then so be it: a chacun son gout. The narrative software which supports such virtual worlds can even be pharmacologically enhanced in the user so that virtual world mastery is always better than The Real Thing - relegated one day, perhaps, to a fading antiquarian relic. The fusion of drugs and computer-generated worlds will yield greater verisimilitude than anything possible in recalcitrant old *organic VR* - the dynamic simulations which perceptual naïve realists call the world. For we live in a messy and frustrating regime which passes itself off as The Real World, but is actually a species-specific construct coded by DNA.

This gives rise to questions such as can power-games really be confined exclusively to VR? Won't tomorrow's Alphas want to dominate both? This question needs a book, not the *obiter dicta* of a literary essay. But if one can enjoy champagne, why drink meths, or even be tempted to try it in the first place? In common with non-human animals, we respond most powerfully to hot-button supernormal stimuli. Getting turned-on by the heightened verisimilitude of drugs-plus-VR from a very young age is likely to eclipse anything else on offer.

This isn't to deny that in any transitional era to a mature *post-Darwinian* paradise, there will have to be huge safeguards - no less elaborate than the multiple failsafe procedures surrounding the launch codes for today's nuclear weaponry. In the near future, for instance, prospective candidates for political leadership in The Real World will probably have their DNA profiles scrutinised no less exhaustively than their *sexual peccadillos*. For it will be imprudent to elect unenriched primitives endowed with potentially dangerous genotypes. If one is going to put oneself and one's children into, say, ecstasy-like states of loving empathy and trust, then one is potentially more vulnerable to genetic cavemen. But this is all the more reason to design beautifully enhanced analogues of ecstasy and coke which fuse the best features of both.

Even if a power-tripper's fantasy wish-fulfilment is confined to private universes, we are still likely to view it as an unnerving prospect. One of the reasons we find the very thought of being dominated and controlled and manipulated *Brave New World* so aversive is that we associate such images with frustration, nastiness and depression. For sure, the Brave New Worlders are typically happy rather than depressed. Yet they are all, bar perhaps the Controllers, manipulated dupes. The worry that we ourselves might ever suffer a similar fate is unsettling

and depressing. *Brave New World* gives happiness a bad name.

But it's a misery that deserves to be stigmatised and stamped out. *Brave New World* dignifies unpleasantness in the guise of noble savagery just when it's poised to become biologically optional. And on occasion unpleasantness really can be *horrific* - too bad to describe in words. Some forms of extreme pain, for instance, are so terrible to experience that one would sacrifice the whole world to get rid of the agony. Pain is a part of the living world even right now. It's misguided to ask whether such pain is really as bad as it seems to be - because the reality is the very appearance one is trying vainly to describe. The extremes of so-called "mental" pain can be no less dreadful. They may embody *suicidal* despair far beyond everyday ill-spirits. They are happening right now in the living world as well. Their existence reflects the way our mind/brains are built. Unless the vertebrate central nervous system is genetically recoded, there will be traumas and malaise in *utopia* - any utopia - too.

No behavioural account of even moderately severe depression, for instance, can do justice to its subjective awfulness. But a *spectrum* of depressive signs and symptoms will persist within even a latter-day Garden of Eden - in the absence of good drugs and better genes. We can understand why depressive states *evolved* among social animals in terms of the selective advantage of depressive behaviour in reinforcing *adaptive* patterns of dominance and subordination, avoiding damaging physical fights with superior rivals, or of inducing *hypercholinergic* frenzy of reflective thought when life goes badly wrong - for one's genes. Likewise, intense and unpleasant *social anxiety* was sometimes adaptive too. So was an involuntary capacity for the torments of sexual *jealousy*, fear, terror, hunger, thirst and disgust. Our notions of dominance and subordination are embedded within this stew of emotions. They are clearly quite fundamental to our social relationships. They pervade our whole conceptual scheme. When we try to imagine the distant future, we may of course imagine hi-tech gee-whizzery. Yet emotionally, we also think in primitive terms of dominance and submission, of *hierarchy* and power structures, superiority and inferiority. Even when we imagine future computers and robots, we are liable to have simple-minded fantasies about being used, dominated, and overthrown. Bug-eyed extra-terrestrials from the Planet Zog, too, and their legion of hydra-headed sci-fi cousins, are implicitly assumed to have the motivational structure of our vertebrate ancestors. Superficially they may be alien - all those tentacles - but really they're just like us. Surely they'll want to dominate us, control us, invade Earth etc. Huxley's vision of control and manipulation is (somewhat) subtler; but it belongs to the same atavistic tradition.

For the foreseeable future, these concerns aren't idle. We may rightly worry that if some of us - perhaps most of us - are destined to get drugged-up, genetically-rewritten and plugged into designer worlds, then might not invisible puppet-masters be controlling us for their own ends, whatever their motives? Who'll be in charge of the basement infrastructure which sustains all the multiple layers of VR - and thus ultimately running the show?

Admittedly, sophisticated and intellectually enriched post-humans are unlikely to be

*naïve realists* about “perception”; so they’ll recognise that what their ancestors called “real life” was no more privileged than what we might call, say, “the medieval world” - the virtual worlds instantiated by our medieval forebears. But any unenriched primitives still living in organic VR could still be potentially dangerous, because they could bring everything else tumbling down. In certain limited respects, their virtual worlds, like our own, would causally covary with the mind-independent world in ways that blissed-up total-VR dwellers would typically lack. So can it ever be safe to be totally nice and totally happy?

These topics deserve a book - many books - too. The fixations they express are doubtless still of extreme interest to contemporary humans. Sado-masochistic images of domination-and-submission loom large in a lot of our fantasies too.

The categories of experience they reflect were of potent significance on the African savannah, where they bore on the ability to get the “best” mates and leave most copies of one’s genes. But they won’t persist for ever. A tendency to such dominance-and-control syndromes is going to be written out of the genome - as soon as we gain mastery of rewriting the script. For on the whole, we want our kids to be nice.

More generally, the whole “evolutionary environment of adaptation” is poised for a revolution. This is important. When any particular suite of alleles ceases to be the result of random mutation and blind natural selection, and is instead pre-selected by intelligent agents in conscious anticipation of their likely effects, then the criteria of genetic fitness will change too. The sociobiological and popular senses of “*selfish*” will progressively diverge rather than typically overlap. Allegedly “immutable” human nature will change as well when the genetic-rewrite gathers momentum and the reproductive revolution matures. The classical Darwinian Era is drawing to a close.

Unfortunately, its death agonies may be prolonged. Knee-jerk pessimism and outright cynicism abound among humanistic pundits in the press. They are common in literary academia. And of course any competent doom-monger can glibly extrapolate the trends of the past into the future. Yet anti-utopianism ignores even the foreseeable discontinuities that lie ahead of us as we mature into post-humans. Most notably, it ignores the major evolutionary transition now imminent in the future of life. This is the era when we rewrite the genome in our own interest to make ourselves happy in the richest sense of the term. In the meantime, we just act out variations on dramas scripted by selfish DNA.

### **21.2.5 Philistinism**

*Brave New World* is a stupid society. For the most part, even the Alphas don’t do anything more exalted than play Obstacle Golf. A handful of the Alphas are well- delineated: Bernard, Helmholtz, and Mustapha Mond. They are truly clever. Huxley is far too brilliant to write a novel with convincingly dim-witted lead characters. The Savage, in particular, is an implausibly articulate vehicle for Huxley’s own sympathies. But in the main, brave new worlders are empty-headed mental invalids in the grip of terminal mind-rot – *happy pigs* rather than

types of unhappy *Socrates*.

Since the utopians are (largely) contented with their lives, they don't produce Great Art. Happiness and Great Art are allegedly incompatible. Great Art and Great Literature are very dear to Huxley's heart. But is artistic genius really stifled without inner torment?

There is a great deal of ideological baggage that needs to be picked apart here; or preferably slashed like a Gordian knot. The existence of great art, unlike (controversially) great science, is not a state-neutral fact about the world. Not least, "great art" depends on the resonances it strikes in its audience. Today we're stuck with legacy wetware and genetically-driven malaise. It's frequently nasty and sometimes terrible. So we can currently appreciate only too well "great" *novels* and plays about murder, violence, treachery, child abuse, suicidal despair etc. Such themes, especially when "well"-handled in classy prose, strike us as more "authentic" than happy pap. Thus a (decaying) Oxbridge literary intelligentsia can celebrate, say, the wonderful cathartic experience offered by Greek tragedies - with their everyday tales of bestiality, cannibalism, rape and murder among the Greek gods. It's good to have one's baser appetites dressed up so intelligently.

Yet after the ecstatic phase-change ahead in our affective states - the most important evolutionary transition in the future of life itself - the classical literary canon may fall into obscurity. Enriched minds with different emotions *encephalised* in different ways are unlikely to be edified by the cultural artefacts of a bygone era. Conversely, we might ourselves take a jaundiced view if we could inspect the artistic products of a civilisation of native-born ecstasies. This is because any future art which explores lives predicated on gradations of delight will seem pretty vapid from here. We find it hard enough to imagine even one flavour of sublimity, let alone a multitude.

The nagging question may persist: will posterity's Art and Literature *really* be Great? To its creators, their handiwork may seem brilliant and beautiful, moving and profound. But might not its blissed-out authors be simply conning themselves? Could they have lost true critical insight, even if they retain its shadowy functional analogues?

Such questions demand a treatise on the nature and objectivity of value judgements. Yet perhaps asking whether we would appreciate ecstatic art of 500 or 5000 years hence is futile in the first place. We simply can't know what we're talking about. For we are unhappy pigs, and our own arts are mood-congruent perversions. The real philistinism to worry about lies in the emotional illiteracy of the present. Our genetically-enriched posterity will have no need of our condescension.

### **21.2.6 Consumerism**

*Brave New World* is a "Fordist" utopia based on production and consumption. It would seem, nonetheless, that there is no mandatory work-place *drug-testing* for soma; if there were, its detection would presumably be encouraged. In our own society, taking drugs

may compromise a person's work-role. Procuring illicit drugs may divert the user from an orthodox consumer life-style. This is because the immediate rewards to be gained from even trashy recreational euphorants are more intense than the buzz derived from acquiring more consumer fripperies. In *Brave New World*, however, the production and consumption of manufactured goods is (somehow) harmoniously integrated with a life-style of drugs-and-sex. Its inhabitants are given no time for spiritual contemplation. Solitude is discouraged. The utopians are purposely kept occupied and focused on working for yet more consumption: "No leisure from pleasure". Is this our destiny too? Almost certainly not. Productivist visions of paradise are unrealistic if they don't incorporate an all-important *genomic revolution in hedonic engineering*. Beyond a bare subsistence minimum, there is no inherent positive long-term correlation between *wealth* and happiness. Windfalls and spending-sprees do typically bring short-term highs. Yet they don't subvert the hedonic treadmill of inhibitory feedback mechanisms in the brain. Each of us tends to have a *hedonic set-point* about which our "well"-being fluctuates. That set-point is hard to recalibrate over a lifetime without *pharmacological* or *genetic* intervention. Interlocking neurotransmitter systems in the CNS have been selected to embody both short- and long-term negative feedback loops. They are usually efficient. Unless they are chemically subverted, such mechanisms stop most of us from being contented - or clinically depressed - for very long. The endless cycle of ups and downs - our own private reenactment of the myth of Sisyphus - is an "adaptation" that helps selfish genes to leave more copies of themselves; in Nature, the restless malcontents genetically out-compete happy lotus-eaters. It's an adaptation that won't go away just by messing around with our external environment.

This is in no way to deny the distinct possibility that our descendants will be temperamentally ecstatic. They may well consume lots of material goods too - if they don't spend their whole lives in fantasy. Yet their well-being cannot derive from an unbridled orgy of personal consumption. Authentic mental health depends on dismantling the hedonic treadmill itself; or more strictly, recalibrating its axis to endow its bearers with a motivational system based on *gradients* of immense well-being.

So what sort of scenario can we expect? If we opt for gradations of genetically pre-programmed bliss, just what, if anything, is our marvellous wellbeing likely to focus on?

First, in a mature IT society, the harnessing of psychopharmacology and biotechnology to ubiquitous virtual reality software gives scope for unlimited good experiences for everyone. Any sensory experience one wants, any experiential manifold one can imagine, any narrative structure one desires, can be far better realised in VR than in outmoded conceptions of Real Life.

At present, society is based on the assumption that goods and services - and the good experiences they can generate - are a finite scarce resource. But ubiquitous VR can generate (in effect) infinite abundance. An IT society supersedes the old zero-sum paradigm and Fordist mass-manufacture. It rewrites the orthodox laws of market economics. The ability of immersive

multi-modal VR to make one - depending on the software title one opts for - Lord Of Creation, Casanova The Insatiable etc puts an entire universe at one's disposal. This can involve owning "trillions of dollars", heaps of "status-goods", and unlimited wealth and resources - in today's archaic terminology. In fact one will be able to have all the material goods one wants, and any virtual world one wants - and it can all seem as "unvirtual" as one desires. A few centuries hence, we may rapidly take [im]material opulence for granted. And this virtual cornucopia won't be the prerogative of a tiny elite. Information isn't like that. Nor will it depend on masses of toiling workers. Information isn't like that either. If we want it, nanotechnology promises old-fashioned abundance all round, both inside and outside synthetic VR.

Nanotechnology is not magic. The self-replicating molecular robots it will spawn are probably more distant than their enthusiasts suppose, perhaps by several decades. We may have to wait a century or more before nanorobots can get to work remoulding the *cosmos* - to make it a home worth living in and call our own. Details of how they'll be programmed, how they'll navigate, how they'll be powered, how they'll locate all the atoms they reconfigure, etc, are notoriously sketchy. But the fact remains: back in the boring old mind-independent world, applied nanoscience will deliver material superabundance beyond measure.

For the most part, admittedly, vast material opulence may not be needed due to VR. This is because we can all have the option of living in immersive designer-paradises of our own choosing. At first, our customised virtual worlds may merely ape and augment organic VR. But the classical prototype of an egocentric virtual world is parochial and horribly restrictive; the body-image it gives us to work with, for instance, is pretty shoddy and flawed by built-in *obsolescence*. Unprogrammed organic VR can be hatefully cruel as well - Nature's genetic algorithms are nastily written and very badly coded indeed. Ultimately, artificial VR may effectively supersede its organic ancestor no less (in) completely than classical macroscopic *worlds* emerged from their quantum substrate. The transition is conceivable. Whether it will happen, and to what extent, we simply don't know.

Drugs-plus-VR can potentially yield a *heightened* sense of verisimilitude; and exhilarating excitement. Virtual worlds can potentially seem more real, more lifelike, more intense, and more compelling than the lame definitions of reality on offer today. The experience of *this-is-real* - like all our waking- or dreaming consciousness - comprises a series of neurochemical events in the CNS like any other. It can be amped-up or toned-down. Reality does not admit of degrees; but our sense of it certainly does. Tone, channel and volume controls will be at our disposal. But once we've chosen what we like, then the authentic taste of paradise is indeed addictive.

Thus in an important sense *Brave New World* is wrong. Our *descendants* may "consume" software, genetic enhancements and designer drugs. But the future lies in bits and bytes, not as workers engaged in factory mass- production or cast as victims of a consumer society. In some ways, BNW is prescient science fiction - uncannily prophetic of advances in genetic engineering and *cloning*. But in other ways, its depiction of life in centuries to come is



backward-looking and quaint. Our attempts to envision distant eras always are. The future will be *unrecognizably* better.

### 21.2.7 Loveless Society

*Brave New World* is an essentially loveless society. Both romantic love and love of family are taboo. The family itself has been abolished throughout the civilised world. We learn, however, that the priggish Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning was guilty of an indiscretion with a Beta-minus when visiting the Reservation twenty years ago. When John the Savage falls on his knees and greets him as “my father”, the director puts his hands over his ears. In vain, he tries to shut out the obscene word. He is *embarrassed*. Publicly humiliated, he then flees the room. Pantomime scenes like this - amusing but fanciful - contribute to our sense that a regime of universal well-being would entail our *losing* something precious. Utopian happiness, we are led to believe, is built on sacrifice: the *loss* of love, science, art and religion. Authentic paradise-engineering, by contrast, can enhance them all; not a bad payoff.

In *Brave New World*, romantic love is strongly discouraged as well. Brave new worlders are conditioned to be sexually promiscuous: “Everyone belongs to everyone else.” Rather than touting the joys of sexual liberation, Huxley seeks to show how sexual promiscuity cheapens love; it doesn’t express it. The Savage fancies lovely Lenina no less than she fancies him. But he loves her too. He feels having sex would dishonour her. So when the poor woman expresses her desire to have sex with him, she gets treated as though she were a prostitute.

Thus Huxley doesn’t offer a sympathetic exploration of the possibility that prudery and sexual guilt has soured more lives than *sex*. In a true utopia, the counterparts of John and Lenina will enjoy fantastic love-making, undying mutual admiration, and live together happily ever after.

The utopians aren’t merely personally unloved. They aren’t individually respected either. Ageing has been abolished; but when the utopians die - quickly, not through a long process of senescence - their bodies are recycled as useful sources of phosphorus. Thus *Brave New World* is a grotesque parody of a *utilitarian* society in both a practical as well as a *philosophical* sense.

Science is usually portrayed as dehumanising. *Brave New World* epitomises this fear. “The more we understand the world, the more it seems completely pointless” (Steven Weinberg). Certainly science can seem chilling when conceived in the abstract as a *metaphysical world-picture*. We may seem to find ourselves living in a universe with all the human meaning stripped out: participants in a soulless dance of molecules, or harmonics of pointlessly wagging superstrings and their braneworld cousins. Nature seems loveless and indifferent to our lives. What right have we to be happy?

Yet what right have we to sneeze? If suffering has been medically eradicated, does happiness have to be justified any more than the colour green or the taste of peppermint? Is

there some deep metaphysical sense in which we ought to be weighed down by the momentous gravity of the human predicament?

Only if it will do anyone any good. The evidence is lacking. Paradise-engineering, by contrast, can deliver an enchanted *pleasure-garden* of otherworldly delights for everyone. Providentially, the appliance of biotechnology offers us the unprecedented prospect of *enhancing* our humanity - and the biological capacity for spiritual experience. When genetically-enriched, our pursuit of such delights won't be an escape from some inner sense of futility, a gnawing existential angst which disfigures so many lives at present. Quite the opposite: life will feel self-intimatingly wonderful. Wholesale genetic-rewrites tweaked by rational drug-design give us the chance to enhance willpower and *motivation*. We'll be able to enjoy a hugely greater sense of purpose in our lives than our characteristically malfunctioning *dopamine* systems allow today. Moreover this transformation of the living world, and eventually of the whole cosmos, into a heavenly meaning-steeped nirvana will in no way be "unnatural". It is simply a disguised consequence of the laws of physics playing themselves out.

And, conceivably, it will be a loving world. Until now, selection pressure has ensured we're cursed with a genome that leaves us mostly as callous brutes, albeit brutes with intermittently honourable intentions. We are selfish in the popular as well as the technical genetic sense. Love and affection are often strained even among friends and relatives. The quasi-psychopathic indifference we feel towards most other creatures on the planet is a by-product of selfish DNA. Sociobiology allied to evolutionary psychology shows how genetic dispositions to conflict are latent in every relationship that isn't between genetically identical clones. Such potential conflicts frequently erupt in overt form. The cost is immense suffering and sometimes suicidal anguish.

This isn't to deny that love is real. But its contemporary wellsprings have been poisoned from the outset. Only the sort of *love* that helps selfish DNA to leave more copies of itself - which enable it to "maximise its inclusive fitness" - can presently flourish. It is fleeting, inconstant, and shaped by cruelly arbitrary criteria of *physical appearance* which serve as badges of *reproductive potential*. If we value it, love should be rescued from the genes that have recruited and perverted the states which mediate its expression in blind pursuit of *reproductive success*. Love is not biologically inconsistent with lasting happiness.

This is because good genes and good drugs allow us, potentially, to love everyone more deeply, more empathetically and more sustainably than has ever been possible before. Indeed, there is no fundamental biological reason why the human genome can't be rewritten to allow everyone to be "in" love with everyone else - if we should so choose. But simply loving each other will be miraculous enough; and will probably suffice. An empty religious piety can be transformed into a biological reality.

Love is versatile; so we needn't turn ourselves into celibate angels either. True love does not entail that we become disembodied souls communing with each other all day.

“Promiscuous” sex doesn’t have to be loveless. *Bonobos* (“pygmy chimps”) are a case in point; they would appreciate a “Solidarity Service” rather better than we do. When sexual guilt and *jealousy* - a pervasive disorder of serotonin function - are *cured*, then bed-hopping will no longer be as morally reckless as it is today. Better still, designer *love-philters* and smarter *sex-drugs* can transform our concept of intimacy. Today’s ill-educated fumbblings will seem inept by comparison. *Sensualists* may opt for whole-body orgasms of a frequency, duration and variety that transcends the limp foreplay of their natural ancestors.

Profound love of many forms - both of oneself and all others - is at least as feasible as the impersonal emotional wasteland occupied by Huxley’s utopians.

### 21.2.8 Things Go Wrong

Even by its own criteria, *Brave New World* is not a society where everyone is happy. There are asylums in Iceland and the Falklands for Alpha-male misfits. Bernard Marx is disaffected and emotionally insecure; a mistake in the bottling-plant left him stunted. Lenina has lupus. If you run out of soma, a fate which befalls Lenina when visiting the Reservation, you feel sick: well-being is not truly genetically preprogrammed. Almost every page of the novel is steeped in *negative* vocabulary. Its idiom belongs to the era it has notionally superseded. On a global scale, the whole society of the world state is an abomination - science gone mad - in most people’s eyes, at any rate. In *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley clearly expects us to share his repugnance.

Surely any utopia can go terribly wrong? One thinks of Christianity; the Soviet experiment; The French Revolution; and Pol Pot. All ideas and ideals get horribly perverted by power and its pursuit.

There is an important distinction to be drawn here. In a future civilisation where aversive experience is genetically impossible - forbidden not by social diktat but because its biochemical substrates are absent - then the notion of what it means for anything to *go wrong* will be different from today. If this innovative usage is to be adopted, then we’re dealing with a separate and currently ill-defined - if not mystical - concept and we run a risk of conflating the two senses. For if we are incapable of aversive experience, then the notion of things going wrong with our lives - or anyone else’s - doesn’t apply in any but a Pickwickian sense. “Going wrong” and “being terrible” as we understand such concepts today are inseparable from the textures of nastiness in which they had their origin. Their simple transposition to the Post-Darwinian Era doesn’t work.

Perhaps functional analogues of things going wrong will indeed apply - even in a secular biological heaven where the phenomenology of nastiness has been wiped out. So the idea isn’t entirely fanciful. For the foreseeable future, functional analogues of phenomenal pain will be needed in early transhumans no less than in silicon robots to alert their bodies to noxious tissue damage etc. Also, functional analogues of “things going wrong”, at least in one sense, are

needed to produce great science and technology, so that acuity of critical judgement is maintained; uncontrolled euphoric mania is not a recipe for scientific genius in even the most high-octane supermind. Yet directly or indirectly, the very notion of “going wrong” in the contemporary sense seems bound up with a distinctive and unpleasant phenomenology of consciousness: a deficiency of well-being, not a surfeit.

This doesn't stop us today from dreaming up scenarios of blissed-out utopias which strike us as distasteful - or even nightmarish - when contemplated through the lens of our own darkened minds. This is because chemically unenriched consciousness is a medium which corrupts anything that it seeks to express. The medium is not the message; but it leaves its signature indelibly upon it. We may imagine future worlds in which there is no great art, no real *spirituality*, no true humanity, no personal growth through life-enriching traumas and tragedies, etc. We may conjure up notional future worlds, too, whose belief- systems rest on a false metaphysic: e.g. an ideal theocracy - is it a real utopia if it transpires there's no God? But it's hard to escape the conclusion that “ill-effects” from which no one ever suffers are ontological flights of fancy. The spectre of happy dystopias may trouble some of us today rather than strike us as a contradiction on terms. But like Huxley's *Brave New World*, they are fantasies born of the very pathology.

This is not to deny that the transition to the new Post-Darwinian Era will be stressful and conflict-ridden. We learn from the Controller that the same was true of *Brave New World* - civilisation as we know it today was destroyed in the Nine Years' War. One hopes, on rather limited evidence, that the birth-pangs of the *new genetic order* will be less traumatic. But the supposition that a society predicated on universal bliss engineered by science is inherently wrong - as Huxley wants us to believe - rests on obscure metaphysics as well as questionable ethics is a concept best left to medieval theologians.

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### 21.3 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have summarised the salient features of the *Brave New World* as depicted by Huxley in *Brave New World*. They include the following :

- A society of false happiness.
- A totalitarian society.
- An anthropocentric society.
- A caste – bound society.
- A philistine society.
- A consumerist society.
- A loveless society.
- A place where things go wrong.

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## 21.4 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the features of Huxley's *Brave New World*.
2. Huxley pokes fun at the emerging scientific utopia in *Brave New World*. Discuss.

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## 21.5 Bibliography

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1. Aldous Huxley; Brave New World, Perennial, Reprint edition, September 1, 1998.
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## UNIT–22

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### GEORGE ORWELL: *SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT*

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Structures

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 About the Author
  - 22.2.1 Important Works of Orwell
  - 22.2.2 The Popularity of Orwell
  - 22.2.3 As An Essayist
  - 22.2.4 Orwell and Language
- 22.3 *Shooting An Elephant* : A Critical View
- 22.4 Orwell and Imperialism
- 22.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.6 Review Questions
- 22.7 Bibliography

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#### 22.0 Objectives

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This unit will help you:

- to understand Orwell as a writer,
- to know the human aspect of Orwell,
- to know his views about Imperialism,
- to know how Orwell has given a new treatment to prose-writing,
- to find his contribution to English Language; and
- to notice that Orwell's essays form a unique place in English Literature.

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#### 22.1 Introduction

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Within no time, George Orwell has become a legend. His unique political allegory, *Animal Farm* (1945) is sold in more than eleven million copies and his brilliant anti-utopia *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) met with a similar success. It brought him worldwide fame and generated much excitement when it was made into a film with Edmund O'Brian as Winston

Smith and shown on the television, as a serial. The publication of *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, in 1968 contributed immensely to the magnitude of the Orwell legend. The bulk of his prose writing was made accessible to the ordinary reader, and he came to be recognised independently as a critic, essayist, political satirist, journalist and reviewer. Numerous critics, scholars and Orwell's own friends exposed the details of his personal life and established him as the austere yet gentle figure whom Lionel Trilling called "a virtuous man" and who, according to George Woodcock, had become a figure of world myth". Indeed, no other prose writer in the twentieth century has commanded more attention and esteem than George Orwell and no other author has exercised more profound influence on the post-war period than him.

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## 22.2 About the Author

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Eric Arthur Blair, who is widely known as George Orwell, was born in Bengal (India) in 1903. Besides him there were two daughters in the family of Richard Welmesley Blair, his father, an official in the Indian Civil Service. But he never found his sisters to be suitable play mates and lead life of a lonely child.

He could not go to very expensive schools due to low income of his father. He was admitted to a private boarding school on the Sussex Coast. The Head Master and his wife spared no opportunity to remind him of his poverty. The scarcity of money and hard words of the Headmaster and his prejudiced behaviour left an indelible imprint of poverty on his mind. His later life and character were influenced by this miserable impression. He says, "I had no money, I was weak, I was ugly, I was unpopular, I had a chronic cough, I was cowardly, I smelt.... The conviction that it was not possible for me to be a success went deep enough to influence my action till far on into adult life".

However, Orwell was able to win a scholarship at Eton. There he found the atmosphere more congenial and freer. He was grateful that, Eton had a tolerant and civilized atmosphere giving a fair chance to all the students to develop their individuality. One of his school friends, Cyril Connolly, gives a very positive view about the knowledge of Orwell at Eton, "The remarkable thing about Orwell was that he alone among the boys was an intellectual and not a parrot for he thought for himself, read Shaw and Samuel Butler".

He could have easily won a scholarship at a University but on the advice of one of his tutors, chose to find a job abroad and make plenty of money and retire at the age of forty. He joined the Indian Imperial Police to serve in Burma from 1920 to 1927. He was opposed to colonialism and tyranny and therefore was not happy in his job. On return to England on leave in 1927, he decided to resign his post. He wavered for sometime whether he should adopt writing as a profession as from childhood he had dreamt to be a writer.

Before settling down as a writer he wanted to atone the feeling of guilt, which he had developed in Burma as he had to be a party to the repressive rule of the British. He wanted to

experience “the failure”, its pain, by throwing himself with the lowest of the low in Paris and London.

He stayed in Paris for eighteen months doing mean jobs like dish-washing to experience dire poverty. On returning to England he joined the tramps and lived as an unidentified member of their company.

His miserable existence had a happy outcome. During the next five years he made his living first as a private tutor, then as an underpaid teacher in private schools and as a bookshop assistant. Meanwhile he contributed articles to *The Adelphi* and poems to *The Tribune*.

He got married and kept a pub, a village store and a chicken farm for additional income. Three of his books came out quickly one after the other – *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936).

Gradually he was getting known as a writer. He changed his name from Eric Arthur Blair to George Orwell. He developed a prejudice against everything Scotch and Eric because of its Norse association with the stories he had read in childhood. He chose a typically English name by choosing the name of the Patron Saint of England (St. George) and the name of the river in Suffolk, Orwell, on whose banks he had once resided. He was extremely patriotic and wished his name to be purely English.

He was commissioned in 1936 by Victor Gollancz to pay a visit to an industrial area and submit a firsthand report of the living-conditions of working – class people there. He went to the coal mines of Wigan and wrote a half-true version of what he saw there.

He was fast turning a socialist. He would have become a Marxist, if he had not joined the Spanish War. He was wounded severely as a result of shooting through his throat in the war. The bullet, it was reported by the surgeon, narrowly missed his wind-pipe. On coming out of the hospital, it was found by him that the Communist Party he had joined was becoming liquidated. Orwell and his wife left Spain in disguise.

His participation in the Spanish Civil War convinced him that most political parties whose aim was to work for the people, actually were interested in power-politics and not the people. He has recorded his disillusionment in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

On his return from Spain, he retired to Hertfordshire for two years and wrote his novel, *Coming up for Air* (1939).

Between 1939 and 1947, he wrote essays and political comments for various magazines. His essays were published under the title, *Inside The Whale* (1940), *The Lion and The Unicorn* (1941), *Critical Essays* (1946) and *The English People* (1947), *Animal Farm*, his masterly political satire, appeared in 1945. He lost his wife in the same year.

He then went to a remote island called Jura of the West Coast of Scotland in order to escape from the possible atomic war. The real reason, behind this, was that he wanted to



produce his classic for which all his earlier work was just a preparation. It was a beautiful place but was too damp for a consumptive. His health was affected. He returned to England in 1947 and entered a Sanatorium in Gloucestershire. Later he was admitted to the University college hospital, London. His last novel, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, was published when he was in hospital. This novel would not have been gloomy if he had not been so ill.

Orwell married a second time on return from Jura. His wife's name was Sonia Brownwell. Orwell died in 1950 due to haemorrhage.

### **22.2.1 His Important Works**

*Shooting an Elephant* (1950) and *Such, Such Were the Joys* (1953) – Collection of Essays were published after his death. Sonia brought out a four volume edition of Orwell's writings, including many of his essays, reviews, letters not published earlier, eighteen years after her husband's death.

*Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) – The theme of the book is poverty. In order to be honest and truthful about what he wrote he became poor, and lived with different kinds of poor and destitute people in Paris and London. The book was written with the purpose of shocking the middle-class complacency by giving a real picture of the many sided poverty. It had the desired effects.

*Burmese Days* (1934) is a novel which tells the story of a sensitive and intelligent but lonely and neurotic Englishman, called Flory. He is desperately eager to be loved and always nearly does the wrong things. Failing to win the love of Elizabeth Lackorsteen he shoots himself. *The Burmese Magistrate*, is a counter study. The novel gives a realistic picture of the life of The European officers in the East.

*A Clergyman's Daughter* (1936), his second novel, deals with the heroine, Dorothy, who fears and loathes the world. It is a kind of picaresque novel.

*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), his third novel is based on the theme of the power of money. The central character, Gordon Comstock, is a literary learned but lonely person. He loves Rosemary, but does not know how to win her. Like Flory, he too has the reflection of his author's image.

*The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) examines the poverty of the coal-miners' lives. It also assails the complacency of the intelligentsia. Its very title reflects the bitterness of the author.

*Homage to Catalonia* (1938) was the outcome of his participation in the Spanish Civil War.

*Coming up for Air* (1939), like his first two novels, deals with the future of a lovely but good-natured middle aged, insurance man called George Bowling. The novel gives a vivid picture of the effects of bombing. It received a great success.

*Animal Farm* (1945), a fable, a political satire, brings out his deep sense of humour and his capacity for detached comment. It is a world renowned political allegory of Orwell

*Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), depicts the fears which Orwell had entertained over the years about dictatorship. He makes an attempt to forecast the future of totalitarianism. As a picture of the future, the book is gloomy but as a fiction it is prominently readable. It is a brilliant anti-utopian work.

His essays were written at various periods in his literary career. They deal with a wide variety of themes. But sociological themes really dominated his thinking. He wrote essays on totalitarianism and its effects on society and even on language and literature. He pleaded for a tolerant way of life not only between individual but also between nations.

### **22.2.2 His Popularity**

The bulk of his prose writing was made accessible to the ordinary reader and he came to be recognized independently as a critic, essayist, political satirist, journalist and reviewer. Numerous critics, scholars and Orwell's own friends explored the details of his personal life and established him as the austere yet gentle figure whom Lionel Trilling called "a virtuous man" and who according to George Woodcock, "had become a figure of world myth". Indeed, no other prose writer in the twentieth century had commanded more attention and esteem than George Orwell and no other author has exercised more profound influence on the post war period than him.

Orwell's popularity is on the ascent and shows no signs of diminishing. His authority on prose writing continues to be appreciated and looked up to in august literary circles.

### **22.2.3 As An Essayist**

The traditional method of categorising the essay into major and minor pieces, into those dealing with contemporary writers and contemporary politics does not succeed with relation to his work because, the versatility, range and variety of his essays make any strict classification impossible. It is equally important to bear in mind that he was extrasensitive to the sociological, cultural, political and literary conditions of his times.

Two factors governed Orwell's progress as a literary critic almost exclusively—the sociological set up and the political environment. In his mind, he had already rebelled against the British imperialist system of the Burma days and back in England he again rebelled against the British imperialism but this time of a different kind, the English class system. To quite an extent he identified himself with the tramps, the downtroddens, the labouring classes, which were the English replica of the oppressed natives of Burma. The painful awareness that men are divided between the ruled and the rulers, between the rich and the poor, between the educated and the uneducated, between the 'sahib' and the 'native' made him class conscious to such an extent that the sociological point of view acquired a dominant strain in his literary

writings.

It is significant to note that Orwell's Literary Criticism does not exist in vacuum, independent of his political or sociological beliefs. His progress as writer and critic was largely governed by two factors: Class consciousness, which gradually led him to reject the English and become a champion of the underdog, and political involvement, which included his disgust at the dominating and detracting influence of politics on art, society, intellectuals, writers and the literary atmosphere in general. A rigid division of these two factors is not found in his literary essays. There is much overlapping, his views on one factor have a direct bearing on the other. They are identical in that they spring from a common pursuit—Orwell's earnestness to put down the misuse of power, whether it be in politics or society.

#### **22.2.4 Orwell and Language**

Talking about the English people, Orwell once remarked that they were generally considered as "very poor linguists", but he was the one who had an absolute love for the language and a deep theoretical knowledge of it. He had been fascinated by the beauty of words since his childhood days. Their sounds and associations haunted him as "The sounding contract" haunted Wordsworth.

Orwell's love for language directly emanated from his love of aesthetics. It was an extension of his craving for artistic values. He had an intensive knowledge of his native language. He found the English vocabulary to be very large as it took birth from two languages—Anglo-Saxon and Norman French. It borrowed a large number of words from Greek, Latin, French and German. It possessed the flexibility to use the same part of speech differently. It could create phrases by combining nouns with prepositions and adjectives by adding prefixes and suffixes to nouns.

Orwell observes that besides possessing adaptability, it had the advantage of being "almost completely uninflected". Its verbs have only three inflections and the nouns have neither gender nor any declension. Its grammar and syntax is simple, but "it is capable of endless subtleties, and of everything from the most high-flown rhetoric to the most brutal coarseness". Despite its irrational spellings, it can be learnt easily and possesses the charm of lyrical verse.

There was a steady growth in his view of language. There is a wave from the "purple passages" of *Burmese Days* (1934) to the more accurate and simpler language of *Animal Farm* (1945). He started to lay more emphasis on the accuracy and clarity of language because he wanted to avoid duplicity of meaning, and artificiality of language.

He was simple and straight in thinking, he avoided all camouflage and wrote lucid English completely free from cant. He was opposed to clichés, padding and redundancy in expressions, and avoided sub-headings, dying metaphors, verbal false limbs, pretentious diction and meaningless words.

He believed that insincerity is the chief cause of bad language. It results when the writer is either confused or finds it hard to grapple with his thoughts or deliberately tries to suppress his ideas and ends up saying something else.

The need to shield and preserve the purity of language essentially springs from Orwell's earnestness to secure the intellectual integrity of an individual. Fearlessness and firm faith in one's own convictions were the only tools by which a creative writer could retain his individuality. As he said "To write in plain, vigorous language one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox."

Orwell's very famous words, "Good prose is like a window pane", reveal an important facet of his view of language. He believed that prose not only projected the picture of contemporary society but also the writer's literary personality, his view, his philosophy. Dr. Jain aptly comments; He does not consider the pane to be an opaque one on which image could be projected and seen but a transparent one making it possible to see into another world. Besides prose, Orwell exercised his critical faculty in the appreciation of poetry also.

To Orwell, Language was not just a literary manifestation. It was the most effective instrument of communication which could be used in politics, in society, by the intellectuals and the common men. The most essential thing, he considered, was to preserve its purity. This required clear thinking and accurate expression. It was this linguistic need of Orwell which made his own writing vigorous and forceful.

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### **22.3 *Shooting An Elephant* : A Critical View**

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George Orwell's hatred for imperialism is reflected through the behaviour of the natives (Burman) towards the Europeans (The rulers)—indicating how the powerless also could upset the powerful in a psychological manner through indifference and ignoring.

#### ***The essay begins with :***

"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 every where, 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”.

Orwell was very much disgusted and had made up his mind to leave the job. His sensitive temperament, a feeling for mankind, hatred towards imperialism are reflected in the following paragraph.

“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 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*, 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”.

The essay is about an incident of shooting an elephant, how the author was “forced” to kill the huge animal under the psychological pressure of the natives while it was not necessary to end his life as he was gradually becoming normal and it was a great loss to the owner.

This incident gave him better glimpse of imperialism than ever before. Through it he learnt better of the motives which prompt despotic government to act.

One day early in the morning he received a phone call from the sub-inspector of a police station informing that elephant had run “mad” (“must”) and causing destruction the in bazar.

He immediately took his rifle, an old 44 Winchester, much too small to kill an elephant, with the intention of only scaring the animal and started to witness the situation. He was stopped by the Burmans on the way who informed of what the elephant was doing. It was a “tame” elephant gone “must”. He was chained up but had broken the chains and escaped. The “mahout”

had set out in its pursuit but took a wrong direction. The elephant, suddenly reappeared in the town and destroyed a bamboo hut, killed a cow, raided some fruit stalls, turned over a municipal rubbish van. The Burmese had no weapon and were helpless.

The Burmese sub-inspector and constables were waiting for him in the poor quarter where the elephant was seen. When asked, no definite information was supplied by the people. Suddenly the yells were heard and an old woman turning away the children was saying “go away”, as the scene ought not be seen by the children. She was followed by more women. On reaching the sight he saw the dead body of an Indian Dravidian coolie sprawling in the mud. He was attacked by the elephant and grounded into the earth. He lay on his belly with arms crucified as it were and his head sharply twisted to one side, his eyes wide open, teeth with a grin with expression of unbearable agony, the skin stripped off from his back. On seeing the dead man he sent an orderly to a friend’s house nearby, to bring an elephant rifle.

Within a few minutes, the orderly returned with a rifle and five cartridges. Some Burmans informed that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, a hundred yards away from them.

The large crowd followed him, sure of his killing the elephant. The crowd was going larger and larger, excited to witness the elephant shot down and get fun and meat as well. Orwell had no intention of killing. The elephant was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and eating them. It did not notice the crowd.

He decided not to shoot the elephant as it did not look dangerous. It was a serious matter to shoot a working elephant. He just wanted to pass time watching him for a little while, waiting for the “mahout” to come back and control him.

The crowd had grown two thousand thicker and was increasing more. The road was blocked on either side. They did not like him but he had become worth watching with a magical refile in his hands. He realized that he would have to shoot the elephant.

“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”.

He decided to act like a sahib. He had got to appear resolute and do definite things. His whole life, like every white man in the east, was a struggle not to be laughed at. He would shoot the elephant at least to avoid appearing like a fool and become a laughing stock.

He knew that it would be a murder to shoot the elephant. He had never shot an elephant and he did not want to shoot it now. The owner of the elephant was also to be considered. The living beast was worth hundred pounds, dead it would be of worth five pounds. He consulted some experienced Burmans about the behaviour of the elephant. They informed that if left alone it would not take any notice but if gone nearer it might attack. He was left without any alternative.

It became a must to go within twenty five yards of the elephant and test his behaviour. He should not look frightened. He was generally not frightened. He put the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the ground to get a better aim.

The whole crowd became still and waited to get the fun. He triggered but did not hear the bang or feel the kick but heard the devilish joy escaping from the crowd. Soon the mysterious changes were noted over the body of the animal. It looked suddenly stricken, shrunken and old as if the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed it without knocking it down. Within five minutes it sagged flabbily to its knees and its mouth slobbered. A second shot was fired. It did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to its feet and stood weakly upright. A third shot was fired which finally killed it. It trumpeted for the first and the last time and down it came shaking the ground.

Still it was not dead. Its mouth was wide open yet breathing rather rhythmically. Its breathing was not weakening. He fired the remaining two cartridges at his heart. The blood oozed out but it did not die. It was dying but very slowly. He sent back for his small rifle and poured shot after shot into its head and down its throat.

He could not stand the sight and went away. Later he was informed that it took half an hour to die. Its body was stripped to the bone by the Burmans by the afternoon.

The owner was furious but being an Indian could do nothing. Legally it was not wrong to kill a mad elephant. The older Europeans justified his action, while the younger considered it shameful to kill an elephant for a coolie. But no one realised that "I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool."

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## **22.4 Orwell and Imperialism**

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Orwell's anti-imperialist stand was motivated by a patriotic instinct of self-preservation. He realised that a great deal of brutality was involved when men were called upon to rule subject races. The image of themselves, which the rulers projected, often became a freedom-denying one. This he has elaborated in "Shooting an Elephant", where the will of the unarmed crowd overpowered the will of the armed police officer. All that imperialism was able to

generate was a feeling of mutual hatred. The men who were sent to the colonies were aliens there and in due process, they also became alienated from the home country. Not being able to belong, living in a closed society, they developed rigid attitudes.

Brown skins, observed Orwell, were “next door to invisible”. What shocked him was the naturalness with which these people accepted their lot, and the respect they felt for the white races. The very basis of imperialism was thus founded an attitude of callousness. It denied equality, and it denied humanity.

*Burmese Days* is Orwell’s only full length study of imperialism. He dwells on the undesirability of the British rule, though his references are mainly negative in content. He does not take up any radical position, and does not advocate freedom for the colonies. He does point out that the subject races are equally human but that is about all. His sympathy for the subject is at a political level, not at a personal level.

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## 22.5 Let us Sum Up

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Literary criticism, like creative writing, is not stagnant. It is an ever evolving process, an ever changing phenomenon. Every age has its own peculiar creative and critical bent of mind and all literary artists are affected by their local atmosphere. Orwell’s age was more political than the period immediately preceding it; it was one beset with various contradictory ideological and nationalistic interests. It was a matter of great distress that both the creative writer and the literary critic were being involved into the political process, more than perhaps what could be considered healthy for the freedom of the intellectual. It is admirable that when other critics had either turned their backs or contributed willingly to it, Orwell dared to raise his voice against it. His “message” was all important for him and it was precisely this message of sincerity, of truthfulness, and of “disinterestedness”—as Arnold called it—that has been left behind for all creative writers and literary critics to follow.

Orwell’s literary criticism is unique because it gives the picture of a mid-twentieth century literary critic, deeply in love with creative literature and highly sensitive to the socio political circumstances of his age.

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## 22.6 Review Questions

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1. *Shooting An Elephant* depicts Orwell’s views towards humans and imperialism. Discuss.
2. Discuss George Orwell as an essayist, in the light of his essays you have read, dealing with his style and his concern for the contemporary life.
3. What makes Orwell shoot the elephant? Was it necessary or there was pressure on him to save himself from not appearing like a fool?
4. Comment on Orwell’s views towards Imperialism.



5. Write a critique on Orwell's essay, "Shooting An Elephant".
6. What view do you hold of Orwell as an essayist?

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## **22.7 Bibliography**

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